

**Drunken Brawls in Brothels: Cheap wine, court records,  
and other disreputable aspects of the economic history of Constance and its region**

Josh Burson

Paper presented at the German Historical Institute's  
medieval history seminar  
London, October 2009

**Citation:** Burton, J. (2009, October). *Drunken Brawls in Brothels: Cheap wine, court records, and other disreputable aspects of the economic history of Constance and its region*. Medieval history seminar conducted at the 6th Annual Conference at the German Historical Institute, London, United Kingdom.

**"Drunken Brawls in Brothels: Cheap wine, court records, and other disreputable aspects of the economic history of Constance and its region."**

In 1456, the records of the City Council of Constance memorialized a fight in a brothel. A certain Burk Brüd had drawn a knife (in itself a punishable offense within city limits) and wounded one Heinrich Appenzeller, for which he was fined four silver marks and sentenced to two months in jail.<sup>1</sup> The source of the quarrel is not recorded, although given the multiple functions of houses of prostitution in the period (and the nature of their clientele in any age), it is likely that alcohol was involved. Such cases were very much the norm for the court, which sentenced participants in brawls and knife fights with some regularity. What makes this particular fight noteworthy is the light that it sheds on the subject of my own research: the many and varied ties that connected Constance to the countryside and the wider region around it. In this case, *both* participants in the fight were from out of town; and their appearance in the city's criminal records—along with that of many of their contemporaries—gives us essential information about who came to Constance in the fifteenth century, and also hints at other aspects of the relationship between town and countryside.

Taken as a whole, my dissertation is nothing particularly out of the ordinary—in terms of German-language historiography. Since the 1970's, historians influenced both by the *Annales* School and Germany's long-standing tradition of local historical study have examined a large number of late-medieval German cities in their relationship with rural areas, just as I have now done for Constance. Particularly influential has been Rolf

Kießling's *Die Stadt und ihr Land* (1989), a study of four prominent Upper Swabian towns.<sup>2</sup> Kießling focused on the different interactions of each town with the surrounding region—as city-state, as center of a rural cloth industry, as princely administrative center, and so forth. He emphasized the importance of the ownership of rural territory by the cities' citizens and institutions, and also examined how civic policy affected the countryside and vice versa, and how the relationship changed as one got further away from the town.<sup>3</sup> Subsequent scholarship in Germany has generally followed Kießling's model,<sup>4</sup> although some studies (notably by Juliane Kümmel and Tom Scott) have also addressed how rural residents saw and were affected by the cities.<sup>5</sup> All of these studies have demonstrated that the relationships between regions and their cities played a key role in the history of late-medieval Germany. The region's economy in particular was dominated by the cities and their role in finishing and exporting rural products, including finished products such as cloth and iron goods as well as raw materials.<sup>6</sup> And in an age of political fragmentation, social, economic and ideological connections between city and countryside played an equally important role, and thus are key to understanding the politics of the period and in particular the background to the Reformation. With the exception of Scott, however, the topic has been under-studied in English, and there has

---

<sup>1</sup> Stadtarchiv Konstanz (henceforth StA K) L 806, p. 80.

<sup>2</sup> Kießling, *Die Stadt und ihr Land: Umlandpolitik, Bürgerbesitz und Wirtschaftsgefüge in Ostschwaben vom 14. bis ins 16. Jahrhundert* (Cologne, 1989).

<sup>3</sup> Kießling, *Stadt und ihr Land*, pp. 707-13.

<sup>4</sup> See for example Thomas Hill, *Die Stadt und ihr Markt. Bremens Umlands- und Außenbeziehungen im Mittelalter* (Stuttgart 2004).

<sup>5</sup> Kümmel, *Bäuerliche Gesellschaft und Städtische Herrschaft im Spätmittelalter* (Constance, 1988); Scott, *Freiburg and the Breisgau* (Oxford, 1986).

<sup>6</sup> Tom Scott, *Society and Economy in Germany* (New York, 2002), pp. 133-6.

been no comparable interest in city-countryside interactions in medieval England.<sup>7</sup> My research on fifteenth-century Constance, therefore, seeks to help remedy this omission, as well as contribute to the field as a whole, since while several authors have studied aspects of the city's history in the late Middle Ages, there has been no systematic study of its relationship with the countryside. (These goals, as well as a more detailed précis of historiography of the topic, are laid out in the introductory first chapter of my dissertation.)

