

# Biographies of Drink



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*A Case Study Approach to our  
Historical Relationship with  
Alcohol*

Edited by

Mark Hailwood and Deborah Toner

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A Case Study Approach to our Historical Relationship with Alcohol

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# INTRODUCTION

## THE “BIOGRAPHIES OF DRINK” APPROACH

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The burgeoning field of drinking studies, often ranging across and between disciplinary boundaries, explores the place of alcohol in human societies from a very diverse range of perspectives. Many scholars have concentrated on the social and cultural importance of alcohol in different geographical and chronological contexts, in terms of class, ethnic or national identity formation, gender relations, generational attitudes, material culture, the moral codes and discourses shaping the use of alcohol, and drinking venues or practices as focal points for different types of communities. Meanwhile, many others have focused attention on medical, economic and political issues relating to alcohol, including taxation, commerce, production, regulation, prohibition, the night-time economy, public health, crime and the treatment of problem drinking, in different historical and contemporary contexts. This breadth and diversity of subject matter is, of course, testament to the importance of drinking studies as a field of scholarly enquiry. But the fact that this work takes place across multiple disciplines, including history, sociology, law, anthropology, criminology, literature, economics, geography, psychology, medicine, health sciences, marketing, social policy, media studies and others, does mean that it can be difficult for these different strands of research to consistently and fully engage with one another.

The central aim of this volume is to propose one methodological pathway in which these multidisciplinary perspectives can participate in a productive dialogue, enabling the cross-fertilization of ideas between broadly socio-cultural approaches and economic, political or medical

perspectives. This methodological pathway, termed “Biographies of Drink,” draws on the seminal work by Arjun Appadurai, Igor Kopytoff and others in tracing the social lives, or cultural biographies, of commodities in *The Social Life of Things* (1986), but goes beyond those scholars’ focus on commodities and commoditization to allow the diverse interests within drinking studies to come together as a whole.

Recent research has demonstrated the insights to be gained from following Appadurai’s methodology more closely, examining the life story of specific alcoholic drinks as they move in and out of particular networks of exchange. By treating aguardiente as a “historical protagonist,” for instance, David Carey Jr. and his collaborators were able to “reconceptualize Guatemalan history,” particularly in terms of revealing the important and varied roles that the lower classes and marginalized social groups played in nation-building processes in the nineteenth and twentieth century.<sup>1</sup> Charles Ludington’s analysis of changing elite attitudes towards wine in eighteenth and nineteenth-century Britain, meanwhile, points to the considerable potential of particular foods and drinks, as “things without which human beings cannot live,” to facilitate historical analysis that can “overcome the all-too-frequent compartmentalization of professional history.”<sup>2</sup> We would go further than that, to say that alcoholic drinks, as things that human beings have overwhelmingly *chosen not to* live without, provide an excellent opportunity to overcome boundaries between, as well as within, disciplines concerned with examining the human condition.<sup>3</sup>

*Biographies of Drink* therefore seeks to suggest productive ways that alcohol can be used as a lens through which to study broad historical and contemporary processes, since the production, trade and consumption of alcohol typically involves multiple social actors in a given time and space, and to facilitate the comparison of social, economic, political and cultural practices across different geographical and chronological contexts. At the same time, we aim to mobilize the biography methodology in a more flexible manner to focus attention on alcohol itself and on our changing historical relationships with alcohol. For, if alcohol is a particularly good lens through which to analyze a wide range of historical phenomena, does that mean there is something historically “special” about alcohol as an item of consumption that brings people together, in both conflict and communion, in particular ways? Consequently, our “biographies of drink” are not solely applied to specific alcoholic beverages but are also focused on objects used in the consumption of drink, particular pieces of legislation relating to alcohol, associations and venues devoted to alcohol consumption, and representations of particular ways of drinking, or thinking about drinking. In exploring these biographical case studies that

range across quite disparate geographical and chronological contexts, our aim is not to give a comprehensive account of alcohol’s special role in human society or of how alcohol can reveal so much about broader historical processes. Instead, *Biographies of Drink* illustrates a methodology through which scholars from multiple disciplines can contribute to that larger research endeavor and enter into dialogue with one another.

### A Biographical Approach

In a 1986 edited collection that had a major impact in the history and anthropology of consumption, Arjun Appadurai and his collaborators set out to trace the social lives of “specific things (or groups of things) as they circulate in specific cultural and historical milieus,” in order to produce “a series of glimpses of the ways in which desire and demand, reciprocal sacrifice and power interact to create economic value in specific social situations.” The central principle was to “follow the things themselves” through space and time: “it is the things-in-motion that illuminate their human and social context.”<sup>4</sup> *Biographies of Drink* mobilizes a similar framework of analysis, focused on the biographies of particular things, moments and ideas in the history of alcohol, but moves away from Appadurai’s overall focus on economic issues to dwell on the social, economic, political and cultural relationships and processes in which alcohol has been embedded across different historical and cultural contexts.

