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Intoxicants and the invention of 'consumption'[†]

By PHIL WITHINGTON*

In 1600 the word 'consumption' was a term of medical pathology describing the 'wasting, petrification of things'. By 1700 it was also a term of economic discourse: 'In commodities, the value rises as its quantity is less and vent greater, which depends upon it being preferred in its consumption'. The article traces the emergence of this key category of economic analysis to debates over the economy in the 1620s and subsequent disputes over the excise tax, showing how 'consumption' was an early term in the developing lexicon of political economy. In so doing the article demonstrates the important role of 'intoxicants'—that is, addictive and intoxicating commodities like alcohols and tobaccos—in shaping these early meanings and uses of 'consumption'. It outlines the discursive importance of intoxicants, both as the foci for discussions of 'superfluous' and 'necessary' consumption and the target of legislation on consumption. It argues that while these discussions had an ideological dimension, or dimensions, they were also responses to material increases in the volume and diversity of intoxicants in early seventeenth-century England. By way of conclusion the article suggests the significance of the Low Countries as a point of reference for English writers, as well as a more capacious and semantically sensitive approach to changes in early modern consumption practices.

In July 1643 a fiscally desperate House of Commons, at war with its king and with troops to pay, introduced the 'EXCISE or NEW-IMPOST, upon several commodities'.¹ The tax was widely opposed on various grounds, not least because it was feared that by raising the cost of goods, commerce would be affected. A year later an anonymous apologist for the excise accordingly looked to reassure the English and Scottish publics that 'That which is laid only upon the Consumption of Goods spent within the Kingdom, and paid by the first Buyer or Consumptioner, can be no burthen to Trade (especially to Foreign Commerce)'.² As the first use of 'consumptioner' in print, it was a significant moment: the first time that the populace was formally identified not by status, wealth, gender, or occupation—the usual modes of social classification before the seventeenth

*Author's Affiliation: University of Sheffield.

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¹ *Ordinance . . . for the Speedy Raising and Levying of Moneys*, title page.

² *Considerations touching the excise*, p. 4.

century—but by the nature and quantity of their individual consumption.³ But this identification and labelling of ‘consumptioners’ was only possible because of semantic and conceptual innovations over the previous 20 years. These had seen the *medical* term ‘consumption’ repurposed to describe normative *economic* practices—that is, the behaviour of ‘consumptioners’. It is with this process of semantic development—and the circumstances and commodities informing it—that this article is concerned.

The last four decades have witnessed, of course, a burgeoning interest in ‘consumption’ before the industrial revolution, Brewer and Porter arguing as early as 1994 that a multi-disciplinary approach—one that illuminated ‘the economic, socio-cultural and political dimensions of consumption’—was the only way to do justice to this complicated subject.⁴ But while interest in the economic, spatial, material, social, and semiotic aspects of pre-modern consumption has gathered apace, much less attention has been paid to the language and semantics of the category of consumption itself.⁵ Unease at this neglect has tended to focus on the habit of pre-modernists borrowing and applying modern terminology (such as consumer society and mass consumption) ‘without much effort to specify their meaning precisely, or much concern for their provenance’.⁶ Equally striking, however, has been the relative lack of interest in the vocabulary used by historical actors to describe or understand the demand for goods, with some influential accounts even chastising authors in the seventeenth century for not thinking in modern economic categories.⁷ The obvious exception—Porter’s discussion of ‘Consumption: disease of consumer society?’—proves the rule, focusing as it does on changing conceptions of ‘consumption’ as a medical condition rather than the repurposing of the medical term as an economic category.⁸

In the meantime, however, interest in economic language and the historical contexts in which it was used and developed has grown. On the one hand, historians increasingly recognize that the discursive categories by which people in the past understood and conceptualized their actions can help to explain why and how they behaved as they did.⁹ On the other hand, historical semantics can also establish the genealogy of modern economic concepts, revealing the surprising histories of categories that may otherwise be thought to be ahistorical or common-sensical.¹⁰ Viewed in these terms, the excavation of so significant a category as consumption is timely in itself. More particularly, what follows argues that it illuminates three important aspects of English economic theory and practice as they developed in the seventeenth century. First, the coinage of ‘consumption’ was integral to the more general emergence of the new discursive field of English

³ Wrightson, *English society*, pp. 25–47.

⁴ Brewer and Porter, ‘Introduction’, p. 2; Pennell, ‘Consumption and consumerism’; de Vries, ‘Purchasing power’, p. 85.

⁵ Ryckbosch, ‘Early modern consumption history’, pp. 83–4.

⁶ Styles, ‘Manufacturing, consumption and design’, p. 535.

⁷ Appleby, ‘Ideology and liberalism’, pp. 499–501.

⁸ Porter, ‘Consumption’, pp. 65, 70.

⁹ For discussions more sensitive to these issues, see Slack, *Invention of improvement*, pp. 4–8; idem, ‘Politics of consumption’, pp. 629–30; Litvine, ‘Industrious revolution’, pp. 552–4.

¹⁰ Withington, *Society in early modern England*, pp. 9–16; Ryckbosch, ‘From spice to tea’; Litvine, ‘Industrious revolution’, pp. 569–70.

'political economy'.¹¹ From the 1620s, the language of consumption played a significant role both in debates about the basis of economic prosperity and in the formulation of practical policies like the excise. It was through these discourses that the language entered more general parlance and came to frame economic analysis in the eighteenth century. Second, economic consumption enabled political economists to distinguish between desirable and undesirable consumption decades before the more famous debates over 'luxury' in the later seventeenth century. This was because a crucial feature of consumption's semantic formation in the 1620s was its evaluative force, with adjectives like 'superfluous' and 'excessive' denoting dangerous and destructive consumption and 'necessary' and 'moderate' designating normative consumer behaviour. It was on this basis that the tax regime of the modern English state was implemented, and people's consumption moralized and prescribed: discursive developments with significant implications for economic practices more generally.¹² Third, in both of these respects English political economists were reacting to domestic conditions and borrowing from the exemplar of continental economies. Indeed, the vernacular invention of consumption can be understood as part of a more general attempt on the part of English writers to explain and emulate the economic success of the Dutch.

The first part of this article accordingly highlights the two moments of public controversy that created 'consumption' and 'consumer' as terms of political economy. These were the debate over the causes of England's trade depression in the early 1620s and the longer dispute over the rights and wrongs of the excise from the early 1640s.¹³ What this reveals, however, is a group of commodities that was especially, if not uniquely, implicated in these semantic developments: intoxicants. The importance of these commodities is suggested simply by their prominence in the excise schedule published in July 1643, where they were placed first above 'Grocery Imported', 'Wrought Silks Imported', and seven other categories of imported clothing and manufacture.¹⁴ The same group of commodities retained their primary position in the revised schedule of September 1643 and throughout the 1640s and 1650s. Even more tellingly, it was only goods from this category that continued to be scheduled in the Excise Acts at the Restoration.¹⁵ In July 1643 this group consisted of tobacco (both 'not of the English Plantation' and 'of the English Plantation abroad'), wine, cider and perry, strong beer and ale, and six-shilling beer. By September 1643 'strong waters and Aquavita' had been added to the list. In 1660—when the excise was retained to provide an income for Charles II in return for the abolition of various 'feudal' sources of income—tobacco and wine were removed from the schedule (to be taxed purely by customs) and 'metheglin or mead', 'vinegar beer', spirits of 'wine or cider' (imported), 'strong waters perfectly

¹¹ Slack, 'Material progress', pp. 591–3; Litvine, 'Industrious revolution', pp. 552–4.

¹² Callon, 'What does it mean?'

¹³ Supple, *Commercial crisis and change*, pp. 73–96, 197–224; Chandaman, *English public revenue*, pp. 37–44; Braddick, 'Popular politics', pp. 600–9; Ashworth, *Customs and excise*, pp. 15–17.

¹⁴ *Ordinance . . . for the Speedy Raising and Levying of Moneys*, pp. 15–17.

