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## Neo-Serfdom in Poland-Lithuania

The purpose of the present article is neither to examine in detail the state of research regarding demesne-robot farming and the “neo-serfdom” or “second serfdom” in Poland-Lithuania nor to attempt a definitive explanation of these phenomena. Rather, the author has set out to show the inadequacy of conventional views by reiterating a series of important points already raised by various Polish historians.

Before elaborating, it is worth mentioning some of the problems around which research and discussion in Polish historiography have centered.<sup>1</sup> Roman Grodecki and Kazimierz Tymieniecki have done much to clarify the legal position of the medieval Polish peasantry, at the same time advancing opposing ideas about the origin of demesne farming.<sup>2</sup> Jan Rutkowski pointed out the widespread application of demesne farming in Eastern Europe, described changing economic conditions in the countryside during the period dominated by robot (corvée) labor, and originated theories about the negative effect of robot labor on trade and industry. He also investigated the Vistula grain trade, which is often seen as the *spiritus movens* in the creation and development of Polish demesne farming.<sup>3</sup> This trade, one of the most studied phenomena of the neo-serfdom period, is a field in which Marian Małowist and his school

1. It would be impossible, even in abbreviated form, to cover here the hundreds if not thousands of Polish articles and monographs concerning neo-serfdom. One might point out, however, that contemporary Polish historiography in this area is characterized by vigorous disputes, based on painstaking monographic work, over problems that survey works treat as long-solved and settled. For a review of the contemporary Polish historiography consult Antoni Mączak, “Polnische Forschungen auf dem Gebiete der Agrargeschichte des 16. und 17. Jahrhunderts (1945–1957),” in *Acta Poloniae Historica*, 1 (1958): 33–57; Ezhi Topol'sky [Jerzy Topolski], “Issledovaniia po agrarnoi istorii v narodnoi Pol'she,” in *Ezhegodnik po agrarnoi istorii Vostochnoi Evropy 1959 g.* (Moscow, 1961), pp. 408–38; V. V. Doroshenko, “‘Model’ agrarnogo stroia Rechi Pospolitoi XVI–XVIII vv.,” in *Ezhegodnik . . . 1965 g.* (Moscow, 1970), pp. 114–29; Stefan Inglot, “Rozwój badań nad historią chłopów polskich,” in Stefan Inglot, ed., *Historia chłopów polskich*, vol. 1 (hereafter cited as *HCP*) (Częstochowa, 1970), pp. 7–33.

2. Roman Grodecki, *Początki gospodarki folwarcznej w Polsce: Studia z dziejów kultury Polskiej* (Warsaw, 1949); Kazimierz Tymieniecki, *Historia chłopów polskich*, 3 vols. (Warsaw, 1965–69), vol. 3: *Geneza zastrzonego poddaństwa chłopów*.

3. See the following works by Jan Rutkowski: *Historia gospodarcza Polski (do 1864 r.)* (Warsaw, 1953; 1st ed., 1923), pp. 85–220; *Poddaństwo włościan w XVIII wieku w Polsce i niektórych innych krajach Europy* (Poznań, 1921); “Przebudowa wsi w Polsce po wojnach z połowy XVII wieku,” *Kwartalnik Historyczny* (Lwów), 30 (1916): 309–42.

have made enormous contributions. Małowist called attention to the connection between Western urban and industrial development and the birth of a particularly profitable boom in Polish grain.<sup>4</sup>

On the grain trade, the dominant place of Gdańsk in it, the quantities of grain sold, and the technicalities of transportation, there are works by Biernat, Bogucka, Burszta, Hoszowski, Mielczarski, Obuchowska-Pysiowa, Samsonowicz, Wachowiak, and Wyczański.<sup>5</sup> Mączak, Rusiński, Wawrzyńczyk, Wyczański, and Zientara have devoted studies to the organization of manors, their levels of production, and the stratification of village society.<sup>6</sup> Peasant production and the ties of villages to local markets, as well as peasant migration to

4. See the following works by Marian Małowist: *Studia z dziejów rzemiosła w okresie feudalizmu w Zachodniej Europie w XIV i XV wieku* (Warsaw, 1954); "Problem genezy podziału gospodarczego Europy w XV–XVII w.," in *Historia Polski do połowy XV wieku*, vol. 2 of *VIII Powszechny Zjazd Historyków Polskich: Referaty i dyskusja* (Warsaw, 1958); "The Economic and Social Development of the Baltic Countries from the Fifteenth to the Seventeenth Centuries," *Economic History Review* (Utrecht), 2nd ser., 12, no. 2 (1959): 177–89; *Wshód a Zachód Europy w XIII–XVI wieku: Konfrontacja struktur społeczno-gospodarczych* (Warsaw, 1973).

5. Czesław Biernat, "Statystyka obrotu zbożowego Gdańska od połowy XVII w. do 1795 r.," *Zapiski Historyczne*, 23 (1957): 97–134. Maria Bogucka, "Handel niderlandzko-gdański w latach 1597–1651 w świetle amsterdamskich kontraktów frachtowych," *Zapiski Historyczne*, 33 (1968): 171–92. Maria Bogucka, "Amsterdam and the Baltic in the First Half of the Seventeenth Century," *Economic History Review*, 2nd ser., 26, no. 3 (1973): 433–47. Józef Burszta, "Handel magnacki i kupiecki między Sieniawą nad Sanem a Gdańskiem od końca XVII do połowy XVIII wieku," in *Roczniki Dziejów Społecznych i Gospodarczych* (Poznań), 16 (1954): 174–238. Stanisław Hoszowski, "The Polish Baltic Trade in the 15th–18th Centuries," in *Poland at the XIth International Congress of Historical Sciences in Stockholm* (Warsaw, 1960), pp. 117–54. Stanisław Mielczarski, *Rynek zbożowy na ziemiach polskich w drugiej połowie XVI i pierwszej połowie XVII wieku* (Gdańsk, 1962). Honorata Obuchowska-Pysiowa, *Handel wiślany w pierwszej połowie XVII wieku* (Wrocław, Warsaw, and Kraków, 1964). Henryk Samsonowicz, "Handel zagraniczny Gdańska w drugiej połowie XV wieku," in *Przegląd Historyczny*, 47, no. 2 (1956): 283–352. Bogdan Wachowiak, "Ze studiów nad sławem na Wiśle w XVI–XVIII w.," *Przegląd Zachodni* (Poznań), 7 (1951): 122–36. Andrzej Wyczański, "Tentative Estimate of Polish Rye Trade in the Sixteenth Century," *Acta Poloniae Historica*, 4 (1961): 119–31.