Some of our contributors apply this form of analysis to the types of things that appeared in Appadurai’s original work and that have continued to be the focus of analysis for subsequent generations of economic historians, anthropologists and other social scientists.<sup>5</sup> Dias-Lewandowska traces the cultural biography of wine amongst elite consumers in Poland, and Mudd follows the typical life story of a group of objects involved in consuming wine, Trier Black-Slipped ware, from production, through trade, and ritualized forms of consumption. Some of the most important insights suggested by the *Social Life of Things* have been further developed through these new case studies. The complex and sometimes overlapping relationship between luxury and staple goods, for instance, can be further elucidated through the histories of alcoholic drinks, which may change from one status to another, or embody both categories simultaneously. Appadurai’s focus on the “semiotic virtuosity” of luxury forms of consumption, carrying the “capacity to signal fairly complex social messages,” and requiring “specialized knowledge as a prerequisite

for [the] appropriate consumption” of luxury goods can certainly be seen in operation where Polish nobles sought to define themselves as modern through the consumption of French wines, and Roman-era Britons of middling wealth selected specially designed beakers as markers of novelty, worldliness and conviviality.<sup>6</sup>

*Biographies of Drink* applies the biography methodology to a broader range of categories than was the focus of *Social Life of Things*. Earnshaw, Rosenthal and Toner trace the biographies of particular literary explorations of alcohol consumption; Pereira and Rountree and Ackroyd discuss the biographies of particular marketing and design strategies in the modern alcohol industry; Jennings charts the biography of a single piece of alcohol licensing legislation; and Muggleton explores the biography of a charitable association that made beer-drinking a cornerstone of its identity. This approach aims to show that the biography method can be usefully applied beyond the realm of commodities and objects to create a unifying lens of analysis for multidisciplinary, interdisciplinary and comparative research within the field of drinking studies.

The biographical methodology lends itself to this goal because of its fundamentally reconstructive and narrative approach, which makes “it possible to analyze the interconnections between individual and institutional aspects of social reality.”<sup>7</sup> In traditional applications of biographical methodology, by the Chicago School of sociology for instance, the trajectories of individuals’ lives and the narratives they tell about their own lives are reconstructed in relation to the broader social structures through which they have moved, revealing how the individual can “shape that which is social ‘self-referentially,’” and situate themselves “in relation to society.”<sup>8</sup> Similarly, in biographical studies of non-human things, the fundamental objective is to “understand the way objects become invested with meaning through the social interactions they are caught up in,” and at the same time, how the life stories of individuals can be told, or rendered meaningful, through different objects or experiences.<sup>9</sup>

*Biographies of Drink* applies this aspect of the biographical methodology through the positioning of individual case studies relating to drink within a broader historical or cultural context, and by analyzing the connection and relationship between the individual case study and the larger historical or cultural structure. In some chapters, this produces insights into how individuals’ life stories become bound up with social movements (Muggleton) or marketing strategies (Pereira); how nations construct and reconstruct their own kinds of biography through cultural icons as well as momentous political developments (Toner and Dias-Lewandowska); the importance of individuals’ and groups’ emotional responses to particular

objects and experiences in shaping social, economic and political, as well as cultural, developments (Rountree and Ackroyd, Rosenthal and Mudd); how visions of society (Jennings) or the self (Earnshaw) evolve through changing historical contexts. Collectively, the chapters also offer contributions towards what we might call a larger cultural biography of alcohol that examines “alcohol” not just as a material thing that comes in various liquid forms, but as a complex amalgam of material things, relationships and processes. Much future research, across many disciplinary, geographical and chronological boundaries, will need to be done to complete this cultural biography of alcohol, but we hope the “Biographies of Drink” methodology will provide a workable pathway through which such cross-disciplinary and cross-cultural work can be done.<sup>10</sup>

### **The Fruits of this Approach**

Of course, the "Biographies of Drink" methodology will be judged on its fruits rather than its theoretical basis, and this volume is intended to stand as a testament to its value when put into practice. What, then, have we learned from our attempts to employ it here? Undoubtedly one of its main strengths is that each biography takes the form of a tightly focused and closely contextualized case study, so that its author is able to bring to bear his or her own specialist expertise and apply the rigor associated with a piece of work aimed at a subject-specific audience. Yet, at the same time, by constructing each detailed study as a story, as a biography, with beginnings and endings, and explanations for developments in between, the chapters move beyond potentially static case studies and enter the realm of charting broader historical processes. Consequently, we are able to identify comparisons and contrasts across the essays, and to identify recurring themes. Readers' own interests will no doubt guide them to isolate numerous areas of fruitful overlap in the themes and processes discussed by the chapters that follow, including several that have not yet occurred to us. Here, we want to highlight just a few examples upon which we think the methodology applied here sheds considerable light. This is not intended as a statement of the definitive argument or conclusions of the book, but rather as one possible reading of the chapters as a whole that serves to demonstrate the way in which we hope readers will seek out and reflect upon connections between the biographies.