¹⁵ *Ordinance . . . for the Levying on Moneys, by Way of Excise*, pp. 2–5; Chandaman, *English public revenue*, pp. 37–9.

made' (imported), coffee, chocolate, sherbet, and tea (imported) were all added to it.¹⁶

This grouping of tobacco, alcohols, and latterly caffeine and cocoa was not a strange conceit of parliamentary scribes. During the early seventeenth century tobacco and alcohols became recognized as a community of goods by commentators, retailers, and consumers; and after 1650 caffeine and chocolates were integrated into the same economy of intoxicants.¹⁷ What connected them was their intoxicating qualities and inculcation of 'addictive' behaviours.¹⁸ These were all comestibles that when taken moderately and appropriately were perceived to be important—even necessary—constituents of early modern medicinal and dietary regimes; but which, when taken in excessive and superfluous amounts, risked personal and social disorder. Not that their nomenclature is straightforward. No name was affixed to the group in 1643 and the epithet used in the 1660 Excise Act—'liquors'—excluded dry goods like tobacco.¹⁹ Subsequent labels used by social and natural scientists—such as 'drugs' or 'addictive items'—come with ideological baggage and obscure the many normative functions associated with these commodities, whether ritualistic, nutritional, calorific, or medicinal.²⁰ The term used here to describe them—*intoxicant*—is intended to avoid or at least minimize these problems. Moreover, although the noun 'intoxicant' was only coined in the nineteenth century, the verb 'to intoxicate' was an early modern concept that contemporaries associated with all of these goods and was the reason they were grouped in the initial excise schedules of 1643.²¹

The prominence of intoxicants in England's first systematic excise on the consumption of imported and domestic commodities was no coincidence. Rather it was entirely consistent with discourses about and practices of 'consumption' over the previous two decades and which continued to inform the politics of excise thereafter.²² The second part of the article unpacks these concerns to show why intoxicants figured so prominently in the imaginations of early mercantilist writers. Section III then considers whether the consumption of intoxicants in practice warranted such discursive attention. Of course, establishing levels of consumption is notoriously difficult, especially for drinks and foodstuffs.²³ The approach used here reconstructs the economy of intoxicants as recorded in the customs records of four major provincial ports and their trading zones, Great Yarmouth and King's Lynn in Norfolk, Chester in Cheshire, and Liverpool in South Lancashire. It does so not to give precise or definitive levels of consumption per capita—which would clearly be impossible given the survival rates of the documents and the haphazard recording practices of officials—so much as to use levels of provincial waterborne commerce as a crude index of regional consumption. When combined with other indicators, the data suggest that the perception of economic writers was not awry. Although the early seventeenth century may well have been a period

¹⁶ Chandaman, *English public revenue*, p. 41.

¹⁷ Withington, 'Intoxicants and society', pp. 635–7; idem, 'Coffee'.

¹⁸ Cree, 'Protestant evangelicals', pp. 446–7.

¹⁹ *Abridgment of the Statutes*, pp. 58–9.

²⁰ Courtwright, *Forces of habit*; Ashworth, *Customs and excise*, p. 52. For the concept of addiction, see Cree, 'Protestant evangelicals'.

²¹ Withington, 'Introduction', pp. 12–15.

²² Braddick, 'Popular politics', pp. 623–4; Ashworth, *Customs and excise*, p. 45.

²³ Morineau, 'Growing without knowing why', pp. 379–82; Muldrew, *Food*, pp. 115–16.

of crisis for England's cloth industries, the economy of intoxicants was buoyant, even burgeoning in places. This was an incongruity that, when combined with the agendas of political economists and legislators, helps explain the discursive resonance between intoxicants and consumption.

I

Until the seventeenth century, 'consumption' in English was a term of humoral medicine. Derived from the Anglo-Norman *consumpcion* and the Latin *consumption*, it intimated the 'wasting, petrification of things'.²⁴ Thus, in Richard Eden's 1555 translation of Pietro Martire d'Angliera's *The decades of the New World or West India*, it was conventionally noted of the Spanish experiences in Darien that 'In the night season they were tormented with the biting of bats . . . so much that some have died thereof, falling as it were into a consumption through the maliciousness of the venomous wound'.²⁵ However, by the time Cristobel de Acuna's *Voyages and discoveries in South America* was translated into English, in 1698, consumption had acquired its economic meaning, Acuna noting that local fisherman 'find an extraordinary profit in it; because the Vent [retail] of [fish] is always speedy and certain in the islands, where there is a great consumption of 'em made'.²⁶ It was in the twin fields of medicine and political economy that consumption figured thereafter. In the 1770s Samuel Johnson listed it as the 'act of consuming; waste; destruction . . . the state of wasting or perishing . . . (In physic) A waste of muscular flesh'. He also acknowledged that 'In commodities, the value rises as its quantity is less and vent greater, which depends upon it being preferred in its consumption'.²⁷

The origins of consumption as economic terminology followed from its signification of medical pathologies. This was because from an early date the medical term was occasionally used metaphorically to describe social rather than human bodies, with its intimations of wastage and decrepitude used to invoke material diminution. In the early 1530s, Thomas Starkey described depopulation as the consumption of the body politic, and in 1549 a royal proclamation noted that Henry VIII had secured the French port of Bolougne only 'with the great adventure of his most noble person, and the consumption of his inestimable treasure'.²⁸ As table 1 shows, this metaphorical sense of wastage became institutionalized in early Stuart legislation, with consumption invariably used in statutes, proclamations, and parliamentary speeches before the 1640s to describe the wasteful destruction of the material resources of sovereignty: bullion and coin in particular, but also timber, gunpowder, and time.²⁹ When consumption was linked to commodities in these documents, it likewise described the waste of essential and finite resources: for

²⁴ Elyot, *Dictionary*, translation of 'tabo' (gore).

²⁵ d'Angliera, *Decades of the New World*, p. 122.

²⁶ de Acuna, *Voyages and discoveries*, p. 63.

²⁷ Johnson, *Dictionary*, 'consumption'. Johnson is quoting Locke, *Some considerations*, p. 46.

²⁸ Starkey, *Dialogue*, p. 60; *Proclamation . . . Containing the Very Truth*.

²⁹ *Book of Proclamations*, p. 101; *Proclamation for the Better Settling of His Majesties Manufacture of Gold and Silver Thread; Proclamation against the Unnecessary Waste of Gunpowder; Paper Received by His Majesty from the Committee of Both Houses*.

Table 1. *Meanings of consumption in government publications, 1500–1700*

	<i>(Physic)</i>	<i>Sovereign bodies and estates</i>	<i>Commodity (waste)</i>	<i>Commodity (normative)</i>
Pre-1600		2		
1600s		1	1	
1610s		1	1	
1620s		11		
1630s		4	4	
1640s	1	10	1	5
1650s		3		2
1660s		2		
1670s				4
1680s		1	1	18
1690s		1		4

Source: Early English Books Online-TCP, <http://eebo.chadwyck.com/home>. A search of ‘consumption’ and spelling variants + ‘England’ as author brings up searchable texts published either under the authority of the English government (the monarch, privy council, or Parliament) or for the attention of government (for example, petitions to Parliament). The search was carried out on 12 Nov. 2018.

Table 2. *Occurrences of ‘consumption’ and ‘consume’ (and variants) in early economic printed treatises*

<i>Author</i>	<i>Text</i>	<i>Date</i>	<i>Consumption</i>	<i>Consume</i>
Gerard Malynes	<i>Canker</i>	1601		3
Gerard Malynes	<i>St George</i>	1601	1	9
Gerard Malynes	<i>England’s view</i>	1603	1	3
Thomas Mun	<i>Discourse of trade</i>	1621	1	16
Edw. Misselden	<i>Free trade</i>	1622	0	3
Gerard Malynes	<i>Maintenance</i>	1622	6	5
Gerard Malynes	<i>Consuetudo</i>	1622	5	16
Edw. Misselden	<i>Circle of commerce</i>	1623	3	3
Gerard Malynes	<i>Centre of the circle</i>	1623	6	5
Thomas Mun	<i>England’s treasure</i>	1664/1620s	13	14

Sources: For full details of texts, see ‘Footnote references’.

example, the ‘great waste and consumption of barley in making of malt’ during periods of dearth.³⁰

The metaphor became a writerly tic of the influential merchant-writer and economic advisor Gerard Malynes (see table 2). In two clusters of economic treatises published in the early 1600s and early 1620s, Malynes combined the transposition of humoral pathology into the world of social action with an even greater predilection for the verb ‘to consume’—another Anglo-Norman term with a Latin etymology connoting destruction, devouring, wasting, and squandering. For Malynes the lexicon of ‘consume’ and ‘consumption’ invoked a maelstrom of socio-economic waste and disease which the author, ‘imitating a good physician’, intended to diagnose and remedy.³¹ In 1601, for example, Malynes identified the twin economic problems facing the commonwealth as high exchange rates and dependency on foreign commodities (‘the canker’), observing that ‘if the foreign commodities, which are consumed *and brought as it were unto dung*, shall amount

³⁰ *Book of Proclamations*, p. 186.