6. Antoni Mączak, "Folwark pańszczyźniany a wieś w Prusach Królewskich w XVI–XVII wieku," *Przegląd Historyczny*, 47, no. 2 (1956): 353–92. Władysław Rusiński, "Drogi rozwojowe folwarku pańszczyźnianego," *Przegląd Historyczny*, 47, no. 4 (1956): 617–55. Alina Wawrzyńczyk, *Studia nad wydajnością produkcji rolnej dóbr królewskich w drugiej połowie XVI wieku* (Wrocław, Warsaw, Kraków, and Gdańsk, 1974). Andrzej Wyczański, *Studia nad folwarkiem szlacheckim w Polsce w latach 1500–1580* (Warsaw, 1960). Andrzej Wyczański, *Studia nad gospodarką starostwa korczyńskiego, 1500–1660* (Warsaw, 1964). Andrzej Wyczański, *Wieś polskiego Odrodzenia* (Warsaw, 1969). Benedykt Zientara, "Z zagadnień spornych tzw. 'wtórnego poddaństwa' w Europie Środkowej," *Przegląd Historyczny*, 47, no. 1 (1956): 3–47. Leonid Żytkowicz, "Grain Yields in Poland, Bohemia, Hungary and Slovakia in the 16th to 18th Centuries," *Acta Poloniae Historica*, 24 (1971): 51–72. Leonid Żytkowicz, "Następstwa ekonomiczne i społeczne niskich plonów zbóż w Polsce od połowy XVI do połowy XVIII wieku," *Roczniki Dziejów Społecznych i Gospodarczych*, 34 (1973): 1–34.

cities, have been treated in studies by Bieniarzówna, Cackowski, Ćwiek, Mączak, Półciwarteł, Trzyna, Wawrzyńczyk, and Żytkowicz.<sup>7</sup> Nearly all of these authors have described the forms and manifestation of peasant resistance to the *robot* system.<sup>8</sup> Basic Polish agricultural texts of the sixteenth to the eighteenth century have been edited and discussed by Inglot, Ochmański, and Podraza.<sup>9</sup>

With this brief orientation in the literature, let us review the standard interpretation of the neo-serfdom period. The economy of Poland-Lithuania from the sixteenth through the eighteenth century has long been described as being dominated by demesne farming and *robot* labor, at the same time that the peasantry is seen falling into a second serfdom. Both phenomena are usually considered to have been decidedly harmful to economic, social, and political development. The use of *robot* labor is almost always viewed as a regression to social forms which predated colonization and money rent—a regression obstructing the “natural” growth of capitalism. Eastern Europe’s relative economic backwardness is explained by the long-term subjugation of its peasantry to manorial lords’ arbitrary demands for labor, made possible by the great political power of a shortsightedly selfish gentry.<sup>10</sup>

7. Janina Bieniarzówna, “Chłopi w rzemieśle krakowskim w XVII wieku,” *Przegląd Historyczny*, 47, no. 3 (1956): 497–514. Stefan Cackowski, *Gospodarstwo wiejskie w dobrach biskupstwa i kapituły chełmińskiej w XVII–XVIII w.*, 2 vols. (Toruń, 1961, 1963). Zbigniew Ćwiek, *Z dziejów wsi koronnej XVII wieku* (Warsaw, 1966). Antoni Mączak, *Gospodarstwo chłopskie na Żuławach Malborskich w początkach XVII wieku* (Warsaw, 1962). Józef Półciwarteł, *Położenie ludności wiejskiej starostwa leżajskiego w XVI–XVIII wieku* (Warsaw and Kraków, 1972). Edward Trzyna, *Położenie ludności wiejskiej w królewskich województwach krakowskiego w XVII wieku* (Wrocław, 1963). Alina Wawrzyńczyk, *Gospodarstwo chłopskie w dobrach królewskich na Mazowszu w XVI i na początku XVII wieku* (Warsaw, 1962). Leonid Żytkowicz, *Studia nad gospodarstwem wiejskim w dobrach kościelnych XVI w.* (Warsaw, 1962).

8. Janina Bieniarzówna, *Walka chłopów w kasztelanii krakowskiej* (Warsaw, 1953). Bohdan Baranowski, *Położenie i walka klasowa chłopów w królewskich województwach łęczyckiego w XVI–XVIII w.* (Warsaw, 1956). Maurycy Horn, *Walka chłopów czerwonoruskich z wysyskiem feudalnym w latach 1600–1648* (Opole, 1974). Adam Jaszczolt, *Walka ludu Podhalańskiego z uciskiem feudalnym, 1625–1633* (Warsaw, 1959). Stanisław Szczotka, *Walka chłopów o wymiar sprawiedliwości* (Warsaw, 1950).

9. Anzelm Gostomski, *Gospodarstwo*, ed. Stefan Inglot (Wrocław, 1951). Krzysztof Kluk, *O rolnictwie, zbożach, tęgach, chmielnikach, winnicach i roślinach gospodarskich*, ed. Stefan Inglot (Wrocław, 1954). Antoni Podraza, *Jakub Kazimierz Haur, pisarz rolniczy z XVII wieku* (Wrocław, Warsaw, and Kraków, 1961). Władysław Ochmański, *Wiedza rolnicza w Polsce od XVI do połowy XVIII wieku* (Wrocław, Warsaw, and Kraków, 1965).