With a few exceptions, my findings suggest that Constance was fairly typical among German cities in its relationship with the surrounding region. Ties between the city and countryside were close, and the relationship between the two played a key role in the history of both. Of particular note were political connections (which I deal with in Chapter 2). In the course of the fifteenth century, the city acquired an assortment of jurisdictional rights, particularly in the Thurgau to the south of the city. These were designed to protect and complement existing ties, created by the extensive holdings (both in the form of individual pieces of land and of more extensive lordships) that belonged to Constance citizens and civic institutions. Further links were created by the admission of *Ausbürger*, country residents (both peasant and noble) who held citizenship in Constance, and by alliances and other contacts with neighboring towns and local nobles, with whom the city had an unusually close relationship.

Of equal importance was the city's economic relationship with the region (Chapter 3). Constance (not surprisingly) relied on the surrounding countryside for food

---

<sup>7</sup> There have, of course, been a few studies of this type, notably Maryanne Kowaleski's *Local Markets and Regional Trade in Medieval Exeter* (Cambridge, 1995), and Brice Campbell's *A Medieval Capital and its Grain Supply: Agrarian production and distribution in the London region c.1300* (Cheltenham, 1993).

supplies; what is more notable is the fact that the town's export industries were *also* dependent on rural production. Linen and wine from the Constance region, both trade commodities of supra-regional importance in the fifteenth century, were both produced in the countryside, but their finishing and export were in the hands of city merchants. The identification of wine as a key trade commodity for the town, incidentally, is at odds with more traditional views of its economic history, which assert the sole primacy of the linen trade and claim that the loss of the city's market share in this sector led to economic catastrophe. That Constance's economy declined in the later part of the fifteenth century is clear from its tax records; but this decline seems to have been both gradual and caused by a number of different factors. Moreover, on a day-to-day basis the most important factor in the urban economy may have been its role as a market center and moneylender to the surrounding region, which are explored through an analysis of debt and of criminal records as guides to who came to Constance to do business.

My fourth chapter explores psychological relationships between town and countryside. Donations by Constance citizens to religious institutions outside the walls demonstrate that these played an important role in the devotional life of the city. An examination of the City Council's attempts to define boundaries in the world outside the walls reveals something of how contemporaries viewed the countryside, and in particular their perceptions of relative distance. Lastly, contemporary literary and administrative texts are analyzed for the light that they can throw on how townsmen and rural dwellers saw one another. The final chapter of the dissertation sums up my findings.

A number of features make my work on Constance distinctive. First and foremost is the unusually extensive source base, preserved both in the City Archives in Constance

and elsewhere. Secondly, as noted earlier my research has led to somewhat different conclusions about Constance's economy and its political fate in the fifteenth century than those of other historians. And finally, I have sought to develop some new conceptual tools to examine contemporary perceptions of the relationship between urban and rural worlds. It is chiefly these distinctive features that this paper will examine, by teasing out some of the implications of the encounter between Appenzeller and Brüd. These topics—the examination of criminal records, and an examination of the role that cheap wine, gambling, and prostitution played in the urban economy and in the city's relationship with the countryside—are, of course, also linked by their common status as somewhat “disreputable” aspects of that relationship and topics of scholarship. But they play a key role in our understanding of Constance and its hinterland, and also help to give an impression of my work as a whole.

Our examination of the topic will begin where the quarrel may well have begun: with cheap wine. South-west Germany was a wine-producing region of some importance, in which wine was traditionally the beverage of choice for rich and poor alike. Constance was no exception in this regard, although the wine from the region (*Seewein*) was not particularly highly regarded. It was, however, cheap and produced in massive quantities. Thus in 1472 the chronicler Conrad Albrecht reported (allegedly on the basis of his own memory), that there was “so much wine that it could scarcely be stored, and barrels became vastly expensive.”<sup>8</sup> Six thousand *Fuder*—nearly seven *million*

---

<sup>8</sup> “sovil wins, das man das kom behalten mocht und wurden vaß vast tüer.” Conrad Albrecht, *Konstanzer Chronik*, in Philip Ruppert(ed.), *Die alte Konstanz in Schrift und Stift: Die Chroniken der Stadt Konstanz* (Constance, 1891; Henceforth *Chroniken*), p. 267.

litres— were said to have been brought into Constance, and the Abbot of Salem was reduced to pouring the previous year's vintage into a brook in order to free up enough casks for the new crop.<sup>9</sup> It was an exceptional year, but the chronicle reflects a more lasting truth about Constance: the city's connection with the wine trade.

