

## Conference report

### **Consumption of everyday goods in social spaces in the pre-modern period**

*6th annual conference of the Working Group „Materielle Kultur und Konsum in der Vormoderne“, Vienna 7 – 9 July 2022*

In the forty years since Neil McKendrick coined the term consumer revolution, academics around the world have tried to study and define the historic changes that took place in the European consumer society of the early modern period, leading up to the establishment of the industrialized world as we know it today. To contribute to this ongoing and interdisciplinary research, the sixth annual conference of the working group “Materielle Kultur und Konsum in der Vormoderne” was held in Vienna from 7.-9. of July 2022. Focusing on consumption and its link to social practices and the nature of objects, traditional approaches were reviewed, new approaches formulated, and the results discussed.

Angelina Illes (University of Vienna) initiated the conference with her presentation on the prevalence of traditional Japanese gowns in Dutch paintings of the seventeenth century. Such clothing items became available due to the exclusive trading rights the Dutch Republic had with Japan, helping to make Dutch cities a centre for exotic products. In search of the reasons and meanings of contemporary Dutch society for wearing foreign costumes and using pictorial as well as written sources, Illes shed light on the business of the import and later imitation of Japanese fabrics for consumption in the Dutch Republic. Owing to its limited availability, such gowns were expensive luxury goods, mostly depicted in the paintings as worn by male academics at their workplaces. According to Illes, by the late seventeenth century the garments had become a staple of Dutch fashion and a symbol of Dutch culture itself.

The second presentation by SümmeYE Hosgör Büke (University of Vienna) gave insight on the clothing consumption of the Ottoman capital of Istanbul in the eighteenth century. She characterized the period of ca. 1700-1760 as one of growing consumption and noted the diversity of colours and fabrics as well as opulent decorations in use at the time. Büke further stated that the clothing law of 1725 and other sumptuary laws were regularly transgressed also showing the critique of luxury consumption by contemporary Ottoman authors (especially regarding women), which she describes as „displaying“. According to Büke’s findings, so called „populuxe“ goods disappeared after 1760 in the sources and the emulation of high-class fashion ceased, owing to the economic implications of the Russo-Turkish War of 1768-1774. However, Büke argued that the practice of „displaying“ continued with different, cheaper methods.

In his presentation, Aris Kafantogias (University of Vienna) examined the changes in the consumption of clothes and accessories in Vienna between 1760-1825 focusing on the emerging middle and lower-middle strata, that is argued to be the basis of increased consumption. Based on probate inventory from 1760-69, 1783/84, 1803, and 1823, he noted the sharp increase in the number and value of clothes in the period of 1760-1784, stating that these trends were observable among all social classes and particularly pronounced among women. Kafantogias suggested that the approach of Roman Sandgruber and the view that higher proto-industrial production as well as the alleged want of the lower classes to emulate the upper classes alone are not sufficient to explain these drastic changes. Moreover, he argued that growing industriousness was not the singular most important aspect for consumption growth. Rather, not just market forces but social forces were demonstrated to be responsible for the changes in consumption with the need to achieve sociability in the newly established social spaces of the period as a primary incentive. Kafantogias further argued that the growing population, the discourse concerning consumption, the Congress of Vienna, and the emergence

of the Viennese fashion changed the practices of sociability and therefore the consumption of clothing and accessories.

Waltraud Schütz and Julia Czachs (University of Vienna) continued the focus on Vienna in the fourth presentation. On the basis of letters to her sister dating from the early nineteenth century, Czachs and Schütz gave an example of a noblewoman, Julie Hoyos, acting as a factor (Comissionärin) for the purchase of consumer goods for her family. They argued that this new role of the (noble) woman as an active consumer was made possible by the emergence of new social spaces and new possibilities for consumption in the cities. The importance of an alleged specific Viennese fashion was shown to be negligible for the nobility, which was able and willing to buy fashion items from fashion centres such as Paris. Czachs and Schütz concluded that the role of Comissionärin constituted a rare possibility for women to take part in the emerging consumer society as well as the social representation of their family.

