

CULTIVATION OF CEREALS ON THE ESTATE OF OSIJEK JESUITS DURING THE 18TH CENTURY

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Abstract. *With the Treaty of Karlowitz signed in 1699, the rule of the Ottoman Empire in large parts of Central and Eastern Europe ended. The liberation of Osijek in 1687, followed by the liberation of all Slavonia (Eastern Croatia) in 1699, marked the beginning of a new era of freedom and well-being for its citizens. After the Great Turkish War and the liberation of Osijek in 1687, Jesuits arrived in the city with the imperial army in order to minister soldiers. With the arrival of additional Jesuits, their Mission evolved into a permanent presence, eventually becoming Osijek's first parish church. Osijek Jesuits administered the parish church from 1693, but officially took the parish church in 1701 and already the next year they were granted Aljmaš estate, which they were leasing from the Esztergom Archdiocese since 1690. It was a small estate, but Jesuits managed it properly and usually produced cereals, with the emphasis on the oats and maize. Wheat, maize and oats were common cereals cultivated in Slavonia. As stated in the Jesuit chronicles, the most common crop usually planted on their estate in Aljmaš was oat, since oat was used as a basic livestock feed because of its high content of fat and other nutritional elements. Next to maize, the most common crop grown for human consumption was wheat.*

Keywords: *Osijek, Slavonia, 18th century, Jesuits, agriculture.*

INTRODUCTION

Osijek from its beginnings was a city with a strong Christian presence. In addition to being the seat of a bishopric in Roman times, it is very likely that "Roman Osijek" extended its Christian roots to the medieval Croatian settlement. With the Ottoman occupation, Christians found themselves in a disadvantageous position and many converted to Islam, and the city was inhabited by Muslims from other parts of the Ottoman Empire. With the Ottoman army retreating in 1687, the Muslim population also left the city, and the Christian people who had inhabited these areas for centuries returned. Jesuits and Franciscans (Minor Brothers) arrived immediately with the liberation army, and they were joined in 1703 by Capuchins, and soon after by the diocesan clergy (HAMAN, 2014).

With the liberating Christian army, the Czech Jesuit Gašpar Dirik arrived in Osijek as a camp chaplain. In addition to caring for soldiers and the wounded, he also saved war orphans who sought refuge in the liberated city. Since there were more and more spiritual needs, he asked the superior of the residence in Pécs to send him help. In May 1688, Gašpar Franz from Silesia also came to Osijek, and Tomo Glavinić in August of the same year. Serving in German and Croatian, they pastored over 4,000 inhabitants and 2,000 soldiers. For a normal Christian life, they needed church space, so Gašpar Franz converted the large Kasim Pasha mosque in the Fortress into the first Osijek church. On 5th March 1689, the Jesuit General gave instructions to the Austrian provincial to accept the Osijek parish only if Emperor and King Leopold I requested it. By imperial act of 13th July 1688, Leopold I ordered the Buda Chamber Inspectorate to

pay 300 forints annually to the two Jesuits in Osijek for their pastoral work. In this way, their work was officially recognized (HAMAN, 2014).

The Jesuits led their mission, which soon grew into a parish, as confirmed by the keeping of parish registers from 1693 onwards. It was also formally handed over to the Jesuits on 13 July 1701, by decision of the Archbishop of Esztergom and Primate of Hungary, Cardinal Leopold Karl von Kollonitsch (HAMAN, 2014).

Through Kolonić's influence, the Osijek Mission in 1702 acquired the ownership of the Aljmaš estate, which it had held since 1690 for an annual rent of 90 forints. In 1773, the estate consisted of 18 and 3/8 sessions with 65 peasant houses. It thus belonged to the small estates (VANINO, 2005).

Jesuits remained parish priests of Osijek's Inner Town (the Fortress or Tvrđa) until the end of the 18th century, or shortly after the suppression of the Society of Jesus in 1773.

MATERIAL AND METHODS

Croatian history, like much of Europe, is deeply intertwined with the cultivation of cereals. These grains played a critical role in the development of societies across the continent. Even today, cereals like wheat remain king in Croatian (and global) plant production, with maize as a close companion (HAMAN, 2021).

Interestingly, the importance of cereals stretches back centuries. The Vinodol Law, the oldest Croatian legal document, highlights wheat as a key agricultural crop of the Middle Ages (HAMAN, 2024). They also cultivated a variety of other cereals like barley, oats, and rye. The Adriatic coast, with its unique climate, proved particularly well-suited for growing olives and grapes. Rounding out the agricultural picture were legumes (peas and beans) alongside a variety of fruits and vegetables (HAMAN, 2022). Across Europe during the feudal era, agriculture reigned supreme. Nearly all available labour was dedicated to food production, a reality also true in Croatia's Virovitica County, whose capital was Osijek (SRŠAN, 2008). However, for the serfs who toiled the land, life was a relentless struggle under the harsh thumb of their feudal lords.

