

Chapter 2

IN TOUCH WITH THE OUTSIDE: THE ECONOMIC EXCHANGES OF THE OBSERVANT DOMINICAN CONVENT OF ST. CATHERINE IN ST. GALLEN

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MONASTERIES AND CONVENTS were—and still are—not only a place of worship isolated from the material world, but also organizations dealing with secular, worldly matters.¹ Everyday goods like food and beverage had to make their way inside their walls; other goods had to leave the monasteries and convents in exchange. Any possessions outside the walls had to be administered; therefore, every religious household needed management. These considerations apply to religious communities throughout the Middle Ages as well as today and are valid as much for Franciscans on divine mission² as for Benedictine monks running a school.³

These considerations become more interesting when thinking of *nuns* because they depend more on others than monks (e.g., for pastoral care from outside). They become even more interesting when thinking of *observant* convents, because one of the consequences of accepting observance is strict enclosure.⁴ How could an observant convent

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“s. p.” (sine pagina) is used when there is no contemporary pagination in the manuscripts. For all dating issues: Grotefend, *Taschenbuch der Zeitrechnung*, esp. 30–110 for determining the saints’ days, and esp. 130–35 and 144–213 for determining the weekdays.

1 See, for example, Gleba, *Klosterleben im Mittelalter*, 99–107.

2 The Franciscans, mainly settled in cities, practised a particularly personal way of pastoral care: Frank, “Franziskaner,” 32.

3 In the Benedictine monastery in Einsiedeln for example a school was established in the tenth century: Salzgeber, “Einsiedeln,” 538–40.

4 Esser, “Dominikaner,” 133. See also, for instance, Uffmann, “Inside and Outside the Convent Walls,” and Makowski, *Canon Law and Cloistered Women*.

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manage its possessions without—at first sight, at least, and by definition—any help from outside their walls? Research on administrative and financial aspects⁵ of convents is rare.⁶ Many case studies focus on architectural and artistic, spiritual, or educational aspects, or describe a convent's history in general, without any specific focus.⁷ But how did nuns in observant convents administer their possessions outside the enclosure without leaving it? How did their management work—with paper, parchment, and ink—apparently without any external support? The striking contradiction between complete seclusion and permanent contact with the world beyond the enclosure is intriguing.

This article focuses on organizational and financial aspects of observant convents in the Late Middle Ages. It tries to reconstruct the—almost daily—economic contact between the convent of St. Catherine (Kloster St. Katharinen) in St. Gallen in north-eastern Switzerland with the outside world. After setting the background to the city and the convent, we will explain how the economic exchanges functioned, our sources and documentation. We will exemplify the processes involved through two case studies, tracing the trade in oats and wine over twenty years. Near the end we will present a few rather surprising objects that could be part of these exchanges.

St. Catherine's: A Convent for the City and its Citizens

The history of St. Gallen began around 612, when St. Gallus brought Christianity to the region from Ireland (where he was probably born) and where he ended his life as a hermit in the forest. About a century later, Otmar founded a monastery at the place where Gallus' cell stood and he placed it under the Rule of St. Benedict. Since those days the monastery—as well as the developing city surrounding it—has borne the name of St. Gallus.⁸

At the beginning of the thirteenth century, a few women wished to live a life devoted to God, living, working, and praying together.⁹ Two citizens of St. Gallen enabled the lay sisters to realize their dream by donating a piece of land outside the city walls.¹⁰ A charter dating from June 30, 1228 is extant.¹¹ This is the first evidence of the citizens' connection with the sisters, which only intensified during the following three centu-

5 Where it exists it has tended to focus on the convents' business partners or on an order's male branch.

6 There are only a few active researchers in the German-speaking area, for instance Gleba and Eberhardt, *Summa summarum. Spätmittelalterliche Wirtschaftsnachrichten*, and Rösener, "Household and Prayer." See also Köppel, *Von der Äbtissin zu den gnädigen Herren*. More recently we have Rückert, "Die Rechnung der Schaffnerin Barbara von Speyer." For secondary literature concerning St. Catherine's see n. 18 below.

7 Miscellanies such as Flachenecker and Tandeki, eds., *Editionswissenschaftliches Kolloquium 2009*, or Bériou and Chiffolleau, eds., *Économie et religion*, and countless monographs.

8 Sonderegger, "Sankt Gallen (Gemeinde). 1. Früh- und Hochmittelalter."

9 Bless-Grabher, "Kanton St. Gallen," 591–95, and Bless-Grabher, "St. Gallen," 739–40.

10 For an illustration, see Reeb and Guggenheimer, *Kloster St. Katharinen*, 2.

11 Stadtarchiv der Ortsbürgergemeinde St. Gallen [hereinafter StadtASG], Altes Stadtarchiv [hereafter Altes StadtA], Tr. C. 10a. For the critical edition: Clavadetscher, ed., *Chartularium Sangalense*, no. 1152.

ries. In 1376 the convent as a whole—having officially adopted the Constitutions of St. Dominic in 1368¹²—gained the civil rights of the city.¹³ The sisters had always lived in close connection to the city; as the suburb called Irervorstadt grew ever larger, it came to surround the nunnery. In 1418, after a fire had destroyed almost the entire city, the newly built city wall incorporated this suburb.¹⁴ The personal connections between the citizens and the nuns are even more remarkable: Most of the nuns came from the city's upper class,¹⁵ including at least the final four prioresses.¹⁶ The legal, geographical, and personal connections between the city and the convent remained very close through till the Protestant Reformation¹⁷ and were partly responsible for the convent's success on many levels.¹⁸

The transition from a Dominican convent to an observant one was a long process. From 1459 the nuns took their vow of personal poverty more seriously, and in 1482 they chose strict enclosure. Three years later, the nuns covered a barred window—the only means for them to see their relatives—with a metal plate.¹⁹ This step made any direct communication between the nuns and strangers impossible.

Generating and Documenting Economic Exchanges

Monasteries and convents were autonomous entities at a financial and organizational level.²⁰ Regular income had to be generated. One means of doing so was ownership of a plot of land—ideally that could be agriculturally worked.

There were two ways how a plot could come into the convent's possession: a donation by a benefactor,²¹ or purchase by the sisters—either on the seller's initiative or the sisters'. We have already seen an example of a donation made to the sisters. The convent

¹² Bless-Grabher, "St. Gallen," 742.

¹³ Bless-Grabher, "St. Gallen," 743. A few authors talk about 1377, for example Bless-Grabher and Sonderegger, eds., *Die Stadtbücher des 14. bis frühen 17. Jahrhunderts*, 390.

¹⁴ Ehrenzeller, *Geschichte der Stadt St. Gallen*, 62–63.

¹⁵ Rickenbacher, "Das Kloster St. Katharina in St. Gallen," 61.

¹⁶ Bless-Grabher, "St. Gallen," 775–79.

¹⁷ When St. Gallen adopted the Protestant Reformation in 1527, the convent's proximity to the city sealed its fate: the Protestant city could not accept any Catholic institution on its ground. After lengthy disputes, an effective religious life had become impossible by 1528. Ehrenzeller, *Geschichte der Stadt St. Gallen*, 143–67; Bless-Grabher, "St. Gallen," 759–62.

¹⁸ A selection of secondary literature on St. Catherine's: for its earliest history: Bless-Grabher, "Kanton St. Gallen," 591–95; for its existence in St. Gallen until the Protestant Reformation: Bless-Grabher, "St. Gallen"; and Vogler, *Geschichte des Dominikanerinnen-Klosters St. Katharina*; and Eberhard et al., eds., *St. Katharinen*; for its end at the Protestant Reformation: the four-part article Vogler, "Das Dominikanerinnen-Kloster St. Katharina in St. Gallen."