Bruno Blondé (University of Antwerp) called the established narratives of consumer modernity into question, specifically regarding the notion that consumption is a product of market integration. Stating the lack of empirical evidence on the cultural meanings of consumption and the unequal distribution of relevant sources, Blondé provided an insight into eighteenth-century English consumer society based on ads for second hand auctions of household estates in London. His findings showcased the use of a seemingly standardized vocabulary. Blondé presented tables of descriptors used in ads for the periods 1732-1745 and 1793-1796 revealing the gradual growth in interest in the aesthetics of goods as well as the growing complexity of the descriptive vocabulary in use. While fashionability itself was not yet a primary concern, the sources show that qualitative markers were more relevant for the lower and middle classes, and that the upper classes focused more on aesthetics. With beds and bedding, one of the most precious household items of the time, the presentation demonstrated the growing importance of design value compared to intrinsic value, with quality descriptors like „good“ or „fine“ becoming insufficient in the late eighteenth century. However, for other goods such as looking glasses, the intrinsic value remained relevant. Blondé referred to the great importance of the secondary market for all social classes, constituting an entry point to the newly emerging consumer society. Finally, Blondé suggested that the already existing social inequalities of the time were reproduced and enforced through the emergence of questions of taste and aesthetics in the new consumer culture.

Opening Panel 2: Everyday Goods, Sabine Arend (Academy of Sciences, Heidelberg) shed light on the circumstances of consumption of dairy products in the early modern period. Arend at first showcased the background of the consumption and trade of (Swiss) dairy products. Especially the meticulous records kept by Thomas Erastus commenting on condition and taste, provide insight on the contemporary practices of consumption. Arend noted that the general lack of price quotations and the focus of Erastus on matters of quality indicate that his privileged position as a big earner made his personal consumption possible. The writings of Oporinus in contrast report on the prices and their development in Basel. Arend highlighted the high price of cheese, being five to six times more expensive than a warm meal at a local Inn. Despite this, the sources provide evidence for the existence of an established export business of Swiss dairy products from Basel. Arend therefore concluded that Swiss cheese was an everyday consumer good only for the most affluent at the time.

Claudia Ravazzolo (University of Jena) continued with her presentation on the credit economy of the early modern period along the example of the city of Bern (ca. 1660-1798) and its impact on the consumption of everyday goods. On the basis of Johann Georg Heinzmann's work, Ravazzolo provided a view into the consumption behaviour of the Bernese upper and upper-middle class family. According to her findings, most products and services were not paid for

immediately following the transaction but rather by taking on credit. The implications of this credit-based economy can be seen with the institution of the *Geltstag* (literally “money day”), the process of a judicial sale of the property of a debtor. According to Ravazzolo’s data, bread and meat were seldomly paid for in cash. Rather, there would have been a regular payday (for example once a year), suggesting that the accumulation of debt for the consumption of everyday goods was understood at the time to be common practice among all social strata. Differences therefore arose through the kinds of goods consumed and social boundaries.

Manuel Mozer (University of Tübingen) used tutelage records as a source for his research on the topic of consumer history in Tübingen in the eighteenth century. According to Mozer, such records can provide insight into consumption behaviour in contrast to the traditionally used inventories, which he argued only provide a snapshot of the owned property of the individual. Tutelage records in contrast provide a detailed compilation of earnings and expenses, also referring to the stores or merchants from whom the item was bought. As an example, Mozer presented the shopping tours of a young artisan and a young academic, revealing the social connotations of the consumption of certain textiles and items of clothing for certain groups of the population, in this case artisans and academics. Therefore, similar to previous speakers, he suggested that the changes in consumption in the early modern period are very much connected to social changes and forces. Mozer further examined the process of the habitualization of children and young adults, arguing that they had influence on purchasing decisions from an early age and made deliberate buying choices themselves.