10. Stanisław Śreniowski, “Oznaki regresu ekonomicznego w ustroju folwarczno-pańszczyźnianym w Polsce od schyłku XVI w.,” *Kwartalnik Historyczny*, 61, no. 2 (1954): 165–96; Zientara, “Z zagadnień spornych,” pp. 4–6, 20–21, 44–46; Hoszowski, “Polish Baltic Trade,” pp. 117–18, 129, 149–50; Jerzy Topolski, “La regression économique en Pologne du XVI<sup>e</sup> au XVIII<sup>e</sup> siècle,” *Acta Poloniae Historica*, 7 (1962): 28–49; Edward Trzyna, “Wtórne poddaństwo,” in *HCP*, pp. 309–19, 358–62.

Partial objection to this picture can immediately be proposed. The main basis for generalizations about demesne-robot farming has been sources concerning crown estates, supplemented by records from church and magnate estates. This is not encouraging, given the fact that 80 percent of arable land was owned by small and middle gentry, who did not, as a rule, leave financial records. We have little information about their methods of administration, their relations with their villages, the relation of robot to hired labor, the organization of the sale of their grain, or details of their incomes and expenditures.<sup>11</sup>

We do know, however, that the position of a crown peasant was quite different from that of a peasant on private land. A private owner had strong interests in the long-term economic welfare of his estate,<sup>12</sup> whereas the profits and responsibilities of a crown overlord ended with his brief term of tenure. Especially in cases of short-term leases, a crown lord would try to squeeze as much profit as he could from an estate without considering any undesirable consequences which might appear after his departure. Sometimes this led to the complete demolition of whole crown latifundia, to the devastation of forested lands, and to the collapse of peasant farms. It took only a few years for Jerzy Wandalin Mniszech—in Sanok *starostwo*—to “lose,” in four villages, 88 peasant households from the total number of 113.<sup>13</sup>

Another great inadequacy of the conventional picture of neo-serfdom is its failure to explain existing regional differences. We do know that rent obligations and money exchange persisted in one area, demesne-robot farming dominated in others, and in some regions (such as the vast territories of the Grand Principality of Lithuania) there prevailed a form of serfdom involving all the usual restrictions and obligations, including some robot labor, but *not* involving a developed system of demesne farming. Although regional differences have received scholarly attention, a tendency persists to treat them as minor flaws in the fundamental homogeneity of Poland-Lithuania.<sup>14</sup>

11. Wyczański, *Wieś*, pp. 6–9. Ćwiek, *Z dziejów wsi koronnej*, has pointed out that although crown villages have been studied more thoroughly than those privately owned, most of these studies are limited to one complex of demesnes, so that generalizations made on this basis for the entire country should be questioned (pp. 5–9).

12. Anzelm Gostomski, *wojewoda* of Rawa, owner of twenty-eight villages and the author of a well-known book on the organization of demesne farming (*Gospodarstwo*, first published in 1588; see note 9), advised landowners to take care of their peasants and to try to enrich them: “Robota kmiotków, to dochód albo intrata największa w Polsce wszędy, którą robotę gospodarz tak ma szafować, coby kmiotków nie zubożył, a ku większemu pożytku co rok przywodził; bo to może po społu stać u pilnego a pobożnego gospodarza” (pp. 19–20).

13. Ćwiek, *Z dziejów wsi koronnej*, pp. 56, 49–55, 77.

14. Although historians are more and more aware of the importance of regional differences (e.g., Leonid Żytkowicz, “Okres gospodarki folwarczno-pańszczyźnianej, XVI–XVIII w.,” in *HCP*, pp. 286–90), only the late Ćwiek dared to question the validity of

Actually, the Commonwealth contained a wide range of different legal, social, and economic conditions. In the period from the fifteenth through the eighteenth century several economic regions can be discerned within the vast territory of the Polish Commonwealth—regions which either differed decidedly from the rest of the country or were undergoing similar economic processes at different times. A fully developed rent system (in Crown Prussia) adjoined *demesne-robot* farms in the Vistula basin, which, in turn, bordered not only on areas of active colonization (the Halicz district, Podolia, the Ukraine) but also on territories which were dominated by a rent system in which the payments were made less in money than in kind (large areas of the Grand Principality of Lithuania, the Carpathian region of Pogórze). Different stages of economic development created differences in the legal position of the rural population and in the economic orientation of the landowners. While in the Vistula basin in the first half of the seventeenth century the average amount of *robot* labor for a holder of sixteen hectares was five days a week with the use of his livestock, at the same time in the Ukraine big landowners settled many new villages giving the peasants freedom from all obligations for up to twenty years.

In the course of the sixteenth and the first half of the seventeenth century, and then also in the eighteenth century, we observe the expansion of areas with market-oriented *demesne-robot* farms. The *demesne-robot* system, however, never gained complete control of the entire territory of the Commonwealth, and its level of development ranged from areas with the “Dutch” model of rich peasants, strong cities, and hired labor to those where long distances from market outlets and adverse natural conditions (such as infertile soil or forests) made the organization of grain-producing, market-oriented *demesne-robot* farms not a profitable venture. Furthermore, even in the regions dominated by the *demesne-robot* system, considerable differences in obligations and the legal position of peasants in neighboring villages often continued to exist. Differences can also be noted in the profit margins for seemingly “similar” *demesne-robot* farms.

On crown lands in Great and Little Poland, settlement under German law, and even—in the West—German colonization, had been going on as late as the thirteenth century. Many village charters survive from this time, but *robot* labor is almost never mentioned in them. Already in the next century, however, ten to twenty days of *robot* labor per year was commonplace, as land fell into the hands of the gentry and royal interference was destroyed. In the villages settled under charter the so-called *soltys* demesnes developed, the vil-

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prevailing opinions and called for research on mass statistical material. Cwiek argued that although nearly any thesis can be supported by specific examples, the antithesis can also be proved by examples.

lage mayor or *sottys* receiving around forty-eight hectares of land, about the same amount as average gentry demesnes of later times. The lands of the *sottys* demesne were tilled by peasants with little or no land of their own, in return for wages, use of land, or other benefits. The buying out of *sottysy* by the village owners (decreed by the Warecki statute of 1423) and the formation of demesne farms under the owners' direct control followed during the fifteenth century, especially in the neighborhood of large towns and on the banks of navigable rivers, above all the Vistula.

