

Wine, Women & Song: Viticulture economy of the Order

Charles Savona-Ventura

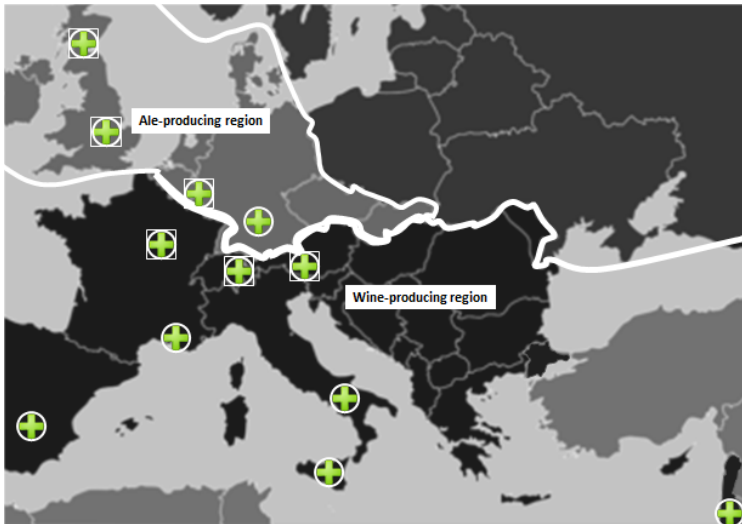
Abstract

Like every monastic community, the Ordre de Saint Lazare during the Medieval Period was dependent on its resources for its economic survival. Many of the establishments of the Order were therefore dependent on the careful and efficient management of the agricultural land benefices associated with the establishments. The agricultural land was used as pastureland and as arable land growing cash crops. An important crop, in the traditional wine drinking regions of Southern Europe, was the cultivation of vines and production of wine. In the northern European regions where ale drinking was preferred, the Order resorted to ale production and distribution. The process of distillation may have also produced stronger alcohol drinks.

Introduction

The common grape vine species – *Vitis vinifera* – originated in the land range from Western Europe to the Persian shores of the Caspian Sea. However, because of the species' high level of adaptability, the grape vine has today accommodated a vast range of environments covering every continent except Antarctica. Wine making has a very long history with the earliest evidence of grape vine cultivation and winemaking dating to the Neolithic period about 7,000 years before present. The science of viticulture made significant headway in the 3rd millennium BCE when grape cultivation developed from an aspect of local consumption to an important component of international economies and trade. Referring to this phase in history, the 5th century BCE Greek historian Thucydides commented that 'The people of the Mediterranean began to emerge from barbarism when they learnt to cultivate the olive and the vine'. The Roman expansion across Western Europe helped the expansion of areas that now have become some of the world's best-known wine-growing regions. The advent of Christianity within the Roman world had a positive effect on viticulture since the new religion adopted the old Hebrew

religious texts including the Book of Ecclesiastes which encourages the faithful to 'Go thy way, eat thy bread with joy, and drink thy wine with a merry heart; for God now accepteth thy works' [chap 9.7]. Wine was also an integral part the most central and important religious activity of this new religion – the celebration of the Eucharist.



Traditional wine-producing regions
also indicating major holdings of the Order of St Lazarus

In the Medieval Period, the major part of the viticulture economy fell under the control of the Catholic monk communities who acquired control of significant land holdings to support their communities through tithes, endowments and as exchanges for indulgences. To manage the agricultural land holdings, these often adopted the Metayage system of so-called Granges. Granges were agricultural centres, possibly including other facilities such as a mill or a tithe barn, from which the monks exploited their landscape and coordinated farming and industrial work. They were manned by lay-brothers or lay tenants who cultivated the lands and reared livestock. The tenants were compensated by a sharecropping agreement whereby agricultural land was contracted out

by landowners to tenants to cultivate with the monastery receiving a proportion of the produce. The granges thus supplied the monastery's food, clothing, utensils and building materials; while any surplus was sold for profit. While the Cistercians are particularly associated with medieval viticulture, many other monk groups adopted a viticulture economy to support their community. The monks pertaining to the Order of St Lazarus in the Kingdom of Jerusalem were no exception.