The Lake Constance region is still a wine-producing region of some minor importance, and a number of sources indicate that the industry was much more important in the fifteenth century. In Sebastian Münster's *Cosmographia*, Constance appears to be surrounded by vineyards (Figure I).<sup>10</sup> More telling is the fact that all of the chronicles of Constance are preoccupied with the vintage. Wine prices are carefully, even anxiously recorded, especially in years when the chronicle also had to report damage to the harvest due to weather or other causes, as in 1436 when, on top of the region's other economic troubles, the vines were damaged by worms.<sup>11</sup> It is also notable that vineyards are the most frequently pledged variety of property in the Ammanngerichtsbuch, the great register of debts in Constance around 1430, as well as being the type of agricultural land most commonly owned by Constance citizens.<sup>12</sup> Also in the Ammanngerichtsbuch are a few references to goods being paid for *in* wine.<sup>13</sup> Likewise notable is the extremely large size of the Vine-dressers' guild, although the latter may well have served as a dumping-

---

<sup>9</sup> Ibid. In contrast to today's world, new wine was generally valued more highly than old.

<sup>10</sup> Münster, *Cosmographia Universalis* (Frankfurt-a.-M., 1537, etc.), p. 338. Reproduced by kind permission of the Beinecke Library.

<sup>11</sup> Dacher's Chronicle, p. 310; in Ruppert, *Chroniken*, p. 190.

<sup>12</sup> StA K A IX 10, 1423-34. Partially edited by Hektor Ammann, "Konstanzer Wirtschaft nach dem Konzil," *Schriften des Vereins für die Geschichte des Bodensees* 69 (1949/50), pp. 63-174.; "Die Judengeschäfte im Konstanzer Ammanngerichtsbuch," *SVGB* 71 (1951), pp. 37-84. There are fifty-five references to ownership of "Reben" or "Wingärten", as compared with thirteen to arable and eighteen to meadow or pasture. The 29 farms (Höfe) may have had more total acreage attached to them; but it seems plausible that some of it was planted with vines as well.

<sup>13</sup> In 1425, for example, Willi Schedlerin and three of her children, all from Mannenbach, owed the wine merchant Conrad Stoffacher nine *Lb. dn.* for cloth, with the sum to be repaid in wine. A IX 10, p. 176.

ground for poorer citizens without close ties to any established craft.<sup>14</sup> On the other hand, vintners (*Weinschenker*) and coopers (*Binder*) were also important trades in the city. And Constance’s major trading partners also possessed large vineyards. About half of the Reichenau was given over to vines, and the vineyards of the Abbey of Salem “stretched along the whole northwest shore of the Bodensee.”<sup>15</sup> Thus, citizens at every social level had close connections to wine production; and the amounts with which they dealt seem to have been large.

All of this wine had to go somewhere. Assuming that Conrad Albrecht’s figures are accurate—and given that he remembered that year himself, and may well have had access to precise records, it is tempting to believe him—there would have been 6.9 million liters of wine in Constance’s cellars by November 1472, in addition to whatever was left of the previous year’s vintage and any imported wine. Even if every man, woman and child in the city drank two *Maße* of wine per day for the next year, (as the priests attached to the city hospital did), they would still have had over two million liters left over.<sup>16</sup> In practice, moreover, it is difficult to imagine them drinking that much: the highest class of residents in the *Spital* only received 1.5 *Maße* per day, and it is unlikely that children, for example, put away even that much.<sup>17</sup> Given these circumstances, the

---

<sup>14</sup> This was the case in Freiburg: Scott, *Freiburg and the Breisgau*, pp. 57, 68.

<sup>15</sup> “Das Weingebiet des Klosters erstreckte sich am ganzen Nordwestufer des Bodensees”. Gerhard Spahr, “Geschichte des Weinbaus am Bodensee”, *Schriften des Vereins für die Geschichte des Bodensees (SVGB)* 99/100 (1982), p. 195.

<sup>16</sup> The amount of food and drink allocated per day is recorded in the contemporary statutes of the *Spital*: see Wolfgang Schürle, *Das Hospital zum Heiligen Geist in Konstanz* (Constance, 1970). For my own calculations, I am assuming that the population of Constance was around 7000.

