

A History of Brewing in Holland, 900–1900: Economy, Technology, and the State. *By Richard W. Unger.* Leiden: Brill, 2001. xxii + 428 pp. Illustrations, map, notes, bibliography, index. Cloth, \$154.00. ISBN 9-004-12037-8.

Reviewed by John S. Ceccatti

The brewing industry offers historians of all varieties a fitting lens through which to view the interactions of business, government, society, and technology. Most histories of brewing, however, do not attempt such broad synthesis. Of the numerous book-length works in this field, the bulk focus on a single brewery or town, and most of these are highly celebratory in nature, often marking an anniversary of one sort or another. There are some notable exceptions to this unfortunate situation. Foremost among these is Peter Mathias's now classic *The Brewing Industry in England, 1700–1830* (1959), which has recently been complemented by T. R. Gourvish and R. G. Wilson's *The British Brewing Industry, 1830–1980* (1994). In addition, Stanley Baron's somewhat dated *Brewed in America* (1962) and Mikulás Teich's recent *Bier, Wissenschaft und Wirtschaft in Deutschland, 1800–1914* [*Beer, Science, and Economy in Germany, 1800–1914*] (2000) both do a good job of covering the industry in the United States and Germany, respectively.

Adding to these important volumes, Richard W. Unger's *A History of Brewing in Holland, 900–1900: Economy, Technology, and the State* now provides a richly detailed overview of the brewing industry in the Netherlands. As the title suggests, Unger takes the long view of brewing in the Low Countries, from the emergence of commercial brewing in the early Middle Ages until the rise of scientific brewing in the wake of the Industrial Revolution at the end of the nineteenth century.

Within the long time span covered in the book, Unger identifies four broad stages that characterize the Dutch brewing industry. Following a preliminary period in which beer-making moved from the home to the workshop during the Middle Ages, brewing in Holland experienced its "golden age" from about 1450 until 1650. During this age of expansion, Dutch brewers capitalized on their proximity to the sea in order to increase beer exports, principally to northern Europe. From about 1650 until 1800, Dutch brewing

went into a period of decline. Unger shows that the reason for this stagnation “is not to be found in competition from foreign brewers,” although many competitors in these foreign markets had begun producing high-quality hopped beers on their own. Rather, it was due to “competition from alternative drinks,” such as wine, spirits, coffee, tea, and cocoa, as well as “from higher costs of raw materials, and the tax burden” (p. 284). In Unger’s analysis it is clear that the fault lies squarely with the latter.

The final phase that Unger covers is one of revival during the nineteenth century, when many brewers adopted steam engines, artificial refrigeration systems, and other technological innovations to advance their craft. Unger notes, however, that Dutch brewers “lagged behind those in Bavaria, Austria, and England in exploiting the opportunities created by technical advance in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, a pattern only changed in the 1860s” when they adopted the popular method of brewing Bavarian style lager beer (p. 380).

Unger’s main focus throughout the book is on the economic history of the Dutch brewing industry, emphasizing the strong role that government’s desire to maintain a healthy revenue stream had on limiting commercial expansion and technological innovation. Unger convincingly argues that the long-running tension between government tax authorities and brewers had a stifling effect on the brewing industry. Brewers did enjoy the benefits of stable commodity prices and relative monopolies in their markets. Yet brewers also “wanted to decrease the control over their own actions so that they could retain a larger portion of the difference between revenue and costs,” but lest the brewer “capture more of the monopoly profit to the disadvantage of the public authority...governments often regulated against the introduction of novel production methods” (pp. 5–6).

Unger notes that English and Bavarian revenue strategies, which levied tax on the quantity of malt used rather than on the volume of beer produced as in Holland, “promoted efforts to find out how to get as much beer as possible from a given quantity of malt” (p. 347). However, other factors were also at work in the adoption of new technologies in these and other countries. For example, many British brewers shunned some of the technological innovations adopted by their Continental counterparts due to differences in brewing styles. Also, the successful application of scientific research to

brewing in Bavaria, Copenhagen, and elsewhere stemmed equally as much from government promotion of technological education in these regions as it did to the differences in taxation and regulation cited by Unger.

In addition to the detailed and comprehensive treatment of its subject, *A History of Brewing in Holland* is a handsome book. The text is supplemented with helpful figures and tables highlighting the economic data, and the numerous black-and-white illustrations show that beer was a prominent aspect of Dutch culture in addition to its cuisine. The book also has a helpful bibliography, a substantial index, and appendices on making beer and measurement, features that some publishers feel are not worth the extra costs, but that greatly aid the researcher.

This book is an important contribution to the economic history of Europe and will also have something to offer to political and social historians as well as to historians of science and technology. At the outset of the volume, Unger states that “[b]rewing in Holland offers a dramatic case of the interplay, over the long term, of developments in the economy, in technology, and reactive and aggressive government policy,” and he adds that “[w]hat happened to the industry reveals a great deal about the society in which it operated” (p. 3). Despite these overtures to the role of brewing in the larger culture, however, Unger’s focus remains on the economic effects that strict government taxation has had on this industry.

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