³¹ Malynes, *Canker*, preface.

Table 3. *Meanings of 'consumption' in early economic printed treatises*

Author	Text	Date	Bodies & Estates	Goods & Commodities
Gerard Malynes	<i>Canker</i>	1601		
Gerard Malynes	<i>St George</i>	1601	1	
Gerard Malynes	<i>England's view</i>	1603		1
Thomas Mun	<i>Discourse of trade</i>	1621	1	
Edw. Misselden	<i>Free trade</i>	1622		
Gerard Malynes	<i>Maintenance</i>	1622		6
Gerard Malynes	<i>Consuetudo</i>	1622	1	4
Edw. Misselden	<i>Circle of commerce</i>	1623		3
Gerard Malynes	<i>Centre of the circle</i>	1623	5	1
Thomas Mun	<i>England's treasure</i>	1664/1620s		13

Sources: For full details of texts, see 'Footnote references'.

in value or cost more, then the commodities or fruit of the land, certes that land is unprofitable in every man's judgment'.³²

The same year Malynes depicted manipulated exchange rates as an 'infernal dragon' that 'doth devour so many creatures, as it were consuming them'. This allegorical dragon destroyed not simply through force, 'but by sleight, devises and stratagems, he causes [people] to destroy one another, in such sort as I have determined to tell you'.³³ Malynes' first use of 'consumption' was to describe how 'physicians of commonweals' might destroy the dragon by 'depriving him first of the strength of his tail, which will cause a great obstruction to his breath, whereby his power shall so much be weakened, as he may easily be brought into a consumption'.³⁴ It was two years later, in his 'replication' of Jean Bodin's explanation of the modern phenomenon of inflation, that Malynes first made commodities the object of consumption, using the word to invoke one of the five causes of increasing prices identified by Bodin: 'the waste or consumption of things'.³⁵

The economic repurposing of consumption occurred in the 1620s, when the merchant-writers Thomas Mun and Edward Misselden challenged Malynes's diagnosis of England's more recent economic crisis (see tables 2 and 3).³⁶ Today recognized as one of the most important theorists of English 'mercantilism', Mun was especially significant in turning a pejorative metaphor into both a pejorative and normative economic category. In his *Discourse of trade*, for example, he offered a forthright defence of the East India Company and, in the process, an early emphasis on the balance of trade—rather than the value of bullion—as the master key to national wealth. Mun used 'consumption' only once in the text. He did so metaphorically, arguing that the expenses of the East India Company in terms of wages, victuals, munitions, and insurance 'are but transmutations and no consumption of the Kingdom's stock'.³⁷ Much more significant were two semantic innovations. First, he avoided using 'consumption'—with all its

³² *Ibid.*, pp. 45–6, 113 (emphasis added).

³³ Malynes, *Saint George*, p. 11.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, p. A7r.

³⁵ Malynes, *England's view*, p. 35.

³⁶ Supple, *Commercial crisis and change*, pp. 73–98; Slack, *Invention of improvement*, p. 82.

³⁷ Mun, *Discourse of trade*, p. 24.

pathological inferences—to describe the purchase and use of commodities. Instead he reserved the verb ‘to consume’ for that purpose, with distinctly ungrammatical consequences. To give one example: ‘the commodities only which we now send yearly into the East Indies and Persia, are of sufficient value there to return us Indigo, Spices, Drugs, and all other sorts of Indian wares, (Raw-Silks of Persia only excepted) *for one year’s consume*, or more in this Kingdome’.³⁸ Second, in order to denote such behaviour as negative, Mun did not rely on the deleterious connotations of ‘consume’ itself. Rather he added a pejorative adjective. He explained, for example, that ‘without this assurance of Vent, together with a good price for the said monies, the Merchants would undoubtedly make their returns in other wares; *the use and extraordinary consume* whereof, would be found less profitable to the Commonwealth’.³⁹ Likewise, ‘if these Indian wares thus brought home, cannot be spared to serve for that purpose of Treasure; but must be sent forth together with our own native commodities: and yet all little enough to provide *our excess and extraordinary consume* of foreign wares’.⁴⁰ By adding an evaluative qualifier like ‘immoderate’, Mun intimated that normative—‘moderate’—consumption was not merely possible but requisite of a successful economy.⁴¹

Whether inadvertently or not, *Discourse of trade* made two conceptual distinctions of lasting significance: between the consuming of commodities and consumptions of the commonwealth and between normative and problematic types of consuming. What it failed to provide was a noun to describe the consuming practices so described. Here Malynes seems to have helped. Ostensibly responding to Misselden’s tract on *Free trade* in 1622, Malynes incorporated the conceptual distinctions made by Mun and repurposed ‘consumption’ as the missing noun. He accordingly talked of the ‘late such *unreasonable Consumption* of Silver’ (adding an evaluative adjective; emphasis added); he argued that ‘*The third Cause of the Want of Moneys [in] England*, is the Consumption of foreign Commodities’; he noted that ‘*of the Three Essential Parts of Traffic, we have but the use of one, which is the buying of foreign Commodities to make Returns homewards, and doth increase the consumption of the said Wares*’; and he noted the Dutch levied a tax on English cloths called ‘Consumption Money’.⁴² Malynes also consolidated a commodity-orientated and value-free use of ‘consumption’ in his most influential economic treatise, *Consuetudo, vel lex mercatoria, or The ancient law-merchant*.⁴³ Misselden continued the trend a year later and although Malynes reverted to type in 1623, deploying ‘consumption’ several times as part of an elaborate medical metaphor to describe the depredations of commonwealth, ‘consumption’ now also described the everyday purchase and use of commodities.⁴⁴ Thereafter, in *England’s treasure*, the foundational text of English mercantilism, Mun used the term 13 times as the missing noun from *Discourse of trade*. Not only was the consumption of different kinds of commodity something that could be calculated and quantified: ‘We have

³⁸ Ibid., p. 45 (emphasis added).

³⁹ Ibid., p. 22 (emphasis added).

⁴⁰ Ibid., p. 56 (emphasis added).

⁴¹ Ibid., p. 57.

⁴² Malynes, *Maintenance*, pp. 22–3 (original emphasis, except where noted otherwise).

⁴³ Malynes, *Consuetudo*, p. 65.

⁴⁴ Misselden, *Circle of commerce*, pp. 33, 135; Malynes, *Centre of the circle*, pp. 129, 132–3.

Table 4. Occurrences and meanings of 'consumption' in some seventeenth-century economic treatises

Author	Text	Date	Bodies and estates	Goods and commodities
Robert Lewes	<i>The merchant's map</i>	1638		
Robert Lewes	<i>Treasure of traffic</i>	1641		1
Well wisher of the Commonwealth	<i>Decay of trade</i>	1641		3
Henry Robinson	<i>England's safety</i>	1641		4
	<i>Considerations touching the excise</i>	1644		1
John Bland	<i>Trade revived</i>	1659		4
William Petty	<i>Treatise of taxes</i>	1662		12
John Graunt	<i>Observations</i>	1662		1
	<i>Short notes and observations</i>	1662		1
Thomas Mun	<i>England's treasure</i>	1664/1620s		13
Thomas Culpepper	<i>Abatement of usury</i>	1668	1	3
Thomas Manley	<i>Usury at six percent</i>	1669		6
John Houghton	<i>England's great happiness</i>	1677		
Thomas Manley	<i>Exportation of wool</i>	1677		2
Mark Lewis	<i>Large model</i>	1678		2
Ed Chamberlayne	<i>Present state</i>	1683		2
Nicholas Barbon	<i>Apology for the builder</i>	1685	1	1
Nicholas Barbon	<i>Discourse of trade</i>	1690		5
Josias Child	<i>Discourse</i>	1690	1	6
William Petty	<i>Political arithmetic</i>	1690/1670s		1
William Petty	<i>Political anatomy</i>	1691/1678		1
Dudley North	<i>Discourses upon trade</i>	1691		1
Nicholas Barbon	<i>Discourse concerning coining</i>	1696		7