¹⁹ Bless-Grabher, "St. Gallen," 744–45. Recently, Sutter, "'Item in dem [14] LVIII iar'", 18–27.

²⁰ Elm, "Orden I," 317.

²¹ In addition to gifts like books, clothes, and similar, every prospective nun had to bring a dowry, which consisted often of a piece of land, or of a financial interest in a piece of land or a house. Bless-Grabher, "St. Gallen," 754–56.

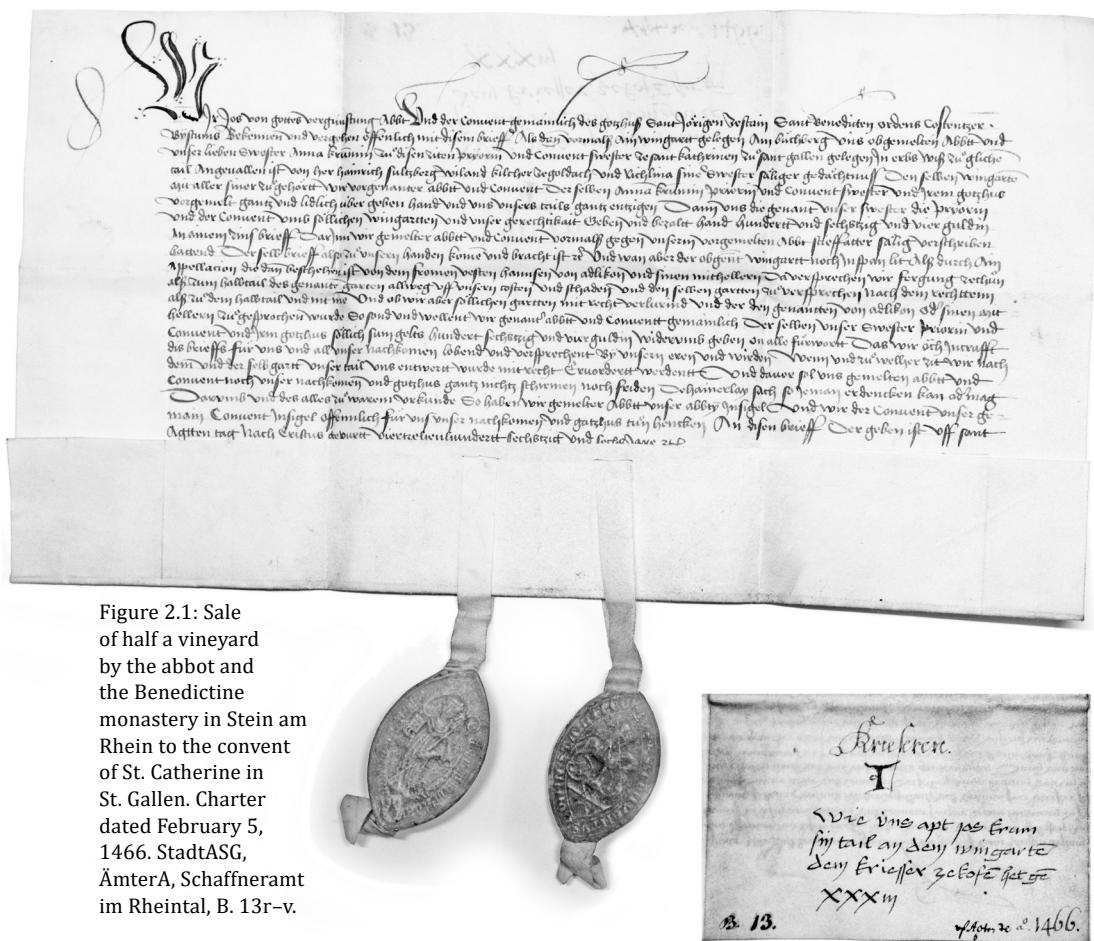


Figure 2.1: Sale of half a vineyard by the abbot and the Benedictine monastery in Stein am Rhein to the convent of St. Catherine in St. Gallen. Charter dated February 5, 1466. StadtASG, ÄmterA, Schaffneramt im Rheintal, B. 13r-v.

bought the second half of a vineyard in February 1466; the first half had already been in their possession. The seller—the abbot and the Benedictine monastery in Stein am Rhein²²—sealed the charter. Once this charter—and any other charter as well—was in the sisters' hands, the work was not over: the charter had to be stored in a way that it could be quickly retrieved in the convent's archive. For this purpose, a numbering system was invented, where a unique number (or "signature") was assigned to each possession. The number was marked on the charter's verso together with a summary of the charter's content [Fig. 2.1].²³

²² Waldvogel, "Stein am Rhein."

²³ The contemporary note is "Wie vns apt Jos Krum sin tail an dem wingarten, dem Kriesser, ze kofen het gen" (How abbot Jos Krumm sold his part of the vineyard to the Kriesser), together with the contemporary signature "XXXIII." The other notes were added later.

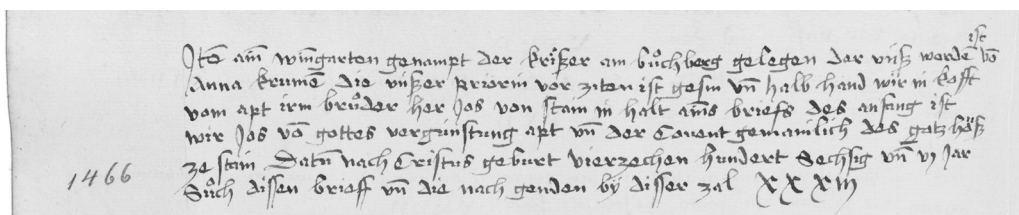


Figure 2.2: Entry in St. Catherine's rent-roll concerning the half vineyard called Griesser bought in 1466. KlosterA St. Katharina Wil, Arch II.10 (Urbar), fol. Lv (contemporary) | fol. 52v (later). <http://e-codices.ch/de/kaw/Urbar/52v/>.

It is one thing to store the charters systematically; but it is better to have the main information systematically copied in a book. This method became increasingly important with the increasing number of charters stored in the archive. In the 1480s, the convent of St. Catherine started a book—a so-called rent-roll—where every possession outside their walls was listed and updated. Generally, one page was assigned to one possession; on this page, all the charters²⁴ relating to this property were listed chronologically.²⁵ Thanks to the rent-roll, the prioress knew which farms, vineyards, and claims on houses they held.²⁶ The half of the vineyard the convent bought in 1466 has its own entry, where the number assigned to this possession—the vineyards at Buechberg—is noted as well:

Item ain winngarten, genampt der Krißer, am Büchberg gelegen, der vnß worden ist von Anna Krumen, die vnßer priorin vor ziten ist gesin, vnd halb hand wir in kofft vom apt, irm brüder, her Ios von Stain, in halt ainns briefs, des anfang ist: "Wir Ios, von Gottes vergünstung apt, vnd der couent gemainlich des gotzhäß ze Stain." Datum nach Cristus geburt vierzechen hundert sechsich vnd VI iar. Sûch dissien brieff vnd die nach genden by disser zal: XXXIII.²⁷

[Item, a vineyard called Griesser at Buechberg came into our possession from Anna Krumm, who was our prioress in those times,²⁸ and we have bought half of it from the abbot, her brother, Jos of Stein,²⁹ of which we have a charter, whose beginning is: "We, Jos, by the grace of God abbot, and the convent as a whole of the monastery in Stein am Rhein."³⁰ Given in the fourteen hundred sixty and sixth year after Christ's birth. Search this charter and the following ones at this number: XXXIII.] [Fig. 2.2].

