Title
The Popularization of Wine Consumption in the Early Dutch Republic: Dutch Merchant Communities in France and the Political Economy of Wine Consumption in Holland

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Keywords
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Research Question
How did Dutch wine consumption increase in the early Dutch Republic (1590-1650) as merchant networks increased the supply of French wines and lobbied governments to reduce excise taxes on wine?

Methods
Analyze archival data for city/provincial excise taxes on wine, distilled and beer to show changes in per capita wine consumption and to show how political economy impacted relative tax rates.

Results
The paper provides estimates of per capita wine consumption in the Dutch Republic and shows that tax policies played an important role as patterns of wine and alcohol consumption changed.

Abstract
In the Dutch Golden Age there was a remarkable increase in wine consumption in the Dutch Republic. While wine was an exclusive beverage consumed by the nobility and rich merchants in the mid-16th century, wine consumption was widespread among artisans and the ‘middling’ sort by the mid-17th century. Not only did wine consumption increase in Holland in the early 17th century, the consumption of distilled liquor rose as the importation of French wines into Holland stimulated the development of Dutch brandy distilling as well as the Dutch jenever (gin) industry. Thus, the late 1590s and early decades of the 17th century mark a remarkable shift in alcohol consumption in Holland: a shift from beer drinking as a “total social fact” to a more complicated beverage consumption profile where wine, distilled liquor, and beer all played a role.

Remarkably, little is known about the changes in per capita wine consumption and the history of Holland’s wine trade in the early 17th century. In their path breaking book, The First Modern Economy, Jan De Vries and Ad Van der Woude assert: “Wine, if the scraps of evidence at our disposal are any guide, ranked among the most important trade goods of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Regrettably, nearly nothing is known about
the organization and development of the wine trade in the Republic.” Despite Anne Wegener Sleeswijk’s study of the Republic’s wine trade with France in the 18th century and a monograph on Rotterdam’s early 17th century wine and brandy trade with France, the picture De Vries and Van der Woude sketch is still so today. Little is known about changes in per capita wine consumption in the first half of the 17th century and the role political economy played in shaping relative tax rates, and consequently, the relative costs of alcoholic beverages.

For the early 17th century, the lack of reliable customs data or readily available excise records allowing the volume of wine imported into or consumed in the Dutch Republic to be estimated is a major obstacle. Consequently, historians and other scholars have focused on the role Dutch merchants played in increasing the supply of wine marketed in Holland, and especially in financing the wine trade. Particular attention has been focused on the growth and role of Dutch merchant communities in Bordeaux and in Nantes in reducing the costs of trade (through reducing asymmetries of information) and in integrating French and Dutch markets.

Dutch merchant in these towns are also often credited with helping facilitate drainage of land that helped increase the cultivation of high quality Bordeaux wines and introducing techniques to preserve wine, especially the use of sulfates, critical for transport. By the 1620s, the Dutch Republic became the most important destination for wines exported from Bordeaux. While the Dutch merchant communities had passed their high point by the 18th century, they played a critical role in the 17th century in linking French wine regions with markets in the Republic and in increasing the amount of wine sold in the Republic.

In moving beyond the important role played by merchant networks in increasing the supply of wine in understanding changes in wine consumption, this paper first uses local tax data to chart changes in alcohol consumption (wine, distilled, and beer) in the early seventeenth century. In estimating changes in consumption behavior, scholars have typically used the excises collected by the States of Holland. In understanding how consumption changed in the early in the Republic’s history, historians have been hampered by the fact that the revenues of these taxes are not known between 1584 and 1650. For the years that the data are available, scholars have emphasized the weaknesses in the excise data for estimating consumption. Not only was fraud widespread, the rates at which the taxes were levied changes and in some years, tax farmers paid a lump sum to that was apparently far below actual consumption levels.

In this paper, I use records of the excise taxes paid on alcohol in Delft, Leiden, and Haarlem to estimate changes in wine and alcohol consumption. Tax data for the period 1590 to 1650 provides important insights into the timing and rates at which Dutch consumers began to drink wine and distilled liquor, and the impact this had on beer consumption. Although it is perhaps a step to move from local consumption patterns to estimates for Holland as a whole, local excise tax data sheds light on how per capita wine consumption changed in urban setting. Further, local authorities in Delft, Leiden, and Haarlem not only managed the collection of local excise taxes on these beverages, they also oversaw the collection of the provincial taxes levied by the States of Holland.

Second, the paper examines how the effective tax rate on wine changed over time, thus contributing to our understanding of the political economy of wine taxation in the Dutch Republic. In the 1670s, for instance, the brewers’ guilds argued that the taxes on wine were much lower than on beer, and that this was an important reason that beer consumption had declined, while wine consumption had increased. While the story is more complex than the brewers’ narrative makes out, the excises on wine apparently declined relative to beer, suggesting that tax changes decreased the relative price of wine which likely increased its consumption. This paper analyzes the impact of the powerful wine merchant guilds in reducing the effective rates at which wine was taxed. While retail prices paid for wine and beer are sparse, by focusing on the changes in the relative rates for wine and beer, this paper, then, contributes to understanding how politics help drive evolving tax policies that impacted wine and alcohol consumption.

The power and impact of tax policies in reflecting and shaping patterns of wine consumption in the Dutch Republic is nicely illustrated by the causes of riots on wine excises. In 1616, the wealthy regents who ruled Delft
were in desperate need of increased tax revenues for the town; consequently, they increased the tax on bread (a daily staple). Inexplicably, simultaneously, they decreased the excise on their beverage of choice: wine. Some 480 residents of the town, mostly working class women revolted, demanding that wine taxes be raised instead and effectively dispersing the town's militia and ransacking the regents' homes. The revolt, of course, was put down and the ring leaders visibly punished. At the end of the day, the tax on bread increased; the tax on wine declined.

By the late 1660s and early 1670s, the situation was quite different. Proposals to increase the excise on wine (sometimes put forward by regents and sometimes by brewers seeking to change policy to their advantage), found no traction. The collection of the wine excise was firmly in the hands of the powerful wine merchant’s guilds, with little prospect that others would or could farm the tax. Since wine consumption was widespread among artisans and apprentices, government officials apparently decided it was imprudent to raise taxes on wine since the laws could not be enforced. In the 1690s, two of the most significant riots for generations involved wine. The so-called Costerman riot shock Rotterdam in 1690 as a tax farmer tried to take possession of an untaxed barrel of wine several young men were carrying to a party. The attempts by Amsterdam’s burgomasters in 1696 to limit the overindulgence of wine at funerals ignited the ‘mortician’s riot that swept through the city. This riot has been described as “the most dramatic act of mass violence of the 17th century” in the Dutch Republic.

As the riots of the 1690s suggest, by the late 17th century wine consumption was part and parcel of Dutch culture. This paper contributes to understanding how this came to be so through analyzing how Dutch per capita wine consumption increased in the early Dutch Republic (1590-1650) and the role played by merchant networks in lobbying governments to reduce excise taxes on wine.