Whereas Little Poland quickly adopted demesne farming, the Gdańsk region continued to contain large peasant farms. In addition to villages with German law charters, there were also Dutch villages near Gdańsk which enjoyed great privileges but paid high rents. Hired labor predominated on both demesne and peasant lands. Over these territories, despite many decrees to the contrary, there wandered numbers of migrant workers.

In the Grand Principality of Lithuania during the 1550s, Sigismund Augustus introduced reforms similar to those that took place in Poland in the thirteenth to fifteenth centuries. The population of Lithuania at this time was more dependent on the government than was true in Poland; hereditary estates and charters of immunity had developed only in the fifteenth century. On his own property, which formed almost a third of the country, Sigismund Augustus undertook to establish villages, distribute land, set rents, and sometimes institute demesne farms. It is disputed whether the grand prince was the first to initiate such measures or whether he followed the magnates' lead. The fact remains that an economic situation resulted which was closer to Little Poland's in the fifteenth century than in the sixteenth.<sup>15</sup>

The huge territories of the Ukraine, incorporated by the crown in 1569, varied greatly, including such different centers as Kiev, Braclaw, Volyn, and Podlasie. Great estates predominated, plenty of land was available, and colonization organized by great landowners continued throughout the period.<sup>16</sup> Grain, cattle, wax, honey, and potash abounded. Independent colonization,

15. For often conflicting views on this subject see D. L. Pokhylevych, *Krest'iane Belorussii i Litvy v XVI-XVIII vv.* (Lviv, 1957); V. I. Picheta, *Agrarnaia reforma Sigizmunda Avgusta v Litovsko-Russkom gosudarstve* (Moscow, 1958); Jerzy Ochmański, "La grande réforme agraire en Lithuanie et en Ruthénie Blanche au XVI<sup>e</sup> siècle," *Ergon* (Warsaw), 2 (1960): 327-42; Karl von Loewe, "Commerce and Agriculture in Lithuania, 1400-1600," *Economic History Review*, 2nd ser., 26, no. 1 (1973): 23-35.

16. Iu. M. Grossman, "Razvitie fol'varochnogo proizvodstva v Russkom i Belzskom voevodstvakh vo vtoroi polovine XVI-pervoi polovine XVII v.," in *Ezhegodnik . . . 1965 g.*, pp. 71-79; Maurycy Horn, *Skutki ekonomiczne najazdów tatarskich z lat 1605-1633 na Ruś Czerwoną* (Wrocław, Warsaw, and Kraków, 1964), pp. 164-66; Ivan Kryp'iakievych, *Bohdan Khmel'nyts'kyi* (Kiev, 1954), pp. 13-57; Władysław Serczyk, *Gospodarstwo magnackie w województwie podolskim w drugiej połowie XVIII wieku* (Wrocław, Warsaw, and Kraków, 1965), pp. 19-29.

threatened by both Tatar raids and new lords, sought protection among the Cossacks. However, we know almost nothing about the organization of demesnes on this land in the sixteenth century.

Territorial differences aside, one may question the idea that gentry rule in Poland-Lithuania was responsible for establishing and maintaining demesne-robot farming where it did exist. Some scholars simply point to the coincidence of the rise of neo-serfdom and the existence of a weak central government, such as the gentry republic.<sup>17</sup> The impression is given that one social group—the gentry—imposed its own system to the detriment of the rest of society. Imposed by the gentry, neo-serfdom overwhelmed the economy, brought about the fall of towns, extended the life of feudalism, delayed the growth of capitalism, and thus lies at the root of Poland's weakness in the eighteenth century.<sup>18</sup>

At the same time, the existence of neo-serfdom under the strong monarchical rule of Russia is often ignored, and the absence of neo-serfdom in such aristocratic republics as Venice and Dubrovnik arouses no comment. Moreover, treatment of the gentry as a single group united by identical interests is highly dubious. Great estates, not the gentry, were the first to adopt rent in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries; likewise they led the way in establishing demesne farming, and eventually—in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries—in again replacing robot labor by rent. It was this last change, supported by government decrees, which led to the ruin of a great number of small gentry estates in the nineteenth century.

It is true that in the East European gentry democracies the gentry had gained full control over the forms and amounts of taxation owed to the state. In Poland-Lithuania all landowners had to pay taxes, and for peasants on gentry estates the state in all its functions was represented by their lord. These facts alone, however, do nothing to explain the growth, establishment, and long life of neo-serfdom or demesne-robot farming. A peasant's position depended less on whether he inhabited a royal, church, or private estate than on the economic conditions prevailing in the region where he lived. Gentry estates in Crown Prussia or the Carpathian highlands were rarely based on the demesne-robot system. In other areas, the system developed, lasted for a while, then disappeared. There are also cases, particularly after military dev-

17. Rutkowski, *Historia gospodarcza Polski*, pp. 275–77; Zientara, “Z zagadnień spornych,” pp. 20–21, 40–41, 45–46.

18. Roman Rybarski, *Handel i polityka handlowa Polski w XVI stuleciu*, 2 vols. (Warsaw, 1958), 1:315–51; Witold Kula, *Teoria ekonomiczna ustroju feudalnego: Próba modelu* (Warsaw, 1962), pp. 149–50; Żytkowicz, “Okres gospodarki folwarczno-pańszczyźnianej,” pp. 258–59.

astations, in which the peasantry was coerced into paying money rent in place of *robot* labor.<sup>19</sup>