²⁴ Whether every single possession was listed in the rent-roll and every single charter was recorded remains to be examined.

²⁵ KlosterA St. Katharina Wil, Arch II.10 (Urbar) for the manuscript and <http://e-codices.ch/de/searchresult/list/one/kaw/Urbar> for high-quality images of it. A critical edition of St. Catherine's rent-roll is part of the present author's doctorate.

²⁶ For the farms in the convent's possession in the 1480s: Sonderegger, "Das erste Zinsbuch," 125. For the convent's farms and the vineyards held in the 1480s: Sutter, "Das Konventsbuch als Quelle," 49.

²⁷ KlosterA St. Katharina Wil, Arch II.10 (Urbar), fol. Lv (contemporary) | fol. 52v (later), lines 3–8.

²⁸ From 1459 until 1476. Bless-Grabher, "St. Gallen," 775.

²⁹ Jos or Jodokus Krumm was the abbot of St. Georgen in Stein am Rhein from 1460 until 1490. Waldvogel, "Stein am Rhein," 1560.

³⁰ Waldvogel, "Stein am Rhein."

As mentioned before, convents were organizations which dealt with secular affairs. This is most clear in the convent's role as a landlord. The nuns were—for various reasons—unable to work the farms and their properties themselves. They rented their farms and vineyards to tenant farmers for an annual fee. The nature and the amount of those rents would vary according to the size and the location of the farm; in general, different kinds of cereals and money had to be paid. Winegrowers leasing vineyards from the convent had to deliver a proportion of the wine they had produced during the year.³¹ Many inhabitants of St. Gallen owed the convent annual rents in cash: the convent gave homeowners credit; in return, they had to pay an annual amount of money to the convent.³²

As a landowner, it was not enough to know which possessions were leased to whom under which conditions; the landlord had to check that these conditions were being fulfilled, particularly that the tenant farmers and homeowners were paying their rents. For this purpose, an account register was used. Every delivery of produce and every payment in cash was listed in a handy fashion.³³ A few pages were assigned to each property; deliveries and payments were listed chronologically.³⁴ The farm Landquart for instance was one of the first farms that came into the convent's possession. Based on the number³⁵ and quality of the charters concerning Landquart, this must have been one of the most important farms in the convent's holdings. The first page concerning Landquart in the oldest account register³⁶ begins with the rents demanded by the convent, followed by other information concerning the farm. After a gap, the tenant farmer's debts were listed:

Item den holf³⁷ zû Lanquart, buwt yetz Kûnly Wirt, vnd sol vnß noch gelten vom LXXXI iar II malter fâsen, vnd III malter haber minder I viertel haber. Wir hand im gelichen I malter fâsen an sant Pauls tag.³⁸

[Item, the farm in Landquart, cultivated now by Konrad Wirt [senior], and he owes us from 1481 2 *Malter* [approx. 249 kg] of spelt,³⁹ and 3 *Malter* [approx. 504 kg] of

31 Generally, the landlord paid half of the costs, while the leaseholder had to pay the other half. In parallel, the leaseholder had to pay half of the wine produced during the year.

32 Not only homeowners in St. Gallen asked the convent of St. Catherine for loans, some cities did as well.

33 Further study is needed to see if a nun or a lay sister accepted the deliveries and who made the entries in the account registers. See further below.

34 Irregularities in the chronological order—in combination with other factors—demonstrate that the account registers were secondary.

35 From the first charter, dating from 1275, until the Protestant Reformation in 1527 sixteen charters remain (those charters concerning Landquart and other farms excluded): StadtASG, ÄmterA, Schaffneramt im Thurgau, c. 1–c. 16.

36 StadtASG, Altes StadtA, Bd. 482. Three account registers are extant, documenting the convent's economic exchanges before the Protestant Reformation (StadtASG, Altes StadtA, Bd. 482, Bd. 483, Bd. 484), but there must have been more, now lost.

37 Scribal error: the "l" is redundant, the word is *hof*.

38 StadtASG, Altes StadtA, Bd. 482, fol. Ir (contemporary) | pag. 3 (later), lines 11–13.

39 The original term *Fesen* signifies the chaff of the grains with the grain of any cereal within it, but it is generally understood as the chaff of the spelt plus the grain inside. Antiquarische Gesellschaft, ed., *Schweizerisches Idiotikon* (1881), 1069–70.

vff 31st

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 zehend ist vñ 10 mte fessen die vor mals sint gange vff dem
 mayter hoff gehoret 1000 vñ och zu also 10 es werdet 1000 mte
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Figure 2.3: First page concerning the farm in Landquart
 in St. Catherine's oldest extant account register. StadtASG,
 Altes StadtA, Bd. 482, fol. 1r (contemporary) | pag. 3 (later).

oats,⁴⁰ minus 1 *Viertel* [approx. 11 kg] of oats. We lent him 1 *Malter* [approx. 124 kg] of spelt on St. Paul's Day.^{41]}

The last sentence of the transcribed paragraph has been crossed out. This means that the tenant farmer paid back the one *Malter* of spelt that the convent had lent him. The following entries concern the tenant farmer's later deliveries [Fig. 2.3].

The conditions set for the rents were fixed in specific charters. The convent gave a sealed charter to the tenant farmer, where the nature and amount of the rents were fixed as well as any other important points;⁴² the tenant farmer provided the convent a sealed charter as well, where he officially accepted the conditions of the rent.⁴³ One of the conditions was that the deliveries in natural produce and the payments in cash had to be brought "without protest, without any disadvantage, loss, or damage to the nuns, in the already named convent [St. Catherine in St. Gallen] in their [the nuns'] care and charge."⁴⁴ The dated entries in the account registers prove that these conditions were fulfilled and that the tenant farmers were bringing the rents in produce and payments in cash to the convent.

As we saw at the beginning of this section, one of the convent's means for generating regular income was land ownership, with tenant farmers cultivating this land regularly bringing rents to the nuns. Another possibility was to sell the tenant farmers' rents or what the nuns produced on their own. Additional—but irregular—sources of income were anniversaries and gifts. The following table gives an overview of St. Catherine's sources of revenue:

Fees				Sales of Produce			Emoluments from Anniversaries	Gifts
Food & Drink	Basic Commodities	Services	Money	Cereals	Wine	Linen		

Table 2.4: Sources of revenue of the convent of St. Catherine.

For the quantities: 1 *Malter* = 4 *Mütt* = 16 *Viertel* (see Dubler, *Masse und Gewichte*, 35). 1 *Markt-viertel* in St. Gallen was approx. 19.44 litres (Dubler, *Masse und Gewichte*, 38). The weight of spelt is approx. 0.4 kg per litre (see https://villiger-eichmuehle.ch/wp-content/uploads/2018/05/Uebnahmebedingungen_Getreide_2018_D_2018-03-15_.pdf). So, the calculation is $(2 \times 16 \times 1 \text{ Viertel}) \times 19.44 \text{ litres} \times 0.4 \text{ kg/l} = 248.9 \text{ kg}$.

40 The weight of oats is approx. 0.54 kg per litre volume (see "Hafer" on page 6 of https://villiger-eichmuehle.ch/wp-content/uploads/2018/05/Uebnahmebedingungen_Getreide_2018_D_2018-03-15_.pdf). So, the calculation is $(3 \times 16 \times 1 \text{ Viertel}) \times 19.44 \text{ litres} \times 0.54 \text{ kg/l} = 503.8 \text{ kg}$.

