

Babeş-Bolyai University
Faculty of History and Philosophy

PhD Thesis

*The Uses and Abuses of Alcohol in Romania in a
European Context at the End of the 19th and the
Beginning of the 20th Century*

Scientific Advisor

Prof. IOAN BOLOVAN, PhD

PhD Candidate

Oana Mihaela Tămaş

Cluj-Napoca
2012

CONTENTS

Contents	3
List of Figures	7
List of Tables	8
Introduction	11
I. Europe between the uses and abuses of alcohol. Distinctive elements in the modern period. The European evolution of the problem of alcohol until the First World War	22
1. Chronological and cultural benchmarks of alcohol consumption in Europe	23
2. The most frequently used types of alcoholic beverages in Europe	32
2.1. Fermented beverages	33
2.1.1. Wine	33
2.1.2. Mead	35
2.1.3. Beer	36
2.2. Distilled beverages (hard liquors)	40
2.2.1. <i>Fuica</i>	40
2.2.2. <i>Palinca</i>	41
2.2.3. Vodka	41
2.2.4. Whisky	47
2.2.5. Cognac	50
2.2.6. Rum	51
2.2.7. Gin	53
2.2.8. Absinth	55
3. The problem of alcoholism and the temperance movements	57
3.1. Alcoholism	57
3.2. The transnational temperance movements	59
3.2.1. The Independent Order of the Good Templars	62
3.2.2. The Blue Cross	64
3.2.3. The Alcoholics Anonymous Association	65
4. The faces of alcohol in various European countries	66
4.1. Mediterranean Europe	66
4.1.1. Greece	66
4.1.2. Spain	67
4.1.3. Italy	68
4.1.4. France	70
4.1.5. Portugal	77
4.2. The Anglo-Saxon countries	78
4.2.1. England	78
4.2.2. Wales	80

4.2.3.	Scotland	81
4.2.4.	Ireland	83
4.3.	The Scandinavian countries	86
4.3.1.	Denmark	86
4.3.2.	Sweden	89
4.3.3.	Norway	92
4.3.4.	Finland	94
4.4.	Central and Eastern Europe	96
4.4.1.	Germany	96
4.4.2.	Austria	99
4.4.3.	Hungary	101
4.4.4.	Bulgaria	103
4.4.5.	Poland	104
4.4.6.	Russia	106
	Conclusions	112
 II. The uses and abuses of alcoholic beverages in Romania at the end of the nineteenth and the beginning of the twentieth century		 116
1.	A historical overview of alcohol consumption in Romania	121
2.	The alcoholic beverages in Romania during the last decades of the nineteenth and the beginning of the twentieth century	122
2.1.	Fermented beverages	122
2.1.1.	Wine	122
2.1.2.	Beer	137
2.1.2.1.	Beer producers	Error! Bookmark not defined.
2.1.2.2.	The economic correlations of beer production	142
2.1.2.3.	The evolution of the beer tax policy in Romania	152
2.1.3.	<i>Braga</i> and other fermented refreshing beverages with a low alcohol content	156
2.2.	Distilled beverages	158
2.2.1.	<i>Țuica</i> and natural liquors	158
2.2.2.	Industrially produced alcohol from cereals, potatoes and beetroot. <i>Basamak</i> , spirits and aromatic beverages	164
2.2.3.	The competition between “natural” distilled beverages (<i>țuica</i> and liquors) and those industrially made from cereals, beetroot and potatoes	176
2.3.	General alcohol consumption and the evolution of its structure in time	180
2.4.	The marketing of alcoholic beverages through the licensing system. Pubs	191
2.4.1.	Pubs	191
2.4.2.	The marketing of alcoholic beverages through the licensing system	197
3.	The control exerted by the state in the field of alcoholic beverages	202
3.1.	Norms of sanitary hygiene	202
3.2.	Tampering with alcoholic beverages	211