One central motif is that alcohol's role in societies needs to be understood as more than simply a problematic one. Admittedly this is not a new argument, and the “pathological” interpretation of historical alcohol use has been under fire in the field of drinking studies since at least the

publication of anthropologist Mary Douglas's edited collection *Constructive Drinking*.<sup>11</sup> Nonetheless, it is a view that often persists in contemporary public discourse, and the essays collected here offer yet another reminder that alcoholic drinks have often fulfilled vital functions in societies: they fuelled the armies of ancient Rome; they were the lifeblood of trade in Roman Gaul (Mudd); their production underpinned a major drinks industry in nineteenth and twentieth century Britain (Jennings); and their consumption served as a focus for charitable fund-raising in 1920s Britain (Muggleton), much as it had done in the Middle Ages through church-ales. Not all of these functions were unalloyed positives of course, but these examples highlight that drink was and is often central to the economies and infrastructures of societies beyond simply being a source of narcotic solace for the poor.

Moreover, the essays here indicate that the consumption of alcohol is as often tied to the expression of positive senses of identity as it used to drown sorrows. Consumption is revealed as characteristically occurring within contexts of association and sociability, and as a focus for rituals of symbolic bonding that helped to forge collective identities. The taverns of sixteenth-century Florence provided a social hub for artisans and laborers, and played a role in shaping their strong senses of "occupational and class-based male solidarities" (Rosenthal).<sup>12</sup> The middle class of post-First World War Britain sought to articulate an identity based on patriotism and civic service through drinking clubs that opposed prohibitionist movements (Muggleton). Literary and intellectual movements also sought to define themselves through a positive engagement with alcohol: from the wine-cherishing literati of Renaissance Florence to the hedonistic *modernistas* of early twentieth-century Mexico, such movements have often stressed the creative inspiration that alcohol can provide (Rosenthal and Toner).<sup>13</sup>

The positive symbolism attached to alcohol consumption abounds in the essays: Romano-British urban dwellers hosted convivial symposia to express their affluence; Polish elites of the eighteenth century quaffed champagne to exhibit their "modernity" (Mudd and Dias-Lewandowska). Interestingly, alcohol consumption has often been configured as a "respectable" activity. Whilst Victorian moralists may have associated respectability with temperance, many working class men in that society defined respectability as adhering to certain drinking rituals, such as buying rounds (Jennings), and for African Americans in the 1960s consuming a fine whisky could carry connotations of success and respectability (Pereira). Of course, as chapters by Jennings and Toner remind us, these positive associations did not go uncontested, and cultural

discourses relating to alcohol were just as likely to condemn its consumption as a danger to both individuals and society. But alcoholic drinks were rarely without their champions, and these were certainly not drawn exclusively from the ranks of the poor or disreputable.

If the consumption and symbolism of alcoholic drink was often central to the construction of various types of group identity, this was likewise the case for national identity. Certain drinks and patterns of drinking can become associated with either patriotism or foreignness. Debates about national drinking cultures typically hinge on a tension between “traditional” and “modern” drinking habits: writers in late nineteenth-century Mexico often saw alcoholism as a modern phenomenon that threatened to dissolve the bonds of traditional society (Toner); “domestic” wines in eighteenth-century Poland became symbols of a traditional Polish identity that opposed what it configured as the corrosive effects of modern, foreign French wines (Dias-Lewandowska); the middle class members of a 1920s drinking fraternity championed the traditional “Merry England” trio of beef, beer and baccy [tobacco] as bulwarks against what they perceived as dangerous and encroaching Russian and American values (Muggleton).<sup>14</sup> Yet the “traditional” and the “modern,” the “domestic” and the “alien,” are not always in conflict in discourses about alcohol consumption. As Rountree and Ackroyd show, the successful British pub chain JD Wetherspoon seeks to appeal to consumers' desires to step into a pub steeped in tradition and its locality, whilst simultaneously offering the glittering range of worldwide products that only modern global consumer capitalism can offer. If nothing else, their design aesthetic demonstrates that both tradition and modernity continue to have potent associations with alcoholic drinks.

Whilst many of the essays explore the relationship between drink and group or national identities, others examine the important role alcohol could play in individual identities: advertising companies pushed drinks as markers of personal success (Pereira); writers of fiction deployed alcoholism as a metaphor for personal failure (Toner); others depicted it as a valuable aide to deep philosophical reflection on the nature of the self (Earnshaw). Taken collectively, then, these “biographies of drink” indicate that alcohol's trade, its consumption, and just as importantly the meanings and symbols attached to it, were often deeply implicated in the ways in which past societies organized themselves: as economies, into social groups, into classes, into nations, and as individuals. This may help to explain why—as several of the chapters show—attempts to regulate or prohibit alcohol often flounder: they need to not only overcome vested economic interests, or reform the behavior of the poorer groups in society

that they often target, but to realize they are attempting to manage a substance that has come to represent such an important resource for the creation of so many cultural and social formations across the social scale.