41 Probably Thursday, January 25, 1481.

42 The German term is *Lehenbrief*.

43 The German term is *Lehenrevers* or *Lehenreversbrief*.

44 "on alle vffzüg vnd widerrede, vnd gāntzlich öne allen iren [für die Nonnen] schaden für alle haftunge, intråg, irung vnd sachen ze rechtem zins geben vnd antwurten gen sant Gallen in dz vorbemelt closter zû iren [...] handen vnd gewalt." StadtASG, ÄmterA, Schaffneramt im Thurgau, c. 12. Of course, reality could differ from the written requirements. See, for instance, Sonderegger, "... der Zins ist abgelon ..."

In the next two sections, we will examine the trade in two kinds of foods over twenty years: oats and wine. They generated income in two ways for the convent: first as rental income in kind, but then the oats coming from the Landquart farm were also partly sold, and the wine—coming from the Griesser vineyard at Buechberg and many others—was also partially sold.

Oats

One of the most important cereals during the Middle Ages was oats. In Alpine Europe it grew during the summer and was not consumed as bread but as porridge.⁴⁵ As a sign of its importance, oats were generally part of the rent tenant farmers had to pay the convent.

The convent's tenant farmers in Landquart had to pay—at least since 1479⁴⁶—8 *Malter* of oats by Martinmas each year.⁴⁷ In other words, they had to deliver before November 11 every year around 1.3 tons of oats. Landquart seems to have been the most important of the farms the convent possessed: in an inventory from 1484, Landquart is top.⁴⁸ But it was not the only farm delivering oats to the convent; but where these large quantities of oats were stored? There is no trace of the convent's cereals being stored outside the nunnery;⁴⁹ so we must assume that the oats in total were stored inside. The two sources—a charter and the rent-roll—are both normative sources: the nuns were owed eight *Malter* of oats, but did the tenant farmers in fact deliver this amount? Here we turn to another type of sources: The descriptive sources, namely the account registers, present the reality, not the contractual one. The following extract is taken from the oldest extant account register and shows how deliveries were recorded:

Item wir hand gerechnet mit dem Wirt an sant Thomas tag ze winâcht im LXXXVII, vnd belaib vns schuldig IIIII viertel fesen vnd VIII malter XIII viertel haber. Gen VI malter haber XIII viertel an sant Anthonius abent im LXXXVIII. Item me het er gen II malter haber vnd IIIII viertel fesen, furt er vns daran, vnd ist der zechend vnd alle ding verrechnet am samstag vor sant Michels tag im LXXXVIII.⁵⁰

[Item, we calculated with [Konrad] Wirt [senior] on St. Thomas's Day [Friday, December 21] in 1487, and he owes us 4.5 *Viertel* [approx. 35 kg] of spelt, and 8 *Malter* 14 *Viertel* [approx. 1491 kg] of oats. He gave us 6 *Malter* 14 *Viertel* [approx. 1155 kg] of oats on St. Anthony's Eve [Wednesday, January 16] in 1488. Item, he gave us 2 *Malter* [approx. 504 kg] of oats and 4.5 *Viertel* [approx. 35 kg] of spelt, he did transport services for it, and the tithe, and everything is taken into account on the Saturday before Michaelmas [Saturday, September 27] in 1488.]

45 Jacomet, "Hafer."

46 This was set in the oldest extant *Lehenbrief*: StadtASG, ÄmterA, Schaffneramt im Thurgau, c. 12.

47 "Es ist ain hoff gelegen ze Lanckwatt, vnd also genant, vß vnd von dem hoff iegklichs iârs, besunder vff sant Martis tag [...] söllent die mayer ze rechtem zins geben vnd antwurten [...] acht malter haber, als gütz, vngeuärliches, wolberaites korns sant Galler mesß [...]" KlosterA St. Katharina Wil, Arch II.10 (Urbar), fol. VIr (contemporary) | fol. 8r (later), lines 1–5.

48 For the inventory as a whole: KlosterA St. Katharina Wil, Arch I.15 (Konventsbuch), s. p. (contemporary) | fol. 36r (later), line 7–s. p. (contemporary) | fol. 38r (later), line 4.

49 Other natural produce could be partly stored outside the convent; see further below.

50 StadtASG, Altes StadtA, Bd. 482, fol. IIv (contemporary) | pag. 6 (later), lines 14–19.

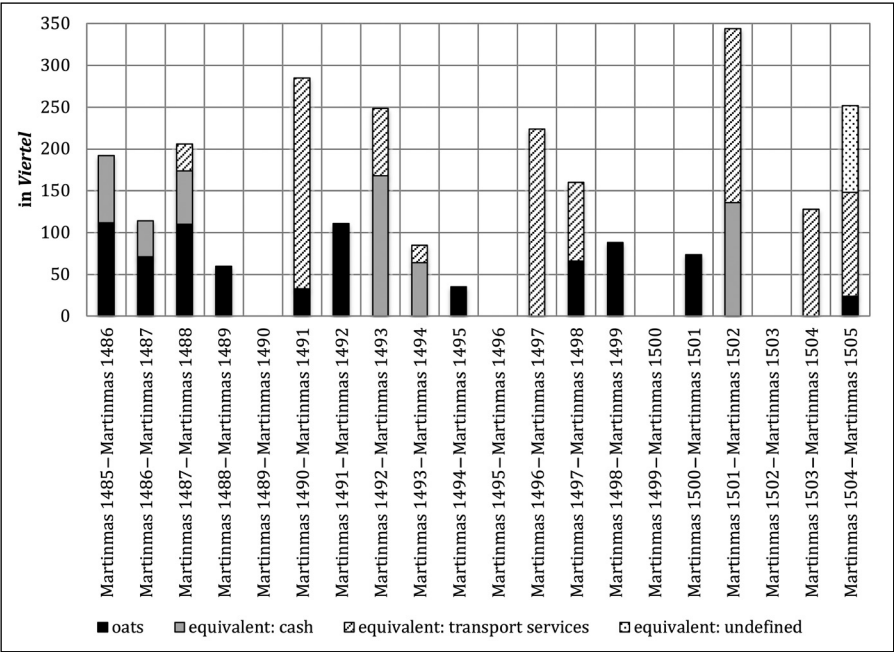


Table 2.5: Annual payment of oats by the tenant farmers of Landquart to the convent of St. Catherine, 1485 to 1505: only 30 percent of this amount was actually delivered.

By analyzing the data in the account registers, the picture changes fundamentally [Table 2.5]. Instead of the 128 *Viertel* due, the tenant farmers of Landquart delivered only around 40 *Viertel* of oats per year on average. The rest of the rents were paid in equivalents. The most popular equivalent was transport services (45 percent); cash (21 percent), and undefined equivalents (just 4 percent) were less frequent. In other words, less than a third of the oats were actually delivered by the tenant farmers of Landquart.

It seems that the tenant farmers of Landquart preferred to provide transport services to delivering oats. Perhaps this is partly due to its geographical situation: Landquart lies on a gentle slope near Lake Konstanz, around two kilometres away. In the village of Steinach, on the shore of Lake Konstanz, the convent possessed a vineyard.⁵¹ The wine produced there was regularly transported by the tenant farmers of Landquart. The wine barrels were transferred to ports on Lake Konstanz where they were traded and then loaded onto boats. The tenant farmers also supported the vineyard in Steinach in other ways. For instance, in December 1494, they brought wooden sticks which were needed to raise the vines.