3.3. Proposals for introducing different monopoly or restriction-based systems	219
3.3.1. The production monopoly system upheld by A.C. Cuza	222
3.3.2. The Russian model of alcohol monopoly	229
3.3.3. The economic foundation of alcohol monopoly elaborated by Vasile Taban (1898)	232
3.3.4. The bill of law on monopolising production proposed by the industrialist A.A. Popovici	233
3.3.5. The first bills of law on a Monopoly of the Pubs (1900-1901)	235
3.3.6. Xenofon Hurmuzi's bill providing for the prohibition of the sale of refined spirits in the rural pubs	238
3.3.7. The 1908 bill of law on instituting a private monopoly of the spirits manufacturers	240
3.4. The 1908 Law on the Monopoly of the pubs and against intoxication, with its later amendments	245
3.4.1. The 1906 bill of the Law on Pubs	246
3.4.2. The 1907/1908 parliamentary debate on the bill of the Law on Pubs	250
3.4.3. The amendment of the Law on Licences	255
3.4.4. The enforcement of the Law on the Monopoly of the Pubs and against intoxication (1908)	257
3.5. The competition between the producers of different types of alcoholic beverages. Attempts at channelling the fiscal policy of the state in its own interest	266
3.5.1. The campaign for taxing <i>țuica</i> according to the alcohol percentage in beverage production (1900-1902)	267
3.5.2. The 1908 amendment of the Law on the Monopoly of the Pubs in the interest of the wine producers 277Error! Bookmark not defined.	
3.5.3. The movement of the brewers for politically obtaining a lower level of taxes on beer	281
3.6. The electoral and economic-political interests underlying the legislation on alcohol	282
4. The sociological correlations of the uses and abuses of alcohol	285
4.1. The public image of alcohol consumption	285
4.2. Measures proposed for stopping the phenomenon of alcoholism	288
4.3. Rural-urban and regional particularities	291
4.3.1. A quantitative comparison of alcohol consumption between the village and the city	304
4.3.2. Regional aspects of alcohol consumption	311
4.3.3. Alcohol consumption at the periphery of cities. The social and cultural context of the slums.	314
5. Alcoholism, socialism and capitalism	316
5.1. Statistical data regarding alcoholism and the public reactions to it	324
5.2. The perception of the effects of alcohol on health in the period	331
5.2.1. The association between alcoholism and pellagra	334
5.2.2. Alcoholism and tuberculosis	335
5.3. The social effects of alcoholism	336
6. The temperance movement	339
6.1. The beginnings of the temperance movement in Romania	339
6.2. Temperance societies	344

6.2.1.	The Anti-Alcoholic League	344
6.2.2.	The Moderation Society	352
6.2.3.	The National Temperance League	353
6.2.4.	The Moderation Cooperative Society	355
6.3.	The involvement of the medical body	356
6.3.1.	The impact of alcoholism on the rapport between the birth and the death rates	364
	Treatment options for the alcoholics	368
6.4.	The religious factor. The role of the Church and of the priests in the temperance movement	370
6.5.	The educational factor in the anti-alcoholic struggle	374
6.5.1.	The role played by the press and the specialised literature	378
6.5.2.	The medical press	380
6.5.5.	Medical education	384
7.	CASE STUDY - The IOGT prohibitionist movement - The Good Templars	388
	Conclusions	419
	BIBLIOGRAPHY	425

KEY WORDS

Alcohol, pub, spirits, alcoholism, the temperance movement

SUMMARY

The research proposed here as a doctoral thesis aims to present and analyse the problems of alcohol consumption in Romania and the most important elements in the field with which the European states were confronted in this period. I have considered it necessary to provide an overview of the alcohol-related problem in the most important European countries. The experience some of them went through presented similarities to that recorded in the Romanian space. Other elements were specific to each and every country and their presence confirms the fact that local and national peculiarities may play a crucial role in addressing the alcohol-related problems from each country. I have also deemed it necessary to describe certain aspects referring to the fermented and distilled alcoholic beverages that were most widely used on our continent. The phenomena that were specific to Romania were manifested in a European context from which they cannot be excised. All these extremely interesting evolutions, with an economic, political, social and medical impact, among others, have drawn my attention to issues related to alcohol use and abuse in Romania, leading me to address this issue both in my BA dissertation and, further on, in my MA studies.