If the essays as a whole constitute a fruitful collective reflection on these several overarching themes—and indeed many other themes not directly discussed in this introduction that readers will themselves identify—each individual chapter also represents a valuable study in its own right, as well as a contribution to one of four themes that we have used to organize the book. Part I, *Biographies of Drink and Society*, consists of three essays each with a very different focus, yet all are concerned with using their case study to explore broader processes of societal change in a given historical moment. David Rosenthal, for instance, takes as his focus a fictional account of a Florentine bar crawl, and unpacks it to highlight important features in the broader biographies of Italian taverns, cities and society in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Paul Jennings reconstructs the biography of Britain's 1904 Licensing Act, tracing its origins, implementation and afterlife. In the process he examines the shifting but intersecting political, economic, socio-cultural and legal contexts that both shaped the Act and reveal much about processes of historical change across nineteenth- and twentieth-century Britain. David Muggleton provides a biography of both the charity-cum-drinking fraternity “Ye Ancient Order or Froth Blowers,” which existed from 1924-31, and its founders, relating these stories to the broader issue of how members of Britain's middle class sought to define themselves in relation to major contemporary issues such as public service, patriotism, respectability and the Drink Question, in the wake of the First World War.

Part II, *Biographies of Drink and Material Culture*, is composed of two essays that focus their attention on the material and physical dimensions of alcohol retail and consumption: the vessels and venues within which drinks are sold and consumed. Each essay demonstrates the ways in which the design of these vessels and venues, in particular, can reveal a great deal about a society's relationship with alcohol. Shaun Mudd offers a biography of wine-drinking beakers from Roman Britain, following the story from their production, through their use in the distribution of wine, to their use in convivial symposia. Mudd's biographical analysis highlights the centrality of wine to the Roman economy and military machine, to trade networks in Gaul, and to associational culture and identity formation in the ancient world. Christopher Rountree and Rupert Ackroyd's joint-authored piece explores the biography of a particular pub-design aesthetic, from its origins in the nineteenth century to its use today

by the pub chain J D Wetherspoon. The chapter shows that the ambivalent associations between drink and ideas about tradition and modernity are embodied in the fabric of drinking venues as much as they are articulated more explicitly in written or printed sources.

Part III, *Biographies of Drink and the Nation*, focuses on contexts in which debates about drink have been closely entwined with debates about national identity. Dorota Dias-Lewandowska reconstructs the biography of wine in Poland, from the seventeenth century to the nineteenth, charting how its changing associations and consumption across that period—especially with regards to the choice of either Hungarian or French wines—reflected developments and tensions in elite attempts to define Polish national identity. Deborah Toner's chapter shows how the emerging concept of “alcoholism” in late nineteenth-century Mexico was taken up by the writers of biographical fiction as a theme through which to reflect upon Mexico's own “national biography,” and examines in particular the way that alcoholism served as a metaphor for both modernity and national decline.

Part IV, *Biographies of Drink and the Individual*, brings together two essays with very different focuses into a fruitful discussion of the role alcohol can play in the formation and exploration of individual identities. Rochelle Pereira examines whisky advertising campaigns from the 1950s and 1960s that were aimed at the African American consumer, and shows how advertisers used the biographies of successful individuals in their adverts to encourage consumers to associate their brand of whisky with success, respectability and a certain “brand” of masculinity. Steven Earnshaw focuses on a range of paintings and biographical novels from the late nineteenth to the late twentieth centuries to argue that new ideas about the self that developed across this period were reflected in changing depictions of the individual habitual drinker. For the first time, the habitual drinker was portrayed as a potentially admirable figure in pursuit of an Existentialist “authentic” self.

Between them these chapters cover a wide range of historical and geographical contexts, and draw upon a diverse selection of source material and disciplinary approaches. In light of this eclecticism we think it is a remarkable testament to the “Biographies of Drink” methodology that they coalesce into a coherent conversation that highlights a range of comparative themes and complementary conclusions. We hope readers find the chapters stimulating and the methodology suggestive.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> David Carey Jr., “Introduction: Writing a History of Alcohol in Guatemala,” in *Distilling the Influence of Alcohol: Aguardiente in Guatemalan History*, with foreword by William B. Taylor (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2012), 14.

<sup>2</sup> Charles Ludington, *The Politics of Wine in Britain: A New Cultural History* (Houndmills, Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), 10. For other works that analyse the changing significance of specific alcoholic drinks over time, see Frederick H. Smith, *Caribbean Rum: A Social and Economic Perspective* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2005); Dmitri van den Bersselaar, *The King of Drinks: Schnapps Gin from Modernity to Tradition* (Leiden: Brill, 2007); Kolleen M. Guy, *When Champagne Became French: Wine and the Making of a National Identity* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2003).

<sup>3</sup> For some important attempts to use alcohol—and other drugs—as a focus for conversations across disciplinary boundaries, see Jordan Goodman, Paul E. Lovejoy and Andrew Sherratt (eds), *Consuming Habits: Global and Historical Perspectives on How Cultures Define Drugs*, 2nd edn (London: Routledge, 2007); Jonathan Herring, Ciaran Regan, Darin Weinberg and Phil Withington (eds), *Intoxicants and Society: Problematic Pleasures of Drugs and Alcohol* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013).

<sup>4</sup> Arjun Appadurai, “Introduction: Commodities and the Politics of Value,” in *The Social Life of Things: Commodities in Cultural Perspective*, ed. Arjun Appadurai (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), 4-5.