The historical evidence suggests that the Order of St Lazarus – *Fratres hospitalis Sancti Lazari Hierosolimitani* – was a fully functioning entity by the second decade of the 12th century. The philanthropic crusader nature of the Order soon attracted land donations throughout Europe thus establishing numerous commanderies in France, Spain, England, Scotland, Hungary, Germany, Austrian Netherlands, Genova, Switzerland and Italy. Some of these commanderies, located below the “wine line”, are traditional wine-producing lands and it is reasonable to presume that viticulture was an essential part of the economic activity of these establishments. The cartography suggests that viticulture seems to have been an important element in the economy of the Order.

Viticulture economy in the Outremer

Besides their urban property in the Outremer, the *Fratres hospitalis Sancti Lazari Hierosolimitani* owned a number of agricultural land holdings which aimed to serve and support the hospitaller and military work carried out by of the Order. The management of these holdings probably followed the Metayage System practice being used in France and other European countries during the Medieval Period. Two contracts, dated 1151 and 1164 respectively, tend to suggest this type of arrangement. In the former, Queen Melisende of Jerusalem donated a vineyard to the *Fratres* with the proviso that the cultivators of the land – Masters George and Salamon – retain half of the proceeds annually;¹

¹ Doc. X (1151). In: A de Marsy. Fragment d'un Cartulaire de l'Ordre de Saint-Lazare en Terre Sainte. *Archives de l'Orient Latin (Paris)* 1884, 2(2), pp.130-131.

while in 1164, Walter II of Brisebarre of Beirut transferred his annual share of the produce from a vineyard cultivated by Master Lambert.²

As one would expect, the larger part of the agricultural land holdings of the *Fratres* was in the surrounding countryside of Jerusalem and the other nearby villages of Bethlehem and Bethania. Throughout the first half of the 12th century, various individuals had undertaken to support the *Fratres* by donating land holdings suitable for the sustenance of the house.³ Many of the agricultural holdings mentioned in the various contracts pertaining to the *Fratres* were identified as being cultivated as vineyards. Thus, in Jerusalem, the *Fratres* in 1144 transformed the land donated by Baldwin of Caesarea in 1142 into a vineyard⁴; this being supplemented in 1153 by a further donation from Robert of Franclieu of adjoining vineyard land.⁵ In the Bethlehem Plain, the *Fratres* in 1150 purchased four *carucates* of vineyard land from the Syrian sheikh Mélegan for the price of 1050 bezants and a horse⁶, which land was in 1151 further augmented by five *carucates* of land donated by Queen Melisende.⁷

Besides the produce grown on land belonging to the *Fratres*, further grapes or wine was obtained by direct donation of produce. Thus, Humphrey II of Toron and his heirs in 1148 committed themselves to the donation of ten quintals of grapes annually to the Order.⁸ In 1160, Hugh of Corbeil and his heirs committed themselves to the annual donation of thirty litres of wine annually, the amount being increased to fifty litres

² Doc. XXI (18.iii.1164). In: de Marsy, *op. cit.*, p.139.

³ Charles Savona-Ventura. The economic sustenance of the Order of St Lazarus in the Kingdom of Jerusalem. *Acta Historiae Sancti Lazari Ordinis* 2016, vol.1, pp.7-19.

⁴ Doc. III (1144). In: de Marsy, *op. cit.*, pp.124-125.

⁵ Doc. XI (1153). In: de Marsy, *op. cit.*, p.131.

⁶ Doc. VII (22.v.1150) & Doc. VIII (after 21.vi.1150). In: de Marsy, *op. cit.*, pp.128-129.

⁷ Doc. X (1151). In: de Marsy, *op. cit.*, pp.130-131.

⁸ Doc. VI (1148). In: de Marsy, *op. cit.*, p.127.



Harvesting and making wine

after the death of Hugh.⁹ Walter II Brisebarre of Beirut in 1164 committed himself to donate half the vintage from a vineyard cultivated by Master Lambert¹⁰; while Adam the Elder and his heirs in 1186 committed themselves to donate fifty litres of wine annually made from a vineyard owned at Terre-Blanche; and a further twenty-five litres made from a vineyard at Chanterperdriz.¹¹ There is no further documented data available to identify the grape type cultivated by the Order in the Outremer. Likely candidate grapes include the local red grape variety known as the Jandali and Hamdani (also known as Marawi) grapes, and the white grape known as the Dabouki.