<sup>17</sup> Schürle, *Hospital zum Heiligen Geist*. One scholar, indeed, suggests an annual per capita consumption of around 150-200 L at the beginning of the seventeenth century. Citation in Bernd Dziersk, “Die historisch-geographisch Verbreitung des Badischen Weinbaus”, *SVGB* 90 (1972), p. 195.



city probably had a considerable oversupply even in normal years. And as one might expect, they exported it.

*Seewein*—wine from the Lake Constance region—was never regarded as being of particularly high quality. It “was generally considered sour,” due in part to being harvested early, in order not to get in the way of the grain harvest.<sup>18</sup> Partly for this reason, even locals imported wine from Italy or Alsace by the fifteenth century.<sup>19</sup> But it was of reasonably good quality (and cheap) and so gained a ready market, especially in the cities of Upper Swabia, where there was no viticulture of any significance. Thus the *Ammanngerichtsbuch* records eleven sales of wine by citizens of Constance to Memmingen, worth a total of £215.11.0.<sup>20</sup> And the city also acted as a site of two further purchases, totaling over £200, from the Knights of St. John, who held considerable acreage in vines in the vicinity of their houses in Überlingen and Mainau. Four more sales of wine (for a total of over 270 *Lb. dn.*!) went to the city of Isny; several others went to Kempten, Biberach, and Nördlingen. Still others went to the vicinity of Lindau, to where it was usually sent by boat before being sent to Upper Swabia by land.<sup>21</sup> By the

---

<sup>18</sup> For example, grapes were harvested on August 9<sup>th</sup> on the Reichenau in 1473. (Dziersk, “Verbreitung”, p. 195.) Nowadays the harvest usually takes place in September and October.

<sup>19</sup> Imports from both are mentioned by Richental’s Chronicle of the Council of Constance, along with Malvoisie and Rhenish (xlvi).

<sup>20</sup> I am reliant for these figures (and those that follow) on the published version in Ammann, “Konstanzer Wirtschaft”. Most of the sales to Memmingen were made by one Conrad Stoffacker, who seems to have made a specialty of it. None of the other seventeen individuals whose wine sales were recorded in the book appears more than once.

<sup>21</sup> Josef Brülisaner, “Der Freitunk, ein altes Recht beim Weintransport,” *SVGB* 92 (1974), p. 170. Likewise, Vadian notes that “Was weyns vom Rheyn und Bodensee herauf inns Algow unnd Vindelicier gegne geführt, wirt aller zü Lindow gelendet.” *Eydgnoossenschaft*, f. 332v.

end of the century, if not earlier, it was being shipped still further: to Nuremburg in 1486, for example.<sup>22</sup>

Unfortunately for the historian, there are no extent records of wine imports or exports from Constance (the city tolls were leased out at a fixed rate), and thus it is impossible to estimate the precise volumes of wine involved in this trade. However, the evidence that I have assembled implies that that it was fairly considerable, and thus that wine—and by extension, the city's connections to winegrowers in the surrounding region—played a major role in the town's export trade. This flies in the face not only of the traditional view that medieval cities were more closely connected with each other than with the countryside, but also with the received wisdom regarding Constance's economy in the late middle ages. Most scholars have assumed that the city was dependant on its linen trade, and that the decline of the latter in the fifteenth century led to economic collapse.<sup>23</sup> In fact, while the city's economy (as reflected in its tax revenues) did decline in the second half of the century, this does not seem to have closely tied with the loss of its linen trade, which began somewhat earlier, and also continued unabated in the 1490s, when revenues from linen rose somewhat.<sup>24</sup> Evidently, Constance's economy rested on a number of different industries, and the evidence suggests that wine was one of the most important. And it was one that forged key bonds between Constance and the rural areas nearby. Wine was grown all around the town, and a large number of its citizens were

---

<sup>22</sup> Dziersk, "Verbreitung", p. 195. Wine from Meersburg was sent to Landsburg an der Lech, south of Augsburg, as early as 1381, and it is tempting to suppose that the wine merchants of Constance followed this lead, as well.

<sup>23</sup> See A. Nuglisch, "Die Entwicklung des Reichtums in Konstanz," *Jahrbücher für Nationalökonomie und Statistik* 32 (1906), pp. 363-71; Bernhard Kirchgässner, *Wirtschaft und Währung am Oberrhein* (Constance, 1976).