<sup>5</sup> See, for instance, Wim van Binsbergen and Peter Geschiere (eds), *Commodification: Things, Agency, and Identities. The Social Life of Things Revisited* (New Brunswick: Transaction Publishers, 2005).

<sup>6</sup> Appadurai, “Introduction,” 38.

<sup>7</sup> Ursula Apitzsch and Irini Siouti, “Biographical Analysis as an Interdisciplinary Research Perspective in the Field of Migration Studies,” *Integrated Research Methods in Gender and Migration Studies*, Research Integration Project, University of York (2007), 10.

<[http://www.york.ac.uk/res/researchintegration/Integrative\\_Research\\_Methods.htm](http://www.york.ac.uk/res/researchintegration/Integrative_Research_Methods.htm)>

<sup>8</sup> Peter Alheit, *Taking the Knocks: Youth Unemployment and Biography, A Qualitative Analysis* (London: Cassell, 1994) cited in Apitzsch and Siouti, “Biographical Analysis,” 5.

<sup>9</sup> Chris Gosden and Yvonne Marshall, “The Cultural Biography of Objects,” *World Archaeology* 31, no.2, The Cultural Biography of Objects (1999): 170. See also Janet Hoskins, *Biographical Objects: How Things Tell the Stories of Peoples’ Lives* (New York: Routledge, 1998), 1-24; Igor Kopytoff, “The Cultural Biography of Things: Commoditization as Process,” in *Social Life of Things*, 67-68; Michael Rowlands, “Value and the Cultural Transmission of Things,” in *Commodification*, 270, 281; Frédéric Lesage, “Cultural Biographies and Excavations of Media: Context and Process,” *Journal of Broadcasting and Electronic Media* 57, no. 1

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(2013): 86-88; John R. Stephens, “The Cultural Biography of a Western Australian War Memorial,” *International Journal of Heritage Studies* 19, no. 7 (2013): 661-63.

<sup>10</sup> Another recent collection of essays that makes an important contribution toward this larger project is Phil Withington and Angela McShane, *Past and Present*, Supplement 9: Cultures of Intoxication (2014).

<sup>11</sup> Mary Douglas (ed.), *Constructive Drinking: Perspectives on Drink from Anthropology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987).

<sup>12</sup> For a similar argument about the role of the alehouse in seventeenth-century England see Mark Hailwood, “Sociability, Work and Labouring Identity in Seventeenth-Century England,” *Cultural and Social History* 8, no. 1 (2011): 9-29.

<sup>13</sup> This theme is also reflected in recent work on early modern England: Michelle O’Callaghan, *The English Wits: Literature and Sociability in Early Modern England* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007); Phil Withington, “Intoxicants and Society in Early Modern England,” *The Historical Journal* 54, no. 3 (2011): 631-57.

<sup>14</sup> The relationship between alcohol and the nation is the focus of a growing body of scholarship. See, for instance, Deborah Toner, *Alcohol and Nationhood in Nineteenth-Century Mexico* (Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press, 2015); Bradley Kadel, “The Pub and the Irish Nation,” *Social History of Alcohol and Drugs* 18 (2003): 65-84; Guy, *When Champagne became French*.



**PART I:**

**BIOGRAPHIES OF DRINK AND SOCIETY**

## CHAPTER ONE

# THE BARFLY'S DREAM: TAVERNS AND REFORM IN THE EARLY MODERN ITALIAN CITY

DAVID ROSENTHAL  
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When Bastiano de' Rossi addressed the esteemed literati of Florence's Accademia della Crusca in 1593, he painted himself as a man in desperate need of a drink. It was one of the Crusca's six-monthly *stravizzi*—lavish, wine-sodden banquets for the investiture of new officials—and Bastiano, one of the Crusca's founders and currently its secretary, gave a speech entitled “A ramble in praise of wine.” He warned his colleagues that he had some bad news, and began to tell them a story about how he had gone to bed one night with an overpowering thirst, then dreamt of finding a tavern in Florence in which he might quench it.<sup>1</sup>

In his “dream,” Bastiano materializes outside the gates of Florence, but he is only forty feet from the walls so he knows he will find a watering hole nearby. In front of him is the Porta alla Croce, the city's eastern gate. “I went inside in order to go to Michele del Bello, who has the tavern at the side of the gate. But I found nobody there except a silly girl who told me that neither master nor servant was around.”<sup>2</sup> He heads down Borgo la Croce until it emerges into the Piazza Sant' Ambrogio, then he swerves up via dei Pilastrini and down to the tavern of the Giardino [Garden]. But there is nobody to be found at that *osteria* [tavern] either. On Bastiano goes. And he keeps going, until he has taken himself around the entire city and some thirty-odd taverns in what turns out to be a fruitless attempt to find a pub that is open or an *oste* [tavernkeeper] who can serve him. In effect, Bastiano traces out an imaginary pub crawl. It is the Florence of the barfly *flâneur*—as opposed, say, to the Florence of the nascent art pilgrim, to whom Francesco Bocchi spoke in his well-known guidebook published two years earlier, in 1591.<sup>3</sup>