If the tenant farmers of Landquart substituted transport services for cereals, it was not unique; we know of other farmers who specialized in transport services.⁵²

51 This vineyard has not yet been located; see further below.

52 For instance, Zwahlen, “Das Textil- und Transportgewerbe.”

Contractually, the rents in oats had to be brought “without protest, without any disadvantage, loss, or damage to the nuns.”⁵³ Once every tenant farmer had delivered his particular amount of oats into the nunnery, it was used for different purposes: by the nuns and the lay sisters, as well as the male and female servants,⁵⁴ who consumed every day oats as porridge.⁵⁵ Beside human consumption, oats were given to horses, pigs, and hens; the remainder was sold. We know this from calculations made by the bursaress who specialized in cereals (*Kornmeisterin*).⁵⁶ At the end of every financial year,⁵⁷ generally in the autumn, this nun separately listed the amount of each type of cereal by use.⁵⁸ For instance during the last financial year examined here, which ran from Wednesday, November 13, 1504 until Wednesday, November 12, 1505, 39 percent of the total oats was consumed by humans, 7 percent by horses, 6 percent by hens, and 1 percent by pigs, while 47 percent was sold.⁵⁹

During this financial year, the convent hit its maximum of fifty-three nuns and lay sisters.⁶⁰ Assuming that there were five additional people living in the nunnery—servants, boarders, and the priest—they consumed together 4619 kg of oats per year, which makes 12.5 kg per day; or slightly more than 200 g per day per person. If we include workers temporally employed in the nunnery, the average daily consumption of oats would further decrease.

53 KlosterA St. Katharina Wil, Arch II.10 (Urbar), fol. VIr (contemporary) | fol. 8r (later), lines 1–5.

54 Additionally, the nuns accepted female boarders, usually a relative of a nun, who would live in the guesthouse. Any workers who were temporally employed in the convent had to be fed: food was part of the salary. See, for instance, Rippmann, “Sein Brot verdienen.” A priest lived and worked in the convent as well.

55 The original expression is *muß mel*.

56 The original name is *Kornmeisterin*. According to the *Book of Duties of the Sisters of the Order of Preachers* (*Das Amtbuch* or *Das Buch der Ämter*, by Johannes Meyer) a bursaress must be responsible for all of the convent’s economic exchanges. Meyer, *Das Amtbuch*, ed. DeMaris, esp. 185–90 for the German edition and 381–85 for the English translation. At St. Catherine’s, the bursaress apparently was responsible for every financial transaction except the cereals, which was the task of the *Kornmeisterin*.

57 The financial year differed from the calendar year. In addition, the *Schaffnerin*’s (bursaress) financial year was not congruent with that of the *Kornmeisterin* (bursaress specialized in cereals).

58 *Kernen*: for personal consumption, or for sale. Antiquarische Gesellschaft, ed., *Schweizerisches Idiotikon* (1895), 465–67. *Fesen*: for personal consumption, or for sale. Antiquarische Gesellschaft, ed., *Schweizerisches Idiotikon* (1881), 1069–70. Oats: for personal consumption, for sale, for horses, for pigs, for hens. Antiquarische Gesellschaft, ed., *Schweizerisches Idiotikon* (1885), 930–32.

59 Breakdown of the 1124 *Marktviertel* (100 percent):

- a) for personal consumption: 27.5 *Malter* (39.1 percent),
- b) for sale: 33 *Malter* 4 *Viertel* (47.3 percent),
- c) for horses: 5 *Malter* 2.5 *Viertel* (7.4 percent),
- d) for pigs: 8 *Viertel* (0.7 percent),
- e) for hens: 3 *Malter* 13.5 *Viertel* (5.5 percent).

KlosterA St. Katharina Wil, Arch I.15 (Konventsbuch), s. p. (contemporary) | fol. 105r (later), lines 14–26.

60 Rickenbacher, “Das Kloster St. Katharina in St. Gallen,” 30–60.

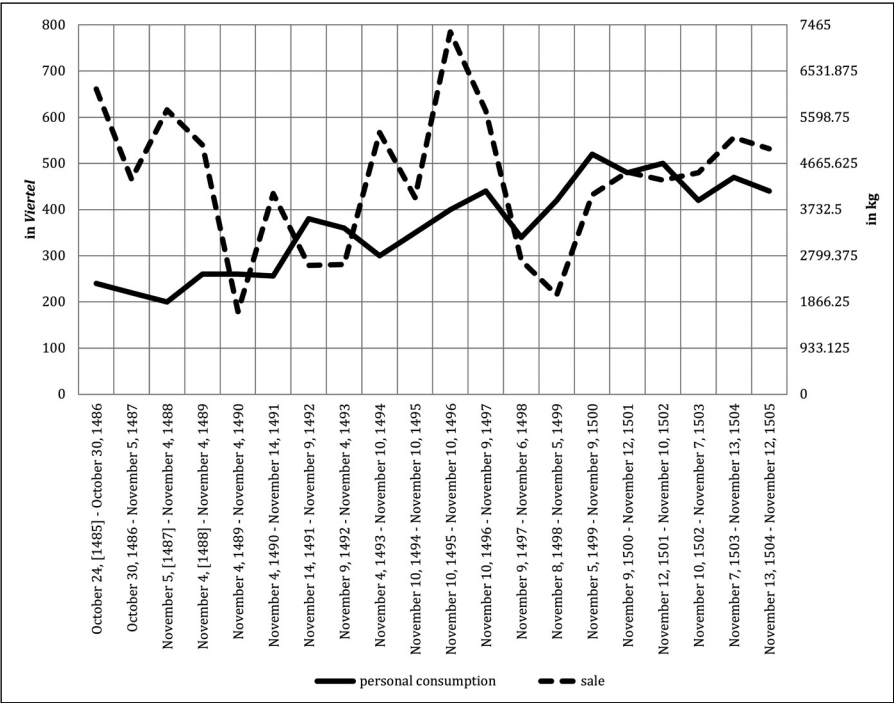


Table 2.6: Personal consumption and sale of oats at St. Catherine's over twenty financial years, 1484 to 1505.

For a comparison, we can do the same calculation for the hens: they consumed 646 kg of oats per year, or 1.8 kg per day. The situation changed every financial year [Table 2.6]: the quantity of oats consumed by humans was generally increasing, while the amount of oats sold varied each year. We have seen how deliveries of oats were extremely irregular, in terms of timing and quantity. This must be one reason for this fluctuation in sales. Another reason could be demand; we can assume that the convent sold the oats on the local market in St. Gallen. Since 1170 the city had the right to a market;⁶¹ and the nuns had the right to sell what they didn't themselves need: "[I]f the monastery has a surplus of anything such as grain or wine to sell, [the bursaress] must sell it at the proper time, but this must be done unobtrusively, with great circumspection and discretion, through the agency of intimate friends of the monastery."⁶² Who these "intimate friends of the monastery" were, in what quantities, and in what place they sold the oats—as well as the other cereals—warrants further study.⁶³

61 Ehrenzeller, *Geschichte der Stadt St. Gallen*, 18.
62 Meyer, *Das Amptbuch*, ed. DeMaris, 382.
63 We can suppose that lay sisters, male and female servants living in the nunnery—but outside the enclosure—played a role.

Wine

Grapes and the techniques of winemaking were introduced into Alpine Europe in the first century CE.⁶⁴ During the Early Middle Ages wine was still reserved for the upper class, but by the Late Middle Ages, it had become a drink across most social classes;⁶⁵ in areas where wine was produced it was part of the daily diet.⁶⁶ For the nuns, wine played not only a significant role in the refectory, but also in the church: wine represents Christ's blood, and as such it has always been used during Holy Communion.⁶⁷ Next to its nutritional and liturgical importance, wine had—in general—an economic significance which cannot be underestimated.