<sup>24</sup> Based on my analysis of the city tax records, edited selectively as *Die Steuerbücher der Stadt Konstanz* (Constance, 1958-66).

involved in its production and trade. Whether as vine-dressers, vineyard owners, tavern keepers or large-scale merchants (or the creditors of any of these), their economic well-being depended on the annual yield of the vineyards of the region. And *everyone* in the city was reliant on these vineyards for what they drank every day.

Another key (though perhaps less unexpected) economic activity in late-medieval Constance was its role as a commercial center for the surrounding countryside. To reconstruct the scale of this trade—and the size of the region to which Constance attracted shoppers—one must once again use indirect methods, since with the exception of the *Ammanngerichtsbusch*, few records of commercial transactions survive, especially for small purchases. One of the best sources is the *Strafbücher*, which record fines and other punishments imposed by the city’s criminal courts.<sup>25</sup> A fair number of the culprits (and victims) were from out of town; and, since it is reasonable to assume that they did not come to the city solely to get into knife fights or slander local inhabitants,<sup>26</sup> they most likely came to buy and sell goods or to enjoy themselves—in other words, to contribute to the economic life of the city.

My research found 145 individuals (both defendants and victims) in the city’s criminal records whose place of origin can be identified. A majority of these came from the Lake Constance region, with just under half from within twenty kilometers of

---

<sup>25</sup> The *Strafbücher* seem to have been designed primarily as a financial record (recording fines owed). They are organized by year, and I have consulted only a sampling of years (1442, 1443, 1445, 1450, 1451, 1456, 1461, 1470, 1480, 1490 (L 794, L 795, L 797, L 801, L 806, L 811, L 820, L 830, L 840). Since these volumes also include outstanding debts from previous years, this sampling gives a reasonable picture of the patterns of criminality in Constance; and I have supplemented them with entries in the *Ratsbücher*, which also record punishments. For a discussion of the *Strafbücher*, see P. Schuster, *Eine Stadt vor Gericht* (Munich, 2000).

<sup>26</sup> The Council punished those who drew knives or swords on other people (*Messerzucken*), and this offense is the most common one in the *Strafbücher*, followed by verbal abuse.

Constance. Of the rest, the majority came from the other cities of the empire (as did the three from Lindau and four each from Ravensburg, St. Gall and Zurich, listed in other sections). These totals are summarized in Table 1 below; specific locations are recorded on Figure 2.

**Table 1:** Persons from outside Constance in the *Strafbücher*

Place of Origin:	Number of Defendants and Victims:	
Thurgau:	38	26%
Hegau (within 20 km.):	29	20%
Hegau (over 20 km. away):	5	3.4%
Rheintal:	5	3.4%
Elsewhere in Bodensee Region:	<u>19</u>	<u>13%</u>
<i>Total:</i>	96	66.3%
<i>Elsewhere:</i>		
Switzerland:	10	6.9%
Imperial Cities:	21	14.5%
Other:	<u>18</u>	<u>12.4%</u>
<i>Grand Total:</i>	145	100.1%

Note: the Hegau here refers to the region north of Lake Constance; the *Rheintal* is the valley along the present borders of Austria, Switzerland, and Liechtenstein.

These data (especially when combined with similar evidence from immigration) suggest that Constance's economic hinterland was broadly similar to that of other German cities in the same period.<sup>27</sup> Like them, Constance had active economic ties with the surrounding region; like them, most of these ties were with places within twenty kilometers of the city walls. Distinctive in this case is the predominance of the Thurgau (and to a lesser extent, of other areas to the south) in Constance's economic life. This

<sup>27</sup> See for example Werner Rösener, "Stadt-Land-Beziehungen im Mittelalter," in *Dorf und Stadt: Ihre Beziehungen vom Mittelalter bis zur Gegenwart*, ed. Clemens Zimmermann (Frankfurt, 2001).

may be easily explained by the lack of other urban centers to the south, especially by comparison with the *several* competing towns (including Überlingen, Radolfzell and Ravensburg) in the area north of Lake Constance. Constance’s wider economic zone included frequent contacts with both Austria and Switzerland, as well as cities such as Munich and Augsburg (residents of all of which appear in the city’s criminal records.) But on a day-to-day basis, the most important economic activity, for Constance as for other cities, may have been the influx of farmers, craftsmen and nobles from the immediate neighborhood, who used the town as a place to sell their produce and to buy imported or manufactured goods.