Bastiano's comic anxiety dream frames a discussion that aims to shed light on the biography or trajectory of the tavern in the early modern Italian city, a subject still to attract sustained scholarly attention. It speaks to both the social practices of drinking and the discursive worlds surrounding and impacting on these practices.<sup>4</sup> What Bastiano presents us with, firstly, is the idea that taverns, like churches or certain streetcorners, were glowing pins on the mental map Florentines had of their city; that they exerted a kind of gravity, that tavern-going could at times determine the itineraries of bodies, primarily male bodies, through urban space. Unlike administrative and tax sources, which furnish the historian with an essentially static city, his document indicates how many of the city's inhabitants joined up the dots. Bastiano also suggests something about the mediating role of the tavernkeeper, a figure who, as we shall see, has a crucial part to play in his conceit. Lastly, Bastiano's celebration of wine was written at a moment of some significance in the biography of the tavern in Italy, when carnivalesque transgressions clashed head on with new religious and economic imperatives. Indeed, taverns in Florence, as elsewhere, were also glowing pins on the urban map of Catholic reform, veritable battlegrounds in a bid to refashion male behavior.

### Taverns as Social Hubs

Bastiano de' Rossi knew his taverns. Almost all of the *osterie* he namechecks in his itinerary can be located in the ducal government's 1561 census of the city's shops, which included forty taverns. Bastiano's "tavern at the side of the gate" was the "tavern at the Porta alla Croce" on the corner of the now-vanished via Gelsomino. His next stop, the better known tavern of the Giardino, could be reached by heading from Piazza Sant' Ambrigo up via Pilastrì—as it is in his route—and then down today's via del Pepe to the lost alley of via Giardino.<sup>5</sup> Taverns such as these, outside of the center, can be seen as junctions in an everyday ecology of neighborhood, along with bakeries and other well-frequented if more sparsely distributed shops, such as those of apothecaries. Like many local shops, taverns were often located at streetcorners, and they were linked to them as points of convergence in the social imagination. Do not be caught "at the streetcorners or in the taverns," a neighborhood confraternity in Piazza Sant' Ambrogio warned its members who were claiming benefits for sickness—and in fact there was a streetcorner tavern a few steps away from the confraternity's oratory.<sup>6</sup>

For Florence's artisans and laborers, these neighborhood taverns had always been arenas of male association. Indeed they had a role in shaping

strong occupational and class-based male solidarities, as happened during the Ciompi wool worker revolt in 1378 and in the scattered cases of industrial agitation that have come to light for the fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries.<sup>7</sup> In Bastiano de' Rossi's time evidence for lower class male association based around taverns is richly furnished by the carnivalesque brigades known as the *potenze* (powers). These brigades flourished from the late fifteenth to early seventeenth centuries, at their height carving up the city into as many as forty-five territories or "kingdoms."<sup>8</sup> Typically the hubs of these kingdoms were streetcorners, and at festive times—such as at May Day or at special politico-dynastic celebrations of the Medici family such as the birth of an heir—they set up wooden thrones on their corners and held court. Two *potenze* named taverns as their "residences." The Biliemme, a *potenza* of wool weavers in the northern parish of San Lorenzo, based itself at the tavern at the Cella di Ciardo, at the corner of via Ariento and via Panicale; while the Spalla met at the Trave Torta [Warped Beam] at the southern foot of the Ponte alla Carraia.<sup>9</sup> Many other taverns were located precisely where *potenze* met, such as the Fiasco D'Oro [Golden Flask] at the Canto al Monteloro in the city's east, or the tavern at the Canto alla Macine in the north.<sup>10</sup> During festivities in 1588, one contemporary wrote that "the Marquis of the Nespola had a fine stage made in the little *piazza* of the tavern of the Drago [Dragon]," at the foot of the Ponte Vecchio.<sup>11</sup>

As *potenze*, the tavern took on a particular symbolic charge for these men, since feasting and drinking were central to carnivalesque tropes of inversion and excess: when the "poor" briefly became kings for a day, they also appropriated the rich man's world of plenty. At celebrations in 1577 for the birth of an heir to Grand Duke Francesco de' Medici, a *potenza* based in Piazza San Lorenzo described how it had put up a six-yard high Bacchus, who carried a huge ewer that poured wine into a tub from which anyone could fill their cup.<sup>12</sup> Another king, in a list of his festive expenses, reveals, indicatively, that he made his single biggest payout that year for a feast, spending twenty-nine *lire* for "a meal in the house of the admiral, all his men and any others who wanted to come." This wool worker king paid out a further six *lire* that day to "Donato the tavernkeeper for lots of wine," plus another twelve *lire* to a wineseller for three barrels "to give to drink to people, whoever wants to drink."<sup>13</sup> Carnivalesque conventions demanded the king play a part in defraying the costs of festivity, whether from his own pocket or, as in 1577, using Medici donations. Indeed at special regime-sponsored festivities, the grand duke—a king himself—supplied wine on the Piazza della Signoria all day long.