Disputes between serfs and lords were a constant source of anxiety, with settlements always decided unfairly in favour of the powerful, similar to a trend across feudal Europe. Beyond the state tax burden, serfs were also subject to a fluctuating county tax (*domesticum*) that could significantly drain their resources. This tax could be inflated by 15 to 30 denars per forint to benefit the county treasury (*cassae domesticae*). The exploitation didn't stop there. Indirect taxes (*iuudi extraordinarii*) further burdened various professions, from millers and craftsmen to fishermen and potters (BÖSENDORFER, 1931).

The serfs' obligations extended far beyond taxes. Prior to Urbarium reforms, they owed their lords a hefty sum annually: 12 forints for the land itself, a punitive 8 forints for supposed "reluctance" to work, and an additional 3 forints for census (SRŠAN, 2008). This wasn't all. They were forced to contribute 12 days of unpaid labour each year, provide lodging for the army, supply wood for military outposts and brickyards, and even contribute materials for the construction of barracks. They were also expected to be ever-prepared to assist any passing army and fulfil any additional demands imposed by their lords, administrators, and county officials. (BÖSENDORFER, 1931).

Despite their harsh realities, Urbariums can be considered precursors to present-day labour acts and collective agreements (BARTULOVIĆ & HAMAN, 2023). As official documents, they documented worker obligations and laid the groundwork for the modern labour acts that protect worker rights today (VRBOŠIĆ & HAMAN, 2014).

In 1745/1746, a detailed picture of Virovitica County (excluding Čepin) emerges from historical records (BÖSENDORFER, 1931). The landscape was dominated by landownership, with 6637 landowners documented. These landowners included 2445 adult brothers (likely indicating shared family holdings) and 381 widows with property. Agriculture was the lifeblood of the county, reflected in the vast amount of arable land – a total of 26,033 acres. Fruit production also played a role, with plum orchards covering over 551 acres. Meadows and vineyards were additional resources, with 14,440 scythes of meadows and over 3,800 hoes of vineyards documented.

Livestock was another significant aspect of the county's economy. Records show a substantial number of animals, including horses (4,726), oxen (6,192), cows (6,474), pigs (20,355), sheep and goats (3,173), and beehives (2,644).

Taxes provide further insight into the economic structure. The entire county contributed a total of 29.647,66 forints. The tax system was tiered, with landowners paying based on their holdings and family structure. Married men with estates paid the most (1.40 forints), followed by adult brothers (1 forint) and widows (0.20 forint). Land itself was taxed, with a rate of 0.20 forints per acre for arable land and a higher rate of 0.75 forints per acre for orchards. Taxes were also levied on various types of livestock and beehives.

The prevalence of medium-sized estates, typically ranging from 1 to 5 acres of arable land, suggests a county with a growing number of landowning families (BÖSENDORFER, 1931). The presence of some estates even smaller than 1-acre hints at a potentially developing class of smallholders. Furthermore, historical data from around two decades later suggests that the area continued economic and demographic growth, with the emergence of larger estates and more villages (HAMAN ET AL, 2021).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

According to the Annual Report of the Osijek Mission, a Jesuit yearbook, most of the data about Osijek Jesuits and their cultivation of cereals on the Aljmaš estate in the 18th century was obtained. While entries for some years, particularly 1764, were very detailed, others only contained a single note. Unfortunately, for most years, there is no mention of the Aljmaš estate or any type of cereals (SRŠAN, 1993).

22nd February 1764. Wednesday

The Superior went to Aljmaš to see the borders and the fields for sowing oats.

The first mention of Aljmaš coincides with a specific cereal – oats. This is unsurprising, as oats were a cornerstone livestock feed in the 18th century, valued for their high fat content and rich mix of nutrients. In a world reliant on animal power for agriculture, transportation, and other endeavours, ensuring a steady supply of nutritious feed for these working creatures was nearly as crucial as feeding the human population.

28th February 1764. Tuesday

The remaining tithe of grain was brought from Aljmaš. The manager was supposed to have handed over this tithe earlier.

Here we can see that the manager of the Aljmaš estate was also in charge of tithe collection and he was late. Jesuits thought that this was important to emphasise, since they mentioned it in their note. Tithes were typically a tenth of one's income or produce, given as a contribution to the Church.

