



Wine as a Urban Cultural Phenomenon from the Middle Ages up the 19th century

The 42nd international conference on Urban History held by the Prague City Archives,
Faculty of Arts of J. E. Purkyně University in Ústí nad Labem, Institute of History
of the Czech Academy of Sciences and Faculty of Humanities of Charles University

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Winemaking tradition in Central Europe dates back to the Middle Ages when, during the Luxembourg era, it expanded beyond the relatively limited business of mostly ecclesiastical circles and became one of the essential economic sectors of the urban economy and a business enterprise for individual inhabitants of towns. The Early Modern period was the golden era of grape cultivation in the suburbs of cities, one that was brought to its definitive end in the 17th century in connection with the transformation of land ownership, the negative consequences of social and economic development and, of equal significance, climate change.

Wine in connection with the urban history of Bohemia has never ranked among the key historiographical topics; instead, research has been focused primarily on descriptions of the regional growth of winemaking in the exposed parts of northwest Bohemia and the Elbe River region. In this sense, the Prague towns are also no exception. Only the organisation of the administration of Prague's vineyard economy has received a thorough treatment, but otherwise our knowledge is based on Zikmund Winter's dated and chronologically narrowly defined cultural-historical work.

Taking into account the results of earlier research, we would like to focus the theme of our conference on the broad field of cultural history with an interdisciplinary scope that includes in particular the spheres of archaeology, ethnography, art history, literature and other social science disciplines. We are interested not only in wine and its perception as a beverage most commonly competing with beer, but also its period medicinal use. An important issue is the production of wine and its importance or specific contribution to the economy of towns and burghers and, on the other hand, the position of this commodity in the tax system of estates society and the related efforts of town councils to control the winemaking economy. Yet another topic should be the wine trade and its possible regulation on local markets and during import and export.

A special question is who exactly were the "people around wine" in towns: winemakers, merchants, wine-bar owners and, on the other hand, vineyard workers. How were their guilds organised and how did they operate? How were women involved in the wine business? And who

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were the people that were hired for seasonal vineyard work? Sources often mention that they were people on the fringes of society for whom the vineyards outside the town walls provided sanctuary. How did the everyday life of this group of people look beyond the town walls and what role did they play in towns, say, during times of escalating social and religious tension?

Vineyards were a major feature of the landscape around towns in the Middle Ages and Early Modern period and they were also characterised by the specific architecture of their utility buildings. But what form did vineyard buildings take in the context of the changing landscape of vineyards in the suburbs? They mainly held equipment necessary for agricultural work, which brings us to the issue of the material furnishings of burgher households connected not only with the production and sale of wine, but also with its consumption.

Many other additional subjects can be mentioned in connection with the issue of wine in medieval and Early Modern towns – from the regulation of the vineyard sphere through normative sources and the competition of the town and burgher vineyard economy with the enterprises of the nobility, church and, in the Prague environment, the university, to the reflection of grape cultivation in the hinterland of towns in contemporary printed and manuscript literature, the festivals associated in towns with winemaking, to its reflection in the toponymy of urban space. And the list of topics here is by no means exhaustive. As usual, we would like to address them primarily in connection with Prague and other Bohemian towns, but the comparative dimension of our conference is also important, not only in relation to Moravian localities, but especially to foreign European metropolises and cities with a similarly significant historical link to grape cultivation, wine production, but also the wine trade in conjunction with the consumption of this beverage.

Please send offers for papers along with an abstract by 15 April 2023 to the contact address provided below. The organisers reserve the right to make selections among the submitted papers. Presented papers shall be printed in a monothematic volume as part of the *Documenta Pragensia* series. Foreign participants will be provided accommodations at the expense of the organisers. No conference fees are collected. The conference languages are Czech and German (or English). Simultaneous interpretation from German is provided.

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