Sources: For full details of texts, see 'Footnote references'.

already supposed our yearly consumptions of foreign wares to be for the value of twenty hundred thousand pounds, and our exportations to exceed that two hundred thousand pounds, which sum we have thereupon affirmed is brought to us in treasure to balance the accompt'.⁴⁵ Consumption had become a driver of the global economy: 'It is not therefore the keeping of our money in the Kingdom, but the necessity and use of our wares in foreign Countries, and our want of their commodities that causes the vent and consumption on all sides, which makes a quick and ample Trade'.⁴⁶

As a treatise begun in the 1620s but only published posthumously, in the 1660s, *England's treasure* directly links the economic discourse of the early and later Stuart eras. As table 4 shows, from the 1640s the controversy over public finances also incubated the economic sense of the concept. Like debates over the balance of trade, arguments about the excise straddled the military, revolutionary, and restoration decades; and in William Petty's *Treatise of taxes* it produced the second foundational text of English political economy to talk repeatedly of 'consumption' as normative economic practice. It was also in this context that the socio-economic classifier 'consumptioner' was coined. A much rarer and discursively restricted term than 'consumption', 'consumptioner' was almost invariably used to describe

⁴⁵ Mun, *England's treasure*, p. 36.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 43.

persons affected by excise duties.⁴⁷ It was nevertheless semantically important for two reasons: technically, it identified for legislators people liable to be taxed; conceptually, it demarcated from an early date the agency of consumption—a semantic space that the more recognizable term ‘consumer’ began to fill from the 1670s.⁴⁸ Before then, however, ‘consumer’ continued to indicate ‘consume’ in the destructive sense of those ‘who are mere spenders and consumers of commonwealth’ in 1650.⁴⁹

Slack has argued that the controversy of the early 1620s between Malynes, Misselden, and Mun created ‘something that looks recognizable as English political economy, with its own founding texts, organizing concepts, and particular mode of discourse’.⁵⁰ Table 4 confirms that consumption was one such concept. In the hands of economic writers, consumption, like consumptioner, never referred metaphorically to the waste and destruction of sovereign or finite resources. Rather, when they referred to it—which they did fairly consistently from the 1660s—they invariably described the consumption of commodities in the normative manner established by Mun and Petty. This habit was also reflected in the governmental texts sampled in table 1, which shows a decline in consumption as waste after 1660 and a corresponding increase in the economic category from the 1640s. The key point to note here is that this increase in references to economic consumption occurred in petitions by companies of merchants and manufacturers *to* government rather than in statutes, proclamations, and speeches produced *by* government, with the first a petition of the Master and Wardens of the Vintner’s Company in 1640.⁵¹ Just as the vocabulary embedded itself in mercantile discourse, so the analytical possibilities of the category expanded. In 1662, Petty argued that consumption needed to be counted, because ‘by good Accompts of our growth, Manufacture, Consumption, and Importation, it might be known how many Merchants were able to manage the Exchange of our superfluous Commodities with the same of other Countries’.⁵² In the same year John Graunt argued for a sociology of consumption ‘by the knowledge whereof Trade, and Government may be made more certain, and Regular’.⁵³ What is beyond question is that the concept was well-established among political economists and economic practitioners by the time Mun’s *English treasure* was posthumously published in 1664.

II

The invention of ‘consumption’ was part of a more general shift in economic theory and practice precipitated by England’s problems at home and new opportunities

⁴⁷ *Considerations touching the excise*, p. 4; *Ordinance for Continuing the Excise*, p. 110; *Additional Orders and Rules*, p. 2; *Order and Declaration of His Highness and His Council . . . Ireland*, p. 50; *Order and Declaration of His Highness and His Council . . . Scotland*, p. 8; *Short notes and observations*, p. 3; *Act for the Settling of the Excise*, pp. 6, 7, 8, 23, 27, 60; Aungier, *State*, p. 45; Sheridan, *Discourse*, p. 155; Petty, *Treatise* (1662 edn.), p. 39 and *Discourse* (1689 edn.) p. 37; Littleton, *Groans*, p. 13; *Case of Their Majesties’ Sugar Plantations*. For the exception, see Knight, *Following speech*, p. 5.

⁴⁸ Culpepper, *Plain English*, p. 12; Ferguson, *East India trade*, p. 25; Willan, *Exact politician*, p. 121.

⁴⁹ Keymour, *Clear and evident way*, p. 17. See also Mun, *England’s treasure*, p. 154; Wilson, *Complete Christian dictionary* (definitions of *Chittim* and *Gomer*), pp. 100, 269.

⁵⁰ Slack, *Invention of improvement*, p. 84.

⁵¹ *Speeches and passages of this great and happy Parliament*, pp. 330, 333.

⁵² Petty, *Treatise*, p. 11.

⁵³ Graunt, *Observations*, p. 73.

abroad, in Asia and the Atlantic.⁵⁴ The significance of this shift should not be underestimated. In the Aristotelian conception of economy articulated by Malynes, consumption denoted the wastage of shared, sovereign, and finite resources within a culture in which economic activity was informed—at least in theory—by principles of place, calling, status, equity, and custom. In the contrasting perspective developed by Mun, consumption represented the demand for commodities within a global economy. Here wealth was determined by the ongoing and fundamentally fluid balance between total foreign imports and total exports (of domestic manufactures and re-exported foreign goods) with consumption helping to determine the flow of all commodities (and so bullion) in either direction. For Malynes, consumption was the blight of commonwealth; for Mun, it was a key determinant of the balance of trade.

The subsequent debate over the excise only consolidated this new sense of consumption. The excise was a charge on specific commodities at the point of retail—rather than upon a person's 'worth' or property—which retailers then passed on to consumption. ⁵⁵ More, it targeted finished commodities rather than their constitutive raw materials: as Petty put it, 'the very perfect Idea of making a Levy upon Consumptions, is to rate every particular Necessary, just when it is ripe for Consumption'.⁵⁶ In this way consumption could theoretically pay an excise on what Petty styled their 'accumulated' consumptions—the entirety of commodities they consumed—the excise enshrining a principle of equity based not on the 'moral economy' and social discretion of Tudor paternalism so much as the dictates of market supply and demand. It was this mechanism, its first proponents argued, that provided the most 'constant and equal way for the levying of monies for the future maintenance of the parliamentary forces, and other great affairs of the commonwealth'.⁵⁷

The discourse that accompanied this shift from the consumption of commonwealth to the consumption of goods was significantly different to the subsequent and more familiar debates about consumption post-1660.⁵⁸ The first economists of consumption did not lionize the category as the primary reason for economic production in the manner of Adam Smith.⁵⁹ Rather, they took it to be a problematic means to economic and political ends—not least a favourable balance of trade and equitable taxation. Nor did they anticipate Nicholas Barbon or Bernard Mandeville in identifying superfluous, private, or luxurious consumption as the secret of economic prosperity. On the contrary, the entire diagnosis was on moderating and controlling consumption for personal and public good.

This was in large part because these first renditions of consumption were haunted—perhaps even defined—by the spectre of intoxicants. In the 1620s intoxicants, along with cloth imports, were perceived to be the main 'foreign commodities' threatening England's economic health. Malynes, Misselden, and Mun consequently triangulated the *problem* of intoxicants, foreign commodities, and consumption, although in ways specific to their discursive modes. Malynes, for

⁵⁴ Wrightson, *Earthly necessities*, pp. 179–82; Slack, *Invention of improvement*, pp. 50–9.

⁵⁵ *Order and Declaration of His Highness and His Council . . . Ireland*, p. 46.

⁵⁶ Petty, *Treatise*, p. 72.

⁵⁷ *Ordinance . . . for the Levying on Moneys, by Way of Excise*, p. 1.

⁵⁸ Litvine, 'Industrious revolution', p. 566.

