The culture of the bottle (Paris, 13-14 Jun 24)

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The culture of the bottle. Uses and visual representations of alcoholic drinks in the 17th and 18th centuries

The subject of alcoholic beverages (wine, beer, liqueurs, etc.) in the modern era has been embraced by the museum world, which has found it a pleasing and intriguing subject to attract audiences. Over the last twenty years, modernist historians have also have also examined the subject, publishing major works on drunkenness (Lecoutre, 2007, 2011 & 2017) and wine (Figeac-Monthus & Lachaud-Martin, 2021).

However, alcoholic beverages such as Armagnac for France, schnapps for the German Empire, gin for Great Britain, or rum and sake for more distant regions, remain under-studied as compared to wine - and, to a lesser extent, beer - which have been the subject of scientific publications. The history of art has often multiplied studies concerning bacchanals, Dutch or Roman bambochades and the works of the Le Nain brothers, but has neglected other types of representations as well as objects associated with this consumption. Above all, places of alcoholic consumption such as farmlands, wine cellars, breweries, taverns, inns and banquets are largely absent from this historiography. Case studies drawing on cultural history, art history and material history are needed to fill these gaps and sketch out a comprehensive overview of the production, consumption and representation of alcoholic beverages in the 17th and 18th centuries.
By fostering a dialogue among researchers engaged in the exploration of this interdisciplinary theme, GRHAM’s annual symposium aims to scrutinize the concept of "alcoholic beverage" in France, Europe, and worldwide to better comprehend the methods and stakes related to its representation. A comprehensive approach to global exchanges and consumption patterns could shed light on a perspective often overly focused on Europe. Moreover, various disruptions, such as armed conflicts, droughts, and floods, intermittently disrupted the habits of European consumers.

A lexicographical approach allows us to identify a typology of beverages and consumers and to move away from a rhetoric that can be simplifying and tinged with moralizing connotations. In the 18th century, the Encyclopédie defined "drink" as "liquid food intended to repair our strength", before distinguishing cold water (recommended as the healthiest) from "beer, wine, & other strong liquors [which should be reserved] for occasions when where it is a matter of warming up, giving movement, irritating, attenuating". A drinker is "a man who drinks wine, & who drinks a lot of it". A drunken person is said to have a "brain clouded by the fumes & vapors of wine, or some other beverage". A "drunkard" is a man “who has the habit of getting drunk or drinking to excess" (Dictionnaire de l'Académie française). In the 1718 edition, the ivrognesse is already mentioned: a woman

who is "inclined to get drunk & drink to excess”. Those drunkards are then contrasted with the "sober" individual who is "Temperant in drinking & eating, who drinks & eats little" (Dictionnaire de l'Académie française, 1762). What might these definitions be in other languages? And in other cultures? What types of beverages, more or less strong, were drunk in the 17th and 18th centuries?
A marker of everyday practices, often tied to a particular geographical area, alcohol also played a part in the dynamics of social distinction and conspicuous consumption. The cohabitation of busy servants and cheerful masters around the Déjeuner d'huîtres is an instructive illustration. Unlike effervescent champagne, beer was a "very common drink" made from wheat, barley or hops in 18th-century France (Dictionnaire de l'Académie française, 1762). However, the Encyclopédie does not devote a single entry to this beverage. Wine, on the other hand, gives rise to a fascinating history of taste, highlighting the characteristics of this beverage as well as the most important wine-growing regions of the time. How do discourses and images apprehend drinks and consumers (drunk or sober) in the society of modern times period? What are the moments, functions (festive, medical, religious, etc.), spaces, and objects (typology of drinking and serving containers) associated with this practice?
The first axis of this symposium is dedicated to the analysis of artistic practices and sociability related to alcohol. Taverns are an essential meeting place for both local and foreign artists. What role do these spaces play in artistic sociability (professional, friendly and emotional encounters; workplaces; recreational and commercial activities...)? To what extent do gatherings over a glass of beer boost or hinder artistic activity? It's worth noting, for instance, new members of the Bentvueghels in Rome underwent an initiation rite involving the baptism of wine. Painters such as Valentin de Boulogne, Alexis Grimou and Gabriel de Saint-Aubin were known for their excessive drinking. But what about lesser-known architects, sculptors and engravers? It is not uncommon for an inventory after an artist’s death to reveal a well-stocked cellar. Was alcohol a source of inspiration or failure? Was it a factor of sociability or social exclusion?
The second axis of this symposium focuses on the iconography of alcoholic beverages and drinkers. How have artists represented the alcoholic liquid and its container in their works? Is the moralism in literature just as strong in visual representations? The representation of liquids is a recurrent motif in still life paintings, Nordic and Caravaggesque genre scenes and Italian bambochades. These themes spread throughout the 18th century, particularly in engravings. Alcohol nourished a varied iconography that contributes to festive, religious and political themes, often with moral or provocative dimensions that should be put into perspective.
Drunkenness, festivity, fertility and sexuality are intimately linked to the representation of alcohol when it comes to bacchanals, carnival parades, banquets, Dionysian scenes and trysts. In this respect, the representation of drunkenness can be understood as a way of contravening the norms imposed by civility. Alcohol is also an important symbol in religious and political iconography. Wine has a strong spiritual and liturgical dimension in Christian Europe and the representation of opponents (political, religious, etc.) as drinkers could be used to discredit them, as in counter-revolutionary prints.
On the other hand, a true scenography of alcohol can mark certain political celebrations. For instance, the construction of wine fountains regularly accompanies military successes and royal entrances. More detailed studies could reveal other meanings linked to the representation of alcohol. For example, the allegory of joy is often associated with a glass of wine, as are oaths of loyalty or, on the contrary, of revenge. More broadly, we will inquire into how representations of alcohol were employed to convey social and political commentary. Were they the target of regulatory limi-

tations or repressive measures in response to moral license and deviant alcohol consumption?
Finally, we aim to examine the various alcohol containers (engraved glasses, bottles, services, etc.) and the drinkers' accessories which serve as supports for all these iconographies. How did craftsmen and artist-decorators interpret and reproduce motifs widely disseminated through engraving?
The third and final axis aims to focus on the representation of the work of the brewer, the wine-maker and the intermediaries who transport the alcohol to the consumer's table. How can these images shed light on the production, marketing and service of alcoholic beverages? We would like to analyze the illustrations of vineyards and their topography, the instruments used to make the beverages, the architecture of the production sites, the stores built in Paris by suppliers to the French Court, and the merchants' advertising tools (signs, posters, labels, etc.).

Participants are encouraged to review existing work, identify gaps in current research, discuss methodological approaches and propose new ones (quantitative methods, digital humanities...). We welcome critical analyses, reflections on research methods, as well as innovative proposals for understanding the presence and significance of alcohol in the art (and history) of the 17th and 18th centuries.

Proposals must be submitted by 31 March 2024 to the following address: asso.grham(at)gmail(-dot)com

Reference:
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