



ULST Timisoara  
**Multidisciplinary Conference on  
Sustainable Development**  
30-31 May 2024



## Cultivation of cereals on the estate of Osijek Jesuits during the 18<sup>th</sup> century

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**Abstract:** After the Great Turkish War and the liberation of Osijek in 1687, Jesuits arrived in the city with the imperial army in order to minister soldiers. With the arrival of additional Jesuits, their Mission evolved into a permanent presence, eventually becoming Osijek's first parish church. Osijek Jesuits were granted Aljmaš estate in 1702, which they were leasing from the Esztergom Archdiocese since 1690. It was a small estate, but Jesuits managed it properly and usually produced cereals, with the emphasis on the oats and maize.

### • Introduction

Osijek from its beginnings was a city with a strong Christian presence. In addition to being the seat of a bishopric in Roman times, it is very likely that "Roman Osijek" extended its Christian roots to the medieval Croatian settlement. After the Ottoman occupation in 1687, the Muslim population also left the city, and the Christian people who had inhabited these areas for centuries returned. Jesuits and Franciscans arrived immediately with the liberation army, and they were joined in 1703 by Capuchins, and soon after by the diocesan clergy.



Three Osijek city units. Head of guild diploma from 1810

The Osijek Mission in 1702 acquired the ownership of the Aljmaš estate, which it had held since 1690 for an annual rent of 90 forints. In 1773, the estate consisted of 18 and 3/8 sessions with 65 peasant houses. Jesuits remained parish priests of Osijek's Inner Town until the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, or shortly after the suppression of the Society of Jesus in 1773.

### • Material and method

Croatian history, like much of Europe, is deeply intertwined with the cultivation of cereals. These grains played a critical role in the development of societies across the continent. Even today, cereals like wheat remain king in Croatian (and global) plant production, with maize as a close companion. Interestingly, the importance of cereals stretches back centuries. The Vinodol Law, the oldest Croatian legal document, highlights wheat as a key agricultural crop of the Middle Ages. They also cultivated a variety of other cereals like barley, oats, and rye.

### • Results and discussions

According to the Annual Report of the Osijek Mission, a Jesuit yearbook, most of the data about Osijek Jesuits and their cultivation of cereals on the Aljmaš estate in the 18<sup>th</sup> century was obtained. While entries for some years, particularly 1764, were very detailed, others only contained a single note. Unfortunately, for most years, there is no mention of the Aljmaš estate or any type of cereals.

#### 22<sup>nd</sup> February 1764. Wednesday

*The Superior went to Aljmaš to see the borders and the fields for sowing oats.*

The first mention of Aljmaš coincides with a specific cereal – oats. This is unsurprising, as oats were a cornerstone livestock feed in the 18<sup>th</sup> century, valued for their high fat content and rich mix of nutrients.

#### 10<sup>th</sup> April 1764. Tuesday

*The Superior went to install the new manager in Aljmaš. When he arrived there, he gave brandy to the innkeeper, then ordered 15 acres to be sown with maize, but only 5 acres were sown. Nevertheless, the harvest was good, and with that money he bought pure wheat.*

This interesting note describes the Jesuit Superior's visit to Aljmaš to install a new manager. This arrival might be connected to the previous issue of the late tithe delivery. The Superior also ordered 15 acres to be sown with maize, a crop gaining popularity in Europe at that time. However, only 5 acres were sown. Despite this, the harvest yielded good profit, which was then used to buy pure wheat.



Jules Breton: "The Blessing of the Wheat Fields" (oil on canvas, 1857)

### • Conclusions

Wheat, maize and oats were common cereals cultivated in Slavonia during the 18<sup>th</sup> century. As stated in the Jesuit chronicles, the most common crop typically planted on their estate in Aljmaš was oat, valued for its high fat content and nutritional elements essential for livestock feed.