⁵⁹ Appleby, 'Ideology and liberalism', p. 514; Porter, 'Consumption', pp. 63–5.

example, looked to restrict the flow of imports in order to prevent the consumption (waste) of land at home and treasure abroad, reverting to elaborate metaphorical allegories in order to invoke the dangers of unrestrained trade in wine and especially tobacco.⁶⁰ Misselden concurred that:

we draw *Unto vs*, and consume *amongst us*, that great abundance of the *Wines of Spain*, of *France*, of the *Rheine*, of the *Levant*, and of the *Islands*: the *Raisins of Spain*, the *Currants of the Levant*, the *Lawns and Cambricks of Hannault* and the *Netherlands*, the *Silks of Italy*, the *Sugars & Tobacco of the West Indies*, the *Spices of the East-Indies*: All which are of no necessity unto us, & yet are *bought* with ready money, which otherwise would be *brought over* in treasure if these were not.⁶¹

He also reserved especial opprobrium for ‘the great excess in *Tobacco*’, arguing to ‘restrain [it] or at least to give a toleration of the *Virginia* and *Bermuda’s* only’, so ‘[tending] to a great enriching of that plantation, which so happily succeeds through God’s blessing’. In the meantime, however, ‘The Superfluity of other Commodities may be restrained by laws *Vestiary* and *Sumptuary*, according to the example of *Germany* & other our Neighbour Countries’.⁶²

Mun, in contrast, looked to regulate the balance of trade by self-policing the personal consumption of commodities. Recognizing that a surplus of foreign imports was detrimental to the balance of trade, he nevertheless jettisoned arguments of governmental ‘restraint’ and, in the practical absence of sumptuary laws (which had lapsed in 1604), he insisted on behavioural change as the way to ensure a positive equilibrium. The result was ostensibly ‘free trade’ that could only work in the national interest because of a remarkably pervasive and internalized disciplining of the body and its appetites, Mun’s mercantilism requiring the populace to replace the ‘superfluous’ and ‘excessive’ consumption of intoxicants that he believed to characterize contemporary England with ‘necessary’ and ‘moderate’ consumption instead. As he put it in 1621: ‘we ought not to avoid the importation of foreign wares, but rather willingly to bridle our own affections to the moderate consuming of the same’.⁶³ Two behavioural shifts in particular would make the nation richer. First, ‘we ought religiously to avoid our common excesses of food and raiment, which is grown to such a height in most degrees of people (above their ability) that it is now beyond all example of former ages’. Second, this ‘bridling’ would achieve no ‘good of the Common-wealth’ without greater productivity and industriousness: to counter the temptations of foreign commodities it ‘concerns us all in general, and every man in his particular, to stir up our minds, and diligence, to help the natural Commodities of this Realm by industry, and increase of Arts’.⁶⁴

These insights proved paradigmatic for his mercantilist bible, *England’s treasure* (Mun explaining that ‘I write the more of these excesses, because they do so greatly waste our wealth, which is the main subject of this whole Book’s discourse’).⁶⁵ Whereas Malynes had appealed to the reader through allegory and metaphor, Mun

⁶⁰ Malynes, *Centre of the circle*, pp. 128–9.

⁶¹ Misselden, *Free trade*, p. 12.

⁶² *Ibid.*, pp. 108–9.

⁶³ Mun, *Discourse of trade*, p. 56.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 57–8.

⁶⁵ Mun, *England’s treasure*, p. 181.

now offered to calculate numerically levels of exports and imports and so dictate quite specifically the levels of consumption required to 'increase our Treasure'.⁶⁶ But this also meant that it was not merely the merchant but also the populace and the prince who were collectively responsible for ensuring a positive balance of trade. The 'Commonwealth shall decline and grow poor by a disorder in the people, when through Pride and other Excesses they do consume more foreign wares in value then the wealth of the Kingdom can satisfy and pay by the exportation of our own commodities'.⁶⁷ Equally 'the Commonwealth [is] notoriously wronged when [treasures] are vainly wasted and consumed by a Prince, either upon his own excessive pleasures, or upon unworthy persons, such as deserve neither rewards nor countenance from the Majesty of a Prince'.⁶⁸

The great exemplar for this collective act of self-regulation lay across the North Sea:

The endeavours of the industrious Dutch do give sufficient testimony of this truth, to *our great shame, and no less peril*, if it have not a timely prevention: for, whilst we leave our wonted honourable exercises and studies, following our pleasures, and of late years besotting ourselves with pipe and pot, in a beastly manner, sucking smoke, and drinking healths, until death stares many in the face; the said Dutch have well-near left this swinish vice.⁶⁹

As Misselden put it, the Dutch were 'the Epitome . . . for Policy and Industry': 'their whole Country is nothing else, but a *Magazine*, a Staple, a Receptacle, of the Commodities of all other Countries'; 'but there you shall see no *Excess* in superfluous consumptions of foreign Commodities' or, indeed, 'home-bred consumptions'.⁷⁰ Mun lamented that 'the general leprosy of our Piping, Potting, Feasting, Fashions, and misspending of our time in Idleness and Pleasure . . . hath made us effeminate in our bodies, weak in our knowledge, poor in our Treasure, declined in our Valour, unfortunate in our Enterprises, and contemned by our Enemies'.⁷¹

The debate over excise inherited these preoccupations. First, its proponents looked to the Dutch as their exemplar, invoking taxes on consumption as the key both to the efficacy of the Dutch state and the 'thrift' and 'frugality' of the Dutch populace.⁷² Second, along with customs duties, the excise was perceived as a means of regulating the choice and behaviour of consumptioners without direct legislation, the tax operating within the nexus of superfluity and necessity and excess and moderation established in the 1620s. Petty noted 'that all Superfluities tending to Luxury and sin, might be loaded with so much Impost, as to serve instead of a sumptuary Law to restrain the use of them'.⁷³ It was no coincidence that towards the end of the century Josias Child likewise observed that '*The abatement of Interest conjoined with Excises upon our home consumption . . . are two of the most comprehensive*

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 11–12, 36, 176–7.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 67.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 155.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 179–80.

⁷⁰ Misselden, *Circle of commerce*, p. 135.

⁷¹ Mun, *England's treasure*, pp. 180–1.

⁷² *City alarum*, p. 25; Petty, *Treatise*, p. 75; Clark, 'Drinking houses', p. 198.

⁷³ Petty, *Treatise*, p. 37.

and effectual Sumptuary Laws that ever were established in any Nation, and most necessitating and engaging any People to thriftiness'.⁷⁴ Third, intoxicants inevitably figured most prominently in the schedules of commodities to be taxed—not only as foreign goods like wine, tobacco, and 'drugs' (all of which were eventually taxed and regulated through the mechanism of customs in any case), but also 'home-bred' alcohols like ale, beer, and perry: domestic 'liquors' that were to be the mainstay of the excise system from the Restoration onwards. This prominence was reflected in revenue yields. In 1661, the excise on native liquors was set at £300,000 per annum. By 1686 it generated £725,000 per annum, with 90 per cent of that figure raised on the commercial retail of beer, ale, and cider.⁷⁵ In the meantime, customs duties on wine and wine vinegar produced an average revenue of £136,513 per annum during the 1670s, rising to £164,211 per annum by 1687–8. When combined with the £155,172 per annum yielded by tobacco and sugar by 1687–8, it transpires that 40 per cent of the 'gross annual value of the main body of the Customs' (£788,219) was raised from European and Atlantic intoxicants.⁷⁶

The prominence of domestic liquors as well as imports in excise debates and legislation stemmed from the inherent complexity of intoxicants as commodities. First, ale and beer were dietary necessities. Crucial as a source of calories and nutrition and also a primary means of hydration, they had a low elasticity of demand that could absorb the extra charges placed upon them. This made them prime targets for excise as conceived as a duty on all consumption: that is, on the grounds that that 'every man ought to contribute according . . . to what he eat, drink, wear, or any other way really and actually enjoy'.⁷⁷ Second, intoxicants were habitual in two, related respects: socially, they lubricated a range of quotidian habits and practices, from public sociability to private intimacy; physiologically, they encouraged degrees of dependency and addiction. In societies in which intoxicants played such a prominent part, the boundary between necessity and superfluity—and between use and dependency—was always permeable. Third, types of alcohol and tobacco could be high-value and performative consumables—social markers for which wealthier consumption were prepared to pay despite a hike in cost.⁷⁸ This made them easier to justify as 'riper' for excise than other commodities: as one Scottish proponent put it in 1644, by taxing only 'ales and flesh' the excise in Scotland 'lies most upon the rich and idle spenders superfluously upon their backs and bellies, and so favours virtue, and punishes vice'.⁷⁹ As early as 1644 another commentator complained that the excise had already become 'extremely garbled, insomuch that there now remains only an Excise upon Beer and Ale and other Liquors, and what reason is there that those other Inland Commodities which were formerly subject to this Duty, should still remain exempt?'.⁸⁰

Brewers unsurprisingly contested these developments. They pointed out that beer, like ale, was a 'Commodity (next to Bread) the very stay and staff of the poor' and that 'the continuance of this heavy imposition of Excise, will be dishonourable

⁷⁴ Child, *Discourse*, p. 27 (original emphasis).