The wine trade was highly lucrative in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, so lords promoted the cultivation of grapes. As vineyards grew in number as well as size, some lords—especially monasteries and convents,⁶⁸ cities, and hospitals⁶⁹—were unable to cultivate the land themselves. The nuns of St. Catherine's could not cultivate their vineyards themselves for religious, personal, and logistical reasons: they had their religious duties inside the enclosure, they were too few, and were distant from the vineyards.⁷⁰ So the nuns leased the vineyards to local farmers who worked the land for them. The expenses—fertilizer, new plants, and suchlike—and the revenues were equally shared between the two parties.⁷¹ Generally the nuns bore half of the costs and in return got half of the wine produced.⁷² As we have seen earlier, deliveries had to be brought “without protest, without any disadvantage, loss, or damage to the nuns, in the already named convent [St. Catherine in St. Gallen] in their [the nuns'] care and charge.”⁷³ This means that the winegrowers had to bring hundreds of litres of wine to the nunnery—which they in fact did.

The bursaress made an inventory every year—generally in January—of the wine which was stored in the nunnery's caves and wrote it down in the convent's chronicle.⁷⁴ From the early 1490s, she even noted the amounts of red and white wine separately.

⁶⁴ Flutsch, “Weinbau. 1. Archäologie.”

⁶⁵ Rösener, *Bauern im Mittelalter*, 113.

⁶⁶ Simon-Muscheid, “Wein, Weinbauern und Weintrinker,” 202.

⁶⁷ Reifenberg, “Wein, Weintrauben, Weinstock. I. Liturgisch”; Janowski, “Wein. II. Biblisch.”

⁶⁸ Matheus, “Wein, -bau, -handel. A. Allgemein. Mittel- und Westeuropa,” 2116.

⁶⁹ More recently Sonderegger, “The Financing Strategy of a Major Urban Hospital.”

⁷⁰ Also, many vineyard jobs had to be done by men. For work in the vineyards see, for instance, Wunderer, *Weinbau und Weinbereitung*, 43–122.

⁷¹ Zangger, “Teilbau.”

⁷² In consequence, the amount of wine delivered differed from year to year; in contrast to the tenant farmers—who had to pay the same amount of natural produce every year—the winegrowers' deliveries were not predictable.

⁷³ StadtASG, ÄmterA, Schaffneramt im Thurgau, c. 12. See also above.

⁷⁴ KlosterA St. Katharina Wil, Arch I.15 (Konventsbuch) for the manuscript and <http://e-codices.ch/de/searchresult/list/one/kaw/konventsbuch> for high-quality images. A critical edition of the convent's chronicle has recently been published: Willing, ed., *Das Konventsbuch und das Schwesternbuch aus St. Katharina*.

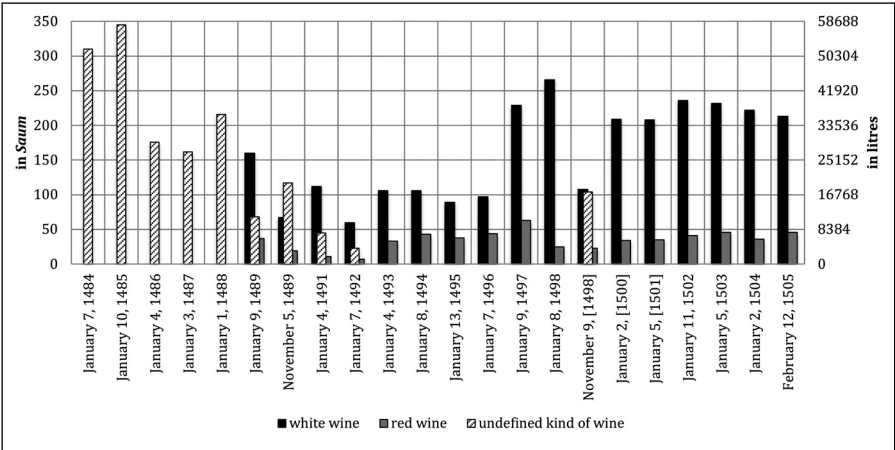


Table 2.7: Amount of wine stored by St. Catherine’s over twenty financial years, 1484 to 1505.

Table 2.7 shows the bursaress’s inventories of wine stored from 1484 until 1505. The graph shows two things clearly: firstly, the amount of stored wine varied wildly. This is due to the amount of wine delivered by the winegrowers, which was dependent on the year’s production. Vines depend on the climate⁷⁵ and meteorological phenomena like hail, frost, variation in temperature, wind, solar irradiation, amount of rain, and so on.⁷⁶ In 1490 for instance, a stream washed away a wall which was supposed to protect a vineyard in Steinach.⁷⁷ Probably not just the wall but also a part of the vineyard itself got destroyed. Consequently, this vineyard’s leaseholder was unable to deliver any wine in autumn 1490. A year later, the Swiss Rhine valley suffered from local political unrests.⁷⁸ We can expect that the convent’s vineyards there were affected. The second observation is that the amount of stored white wine was higher by far than the amount of stored red wine. It is said that white wine has been preferred to red wine for centuries;⁷⁹ this information supports that truism.

In the context of the convent and its sources, a third point can be seen from table 2.7: on January 7, 1484 the nuns had stored 310 *Saum* of red and white wine;⁸⁰ in today’s units, this equals 51,981 litres.⁸¹ The same day, the bursaress counted the wine barrels

75 For the difference between “climate” and “weather”: Hupfer and Kuttler, eds., *Witterung und Klima*, 4–5.

76 Johnson and Robinson, *Der Weinatlas*, 24–25.

77 KlosterA St. Katharina Wil, Arch I.15 (Konventsbuch), s. p. (contemporary) | fol. 62v (later), lines 18–21.

78 Tremp, “Rorschacher Klosterbruch.”

79 Simon-Muscheid, “Wein, Weinbauern und Weintrinker,” 208.

80 KlosterA St. Katharina Wil, Arch I.15 (Konventsbuch), s. p. (contemporary) | fol. 30v (later), line 12.

81 1 *Saum* = 4 *Eimer* = 128 *Mass* (Dubler, *Masse und Gewichte*, 43). 1 *Stadtmass* in St. Gallen was

standing in the nunnery's caves; she noted the number of wine barrels and their capacity, and calculated the totals:⁸²

Number of wine barrels	Capacity (in litres)	Number of wine barrels	Capacity (in litres)	Number of wine barrels	Capacity (in litres)
3	3018	2	1509	1	587
1	1761	1	1341	10	503
1	2348	1	1174	2	335
3	1844	2	1006	2	210
4	1677	5	838	5	168
1	1593	2	671	3	84
				2	42
Total barrels	51				
Total capacity	47,905 ⁸³				

Table 2.8: Inventory of the convent's wine barrels by the bursaress, January 1484.

Comparing the two totals—the stored wine and the capacity of the barrels—the quantity of stored wine is bigger than the total capacity of the barrels, which is implausible. A closer look at the sources may solve this problem: the convent's wine was partly stored outside the nunnery:

... vnd in vnsers lieben brüders kerr, Vlrich Varnbülers, VII som, vnd in des Iâglis kerr X som, aim Büchberg.⁸⁴

[... and in our dear brother's⁸⁵ cave, Ulrich Varnbüler's,⁸⁶ 7 Saum [approx. 1174 litres], and in Jägli's cave 10 Saum [approx. 1677 litres] at Buechberg.]

The deliveries in wine are only one part of the story; the other part is the selling of the wine and the revenue generated. As we saw in table 2.4, the convent sold cereals, linen, and wine. It earned most of the money from wine; but at the same time, this source

equivalent to 1.31 litres (Dubler, *Masse und Gewichte*, 45). So, the calculation is $(310 \times 128 \times 1 \text{ Stadtmass}) \times 1.31 \text{ litres} = 51,980.8 \text{ litres}$.