Of course, the effect of noneconomic factors on rural economic life is clearly important and has long been a subject of discussion, but it is hard to come by even the most approximate statistics. For example, it is easy to enumerate the cases of abandonment of fields in the mid-seventeenth century, but it is very hard to determine to what extent these phenomena are related to the enormous military devastations and extended periods of war and to what extent they reflect decay in the demesne-*robot* economy. Anyhow, it seems too risky to draw a direct connection between the abandonment of fields and depopulation. Rather, one can argue that war devastation dramatically speeded the stratification of villages and brought a significant increase in the landless population. Tax collectors obviously would notice and record only those of the *kmiecie* (peasants who had one *łan*—around sixteen hectares—or one-half of a *łan*) who were not hopelessly ruined and who might pay their dues at least in the near future. The number of these *kmiecie* drastically decreased after the 1648–1660 wars, but I would suggest that this decrease corresponded rather to a dramatic increase in the landless population than to actual depopulation (due to the plague, war deaths, or running away).

A conviction on the part of historians that the harmful demesne-*robot* system should not have lasted so long has led to the suggestion that foreign powers were responsible for keeping it alive. The Dutch, with their involvement in the grain trade, were seen to profit the most from the demesne-*robot* system, and therefore were “accused” of having kept it alive by economic and political means.<sup>20</sup> Such hypotheses may be questioned on the grounds of insufficient evidence, oversimplification, or inconsistency. A more annoying fault is their generality, their failure to suggest or consider mechanisms whereby mundane reality might have played a leading role. Our lack of sources regarding small and middle gentry estates can to some extent be compensated by the study of these estates in later periods, as well as by existing deeds of purchase and sale, by occasional contemporary descriptions, and, of course, by records from the courts. Although the situation regarding the peasantry is far worse, even here we know enough to ask questions suggesting the inadequacy of general theories propounded up to now. It will be worth our while, then, to touch on some of what *is* known about rural economic organization.

19. Mączak, *Gospodarstwo chłopskie*, p. 341; Ćwiek, *Z dziejów wsi koronnej*, p. 163; Trzyna, “Wtórne poddaństwo,” pp. 389–93.

20. Zientara, “Z zagadnień spornych,” pp. 11, 25, 45–46. Kazimierz Tymieniecki regarded East Central Europe as semicolonial. See his “W sprawie powstania zaostrzonego poddaństwa w Polsce i Europie Środkowej,” *Roczniki Historyczne*, 24 (1958): 326–28.



The conviction is deeply rooted in historiography that massive adoption of demesne-robot farming resulted from Poland's gaining control of the mouth of the Vistula in 1466 and from the facilitation of access to western buyers.<sup>21</sup> Wyczański has been the most recent to call this assumption into serious doubt. Without in any way deprecating the economic importance of the Vistula grain trade, he has pointed out that in Great and Little Poland around 75 percent of the land lay in the hands of the middle gentry, who lived in the countryside and had always needed a demesne to satisfy the needs of their own households and servitors. The price revolution of the sixteenth century which favored grain production could not significantly increase on these territories the area of existing demesnes, since the middle gentry generally possessed very little land not already under cultivation. The growth of demesne farming for internal and external markets took place not on such middle estates but on the great properties of the king, church, and magnates. Although the average gentry demesne was limited to one village, and two demesnes in one village were not uncommon, a demesne on a great estate usually comprised between three and seven villages. The average area of a small to middle gentry demesne was forty-eight to sixty hectares, whereas on the great estates it was three to six times larger.<sup>22</sup>

Sixteen hectares of demesne land yielded its owner about forty-eight złoty per year, while the same area leased to a peasant brought in a rent of about two and a half złoty, along with a negligible return in kind. This meant that the demesne brought in 90 percent of a gentry owner's return from his land, and about 80 percent in the case of a large estate. But despite the huge difference between rent and demesne returns, we find only sporadic cases in which peasants were evicted to make room for a demesne. The peasant was in fact responsible for the high return on demesne land through his labor in tilling, harvesting, threshing, transporting, and sometimes even selling the grain, as well as guarding the land and harvests. The urgency of reaping and the long hours involved in threshing often required the manor to engage hired hands in addition to its own peasants. Free labor could be assured only by the existence on each gentry estate of self-sufficient peasants well enough off to be able to work the demesne and still live off their own land.<sup>23</sup>

21. Trzyna, "Wtórne poddaństwo," p. 309; von Loewe, "Commerce and Agriculture," pp. 34–35; Rutkowski believed that market availability for agricultural products drove the nobility in the direction of a demesne-robot economy, all the more so since the existing dependence of peasants facilitated this form of production (Rutkowski, *Historia gospodarcza Polski*, pp. 91–95).

22. Wyczański, *Wieś*, pp. 73–76, 82–83.

23. Wyczański, *Studia nad gospodarką starostwa korczyńskiego*, p. 218; Alicja Falniowska-Gradowska, *Świadczenia poddanych na rzecz dworu w królewskich województwach krakowskiego w drugiej połowie XVIII wieku* (Wrocław, Warsaw, and Kraków, 1964), pp. 99–100.

Such an economic interdependence was far from even the most modest vision of a rustic idyll. The lord tried constantly to raise his income by increasing *robot* labor and other services. The peasant resisted through careless work, refusal to fulfill his obligations, attacks on the overseer, occasional attacks on the landlord himself, arson, and, last of all, through flight. Flight was usually organized with the knowledge and help of another landlord to whose estate the peasant would move.<sup>24</sup> It constituted the greatest kind of disaster for a landowner, and as such helped to restrain the exploitation of the peasantry.