The register of historical research on the topic of alcohol use and abuse unfolds like a fan, covering the diverse issues that are approached, by establishing a fixed point of observation, i.e. a precisely delineated space and historical time.

This paper is divided into two parts, each having several chapters and subchapters. Thus, in the first part, I present the situation of the most important countries in terms of alcohol consumption, the economic situation, the temperance movements, the mechanisms of control that were applied to alcohol marketing and consumption, and the influences that some of these countries exerted on the Romanian territory. In order to outline a general framework of alcohol consumption in Romania and in the European countries, I have considered it necessary to

introduce an expanded chapter providing the fundamental coordinates of the problem of alcoholic beverages in Europe in the period under analysis.

My research aims to highlight the manner in which the legislation in each country, as well as its evolution, has influenced the problem of alcohol and alcoholism. An analysis of the evolution of Romanian legislation in the field until World War I may be more objective and relevant if it is related to the experience of other European countries.

I have examined the norms related to the production of alcoholic beverages, the promotion of some beverages at the expense of others, their taxation or supra-taxation, the possible existence of a monopoly regime, the regulation of the means of transport, wholesale or retail marketing, the restrictions on potential consumers, and so on. I have found that special emphasis should be laid on the activity and goals of the temperance movements, as well as on the regimes of partial or total prohibition existing at a particular time and in a particular European country.

In the second part of the thesis, I present and analyse the situation of alcohol use and abuse in Romania in the late nineteenth and the early twentieth century. I have deemed it both beneficial and necessary to structure this research thus because of the strong interferences between some of these developments and the general European context. Industrialisation and the rise of capitalist production offered, in Romania, too, the technical support for the rapid expansion of industrial alcohol, which became increasingly well regulated and more affordable, even for the income of the poorer population categories.

During the last decades of the nineteenth century and the early twentieth century, the consumption of alcoholic beverages in Romania represented an important element in the everyday life of a society in transition, which, through modernisation and industrialisation, left behind the essentially rural and agricultural character of the previous decades.

The types of alcoholic beverages, their relative proportions and the global scale of consumption are essential elements for understanding both the use and the abuse of alcohol in the period examined here.

The range of beverages that were on the market or produced for individual use was derived both from the traditions inherited from the previous periods and from the general trends manifested in a European context. A country that abounds in hills and vineyards and orchards, Romania continued, in the late nineteenth century, to be a consistent producer both of wines and

of distilled beverages derived from grapes, plums and other fruits. After 1870, plum brandy and other liquors had to face the fierce competition of a market newcomer, brought to us by the European developments and technological progress. Industrially manufactured alcohol (“spirits”), produced in the so-called *velnițe* or *poverne* (improvised distillation vats used in the rural areas), brought the consumers in Romania the opportunity to drink increasingly cheaper beverages from cereals, potatoes or beetroot, whose attractiveness increased. Liqueurs, brandies, rums produced by adding various essences to industrial spirits disrupted and increased consumption on a previously patriarchal market, in which “natural” drinks, usually prepared in artisanal manner, had virtually had no competition.

This work aims to address this issue in order to provide an overview of alcohol consumption during the period under study. The most frequently used drinks are investigated separately, both in terms of the evolution of their production and consumption and insofar as their diversity and quality problems are concerned.

Various assessments of the overall consumption reported in litres of pure alcohol/ year/ *capita* have been reviewed to highlight the fact that several sources indicate the top position Romania occupied in this regard in the European context. With 9-12 litres of alcohol 100%/ year/ *capita*, Romania was one of the most “alcoholic” European countries in the late nineteenth and the early twentieth century.

The Romanian system of marketing alcoholic beverages, both wholesale and retail, specifically marked the structure and amplitude of consumption. For this reason, the research undertaken here has approached, in a separate chapter, the problem and number of pubs, analysing certain distinctive regional and urban-rural elements.