The viticulture economic activity of the Convent of St Lazarus received a significant setback with the loss of Jerusalem by the Crusader forces to Salah al-Din in 1187 since the brethren of St Lazarus lost their

holdings around the Holy City and in the towns and villages now under Salah al-Din's control. While the Order retained and acquired further land holdings in regions under Crusader control, it is not clear to what agricultural use these holdings were dedicated. The Crusader forces were completely expelled from the Holy Land in 1291.

⁹ Doc. XIX (iii.1160). In: de Marsy, *op. cit.*, pp.137-138.

¹⁰ Doc. XXI (18.iii.1164). In: de Marsy, *op. cit.*, p.139.

¹¹ Doc. XXXI (30.x.1186). In: de Marsy, *op. cit.*, pp.148-149.

European Lazarite holdings associated with viticulture

Italy and Sicily: The Order of St Lazarus established itself on the Italian Peninsula and the island of Sicily around the latter half of the 12th century. Its hospitaller establishments or monasteries were similarly economically supported by assigned agricultural land benefices worked by the monks themselves or let out to other individuals. These agricultural lands appear to have been generally used to produce grapes or olives crops. The Italian peninsula and Sicily is particularly renowned for its viticulture and boasts a number of regional red and white grapes varieties including the red grape varieties Negroamaro, Primitivo, Nero di Troia, Aglianico, Montepulciano and Malvasia Nero. White wine grapes in the region include the Bombino and the Fiano Minutolo.

In the north of Italy in 1163, the Order is documented to have owned vineyards associated with a rural church on St. Lazarus Hill near Mairano in the province of Brescia, in Lombardy.¹² Further south, in the Apulia region near Bari, the Order in 1200 is documented as owning a plantation of olives '*in pertinentiis Sanctae Agnetis*' and vines '*in pertinentiis Sancti Martini*' to support the 'church of S. Lazaro where, outside Bari, the lepers dwell'.¹³ The holdings in the Apulia region were retained by the Order right up to the mid-sixteenth century. In 1554, the Grand Master is recorded as leasing out all the land, vineyards, fields and other property belonging to the Order in the region to a knight from Calabria.¹⁴

¹² Filangeri di Candida, E. (editor). Le pergamene di Barletta del R. Archivio di Napoli (1075-1309) In: *Codice Diplomatico Barese*. Bari: Società di Arch. de Storia Patria, 1928, vol. X, p.32, doc.20. As reported in: Doronzo G. Barlette. *Custode di Insigni Relique della Passione di Cristo*. Barletta: Centro Regionale Servizi Educativi e culturali, 2000, p.68.

¹³ P. Oldfield. *Urban society and communal independence in Twelfth-Century Southern Italy* (PhD thesis). Leeds, U.K.: University of Leeds, 2006, pp.246, 293.

¹⁴ P.E.G. de Sibert. *Histoire des Ordres Royaux, Hospitaliers-Militaires de Notre-Dame du Mont-Carmel, et de Saint-Lazare de Jerusalem*. Paris: Royal Press, 1772.

In the island of Sicily, the Order presence was similarly supported by agricultural land benefices. An important acquisition for the Order in Sicily was the transfer of the Church of San Giovanni dei Lebbrosi in Palermo, together with its associated benefices in 1294. Throughout the latter half of the 13th century during the period 1258-1261, contractual documents attest to the wide range of land holdings associated with the church. These were generally let out to individuals to be worked as vineyards on the Metayage System, the church being recompensed by a quarter of the produce - *con l'obbligo di impiantarla a vigna a proprie spese entro due anni e di fornire all domus teutonica la quarta parte delle uve ricavata annualmente dalla vigna a partire dal quinto anno dalla data del presente atto*. Later contacts made out during the period 1284-1295 simply lease out the land as vineland for management against payment of an annual monetary lease.¹⁵

France: The economic sustenance of the Order in France was also in part supported by the produce obtained from viticulture. Louis VI, in ≈1137 is documented as having donated revenue to Étampes Hospital in the form of land, wheat and wine; while in 1161 Louis VII decreed that a one-tenth allotment of the wine provision entering Paris was to be given to the nuns in the Convent at La Saussaie.¹⁶ By the seventeenth century the Order of St Lazarus was organized into five grand regional priories, each represented a number of first and second class commanderies. Two of these regional commanderies – the Grand Priore de Languedoc and the Grand Priore de Bourgogne [Burgundy] are particularly renowned for being important wine-producing regions having a wide range of local

¹⁵ Lo Cascio, E. *Il Tabulario della Magione di Palermo (1116-1643) – Repertorio*. Rome: Archivio di Stato di Palermo. Ministero per i beni e le attività culturali, 2011, Fonti XLVIII, doc. 91-93, 98-99, 102-105, 107, 113, 119, 179, 258, 280-281, 289, 296-297, 451.