The *potenze*, whose active members numbered anywhere between fifty and one hundred and fifty men, attest to the tavern's role as more than a hub of everyday social contact; it was, as Edward Muir has suggested for Italy, an agent of community.<sup>14</sup> Here, the figure of the tavernkeeper comes into relief. The *potenza* of the Nespola at the Drago tavern, mentioned above, brought together a disparate group of tradesmen: at various times its core members included a mattress-maker, butcher, painter, barber, flour-vendor and smith.<sup>15</sup> In 1577, the men of the Nespola elected the Drago's tavernkeeper, a certain Luigi di Bastiano, as their king. Tavernkeepers such as Luigi can be seen as mediating figures; indeed such men were cultivated because of the social and the material resources they represented. *Potenze* leaders, who were often illiterate, sometimes asked tavernkeepers to accompany them to the offices of various magistracies in order to pen receipts or other documents. In 1610, the king of the Spalla, an illiterate miller, called upon a tavernkeeper—most likely the *oste* at the Spalla's Trave Torta—to write both a receipt for Grand Duke Cosimo II's payout as well as a census the brigades were instructed to take of their territories that year.<sup>16</sup> At the same time, this tavernkeeper, Chimenti Maroni, was one of two *osti* called to affirm the census of a brigade at the Porta San Gallo gate, all the way up at the northern tip of the city.<sup>17</sup> Very few men appear among the leadership cohort of more than one *potenza*—nine out of 259 in 1610. Tellingly, two of them were tavernkeepers: Maroni was one; another played the roles of secretary and counselor to two groups that shared a border.<sup>18</sup>

While we still know too little about either the extent or the nature of everyday social interaction between urban strata in Italian cities the tavern was one of the ambiguously public-private spaces in which we can be sure that social boundaries became more porous. Here, again, the tavernkeeper was a mediating figure, or so the words of an *oste* in Venice offering to spy on his clientele for the government suggest: "As a tavernkeeper I have the true way of hearing, dealing, and reporting ... because every quality of people come to my place, and I can make them familiarize with me."<sup>19</sup> From the outset of his comic oration, Bastiano de' Rossi associated tavern with tavernkeeper, "recounting" how he had sought out Michele del Bello at the Porta alla Croce gate; and later, after exhausting almost every tavern in the city, how he had spotted Stivale of the Porco [Pig], "the sight of whom comforted me," and rushed to ask him why all the taverns in Florence were shut down. Indeed, tavernkeepers themselves represented an important first point of contact between elite clienteles and artisan Florence. Without exception tavernkeepers were the renter-operators rather than the owners of the taverns they ran; the owners, as was typical

of property in Florence and other Italian cities, were mainly patrician families and ecclesiastical institutions. In the government's census of 1561 about eighty-five per cent of these tavernkeepers were men without a family name, just a patronymic and sometimes a nickname, such as Mariano di Betto *detto falefeste* [Mariano di Betto called the party-maker], who had been running the tavern near the southern gate of the Porta Romana for a year; or Bartolomeo di Tomasso *detto il morte* [the deathly one], who had kept the Baldracca near the Bargello or palace of justice for around the same length of time.<sup>20</sup>

Without doubt, the main arena for tavern-based contact between Florentine men of all backgrounds was the city center—dense with shops and markets, alive with the rhythms of work, commerce and shopping, criss-crossed daily by hundreds if not thousands of individual journeys. In the center, taverns had a social, spatial and imaginary character all of their own. They were so well known that Galileo, in the early 1590s, could confidently throw out the names of just a few of them to help him nail his argument against the “toga” or academic gown, which was that clothes do not make the man. Instead men were made like flasks. “When you go to the tavern in summer, to the Bertuccie, Porco, Sant’ Andrea, to the Chiassolino or Malvagia,” Galileo said, you will see that the flasks are not very fancy but instead reveal the excellent red wine within.<sup>21</sup> These taverns were clearly a magnet for many Florentine men, their barkeeps well known around the city. In 1577, one illiterate *potenza* king in the northern parishes sought out a tavernkeeper in the tavern of Sant’ Andrea—beside the central market, the Mercato Vecchio—to write for him at the ducal treasury.<sup>22</sup> It was in the taverns of the center that Bastiano de’ Rossi’s imaginary pub crawl (and one assumes many actual drinking bouts) ended up: ultimately at the Porco and Fico [Fig], two taverns more or less opposite each other in alleyways off the via Calzaiuoli, the major processional and commercial thoroughfare connecting the Duomo to the Palazzo Vecchio. Among tavernkeepers themselves, the Porco was considered one of the principal inns of the city. This was where the two men elected to visit the sick of the tavernkeepers’ confraternity of San Martino went every week to consult a list of the brothers who needed to be encouraged to confess and take communion.<sup>23</sup>