The health legislation on the production and marketing of alcoholic beverages has been analysed separately, following their evolution in time and aspects relating to the practical enforcement of these laws. I have considered it necessary to present the wide range of tampering methods used for almost all the types of beverages.

The political factor had a very important role in the regulation of alcoholic beverages. This should not be surprising given that about 10% of the state budget came from alcohol, while the budgets of the rural and urban localities were even more dependent on taxes derived from the alcohol trade.

An essential element in the landscape of alcohol consumption in Romania during the period under review was the delivery system. Predominantly in the rural world, pubs played an important role in terms of both the public consumption of alcohol and as a unique venue of socialisation. Lacking alternatives, the peasants regarded pubs not only as the place where they drank beverages of often questionable quality, but also as the centre of the village world which was marked by deprivation, illiteracy and great sanitary deficiencies.

The last part of the thesis is dedicated to the transition from the use to the abuse of alcoholic beverages. Alcoholism was a major public issue in the Old Kingdom, particularly during the last two decades of the nineteenth century, amid the sharp rise in the production of industrial alcohol and its becoming cheaper. From 1895-1900, Romania was placed on one of the top places in Europe as regards consumption in litres of pure alcohol/ year/ *capita*. Several personalities involved in that period in analysing this domain estimated that the annual alcohol consumption in Romania was between 9-12 l/ *capita*.

Given this scale of public consumption, individual excesses were numerous. Some studies of the time estimated that in 1900 the percentage of alcoholics represented at least 10% of the population. Consumption was higher in the towns than in the countryside, but the rural population was significantly more affected by alcoholism. Poorly nourished, keeping fast after fast every year, with a very low access to health care, the rural world could easily fall prey to alcohol abuse. Its association with other poverty-related diseases, such as pellagra and tuberculosis, was common.

Faced with the extended phenomenon of alcoholism, the Romanian society initially reacted through a part of the medical, political and journalistic elite. The resulting temperance movement in Romania had an eminently secular character, the involvement of the Church being more evident after the peasant uprisings of 1907.

A series of publications and several failed legislative initiatives preceded the establishment, in Iași in 1897, of the first national temperance structure, the National Anti-Alcoholic League, whose main promoter was the politician A. C. Cuza. The league managed primarily to draw the attention of the Romanian society to the serious problems alcohol abuse entailed. The uninterrupted publication of the magazine *Anti-Alcohol* in Bucharest, under the authority and with the support of Professor Mina Minovici, gave a new dimension to the Romanian temperance movement.

As regards the working methodology underlying this research, what should be emphasised is the use of both sources from that period and of later studies. In the period under review, there were published a significant number of works on alcohol-related issues, which were approached from several points of view. On the one hand, people with competence in this field, alerted by the amplitude of the alcohol-consumption phenomenon in Romania, tried to provide as objective a perspective on alcohol and alcoholism as possible.

The novelty of the theme has led to both published and unpublished sources being subjected to the same rules subsumed to exploring the subject, which has been insufficiently examined in Romanian historiography so far. Given that the subject was previously approached only briefly, tangentially or through a few research undertakings focusing exclusively on this topic, the published and unpublished sources reveal the diversity of the issue and of the discourses that provided information on this subject in that period.

This research aims at charting the defining elements of alcohol use and abuse in Romania in the period analysed by developing an integrated vision on the highly complex phenomenon that the use of alcoholic beverages represented in society. The aforementioned distinctive elements make it possible to outline an image of the Romanian society from a unique perspective and to understand the interdependencies with the other European countries and cultural spaces.

The scale and complexity of the field make possible numerous sectorial in-depth analyses. The economic, social, cultural and medical approaches have assisted, both conceptually and statistically, in detailing the elements subsumed to the overall vision reflected in this research.

The selection of the time interval on which the research has focused is justified by the independent elements it presents in terms of the phenomenon of alcohol consumption and alcoholism. The analysis made against the background of the European context also proves beneficial, given the influences and similarities it has highlighted. Romania's belonging to the general European space has also manifested insofar as the consumption of alcoholic beverages is concerned, both as regards their typology and public image and as a problem generated by the social imbalances their abuse produced.