¹⁶ de Sibert, *op. cit.*, pp.55, 58-59.

grape varieties. The former yielded a total revenue of 4830 *livres*; the latter 6000 *livres*.¹⁷

Central Europe: In Hungary, before the 16th century the Order of St Lazarus owned agricultural land in the Esterгон/Strigonia – Buda – Eger region, today renowned as an important wine-producing region with typical regional grapes such as the red varieties Kékfrankos and Kadarka, and the Olaszrizling white variety. In 1298, the monastery in Schlatt, sited in Baden-Württemberg, Germany, was bequeathed two vineyards by Werner von Staufen: *zwei Jucherte Reben, gelegen in dem Berge zu Schlatt, an den Orte, genannt Huntchenki was ortsüblich heist Esselmundes Reben*¹⁸ Württemberg is a region for quality wine in Germany with 11,511 hectares (28,440 acres) under vine cultivation in 2008. The large majority of vines grown in Württemberg are of the red variety [71%] with the most common varieties of red wine originating from the Trollinger grape [at 21.2%], Schwarzriesling [15.1%], Lemberger [13.9%], and Spätburgunder [11.1%]. The most common white variety is Riesling [18.1%].¹⁹

Lazarite holdings associated with ale production

The Order of St Lazarus had also acquired land holdings in regions where viticulture was not traditionally employed. The common alcohol-containing drink in these regions was generally ale produced from malt. The preceptories of the Order in England, particularly the St Giles

¹⁷ H.M. de Langle, J.L. de Treouret de Kerstrat. *Les Ordres de Saint Lazare de Jerusalem et de Notre-Dame du Mont-Carmel aux XVIIe et XVIIIe siècles* (pp.71-79). Paris: Publications LTK., 1992.

¹⁸ Contract transcribed in: Anton Munkel. *Das Lazaritenkloster von Schlatt/Breisgau* (p.39). Schlatt: Dem Gedachtnisse an die Gemeinde, 1932, p.39. Translated: *two Jucherte of vines, located in the mountains to Schlatt, in the places called Huntchenki what locally means Esselmundes vines*

¹⁹ *German Wine Institute: German wine statistics 2009/2010*.
<https://web.archive.org/web/20110726004051/http://www.deutscheweine.de/icc/Internet-DE/med/0be/0be2f08f-a4a0-4218-cb63-6a55f440fd33,11111111-1111-1111-1111-111111111111.pdf>

demesne, are documented to have used the associated arable land to grow crops such as barley, wheat, rye, malt, peas, beans and oats. The cultivation of malt suggests also that beer brewing was another economic concern. St Giles had seven vats, a mashing-vat and an ale-vat besides a wide range of containers, tubs and sieves. The estate also owned a number of inns and alehouses.²⁰



Monastic ale brewing

Die Nürnberger Hausbücher, 1506

Conclusion

There is sufficient evidence to prove that the production and sale of alcoholic beverages played an important role in the economic endeavours of the Order's different preceptories. The reliance to grape or malt cultivation and the production of wine or beer in the economic activities

²⁰ David Marcombe. *Leper Knights. The Order of St Lazarus of Jerusalem in England, 1150- 1544* (pp.120-122, 125). Woodbridge, U.K.: Boydell Press, 2003.

or the Order's preceptories may have been further extended to the production of stronger alcoholic preparation through distillation particularly in the far northern European holdings.²¹



Aqua vitae Medieval distillation

Hieronymus Brunschwig. *Liber de arte Distillandi*, 1512

²¹ The Order has been said to have had holdings in Scotland, one of which may have been Saint Magdalene Leprosarium in Linlithgow in Scotland. The evidence for this is unsatisfactory and probably refers only to a croft in Linlithgow rather than a preceptory. Vide: R. MacLellan (2017). *The Leper and the Lion: The Order of St Lazarus in Scotland*. *Scottish Historical Review*, 2:pp.218-232. The leprosarium was established as a whisky distillery in 1765 by Sebastian Henderson on the lands of Saint Magdalene's Cross. The distillery closed down in 1983 and has been transformed into apartments.