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 38, 41, 45, 75.

⁷⁶ Chandaman, *English public revenue*, pp. 304–7.

⁷⁷ Petty, *Treatise*, p. 72.

⁷⁸ Ashworth, *Customs and excise*, p. 45; Braddick, 'Popular politics', p. 608.

⁷⁹ *Reasons and grounds*, p. 2.

⁸⁰ *Considerations touching the excise*, p. 5.

to the Parliament, in that they ease themselves, and the Gentry, and rich People of the Nation; and lay the burden on Corporations, and the meanest of his Majesties Subjects'.⁸¹ Petty also argued that the conceit that beer was 'the only Excisable Commodity . . . certainly will not hold, especially if Strong Beer pay quintuple unto, (as now) or any more Excise then the small'. Implemented in this way, the excise was an unfair burden on those 'poor Carpenters, Smiths, Feltmakers, &c' who, as part of their everyday diet, drank 'twice as much Strong Beer as Gentlemen do of Small'; and it failed to tax the accumulated consumption of the gentry, for whom beer was only ever a small proportion of their overall 'enjoyment'.⁸² No matter, the combined necessitous and superfluous quality of alcohols made such criticisms irrelevant. Indeed, while popular protest eventually made excise on necessities like meat and salt untenable, that on intoxicants survived.⁸³ As John Bland approvingly noted in 1659, 'when necessity of State requires a duty to be levied upon a people for public occasions', then the consumption so taxed should represent 'the viciousness of the Nation' rather than 'the ingenious industry of men'.⁸⁴

III

The invention of consumption as a category of English political economy was linked to debates over the balance of trade and the introduction of excise duties. In both instances, intoxicants figured prominently in these discourses, as goods that were both integral to foreign and domestic trade and liable to necessary and superfluous consumption. While alcohols and tobacco were not the only goods to be scrutinized, they were the only commodities to feature in all the configurations of consumption identified by early economic writers. While the balance of trade demanded that the populace moderate its consumption of intoxicants, the institutionalization of the excise, in conjunction with escalating and strategic customs duties, was justified as a mechanism that rewarded them for doing so.

Alcohols, of course, were a perennial feature of pre-modern European societies and a reliable target for both moralistic angst and fiscal expropriation: urban governments in Germany and the Low Countries had depended on wine and beer revenues since at least the fourteenth century.⁸⁵ In this respect, English writers were appropriating familiar arguments and strategies for new and particular circumstances. That they could do so, however, was due to increases in the traffic of foreign and domestic intoxicants in England by the 1620s. On the one hand, the wine trade and brewing industry experienced a particularly intense phase of commercialization. Stephens has calculated that the annual average of wine imports into London and the six main English wine-importing ports in 1541 to 1546 was 7,891 tuns. In 1623 this figure was 18,845 tuns and by 1639 it had risen to 43,875 tuns.⁸⁶ With the onset of civil war and aggressive customs tariffs, imports reduced and only sporadically reached prewar volumes thereafter, leading Stephens

⁸¹ *Free-men enslaved*, p. 1.

⁸² Petty, *Treatise*, p. 74.

⁸³ Braddick, 'Popular politics'; Clark, 'Drinking houses', p. 198; Taylor, 'Tobacco retail licenses', pp. 452–3.

⁸⁴ Bland, *Trade revived*, p. 48.

⁸⁵ Unger, *Beer*, p. 198; Tlusty, *Bacchus*, pp. 177–8; eadem, 'Full cups, full coffers', p. 26.

⁸⁶ Stephens, 'English wine imports', pp. 142–5.

to conclude that ‘the early seventeenth century was a period when the volume of wine imports was particularly large compared with preceding and succeeding periods’.⁸⁷ In the meantime, the introduction of European brewing technology into England meant that by the 1570s beer was eclipsing ale as the preferred everyday beverage. With hops making the brew more stable and durable the opportunities for commercial production proliferated. Luu has estimated that in London alone annual consumption rose from 51 million litres in 1574 to 106 million litres in 1585 and 146 million litres in 1600; into the seventeenth century, commercial success meant that brewers had become new and significant figures in urban and national politics.⁸⁸ On the other hand, the introduction of new commodities like tobacco diversified the repertoire of intoxicants available for public and private consumption. Until the 1620s, tobacco was a relatively expensive and exclusive commodity that people were more likely to read or hear about than taste. As Taylor has definitively shown, the establishment of the Atlantic trade rapidly transformed the availability of the intoxicant. Before 1620 English imports struggled to reach over 50,000 lbs per annum. By 1628 imports topped 500,000 lbs per annum and by 1638 they had reached 3,000,000 lbs.⁸⁹ Although the trade remains to be studied, this was also the period when distilled spirits became a commercial product.

While London dominated these trends and figures, the customs records maintained in provincial ports—that is, port books—can be used to assess whether regional economies followed a similar pattern to the metropolis (an important consideration given that, no matter the remarkable growth of the capital, the majority of people still lived—and consumed—in the provinces).⁹⁰ As previous generations of economic historians well knew, there are plenty of reasons why port books do not provide full and reliable data: survival rates are erratic; recording protocols are inconsistent and unclear; the system was vulnerable to under-reportage and smuggling; and they shed little light on the inland movement of goods.⁹¹ However, what they do provide is a partial indication of sea-borne commerce over time: the amount and kind of goods moving not only through individual ports but also within the *trading zones* to which the ports, through their shipping routes, were connected.⁹²

These trading zones were integral to England’s regional economies, informing the relative wealth and occupational structure of particular provinces as well as the ‘orientation’ of their dietary and material cultures. The north-western ports of Chester and Liverpool, for example, were the trading hubs for Cheshire and Lancashire. They exchanged imports and exports with Spain and southern France; traded primarily with Dublin and other east Irish ports; enjoyed less frequent connections with London; and supplied the smaller ports along the Welsh, Cheshire, and Lancashire coast.⁹³ It can be compared with the Norfolk

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 141, 161.

⁸⁸ Luu, *Immigrants*, pp. 259–62, 267, 277; Withington, ‘Intoxicants and society’, p. 638; Clark, ‘Drinking houses’, p. 197.

⁸⁹ Taylor, ‘Venting smoke’, p. 50.

⁹⁰ de Vries, *European urbanization*, p. 64; Wrigley, ‘Simple model’, pp. 65–8; Withington, ‘Urbanization’, p. 179.

⁹¹ Woodward, *Trade*, p. 69; Michell, ‘Port and the town’, pp. 196, 338.

⁹² Woodward, *Trade*, pp. 128, 137; Willan, *Studies in Elizabethan foreign trade*, pp. 65–6; Stephens, *Seventeenth-century Exeter*, pp. xix–xxvi; Metters, ed., *King’s Lynn port books*; Zahedieh, *Capital and the colonies*, pp. 10–14.

⁹³ Woodward, *Trade*, pp. 5–6, 37–8, 66–9; Stephens, ‘Overseas trade’; Phythian Adams, ‘Agenda’.