10th April 1764. Tuesday

The Superior went to install the new manager in Aljmaš. When he arrived there, he gave brandy to the innkeeper, then ordered 15 acres to be sown with maize, but only 5

acres were sown. Nevertheless, the harvest was good, and with that money he bought pure wheat.

This interesting note describes the Jesuit Superior's visit to Aljmaš to install a new manager. This arrival might be connected to the previous issue of the late tithe delivery. The Superior also ordered 15 acres to be sown with maize, a crop gaining popularity in Europe at that time. However, only 5 acres were sown. Despite this, the harvest yielded good profit, which was then used to buy pure wheat. The reason for planting maize instead of wheat is unclear, but it might be related to crop rotation practices or perhaps maize was seen as a more profitable crop at the time.

13th August 1764

An order was issued to the judges of the three cities of Osijek to announce to the people:
a. those who have vineyards in the Aljmaš hills should show their documents, because those who do not show them or do not have them will not be allowed to pick grapes,
b. if they have more "motikas"¹ than is stated in the document, they must hand them over to the superior. If they do not tell the truth, then all the "motikas" will be confiscated when they are measured.

This order was issued so that there would be no danger of "caducitas" (lapse), so that vineyards would not be sold without our knowledge and permission. In this way, they will have the correct number of "motikas" which we have never had.

Next note is stating that the city of Osijek (divided into three administrative parts) issued an order for all vineyard owners to prepare their documents as a proof of land they are entitled to work on. This regulation aimed to address underreported vineyard sizes, a tactic used to evade tithe payments. The Jesuits welcomed this order, believing it would finally provide them with accurate "motika" counts. In essence, they were only interested in verifying vineyard ownership and size to ensure they received the correct tithe.

5th October 1764

The Osijek grape harvest began. The tithe is bought by three councillors and our manager. In the meantime, people from both towns (i.e., Osijek's Lower and Upper Town) who have vineyards in Aljmaš came, and who were told a quarter of a year ago that they could not go to the harvest before showing a document of ownership of their vineyard. Since many did not have such documents, new ones were issued after they had proven their right to own the vineyard. They paid 30 krajcers² for this procedure. On this occasion, the superior obtained the correct number of "motikas", so it was clear that the residence had received barely half of its due in the past 20 years. 9 krajcers were paid for each "motika".

The last note for the year 1764 showed us that the previously mentioned process finally provided the Superior with the accurate "motika" count, revealing a startling truth: the Residence had only received about half of its rightful tithe over the past two decades. Following this discovery, the 9 krajcars tithe per "motika" was applied to the newly verified vineyard sizes. This underscores the Jesuits' earlier approval of the city's order regarding vineyard documentation. The new and accurate "motika" count exposed significant underpayment of tithes for the past twenty years.

9th March, 1765

¹ A "Motika" is a unit of land measurement equal to about 1/8 of an acre.

² A "krajcer" is a unit of currency used in Croatia at the time. It was equal to about 1/100 of a florin.

The Superior went to Aljmaš to install a new manager. He then measured the wine and the vineyards and settled the accounts with the innkeeper.

The sole entry for 1765 describes the Superior's visit to Aljmaš to appoint a new manager. This was followed by the measurement of wine and vineyards, and finally, the settling of accounts with the innkeeper. These actions suggest that the previous manager might have been responsible for some discrepancies, prompting the Superior's personal oversight. On their estate in Aljmaš, the Jesuits had feudal rights, which included the right to sell drinks, but as we can see, the Jesuits leased this out.

11th April 1768. Monday

The Superior went to Aljmaš to sow oats.

The final entry mentioning the Aljmaš estate in 1768 finds the Jesuit Superior once again overseeing agricultural activities. This time, his focus is on organizing the sowing of oats. This reinforces the notion of oats being a primary cereal crop cultivated by the Jesuits on the Aljmaš estate.

CONCLUSIONS

Wheat, maize and oats were common cereals cultivated in Slavonia during the 18th century. As stated in the Jesuit chronicles, the most common crop typically planted on their estate in Aljmaš was oat, valued for its high fat content and nutritional elements essential for livestock feed.

Next to maize, for which we found only one entry, the most common crop grown for human consumption was wheat, which they bought after selling the maize. While the Jesuit yearbook entries provide details about specific years, there seems to be a lack of consistent data throughout the 18th century, which is not unusual for the time period.

The extent and variety of other crops cultivated on the estate remains unclear due to the limited data available. However, based on the information at hand, cereals were a significant agricultural activity on the Aljmaš estate, with oats being the most commonly cultivated grain.

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