A faltering market in Polish grain in the 1620s and during the second half of the century, combined with the terrible losses sustained during the years of the so-called *potop*<sup>25</sup> and the great rise in taxes necessitated by war with Turkey and the Tatars, led to the collapse of gentry prosperity. Faced with ruin, landowners looked not for long-range solutions but for drastic measures to deal with their pressing needs. They increased peasant obligations. The peasant, harried by domestic and enemy armies alike, forced to fulfill ever-heavier *robot* obligations and pay ever-increasing taxes to the state, could find no alternative to reducing the extent of his cultivation, on which both *robot* labor and taxes depended. Losing his surplus production, the peasant also lost his chance for economic independence and relative prosperity, and ceased to be able to employ his poorer neighbors. He now limited himself to subsistence farming, and fell ever more into dependence on the manor, which helped him out in need, but which never ceased to raise the level of *robot* labor. The growth of *robot* labor led to a reduction in the amount of labor hired by the manor, at the same time ruining sixteen- and even eight-hectare peasant farms, and bringing into existence four-hectare ones.<sup>26</sup>

24. Józef Leszczyński, "Walka chłopów z uciskiem feudalnym," in *HCP*, pp. 402–6; Cackowski, *Gospodarstwo wiejskie*, 1:231–35; Trzyna, *Położenie ludności*, pp. 282–88; Ćwiek, *Z dziejów wsi koronnej*, pp. 213–55.

25. Historians have collected impressive data regarding the devastation of villages during wartime. I will give here only a few examples. In Gniezno county in 1658–59 there were 172 villages: 82 were privately owned, 79 were owned by the church, and 11 belonged to the crown. In these villages there were 1,055 *łans* of arable land, of which only 300 *łans* were cultivated. In Kościan county, 50 percent of the arable land was not cultivated. In eighteen *folwarks* of Kalisz *województwo* the grain harvest of 1661 reached only one-fourth of the 1616 harvest. See Władysław Rusiński, "Straty i zniszczenia w czasie wojny szwedzkiej oraz jej skutki na obszarze Wielkopolski," in Kazimierz Lepszy et al., eds., *Polska w okresie drugiej Wojny Północnej, 1655–1660*, 3 vols. (Warsaw, 1957), 2:293, 295. In Masovia in 1660 only 15 percent of the arable land in crown possessions was under cultivation (Irena Gieysztorowa, "Zniszczenia i straty wojenne oraz ich skutki na Mazowszu," in *Polska w okresie*, 2:333). In thirty crown villages of Sandomierz *województwo* the number of peasant households decreased from 776 to 267 (Adam Kamiński, "Zniszczenia wojenne w Małopolsce i ich skutki w okresie najazdu szwedzkiego, 1655–1660," in *Polska w okresie*, 2:371).

26. Kula, *Teoria ekonomiczna ustroju feudalnego*, pp. 53–70, 134–46; Andrzej Wy-

The gentry's attempt to save itself, which led to the ruin of the peasantry, could not work for long. From the sixteenth through the eighteenth century we observe the disappearance of small gentry estates. These processes have been studied only in the case of a few *województwa*. Thus although scattered data from other regions do seem to confirm the trend, our figures are still very incomplete. Wyczański has shown that in Lublin *województwo* in the middle of the fifteenth century 49.9 percent of the total land used by the peasantry was in the hands of those nobles whose possessions were smaller than sixteen hundred hectares. By the end of the eighteenth century the same group had only 9.8 percent of this land. In contrast, the proportion of this land owned by nobles holding more than nine thousand hectares increased from 13.3 percent in the middle of the fifteenth century to 41.9 percent by the end of the eighteenth century.<sup>27</sup>

Turning to the peasantry, we are faced with a far more complicated problem. We have some sources in the form of court records, mainly from crown lands, complaints of military destruction, wills, and legal documents, but there are no sources to determine how a peasant's farm was organized and only fragmentary indications of his role in the local market. And there is very little information available about the productivity of peasant cultivation, the proportion of his harvest allotted to sale, and such matters. Demographic information—directions of population flow, seasonal migrations, flight, colonization, and so forth—is by and large unclear.

Despite increasing impoverishment among the peasantry and the decline of sixteen-hectare farms throughout our period, peasants did not cease, even under the heaviest *robot* labor, to have some contact with the market, and they continued to have enough cash so that in the eighteenth century the liquor-monopoly rights accounted for 30 percent of the returns that a lord received from his manor.<sup>28</sup> Furthermore, the widespread appearance of very

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czański, *Polska Rzecz Pospolitą szlachecką, 1454–1764* (Warsaw, 1965), pp. 315–17; Rutkowski, *Historia gospodarcza Polski*, p. 189; Cackowski, *Gospodarstwo wiejskie*, pp. 104–5; Żytkowicz, "Gospodarka folwarczno-pańszczyźniana," pp. 261–62; Ćwiek pointed to the fact that the general decrease of sixteen-hectare farms was accompanied not only by the increase of small holders (four to eight hectares) but also by a substantial enlargement of big peasant holdings (thirty-two to forty hectares and more) (Ćwiek, *Z dziejów wsi koronnej*, pp. 173–74). The same facts were noted by Żytkowicz (*Studia nad gospodarstwem wiejskim*, p. 129) and especially by Mączak (*Gospodarstwo chłopskie*, pp. 274–85).

27. Wyczański, *Polska Rzecz Pospolitą szlachecką*, table on p. 209. For similar trends in other crown provinces see Żytkowicz, "Gospodarka folwarczno-pańszczyźniana," p. 256.

28. Kula, *Teoria ekonomiczna ustroju feudalnego*, pp. 155–57; Wyczański, *Polska Rzecz Pospolitą szlachecką*, table on p. 224; Serczyk, *Gospodarstwo magnackie*, pp. 154–56; Irena Rychlikowa, *Studia nad towarową produkcją wielkiej własności w Małopolsce w latach 1764–1805*, vol. 1 (Wrocław, Warsaw, and Kraków, 1966), pp. 202–4.

rich peasants, not only in those regions where demesne-robot farming did not predominate but even in Great and Little Poland itself, has not been studied. From scattered studies, it appears that rich peasants bought themselves out of some or all of their robot obligations, owned amounts of land often equivalent to gentry demesnes, and were involved in trade and industry. Some made enough money to buy their sons entrance into the merchant class, the university, and even into the gentry.<sup>29</sup> In the *województwo* of Cracow we know—thanks to the unmasking activities of Trepka Nakenda—that the majority of self-styled gentry came from among rich peasants or the manorial bureaucracy.<sup>30</sup>

Social stratification within the village, potentially a crucial factor in the growth of demesne farming and neo-serfdom, remains very unclear. The basic peasant class is usually considered to be that described in the sources as *kmiecie*, *gburzy*, or *włóczęnicy*, possessing a farm of at least sixteen hectares. In addition, there were the peasants having only eight hectares, below which were so-called *zagrodnicy*, *chałupnicy*, and *ogrodnicy*, possessing a house and varying amounts of land. Finally there were the landless population (*komornicy*), householders (*kątownicy*), hired hands (*parobcy*), and milk maids (*dziewki służebne*).