Our modern attempts to define the “hinterlands” of medieval cities inevitably raise the question of how *contemporaries* viewed the situation: what did the inhabitants of late-medieval Constance think of the city’s relationship with the countryside? In the absence of a corpus of writings directly addressing this question, it is difficult to be certain; but once again, some light is shed on the subject by the city’s criminal records. In the course of the fifteenth century, the City Council banished over one hundred individuals from the city, for crimes ranging from insults to violent crime. In some cases, the sentence was for a term of months or years; in others, it was to be permanent.

**Table 2:** Banishment from Constance (1414-1507: *selected years*)

Distance Banished	Number of Cases	% of all Banishments	Typical Crimes	Typical length of sentence
1 <i>Meile</i>	36	26.9%	Petty theft, slander, swearing.	One year
2 <i>Meilen</i>	17	12.7%	Petty theft, slander, swearing.	Variable
4 <i>Meilen</i>	24	17.9%	Theft, assault, repeat offending, adultery	4 years, or life
6 <i>Meilen</i>	4	3.0%		For Life

10 <i>Meilen</i>	14	10.4%	Major thefts, slander of <i>Rat</i> , etc. Oft. w. corporal punishment.	For Life
Other	6	4.5%		(Varies)
Unknown	33	24.6%	Theft, violent crime	(Varies)
<b>Totals</b>	134	100.0%		

What makes these cases interesting (and relevant to our understanding of how those involved saw their world) is that in most cases those banished were forbidden from coming within a certain *distance* of the city. In about a quarter of the 134 cases of banishment included in this study, those accused were banished to a distance of one *Meile* (about 7.5 kilometers), usually for minor crimes. (See Table 2). A further two individuals were banished to a distance of one-half *Meile*, but this seems to have been an unusual punishment. In general, then, a radius of one *Meile* was regarded as comprising the immediate surroundings of the city. The list of banishments also defines a number of other degrees of proximity to the city: within two, four, six, and ten *Meilen*. The last of these, a radius of about 75 kilometers, would have encompassed the entire Lake Constance region and also included adjoining areas as far off as Rottweil and the Forest Cantons. (See Figure 3)

A number of sentences specify other geographical boundaries within which those convicted were not to venture. In 25 cases, they were “verbotten über Rin”, that is, forbidden to cross the Rhine: presumably, then, they were to remain within the Hegau to the north. (However, the case of Ulrich Bruger of Petershausen, “verbotten über Rin und in das thurgôw” suggests the alternative possibility that they were banned *from* the region north of the lake.) Four other individuals were to be sent “über see” (across the lake). How this is to be interpreted is somewhat unclear, given the local geography: were they

banished to points north of Überlingen? Or from the entire Bodensee region between Stein and Bregenz, the latter about 45 km. away? In either case, this latter group of banishments implies that the lake was part of civic identity, and that Constance's citizens saw the region around it as in some way comprising their hinterland. Banishment *über Rin*, on the other hand, may suggest once again that the city saw the Thurgau as being uniquely "its" region.

There are also cases where individuals were banished to extreme distances for particularly heinous crimes. That of Herman Lobruher is unusual in several respects: he was from outside Constance (specifically, from Rottenburg an der Tauber); he was banished for crimes whose nature is unclear; and he was banished twelve miles, rather than the usual ten.<sup>28</sup> Still more severely, a thief in 1435 was banished "from the kingdom".<sup>29</sup> This is probably to be interpreted as "from Germany", especially given a somewhat similar sentence in the case of Elß Sailerin, banished "over the Lombard Mountains" (i.e. the Alps) in 1445.<sup>30</sup> These instances hint at a fifteenth-century awareness as being part of a larger nation of "Germany", although the evidence is somewhat ambiguous. And sending someone "out of the kingdom" was in some respects simply a hyperbolic version of what all the banishments were trying to achieve: send the person a long way away. (The thief, in any case, had his sentence reduced to six miles).

Despite the ambiguities, these sentences of banishment provide essential insights into contemporary perceptions of what "nearby" meant. It would seem that the area within a few kilometers of Constance was "nearby". Not coincidentally, this was also the

---

<sup>28</sup> StA K, B I 15 (1495), p. 137.