82 KlosterA St. Katharina Wil, Arch I.15 (Konventsbuch), s. p. (contemporary) | fol. 30v (later), lines 16–28. In January 1507, the bursaress made another inventory: KlosterA St. Katharina Wil, Arch I.15 (Konventsbuch), s. p. (contemporary) | fol. 110r (later), lines 6–13.

83 The manuscript says “CCLXXVI som” (= 276 *Saum* = 46,230 litres), but the calculation's correct sum is “CCLXXXVI som” (= 286 *Saum* = 47,905 litres).

84 KlosterA St. Katharina Wil, Arch I.15 (Konventsbuch), s. p. (contemporary) | fol. 30v (later), lines 12–15.

85 The text is written by Angela Varnbüler, prioress of St. Catherine's from 1467 until 1509. Bless-Grabher, “St. Gallen,” 775–77.

86 Ulrich Varnbüler, the city's mayor, was the prioress Angela Varnbüler's brother. Krauer, “Varnbüler, Ulrich.”

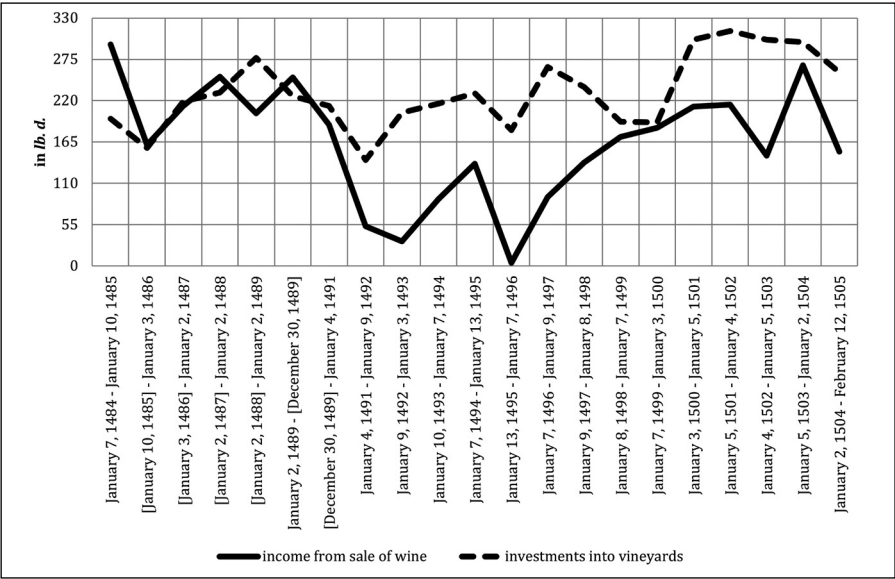


Table 2.9: Income to St. Catherine’s from sale of wine, and investments into their vineyards, 1484 to 1505.

of revenue was the most variable.⁸⁷ The variation was due to the amount of wine sold as well as its price. Thanks to the bursaress, we know the yearly revenues generated through wine selling. But she didn’t only list these revenues, but also the investments in the vineyards.⁸⁸ Table 2.9 shows the revenues from wine selling in comparison to the investments done.

The *Amtbuch* or *Das Buch der Ämter* by Johannes Meyer has already been cited: “[I]f the monastery has a surplus of anything such as grain or wine to sell, [the bursaress] must sell it at the proper time, but this must be done unobtrusively, with great circumspection and discretion, through the agency of intimate friends of the monastery.”⁸⁹ We know neither who sold the wine for the nuns, nor where it was sold, nor for which price, nor in what amounts. We can assume that the wine was sold in the city of St. Gallen as it had the market privilege since 1170;⁹⁰ the other questions need further study. We do know about the investments in the vineyards thanks to the prioress: every time maintenance work was done, she noted it in the convent’s chronicle. When the stream in 1490 washed away a wall which was supposed to protect a vineyard in Steinach, that

87 Sutter, “Quelle für Wirtschafts- und Regionalgeschichte.”

 88 The original terms in the bursaress’s yearly calculations are *von win ingnun* and *über den win gangen*.

 89 Meyer, *Das Amtbuch*, ed. DeMaris, 382.

 90 Ehrenzeller, *Geschichte der Stadt St. Gallen*, 18.

same year a wall was built.⁹¹ A year later, a dam or a weir was made with oak trees, and the new wall had to be repaired.⁹² In 1493, the wine press in Steinach was moved and reconstructed; the shingles for the roof, the nails, the wood, the workers' salaries and their food had to be paid.⁹³

A comparison of these two quantities—revenues and investments—shows their relation. If the investments were higher than the revenues on a long-term basis, the wine business was losing money which, at first sight, seems to be the case. But there is no sign that the prioresses of St. Catherine's considered giving up this source of revenue. The solution may lie in wine's two other roles—as basic foodstuff and its fundamental role in their liturgical life. For every eucharistic celebration wine was needed, so the convent would have been forced to buy wine from traders and would have been dependent on them. By possessing their own vineyards, the nuns were able to keep a large degree of independence.

Some Surprises

Oats and wine were far from St. Catherine's only sources of revenue (see table 2.4 above). As we saw earlier, tenant farmers had to pay annual rents. They generally had to pay a certain amount of oats, spelt,⁹⁴ chickens, eggs, and cash; winegrowers had to pay a certain percentage of the wine they had produced; and homeowners had to pay a certain amount of money. We have also learned that rents could partly be substituted by another kind of charge. Having this possibility of substitution, many unexpected things made their way into the nunnery.

Tenant farmers did not only deliver oats and spelt, but also rice. From the early 1510s, several tenant farmers delivered this relatively new and precious product.⁹⁵ On October 9, 1511, the Reutlinger family brought the nuns approx. 9.2 kg of rice.⁹⁶ About ten years later, on November 27, 1521, Stefan Spengler even delivered approx. 25.4 kg.⁹⁷ The value of rice apparently increased a little, as in 1511 1 *Pfund* cost 3.5 *d.* and in 1521 4.5 *d.*⁹⁸

91 KlosterA St. Katharina Wil, Arch I.15 (Konventsbuch), s. p. (contemporary) | fol. 62v (later), lines 18–21.

92 KlosterA St. Katharina Wil, Arch I.15 (Konventsbuch), s. p. (contemporary) | fol. 66r (later), lines 5–8.

93 KlosterA St. Katharina Wil, Arch I.15 (Konventsbuch), s. p. (contemporary) | fol. 70v (later), lines 29–36.

94 *Fesen* and *Kernen*. See nn. 39 and 58 above.

95 Schmidt, "Reis."

96 "Item me het sy vnß gen XVI lb. riß, kost I lb. IIIH d., an sant Dyonisius tag." StadtASG, Altes StadtA, Bd. 483, fol. IIß IIv (contemporary) | pag. 606 (later), lines 1–2. 1 *Pfund* in St. Gallen was 578 grams (Dubler, *Masse und Gewichte*, 52). So the calculation is $16 \times 0.578 \text{ kg} = 9.248 \text{ kg}$.

97 "Item Stefa Spengler het gen XLIIII lb. ris, kost I lb. IIIH d., tüt XVIIß., gab er am mitwoch nach sant Cünrats tag im XXI iar." StadtASG, Altes StadtA, Bd. 483, fol. XXXIIv (contemporary) | pag. 52 (later), lines 24–25.

98 1 *Pfund* (lb.) = 20 *Schilling* (ß.) = 240 *Pfennig* (d.). Schmutz, "Pfund (Währung)"; Fedel, "Schilling"; Schmutz and Zäch, "Pfennig".