On the basis of studies of crown and church estates, scholars have established that the number of sixteen-hectare farms declined from the sixteenth through the eighteenth century, while the number of eight-hectare farms, *zagrodnicy*, and *chałupnicy* grew markedly. Cackowski calculated that 79.8 percent of peasant farms on the bishop of Chełm's estates were of the sixteen-hectare type in 1614, as opposed to only 50.4 percent in 1676. On

29. Around 15 percent of the faculty of Jagiellonian University in the second half of the sixteenth and the first half of the seventeenth century were of peasant origin. See Waclaw Urban, "Akademia Krakowska w latach 1549–1632," in *Dzieje Uniwersytetu Jagiellońskiego w dobie reformacji i wczesnej kontrreformacji (1364–1764)*, vol. 1 (Kraków, 1964), p. 256. If the need arose during court proceedings on crown lands, some peasants were able to pay up to several thousand złotys (Ćwiek, *Z dziejów wsi koronnej*, p. 189). The number of poor, landless villagers who found their way to the cities to become servants and unskilled workers is not known. Town records tell us only about those well-to-do peasants or their children who became artisans or merchants. Their number in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries (around 30 percent of all who became town citizens) was impressive and indicates the existence—in spite of demesne robot—of social mobility. On peasant migration to towns and cities see M. J. Mika, "Przyjęcia do prawa miejskiego w Poznaniu w latach 1576–1600," in *Kronika miasta Poznania*, 11, no. 2–3 (1933): 207–30; Bieniarzówna, "Chłopi w rzemiośle"; Włodzimierz Dworzaczek, "Perméabilité des barrières sociales dans la Pologne du XVI<sup>e</sup> siècle," *Acta Poloniae Historica*, 24 (1971): 43–44.

30. Walerian Nakenda Trepka, *Liber generationis plebeorum*, ed. Włodzimierz Dworzaczek, vol. 1 (Wrocław, Warsaw, and Kraków, 1958), pp. 6–22.

crown lands in the *województwo* of Cracow, the number of sixteen-hectare farms fell from 70.3 percent in 1564 to 43.5 percent in 1660. The situation in Crown Prussia was somewhat different, in that the sixteen-hectare farms made up only 11 percent of the total peasant farms in the second half of the seventeenth century, while farms of thirty-two to fifty hectares accounted for 67.6 percent. At the same time, in twelve villages of Korczyń *starostwo* the number of sixteen-hectare farms remained constant, despite a large rise in the number of *zagrodnicy*, until the military disasters of the period from 1655 to 1660. In 1600 these villages contained 98 so-called *kmiemie* and 107 *zagrodnicy*; in 1646–52 the figures were 96 *kmiemie* and 308 *zagrodnicy*; by 1660, however, the number of *kmiemie* had fallen to 46 and the *zagrodnicy* to 234.<sup>31</sup>

All of the scholars whose figures are cited above have emphasized the total lack of precise information about the actual size of what we call sixteen-hectare farms, and the inadequacy of our ideas concerning the size of smaller *zagrodnik* and *chatupnik* farms. We do, however, have precise information, especially from crown and church lands, about every kind of peasant obligation. Even the most superficial acquaintance with the system of obligations permits three observations: first, *robot* labor increased significantly between the fifteenth and the eighteenth centuries; second, there existed a direct correlation between the amount of *robot* labor and the rent a peasant owed and the amount of land he cultivated; and, last, the portion of the village population which did not possess land was not as a rule registered, since throughout the sixteenth and most of the seventeenth century it owed no services (or practically none) either to the lord of the manor or to the state.

In Wyczański's estimation, the average demesne, containing about fifty hectares of land in the sixteenth century, required approximately 650 man-days of labor during the forty-five days of harvest. By the same token, a sixteen-hectare peasant farm would require 208 man-days over the same period, or the full-time labor of about five people (4.62). Since a sixteen-hectare peasant in the sixteenth century had "average" *robot* obligations of three days per week, performed by two persons and the peasant's team of oxen, and since he was usually saddled with additional obligations during harvest time, it is clear that unless he was endowed with a working family of seven or eight persons including himself, he would have to hire help, if only on a seasonal basis. The average demesne of fifty hectares required the full-time hired labor of five persons in addition to *robot* labor available from the village,

31. Cackowski, *Gospodarstwo wiejskie*, 1:103; Trzyna, *Położenie ludności*, pp. 68–87; Ćwiek, *Z dziejów wsi koronnej*, p. 115; Wyczański, *Studia nad gospodarką starostwa korczyńskiego*, p. 155.

and a peasant farm of thirty-two to sixty hectares, receiving no *robot* labor, correspondingly would have needed more.<sup>32</sup>

Occasional references in the sources do confirm the existence of a landless population who hired themselves out in unknown numbers to manors and rich peasants, seeking employment in the towns and wandering with the seasons over the lands of Crown Prussia looking for a market for their labor.<sup>33</sup> Such people, having worked the fields for years, would certainly have possessed the qualifications necessary to become *zagrodnicy* in the villages, yet despite the existence of unused arable land during the entire period under discussion, these hired hands did not settle down on it. Unused land existed in many villages containing a few sixteen-hectare farms and a complement of *zagrodnicy*, but no one either could or would undertake to farm it and fulfill the obligations it entailed, even in crown territories where labor was seldom in short supply and even in regions where the lords demanded little *robot* labor.