Apart from drinking and eating, these taverns also loomed large in a city-center topography of gambling and sex. Indeed, when it came to regulating tavern culture, Florentine governments did not have a lot to say about drinking, but repeatedly banned “all kinds of games in any tavern of the city of Florence, either on the little walls outside or on the tables of those taverns.”<sup>24</sup> One catches glimpses of this gambling culture from court

cases, such as one back in 1433 in which a group of men were prosecuted for gambling in Piazza Sant' Andrea, including a cloth merchant from Pisa, a wool cloth manufacturer, a worker in the government's forced loans office and a belt-maker. It turned out that "the cook at the neighboring tavern" of Sant' Andrea had supplied the dice.<sup>25</sup> The Fico became notorious, or notorious again, in 1501, due to the case of a certain Antonio Rinaldeschi, who threw horseshit at a tabernacle of the Virgin after losing at dice in that tavern, a crime for which he was hanged from the windows of the Bargello.<sup>26</sup> Meanwhile, the warren of streets between the Mercato Vecchio and the Florentine Baptistry contained the city's public brothel from 1403 until the creation of the ghetto in 1571; and the *osterie* of that zone were nightly venues for contact between pimps and prostitutes and their clients.<sup>27</sup> In the rich Florentine lexicon of double-entendre, city-center taverns, as Guido Ruggiero has pointed out, had highly suggestive names: Bertuccie [Monkey, or Pussy], Chiassolino [Alley, or Little Whorehouse], Fico [Fig, or Cunt], Porco [Pig/Depraved].<sup>28</sup> The same taverns, especially Sant' Andrea and the Buco [Hole] near the Palazzo Vecchio, were also regular rendezvous for male sodomy, a widespread practice that involved liaisons between men of every rank.<sup>29</sup> In Florence's hypersexualized Carnival song literature, where double-entendre—and sodomy—was everything, the word *osteria* itself signified the arse, while barfly [*taverniere*] was another way of saying sodomite. Indeed several times in this sixteenth-century literature the taverns of the Fico and Buco appear together to signify vaginal and anal sex. In one poem, Alfonso de' Pazzi's "Song of the Barflies," penned in the late 1540s, the barflies address "the ladies" (the standard format of the genre, though there is a sly understanding that Carnival "ladies" often referred to cross-dressed men) to imply that while they preferred sodomy they would go to the tavern of the Fico since the Buco was closed for non-payment of taxes.<sup>30</sup>

In his dream, Bastiano de' Rossi finally fetches up at the tavern of the Fico, where "Silvio, honored by the herdsmen and godfather of some of you" is packing up, and there he discovers why he cannot get a drink in Florence that day: everyone has gone off for a special meeting of the tavernkeepers' guild to hear about a catalogue of crimes perpetrated against the trade by the members of the Accademia della Crusca. Bastiano tags along. He sees the tavernkeepers show up in a sumptuous procession. There is a king. There is a hierarchy of senators, the most important of whom, representing the city's most important taverns, sit closest to the monarch. It is a micro-state of publicans, a burlesque mirror of ducal government (or the government of the Crusca for that matter). The denunciations begin. The tavernkeeper of the Porco says he was tripped up

by a member of the Crusca while delivering food to the table. One bartender says he was given a smack for not serving fast enough. Another was lampooned in song; another was told his boiled eggs were inedible. Bastiano himself is accused of not paying his bar tab. Even the dead, the ghost of a bar servant who once worked at the Buco, makes an appearance to condemn the members of the Crusca. At the end of it all the king passes a terrible sentence: from now on the Cruscanti will only be served wine from Cinque Terre, or even less palatable plonk if that is available. Bastiano is so traumatized by this turn of events that he wakes up. Worse, when he runs off to the Fico to tell his friend Silvio about his dream, he discovers it is all true. His oration ends with an appeal to the Counsels of the Crusca to make amends. Otherwise the Cruscanti may be forced into exile in order to get a decent glass of wine.

Bastiano precisely tailored his oration for its liminal moment at the Crusca and its carnivalesque excesses. It was an exuberant love letter to wine: “Oh precious liquor, for that is what you truly are, with your ruby color you cheer the hearts of the living, with your odor you comfort them, with your taste you revive them. What can one do without you? What can one say? What can one think?”<sup>31</sup> It was also a love letter to the tavern, which he imagines as a carnivalesque space in which boundaries were easily and legitimately permeable—between restraint and excess, and between men of different rank; a space, indeed, where plebeian tavernkeepers, the gatekeepers who regulated entry to that prized milieu, were kings. Bastiano, like any Florentine, was clearly familiar with his city's streetcorner kingdoms and the tropes of status-inversion within which they paraded themselves on the festive stage; in fact, a *potenza* kingdom specifically of “Tavernkeepers” emerges in the sources in the early seventeenth century, and may well have existed earlier, enmeshed with the occupational confraternity of San Martino.<sup>32</sup>

No doubt Bastiano's portrayal of a faintly ludicrous, vendetta-hungry “nobility” of drink would have gone down a hoot among his learned brothers in the academy. Yet at the same time it recognized the actual social importance of these men and of the taverns they ruled. There is a mid-sixteenth century short story by the Florentine satirist Antonfrancesco Grazzini—a co-founder, with Bastiano, of the Accademia della Crusca in 1583—that similarly invests the tavern with profound social importance. The story involves a cruel trick, or *beffa*, played on a physician called Manente, who was kidnapped after being left drunk one night outside his customary haunt, the city-center *osteria* of the Bertucci.<sup>33</sup> A rumor is spread about that Manente is dead, so that when he is released and returns to Florence months later none of his friends recognize him. Even his wife