The Stahel family, homeowners in St. Gallen, had to pay the sisters 7 *ß.* each year. It seems that they had problems delivering even this little amount of money in cash. They substituted metalwork for money; apparently, father Stahel worked as a blacksmith. In the 1490s, he delivered to the convent—among other things—a number of axes, a shovel, a hook, and a special knife.⁹⁹ The Fläschner family, also homeowners in St. Gallen, owed the convent 4 *lb.* per year. Apparently, father Fläschner worked as a nailer, since during the 1490s, he delivered the convent thousands of different kinds of nails.¹⁰⁰

We learned that tenant farmers could provide transport services; in parallel, homeowners could provide services, too. The Fluri family for instance, who owed the convent 5 *lb.* 6 *ß.* per year, prepared a bath for several people in the nunnery's vicinity;¹⁰¹ if none of the nuns could benefit personally of this service, who were these people and where did they take their bath?

Lastly, we see records of gifts. In 1508, the nuns listed the wonderfully coloured windows they had in their cloister.¹⁰² Most of these windows were paid by the nun's relatives:

Item I fenster het vns gen vnser liebi müter, die von Yestetten, mit sant Anna. Item vnser lieber bruder Iacob Muntprat I fenster mit sant Iacob. Item vnser lieber bruder Hans von Vlm I fenster mit sant Mateus. Item Hans Schönow, vnser lieber bruder, I fenster mit sant Johannes Baptisten.¹⁰³

[Item, one window was given to us by our dear mother, the von Jestetten, with St. Anna. Item, our dear brother Jakob Muntprat [gave us] one window with St. James. Item, our dear brother Hans von Ulm [gave us] one window with St. Matthew. Item, Hans Schönow, our dear brother, [gave us] one window with St. John the Baptist.]¹⁰⁴

99 "Item daran het er vns gemachet ain ax, kost IIII d., vor sant Vallentinus tag. Item me II d., machet er ain gehenckt, nach sant Matias tag im XCV. Item me III d. von aim garter, vor fasnacht im LXXXV. [...] Item me het er geschmidet nach pfingsten, kost II d., vnd ainen haggen, nach sant Peters tag, kost III d. [...] Me vns gemachet ain gehenckt, kost VI d., vnd ain schufel, kost III *ß.* IIII d., ze ostren im LXXXVI. Me het er gemachet ainen garter vnd gehencken, kost V d., nach ostren. [...] Me het er ain ax gemachet im advent, kost IIII d. Me het er ain ax gemachet, kost VII d., ain sant Dorotea tag." StadtASG, Altes StadtA, Bd. 483, fol. XXXVIIIr (contemporary) | pag. 67 (later), lines 6–17.

100 "Item er het vns gen fier tusid tachnagel, kost I tusid III *ß.* I d., vnd hundert latta nagel, kost XXI d., namend wir in der apas wochen im LXXXVIII. Me II latta nagel, kost I XXI d., vnd L schirm nagel, kost IX d., och da. Me tusid tachnagel in der apas wuchen. Me zwai tusig tachnagel in sant Peter vnd Pals octav. Me C lata nagel, nam Vrsel aim. Me vns gen VII tach nagel an sant Germanus tag. Item me vns C schirm nagel, kostend XVI d., an sant Laurentzen abend. [...] Me vns gen II latta nagel, kostend C II *ß.*, nomend wir an sant Augustinus abend. Me L latta nagel, am mitwoch dar nach." StadtASG, Altes StadtA, Bd. 483, fol. CCXIIIv (contemporary) | pag. 428 (later), lines 5–14.

101 "Item me het er gen V *ß.* d., badet Vrsel vnd Rudolf daran vor pfingsten. [...] Item me het der Fluri gen XI d., badet Vrsel daran nach ostren. Item me het er gen XV *ß.* d., badet her Hanrich daran." StadtASG, Altes StadtA, Bd. 483, fol. CXVIIIr (contemporary) | pag. 233 (later), lines 14–26.

102 KlosterA St. Katharina Wil, Arch I.15 (Konventsbuch), s. p. (contemporary) | fol. 116r (later), line 5–fol. 116v (later), line 13.

103 KlosterA St. Katharina Wil, Arch I.15 (Konventsbuch), s. p. (contemporary) | fol. 116v, lines 10–13.

104 Barbara von Jestetten entered St. Catherine's in 1500; her mother was Anna von Jestetten. Jakob Muntprat was Elisabeth Muntprat's brother; Elisabeth entered St. Catherine's in 1472. Hans von Ulm was Elisabeth von Ulm's brother; Elisabeth was from at least 1476 a nun in St. Catherine's.

Conclusions

Convents were autonomous entities both economically and organizationally.¹⁰⁵ This was true for non-observant convents as well as for observant ones. We have seen that the nuns did—even when living in strict enclosure—take care of their convent’s legal, administrative, and economic affairs. We have tried to show some intriguing research questions about how the nuns managed the convent’s possessions and its economic exchanges.¹⁰⁶

We can try to answer one question partially. We know that the nuns took their vow of personal poverty seriously since 1459.¹⁰⁷ The wording of entries in the account registers show their active involvement (our emphasis):

Item *wir* hand gerechnet mit dem Wirt an sant Thomas tag ze winächt im LXXXVII, vnd belaib *vns* schuldig IIIII viertel fesen vnd VIII malter XIII viertel haber.¹⁰⁸

[Item, we calculated with [Konrad] Wirt [senior] on St. Thomas’s Day in 1487, and he owes us 4.5 *Viertel* of spelt, and 8 *Malter* 14 *Viertel* of oats.]

We know of only one single passage where the formulation of the entry states who did the calculation:

Item schwöster Magdalen hett gerechnet mit der Flesschsnerin ain sant Appolonia tag im LXXXVIII ...¹⁰⁹

[Item, Sr. Magdalene calculated with Mrs. Fläschner on St. Apollonia’s Day in 1498 ...]

There is a possible explanation for Sr. Magdalene being able to calculate with Mrs. Fläschner: she was probably the convent’s turnkeeper.¹¹⁰ “The constitutions of the sisters of the Order of Preachers say that there should be a turn at an appropriate place in the monastery through which things can be passed in and out as required [...],¹¹¹ and the turnkeeper was the nun taking care of the turn. It is easy to imagine two women doing calculations through the turn, but inconceivable how tons of cereals and wine and anything else could have passed through this little hole. Another intriguing detail worth further examination.

Retracing the economic exchanges between the convent and the world surrounding it opens small windows into the world inside the enclosure. Did observant Dominican nuns stay in touch with the outside? Yes, almost daily, thanks to their economic exchanges.

Hans von Schönau was probably Elisabeth von Schönau’s brother; she entered St. Catherine’s in 1484. Rickenbacher, “Das Kloster St. Katharina in St. Gallen,” 30–60.

105 Elm, “Orden I,” 317.

106 Part of the author’s doctorate involves the reconstruction of the convent’s management.

107 Bless-Grabher, “St. Gallen,” 774. Recently Sutter, “Item in dem [14]LVIII iar,” 18–23.

108 StadtASG, Altes StadtA, Bd. 482, fol. IIv (contemporary) | pag. 6 (later), lines 14–16.

109 StadtASG, Altes StadtA, Bd. 483, fol. CCXIIIv (contemporary) | pag. 428 (later), lines 1–2.

110 The German term is *Raderin*. Her duties are listed in Meyer, *Das Amptbuch*, ed. DeMaris, 213–34 (German edition), and 408–25 (English translation).

111 Meyer, *Das Amptbuch*, ed. DeMaris, 408.

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