Such a situation raises questions about the nature of village stratification. How fluid were social distinctions? Did a *kmieć* whose holdings were destroyed by war become a *zagrodnik*, or did he keep his status and have to rebuild his farm? Could the industrious labor of a *zagrodnik* raise him to the status of a *kmieć*, or could he only increase his lands but not alter his status? Did the sons of a wealthy *kmieć* divide his land and become *zagrodnicy*, or did they use inherited capital to seek other professions or acquire sixteen-hectare farms of their own? Was one's status in the village in fact dependent on the amount of land one cultivated, or did it become a hereditary class distinction? *Robot* obligations and serfdom did not really apply to the landless poor whose economic position was far worse than that of the *kmiecie*. Did the richer peasants not find it possible to exploit these poor through wage labor even more effectively than they themselves were exploited through the *robot* system?

The impression which emerges from examining the rural economy is

32. Wyczański, *Wieś*, p. 101.

33. The existence of a vagrant population (*ludzie luźni*) who escaped personal serfdom, during the entire period of the demesne-*robot* economy (suggesting direct and considerable interdependence between serfdom and the use of land), brings into focus questions concerning the reasons for the existence of unoccupied arable land, the role of hired labor on the demesne-*robot* farms and large peasant farms, and the existence of a sufficient number of workers for the eventual development of manufactures. The basic monographs dealing with loose people and Kula's model proposition seem to suggest the "marginality" of this problem. The nobility, however, thought otherwise and attempted to prevent the "loose" elements from seasonal migrations. See Józef Gierowski, "Luźni ludzie na Mazowszu w świetle uchwał sejmikowych," *Przegląd Historyczny*, 40 (1949): 164–202. It is also difficult to accept the marginality of the vagrant population, since it appears that larger peasant farms throughout the country could not have maintained themselves without their labor. They were also used by demesne-*robot* farms.

not one of independent elements coercing and being coerced, but one of shifting interdependences between elements in contractual relation to each other. In villages settled under German law the charters usually specified what obligations the peasants owed in return for use of the lord's land. Both the lord's ownership of the land and the peasants' personal freedom were implicit conditions of these contracts. Although limitations on peasant freedom of movement, first set by Casimir the Great in 1348, were later confirmed and expanded, and although legal jurisdiction over the peasantry slipped from the state's into the gentry's hands, research thus far indicates that peasants never lost their legal entity. A peasant could appear in court as plaintiff and defendant, he had full rights of ownership of movable property, and in some cases he could buy, sell, and bequeath land.

At the same time, peasants had no judicial protection in regard to the *robot* system, and their real legal position changed from district to district, from manor to manor, subject entirely to the discretion of the landowner. The well-known *sejm* resolutions placing a limit on *robot* labor, like laws regarding peasant flight, were passed on behalf of gentry whose peasants were being enticed away in times of economic boom.

At the end of the sixteenth century, investment of capital in land appears to have guaranteed the largest and perhaps also the safest returns, causing a withdrawal of money from industry and trade. The enormous wealth of the Boner family, merchants who played a role under the Sigismunds comparable to that of the Fuggers, was converted into land, as was that of the Morsztyns and a great many others. At the same time, in place after place, peasants were finding it impossible to keep up with high money rents. For some reason, perhaps because of economies of scale relating to transport or marketing, peasants could not consistently take advantage of high grain prices to convert their surpluses into cash. As a result, they had to surrender some of the risks and opportunities of surplus production to the manor, in return for greater security in the form of a hereditary plot of land for which they paid nominal rent and heavy *robot* obligations. If they wished to increase their production for sale, there was often land available which they could cultivate at the price of additional obligations, but they no longer *had* to depend on the market to pay their rent. An illustration of the resulting interdependence between lord and peasants is the fact that at the very time when peasant flight constituted the greatest disaster for a landlord, the most effective threat against refractory peasants was eviction.

By now it should be clear that Rutkowski's generally accepted outline of the origin and development of the demesne-*robot* economy does not explain much of the data accumulated by subsequent historians. We have seen, for example, that the rise of *robot* obligations was accompanied not only by the

decline of sixteen-hectare peasant farms, and by an increase in the number of peasants having little or no land, but also by an increase of arable land in the hands of rich peasants. In view of this, it is unfortunate that the role of rich peasants in regional economic life has not been studied. With the exception of Crown Prussia, the rich peasant is treated as an exceptional and marginal phenomenon, confirming the general rule of peasant poverty and subjection. We have also seen how in certain areas of the Commonwealth the *demesne-robot* system did not appear at all, in some it was insignificant, and in others it appeared only in the second half of the seventeenth century or even in the eighteenth century, when attempts were already being made to reinstitute rent in formerly *robot* areas. How much were these differences the product of conscious choice; how much were they determined by social and economic realities? The problem of the scope and importance of "economic" motives in the activities of nobles, townspeople, and peasants is connected with this issue. There is a strong tendency to look at the origin and development of the *demesne-robot* system through the prism of grain production, even though we are aware of other economic enterprises (for example, a considerable export cattle trade with annual sales in the tens of thousands, fully developed sheep-breeding, and intensive gardening). Such matters as the existence of large peasant farms employing hired labor, an active handicraft industry, the flow of population between towns and villages, the dual role of peasants as sellers and buyers in the domestic market, and the presence of a substantial vagrant population, should compel us to take a cautious approach to the problem of neo-serfdom. With the exception of the Mączak study, we still do not have works attempting to describe the *totality* of regional economic life over a long period of time.

Until these studies are made and historians venture more boldly beyond the hedges of villages and the *demesne-robot* of crown lands, then the synthetic articles, interesting economic models, and didactic textbook generalizations can only serve to reveal the methodological inadequacy of their concept of a "neo-serfdom."