Table 5. *Port books (at TNA) consulted for Great Yarmouth, King's Lynn, Chester, and Liverpool, 1580s to 1630s*

<i>Book</i>	<i>Date</i>	<i>TNA reference</i>
Chester overseas and coastal	1582/3	E190/1325/7
Liverpool overseas and coastal	1582/3	E190/1325/1
Great Yarmouth coastal	1582/3	E190/475/1
Chester coastal	1592/3	E190/1326/15
Chester overseas	1592/3	E190/1326/6
Great Yarmouth coastal	1593/4	E190/477/8
Great Yarmouth overseas	1591/2	E190/476/19
Chester overseas and coastal	1602/3	E190/1328/20
Liverpool overseas	1603/4	E190/1328/11
Great Yarmouth overseas	1604/5	E190/483/2
King's Lynn overseas and coastal	1600/1	E190/432/12
Chester coastal	1611/12	E190/1330/5
Chester overseas	1614/15	E190/1330/14
Liverpool overseas	1611/12	E190/1330/1
Great Yarmouth coastal	1613/14	E190/484/7
Great Yarmouth overseas	1611/12	E190/484/2
King's Lynn overseas	1611/12	E190/433/12
Chester coastal	1622/3	E190/1333/1
Liverpool overseas	1620/1	E190/1332/11
Great Yarmouth coastal	1622/3	E190/487/6
Great Yarmouth overseas	1621/2	E190/487/4
King's Lynn overseas	1621/2	E190/434/10
Chester overseas and coastal	1638/9	E190/1334/18
Chester overseas	1638/9	E190/1336/3
Liverpool overseas and coastal	1635/6	E190/1335/12
Great Yarmouth coastal	1637/8	E190/490/10
Great Yarmouth overseas	1637/8	E190/490/1
King's Lynn coastal and overseas	1638/9	E190/435/7

ports of Great Yarmouth and King's Lynn. These faced across the North Sea, to Scotland, Scandinavia, the Baltic, and the northern Netherlands; were integrated into England's eastern coastal trade (from Northumbria to Kent); had busy links with London; and took Norwich as the provincial capital.⁹⁴ Chester was capital to a relatively poor and less populous zone, its coastal trade hampered by its distance from London and its dependence on Irish markets (Lancashire cloth manufactures were distributed directly overland to London rather than via its own coastal routes, for example).⁹⁵ Norwich, in contrast, was at the centre of English agrarian capitalism, the Norfolk ports integrated into London, Dutch, French, and Baltic networks.

These factors inevitably affected the local economy of intoxicants, and port books provide some clue as to the types of commodity moving around these trading zones in terms of both overseas and coastal trade. Port books were kept in each head-port for overseas and coastal trade on an annual cycle: in this sample an overseas and coastal book has been transcribed per decade for each of the four ports whenever possible (see table 5).

Table 6 accordingly describes the movement of wines, tobacco, beer, and aqua vitae (distilled liquor) in the north-west and south-east between the 1580s and

⁹⁴ Michell, 'Port and the town'.

⁹⁵ Stephens, 'Overseas trade', p. 34; Woodward, *Trade*, p. 69.

Table 6. *Intoxicants imported into and distributed from North Sea and/or Irish Sea ports, a year per decade, 1580s to 1630s*

A.		<i>Wine imported (tuns)</i>					
<i>Port books</i>	<i>1580s</i>	<i>1590s</i>	<i>1600s</i>	<i>1610s</i>	<i>1620s</i>	<i>1630s</i>	
Great Yarmouth coastal	130.9	91.8		13.8	94.4	206.0	
Great Yarmouth overseas		242.3	529.1	633.8	477.1	1631.8	
King's Lynn overseas				445.4	416.9		
King's Lynn overseas/coastal			254.8			546.3	
Chester coastal		33.8		74.5	26.3		
Chester overseas		4.5		144.8		367.4	
Chester overseas/coastal	293.7		166.8			408.3	
Liverpool overseas			0.0	55.0	73.3		
Liverpool overseas/coastal	36.3					90.5	
B.		<i>Wine distributed (tuns)</i>					
<i>Port books</i>	<i>1580s</i>	<i>1590s</i>	<i>1600s</i>	<i>1610s</i>	<i>1620s</i>	<i>1630s</i>	
Great Yarmouth coastal	6.3	11.0		0.0	14.5	96.8	
Great Yarmouth overseas		0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	
King's Lynn overseas				0.0	1.0		
King's Lynn overseas/coastal			8.0			35.0	
Chester coastal		19.5		2.0	22.6		
Chester overseas		0.0		0.0		0.0	
Chester overseas/coastal	3.0		19.1			34.2	
Liverpool overseas			23.8	0.0	0.0		
Liverpool overseas/coastal	0.0					0.0	
C.		<i>Beer imported (tuns)</i>					
<i>Port books</i>	<i>1580s</i>	<i>1590s</i>	<i>1600s</i>	<i>1610s</i>	<i>1620s</i>	<i>1630s</i>	
Great Yarmouth coastal	48.3	21.3		69.8	58.0	2.0	
Great Yarmouth overseas	0	0	4.0	5.0	0	0	
King's Lynn overseas				0	0		
King's Lynn overseas/coastal			6.7			2.3	
D.		<i>Beer distributed (tuns)</i>					
<i>Port books</i>	<i>1580s</i>	<i>1590s</i>	<i>1600s</i>	<i>1610s</i>	<i>1620s</i>	<i>1630s</i>	
Great Yarmouth coastal	0	12.2		0	17.0	10.0	
Great Yarmouth overseas	1.0	0	5.0	9.0	43.1	0	
King's Lynn overseas				69.0	125.1		
King's Lynn overseas/coastal			48.0			158.5	
E.		<i>Tobacco imported (lbs)</i>					
<i>Port books</i>	<i>1580s</i>	<i>1590s</i>	<i>1600s</i>	<i>1610s</i>	<i>1620s</i>	<i>1630s</i>	
Great Yarmouth coastal	0	0		0	369	336	
Great Yarmouth overseas	0	0	0	31	50	28	
King's Lynn overseas				20	0		
F.		<i>Tobacco distributed (lbs)</i>					
<i>Port books</i>	<i>1580s</i>	<i>1590s</i>	<i>1600s</i>	<i>1610s</i>	<i>1620s</i>	<i>1630s</i>	
Chester coastal		0		0	73		
Chester overseas		0		370		1,102	
Chester overseas/coastal	0		90			16,147	
Liverpool overseas			0	140	0		
Liverpool overseas/coastal	0					20,420	

Table 6. *Continued*

<i>G</i>	<i>Aqua vitae imported (gallons)</i>					
	<i>1580s</i>	<i>1590s</i>	<i>1600s</i>	<i>1610s</i>	<i>1620s</i>	<i>1630s</i>
<i>Port books</i>						
Great Yarmouth coastal	0	0		252	243	360
Great Yarmouth overseas	0	0	0	0	42	7,056
King's Lynn overseas/coastal			0			330
Chester coastal		0		4,533	336	
Chester overseas		45		0		189
Chester overseas/coastal	0		0			1,764
Liverpool overseas/coastal	0					18
<i>H</i>	<i>Aqua vitae distributed (gallons)</i>					
<i>Port books</i>	<i>1580s</i>	<i>1590s</i>	<i>1600s</i>	<i>1610s</i>	<i>1620s</i>	<i>1630s</i>
Great Yarmouth coastal	0	0		0	0	0
Great Yarmouth overseas	0	0	0	0	0	0
King's Lynn overseas				80	104	
King's Lynn overseas/coastal			0			1,212
Chester coastal		0		0	18	
Chester overseas		0		315		6
Chester overseas/coastal	0		1,917			225
Liverpool overseas			0	126	0	

Sources: See tab. 5.

1630s—the 50-year period that merchant writers may have had in mind when they talked about recent increases in the consumption of intoxicants. The figures only describe the movement of intoxicants for a year per decade within each type of book: the data represent a fraction of the overall trade. There are also significant gaps: there are no surviving coastal books for King's Lynn and Liverpool for the period in question and no data at all for either port for the 1590s. Great Yarmouth has the best run of books, though still lacks an overseas book for the 1580s and a coastal book for the 1600s.