Next Melissa Calaresu (University of Cambridge) talked about her research on the practices and places of everyday consumption in eighteenth century Naples. She used two sets of sources, the first one being licenses for selling food in public areas, and the second one the Italian account book of Thomas Jones’ Grand Tour household. This source not only gives a detailed overview of food purchases with references to quality, price, and amount but also of game and herb consumption which is only rarely included in such documents. The account book is complemented by Thomas Jones’ memoirs written in 1803 and several of his paintings. The subsequent discussion was about food consumption in public spaces and obtaining licenses for selling food in public areas. According to Calaresu, street food was meant to be eaten on the spot and concerning its production, the sources indicated that it was already processed and that most of the work was done within the households. Regarding licenses, she pointed out that this subject needs further investigation, and that most reports concerned the consequences of misbehaviour and not the granting of licenses.

Panel 3 was initiated by Astrid Wendel-Hansen (University of Jena) with the topic of “marginal” economies in early modern Sweden. In her work, Wendel-Hansen focused on thefts in three different university towns in Sweden, Finland and Livonia. She analysed the source material regarding traces of economic activity related to thefts and the spaces and networks used for these activities. Wendel-Hansen believes that, even in the margins, the early modern economy was more complex than simply exchanging one good for another and consisted of complex interactions, especially when stolen goods were involved. She also pointed out the low importance of cash as means of payment and that the money value of goods was not absolute but rather highly dependent on social context and thus often open for negotiation.

Beverly Tjerngren (University of Uppsala) continued with an insight on consumption practices of Swedish rural parish rectors in the eighteenth century. Tjerngren examined eight parishes in the Uppland region of Sweden. She presented a case study of a rector who held office from 1720 to 1748, when he died aged 81. The probate inventory depicted an accumulation of wealth which is rather meagre for a person of his age and social status. In total, his debts exceeded his assets but although he owed significant amounts to different people and entities, he was able to

sustain a certain lifestyle which indicates that loans were often granted on basis of status and trust, not only solvency of the person.

The third lecture of Panel 3 was held by Olga Kozubska (freelance researcher/Ukraine) in which she talked about the spaces of consumption in small towns of Podolia in the late eighteenth to the early nineteenth century with particular focus on the clergy, which began to consume new consumer goods at that time. Starting from the eighteenth century we begin to see tea getting popular among the upper clergy with pots and cups as material evidence for tea consumption. Next to coffee, tea was regarded as a status symbol particularly in combination with sugar. Tea consumption also became popular in the lower clergy such as monks. Nonetheless, these stimulants remained luxury goods and consumers had to be mobile and possess the adequate financial resources to be able to obtain them. Hence, their consumption was an indicator for the social status of the consumers.

Panel 4: Flows of Goods started with Heinrich Lang (University of Leipzig/Vienna), whose lecture concerned the cultures of consumption and the practices of accounting in Tuscan cities in the Renaissance with a focus on Florence. First, he analysed the process, the objects, and the practices of accounting. Lang argued that account books are cognitive artefacts that help to reveal networks of social relationships. The sources presented by Lang involved “Libro di amministrazione dell’ eredità di Baldovino Riccomanni” which provided detailed information about textiles and a household inventory of a member of the Strozzi family from 1377. It listed the important objects in each room but did not include their value. This is in line with the other sources, as the value of the objects arose from the social relationships as they did not have an intrinsic value. In the last section of his lecture, Lang described the creation of parental networks through material properties as presented in accounting.

The conference continued with Henning Bovenkerk (University of Münster) and his lecture on the consumption of everyday goods in Westphalia in the seventeenth and eighteenth century. He observed around 1,000 probate inventories from Münster and its surrounding communities, which differed greatly in their socio-economic contexts. These inventories revealed close relations with the Netherlands and mentioned objects that had to be imported and obtained at a market. These goods were tableware and cutlery, bedclothes, and objects related to coffee and tea consumption. Concerning imported goods, Münster being a city enjoyed a more dynamic development than the other areas. While there is little mention of clothing in the sources, formerly exotic fabrics seem to have become more common over time. The availability of such goods was however dependent on access to the relevant markets.