<sup>29</sup> "uß dem kunigkric". B I 6, p. 259.

area in which the majority of the city's commercial and political contacts were to be found. The area within four *Meilen* represented a somewhat broader "neighborhood": not seen as being in the immediate vicinity of the city, but not very far away, either. The same could perhaps be said of the Bodensee region as a whole. Ten *Meilen*, on the other hand, was evidently regarded as a fair distance away; twenty *Meilen*, which would have taken a traveler to the crest of the Alps of the borders of Bavaria, was evidently regarded by citizens of Constance as the limits of "their" region. Although long-distance traders might venture further, to go beyond these borders was evidently to enter a different world.

There remains the question with which we began: that of the role of morally dubious activities—including those that led participants to be tried before the city Council—in the economy of fifteenth-century Constance. Here one is (perhaps not surprisingly) forced to rely on anecdotal evidence; but what there is suggests that Constance, if not quite Las Vegas, was at least of some importance in providing the Bodensee region with the less respectable sort of goods and services. As in much of Nevada, prostitution was legal in Constance, although heavily regulated: the city fathers (like many of their contemporaries elsewhere in Europe) evidently regarded it as a necessary evil.<sup>31</sup> The most important brothel (or possibly a small red-light district?) was located on the Ziegelgraben, the canal running along the northern edge of the city.<sup>32</sup> And

---

<sup>30</sup> "verbotten...uber daz lampersch gebirg und ewentlich von der Statt umb her in niemer [jemer?] zu komen..." StA K, B I 7, f. 152r.

<sup>31</sup> On prostitution in Constance, see Beate Schuster, *Die unendlichen Frauen: Prostitution und städtische Ordnung in Konstanz im 15. / 16. Jahrhundert* (Constance, 1996).

<sup>32</sup> It was thus located near the city wall, although on which side of it is somewhat unclear: Maurer (*Konstanz im Mittelalter*, v. II [Constance, 1989], p. 186) asserts that house was located near the outlet of the canal, against the *outside* of the wall, as would fit its marginal status; but an eighteenth-century map shows a *row* of houses "in Zieglgraben genent" on the *inside* of the wall (*Konstanz in der frühen Neuzeit* [Constance,



it seems to have gained a widespread reputation, since a contemporary song from Nuremberg claims that "many Swiss lads come to Constance, to the *Ziegelgraben*."<sup>33</sup> This, combined with Heinrich Appenzeller's visit to Constance from his hometown of St. Gall (some 30 kilometers away) in 1456, suggests that Constance's brothels may have attracted a substantial out-of-town clientele, especially since there are other indications that the Swiss in particular came to Constance with some regularity for business reasons.

Other forms of entertainment are more certainly known to have drawn outsiders to Constance. A famous instance was an archery fair in 1458, which evidently attracted not only contestants, but also spectators and individuals interested in other forms of entertainment...such as the dice game where a quarrel between a citizens of Lucerne and Constance led to a riot, which led ultimately to a minor war between Constance and the Swiss (the *Plappartkrieg*).<sup>34</sup> Other *Schützenfeste* were held at other points in the century: one in 1434 lasted several days (without, apparently, any major brawls). 141 men were reported to have taken part, and the prizes were won by marksmen from Augsburg, St. Gall, Überlingen, and Arbon.<sup>35</sup> Another followed two years later (with victors from Memmingen and Schaffhausen, among others), which suggests that it may have been an annual event.<sup>36</sup> Citizens of Constance, of course, also visited similar events in nearby towns: in 1465 two men from Constance won the prizes at a shooting competition in Lindau, and a particularly large archery fest in Zurich in 1504 was attended by numerous

---

1991], p. 183). Whether there was a single brothel, or several, is also unclear: contemporaries refer simply to "am Ziegelgraben" which could be either a house or a street.

<sup>33</sup> "Zuo Costantz imm ziegelgraben / kumet auch vil Schweitzer knaben." Fifteenth-century poem from Nuremberg, cited in B. Schuster, *Die Unendlichen Frauen*, p. 188.

<sup>34</sup> Maurer, *Konstanz II*, p. 102.

<sup>35</sup> "Item anno 1434 ist ain schießen gewesen ze Costentz am guten tag nechst vor sant Bartolomeustag [18 Aug] und werot bis an den sambstag uff das ain." Ruppert, *Chroniken*, p. 179.

<sup>36</sup> Ruppert, *Chroniken*, p. 200.