For all their problems, though, the data clearly reveal the commercialization and diversification of the provincial economy of intoxicants. In the first instance, panels A and B of table 6 show that wine imports and also the coastal distribution of wine significantly increased over the 50-year period. This was most emphatic for Great Yarmouth and King's Lynn, but also apparent for Chester (which is likely to be underestimated in the books consulted) and corroborates the trend identified by Stephens.⁹⁶ The second development is the notable traffic of beer through Great Yarmouth and King's Lynn (table 6, panels C and D). While this trade was already well established by the 1580s, it nevertheless underwent two changes thereafter: there was a steady increase in imports of beer from the Low Countries and London, peaking in the 1620s, and a significant rise in local exports of beer in the 1630s, suggesting the commercialization of local production (which was most likely precipitated by the need to supply an English army that had mustered in the north in 1639). The commercial beer industry was much less developed in Cheshire and Lancashire, with virtually no traffic recorded in the port books—a

⁹⁶ Stephens, 'English wine imports', pp. 144–5; idem, 'Overseas trade', p. 33.

point corroborated by much smaller amounts of hops, barley, and malt circulating around the Irish Sea as opposed to the North Sea.

Panels E and F of table 6 demonstrate the arrival of tobacco into Norfolk ports from the 1610s (albeit in relatively small amounts) and, much more dramatically, the large amounts of tobacco re-exported from Liverpool—almost entirely to Irish ports—by the middle of the 1630s. The relative popularity of tobacco in Norfolk is corroborated by the distribution of tobacco retail licensing in the 1630s, with Norfolk and Suffolk possessing 152 licenses, compared to Cheshire and Lancashire with only 33. Likewise, whereas Norfolk raised £354 in rents for licenses in 1634–5, Cheshire raised £123 and Lancashire £185.⁹⁷ This coincided, finally, with the introduction of distilled liquors into both trading zones. Panels G and H of table 6 show that over 100 years before the infamous ‘gin craze’, there was significant commerce in aqua vitae on both sides of the country.

These patterns suggest that intoxicants were not simply durable perennials of pre-modern society but rather an important dynamic of early modern commercialization. Just as the rapid increase in population required more necessary consumption, so social polarization and greater disparities in wealth encouraged the performance of affluence.⁹⁸ While there is no space here to examine how these trends affected social practices, what should be noted is that just as intoxicants helped shape the conceptual formation of consumption within economic discourse, so contemporaries were keenly aware of their semantic ramifications socially. As William Prynne observed in 1628, ‘the reason of the increase and growth of drunkenness, are those many specious, beautiful, popular, amiable and bewitching names and titles wherewith this ugly, odious and filthy sin, together with the Practitioners, Patrons and Abettors of it, are beautified, gilded and adorned’.⁹⁹ This contrasted with ‘those common terms and mottos of ignominy, scorn and reproach ... cast upon the graces of temperance and sobriety’.¹⁰⁰ Prynne explained that ‘Drunkenness is now shrouded (nay countenanced, defended, justified, and applauded) under the popular and lovely titles of *hospitality, good-fellowship, courtesy, entertainment, joviality, mirth, generosity, liberality, open housekeeping, the liberal use of God’s good creatures, friendship, love, kindness, good neighbourhood, company-keeping, and the like*. ‘Drunksards’ took the epithets of ‘good fellows, wits; Poets; courteous, sociable, merry, jovial, and boon-companions’. In contrast, proponents of temperance and sobriety were ‘deformed, vilified, derided, sentenced, condemned, and scoffed at, under the opprobrious and disdainful names of *puritanism, preciseness, stoicism, singularity, unsociableness, clownishness, rudeness, baseness, melancholy, discourtesy, pride, surliness, disdain, coyness, and what not*’.¹⁰¹ Such was the risk that the first theorists of consumption ran.

IV

Probably the most influential account of pre-modern consumption in north-western Europe is predicated on the shift from a discourse of ‘Old Luxury’ to ‘New

⁹⁷ Taylor, ‘Tobacco retail licenses’, pp. 440, 447.

⁹⁸ Wrightson, *Earthly necessities*, pp. 198–200.

⁹⁹ Prynne, *Healths*, p. Bv.

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, p. B3r.

¹⁰¹ *Ibid.*, pp. B3r–B4v (original emphasis).

Luxury': the one a performative consumption of display, refinement, and hierarchy that also risked 'personal decadence and societal ruin'; the other heterogeneous, emulative, sociable, and dedicated to 'comfort and enjoyment'. While old luxury was aristocratic, hospitable, and 'an essential prop upholding the established order', new luxury was urban, sociable, commercial, and focused primarily on colonial imports—a distinctly modern kind of acquisitiveness that encouraged household industriousness in the pursuit of more and new commodities.¹⁰² According to de Vries, this new luxury first emerged in the Dutch republic in the early seventeenth century by a kind of stealth, 'the old discourse' remaining visible and influential 'for the simple reason that it was the only vocabulary available'.¹⁰³ As such, it was consumption rooted in practice rather than theory: for whatever reason, 'the Dutch did not fashion its bits and pieces of religious and republican thought to describe and theorise the new reality'.¹⁰⁴

The conclusion of this article must be that this 'reality' (if that is, indeed, what it was) *was* theorized, and contemporaneously; but that it was done so in English rather than Dutch, and through the vocabulary of 'consumption' rather than 'luxury' (a word which did not figure in the economic treatises of the 1620s). Viewed in these terms, it is not difficult to see that Malynes, a son of Antwerp and member of the Dutch Church in London, was a strident moralist of the traditional kind who, responding to the consumption of imports, also articulated political fears of the new as the 'drain of coin abroad'.¹⁰⁵ Mun, who admired as well as feared the economic power of the Dutch, used what he understood to be their culture of acquisition and restraint as both the example from which to theorize the balance of trade and the stick with which to reform English behaviours. Petty, like many of his contemporaries, was clearly attuned to and emulative of economic and governmental practices on the continent.¹⁰⁶ Indeed, although work on the Dutch semantics remains to be done, it is quite possible that words like *verbruik* or *tering* that denoted consumption underwent a similar process of repurposing.¹⁰⁷ Either way, the result in England was a new economic category forged at once to invoke Dutch practices and prescribe English ones.

In its first manifestations, therefore, 'consumption' served as a term to evaluate, reform, and tax the behaviour of 'consumptioners'. A language that enabled social and moral reform along with political and economic analysis, it characterized a discursive moment that was also shaped by the apparent ubiquity of intoxicants—and all the social and economic dangers that their superfluous consumption posed. Later in the century—around the time that 'consumptioners' became 'consumers' and 'luxury' entered the economic lexicon—writers began to valorize excessive and conspicuous consumption as economically important in its own right.¹⁰⁸ In a world proliferating with goods, intoxicants remained fraught commodities within these debates. But as the revenues from customs and excise indicate, and as data on household and public consumption also suggest, demand for them did not

¹⁰² de Vries, 'Luxury in the Dutch Golden Age', pp. 42–3; Levy Peck, *Consuming splendour*, p. 13.

¹⁰³ de Vries, 'Luxury in the Dutch Golden Age', p. 51.

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 53; *idem*, *Industrious revolution*, *passim*.

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 42.

¹⁰⁶ Slack, *Invention of improvement*, pp. 123–4.

¹⁰⁷ Thanks to an anonymous reader of *EcHR* for this suggestion.

¹⁰⁸ Slack, *Invention of improvement*, pp. 144–9.

dissipate.¹⁰⁹ The number of Kentish farmers keeping brewing or cider-making equipment increased from 33 per cent to 79 per cent between 1650 and 1750.¹¹⁰ As English merchants to France explained in 1674, so great was the English taste for wines and brandy that any duties—even to the doubling of cost—was only ‘on the Consumption, and do no ways impair the Trade of those Commodities’.¹¹¹ As such, the invention of consumption institutionalized a familiar paradox: that the state depend fiscally on practices that its ‘physicians’ sought to ‘bridle’ (to use Mun’s metaphor) or at least tax. Or to put that slightly differently: in England the ‘new luxury’ was not hidden by ‘old vocabulary’, as de Vries claims for Holland. Rather, old habits were left ‘shrouded’ in the kind of ‘popular and lovely titles’ described by Prynne. It is in the practice of these ‘titles’—of ‘company-keeping, and the like’—that the fuller history of early modern consumption lies.

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¹⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 155–7; Chartres, ‘No English Calvados?’, p. 324.

¹¹⁰ Overton, Whittle, Dean, and Hann, *Production and consumption*, pp. 57–60.

¹¹¹ *To the Right Honourable the Lords Commissioners*, p. 8.

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