The final lecture was held by Matthias Baumgartl (University of Bamberg) on the Trade and consumption of Baltic Germans in the late eighteenth century. His main source was a 500-page account book from Mitau in today’s Jelgava in Latvia, which he obtained through an edition project. The book contains only ten suppliers and a few creditors, with debtors making up the majority of the accounts. The source proves the existence of trade relations between Russia and Western Europe. On the basis of the account book, Baumgartl was able to generate purchasing profiles of the customers. The company was mainly involved in textile trade but also had customers which purchased fashion accessories, coffee, or metalware such as nails. Baumgartl concluded that the account book is proof for a luxurious life in Mitau, which was due to its position as a residence for the dukes of Courland and Semigallia. This also made the city distinct from other cities in the area. Furthermore, the majority of the population was made up by ethnic Germans who constituted the elite of the duchy’s population. As per Baumgartl, the source shows that a dense distribution network is the basis for a consumer society.

In the following final discussion, the findings of the individual presentations were discussed. In general, it could be stated that the numerous sources presented provided far-reaching insights into the consumption behaviour of actors from almost all classes and spaces. The participants of the conference agreed that there is still a lot of knowledge potential in historical consumer research.

## **Overview of the conference**

### **Panel 1: Clothing and Fashion**

- Angelina Illes (Vienna): From gift to luxury good – Japanese gowns and its variants in seventeenth-century Dutch painting
- Sümeyye Hoşgör Büke (Vienna): Some observations on the change of the clothing consumption of the Ottomans in the eighteenth century: The case of Galata
- Aris Kafantogias (Vienna): The wardrobes of the Viennese middle strata: Changes in consumption of clothes and accessories, 1760–1825
- Julia Czachs und Waltraud Schütz (Vienna): Adelige Schwestern als Konsumentinnen im frühen 19. Jahrhundert

### **Keynote Lecture**

- Bruno Blondé (Antwerpen): Aesthetics for a Polite Society? Re-assessing the consumer revolution through the consumer values on the London auction market of the eighteenth century

### **Panel 2: Everyday Goods**

- Sabine Arend (Heidelberg): Ich möchte auch gern leiden, ir schicket mir jetzt ein oder ii gute Schweitzer Käß. Milchprodukte als Alltagskonsumgüter in den Briefen südwestdeutscher Theologen 1550-1620
- Claudia Ravazzolo (Jena): Leben auf Pump? Konsum von Alltagsgütern und Dienstleistungen im Rahmen der frühneuzeitlichen Kredit-ökonomie am Beispiel Berns (ca. 1660 – 1798)
- Manuel Mozer (Tübingen): Einkaufen in Tübingen im 18. Jahrhundert. Pflschaftsakten als Quelle der Konsumgeschichte
- Melissa Calaresu (Cambridge): The practices and places of ,everyday consumption of a Grand Tour household in the ‘Italian account book’ of Thomas Jones (1780 – 1783)

### **Panel 3: Marginal Groups**

- Astrid Wendel-Hansen (Jena): Beyond beg, borrow, and steal? Marginal economies in early modern Sweden

- Beverly Tjerngren (Uppsala): Consumption practices of Swedish rural parish rectors in the eighteenth century
- Olga Kozubska (freelance researcher/Münster): Spaces of consumption in small towns of Podolia in the second half of the eighteenth to the early nineteenth century

#### **Panel 4: Flows of Goods**

- Heinrich Lang (Leipzig/Vienna): Cultures of consumption and practices of accounting in Tuscan cities in the Renaissance
- Henning Bovenkerk (Münster): Von brüggischer Kinderkleidung und flämischen Betten – Konsum gehandelter Alltagsgüter in Westfalen, 17. – 18. Jahrhundert
- Matthias Baumgartl (Bamberg): Handel und Konsum der Deutschbalten im Spiegel eines kurländischen Geschäftsbuchs des späten 18. Jahrhunderts

#### **Final Discussion**