Konstanzer who went to buy tickets for the lottery that funded it.<sup>37</sup> Since most of these festivities are known only due to the unusual character of the events that took place there (or that the City council wished to *prevent* from happening, in the last case) it seems at least possible that they took place on other occasions as well.

People attended other festive events as well. Some three hundred men from St. Gall, all in costume, visited Constance for Faßnacht (Carnival) in 1484, and then later received a similar delegation from Constance in their own town.<sup>38</sup> On a more elevated social level, the Patricians of Constance are recorded as organizing tournaments on several occasions, which were attended by delegations from neighboring cities such as Zurich and Schaffhausen, as well as by the rural nobility of the region.<sup>39</sup> As a result of such occasions, Constance was involved in a web of relationships that tied it to the region and to the other towns around Lake Constance socially as well as economically.

Such events seem to have created a place for outsiders to come to Constance for other forms of entertainment, as well. The dice game that led to the Plappartkrieg has already been mentioned; and while there are no other reported instances of people coming to the city to gamble, the indirect evidence is suggestive. Gambling was frowned upon by medieval moralists, but (like prostitution) was legal, if heavily regulated.<sup>40</sup> Various specific games and practices (especially playing for high-stakes or cheating) were forbidden, and there were periodic attempts to ban games in brothels and taverns. The regularity with which this legislation was reissued, on the other hand, probably indicates

---

<sup>37</sup> "do gewonnen die von Costentz ii affentüren ze Lindow..." (HS A, f. 73v; in Ruppert, *Chroniken*, p. 253); Maurer, *Konstanz II*, p. 259.

<sup>38</sup> Maurer, *Konstanz II*, p. 182. Faß(t)nacht remains extremely popular in Constance, and the custom of groups (nowadays organized in *Narrenzünfte*) visiting other towns has been revived.

<sup>39</sup> Maurer, *Konstanz II*, pp. 182-3.

difficulties in enforcing it. And given this, there is at least the possibility that residents of the surrounding region, as well as the Swiss, used Constance as their Vegas in this regard as well.

None of this constitutes conclusive evidence. One bawdy song and a few anecdotal cases are not enough to prove that Constance was the Vegas of the Upper Rhine. But the legal possibility existed, and it seems at least likely that entertainment—whether decorous or dubious—was a motive that drew people to Constance and helped both to fuel its economy and to strengthen its ties with nearby towns and rural areas. And if nothing else, one would expect that individuals who visited Constance for other reasons might have taken advantage of its distractions as long as they were in town.

We will never know of course, what brought Brüd and Appenzeller to Constance in 1456. It could have been as small-scale merchants buying or selling wine, or to sell other kinds of produce, or to go shopping, or just to enjoy the dubious entertainments available on the Ziegelgraben. Or it could have been any of a dozen other economic, political, or (less probably) spiritual ends: this paper has only scratched the surface of Constance's relationship with its region. Nor do we know how they came to blows: over a woman, over a dice game, or just because one or both were drunk and things got out of hand? Since Burchard Brüd was from Stahringen (on the north shore of Lake Constance), and Appenzeller was from modern Switzerland, it is tempting to speculate that in the 1450s, the tensions between the Hegau to the north of the lake and the Swiss Confederation to the south—tensions which would culminate in the Swabian War of

---

<sup>40</sup> For what follows, see Peter Schuster, *Eine Stadt vor Gericht*, pp. 119-24.

1499—were already on the rise. The war would see the conclusive takeover of the Thurgau by the Swiss, and thus (to some extent, at least) cut Constance off from the most important part of its natural hinterland. But in the fifteenth century, as this paper has shown, the city had extensive economic and political connections to the surrounding region, both north and south of the lake. It drew on both areas for the wine and linen that formed its key export commodities. And country people came to Constance from both north and south for a wide variety of reasons, including shopping, conducting business, and enjoying themselves. Finally, city dwellers had a definite sense that the surrounding countryside was in some sense “theirs”, an attitude reflected by urban landownership and legislation, as well as by the fact that malefactors were banished not merely from the city, but from the whole region around it. This latter circumstance also illustrates contemporary conceptions of distance and, by extension, of the size of Constance’s sphere of influence. In late-medieval Germany, therefore, and above all in the case of Constance, town and countryside were closely linked; and it was frequently the less respectable sides of that relationship that are most important to contemporaries and to modern historians trying to understand late-medieval society.