

THE
PEASANTRIES OF EUROPE
from the Fourteenth to the Eighteenth Centuries

Edited by
TOM SCOTT



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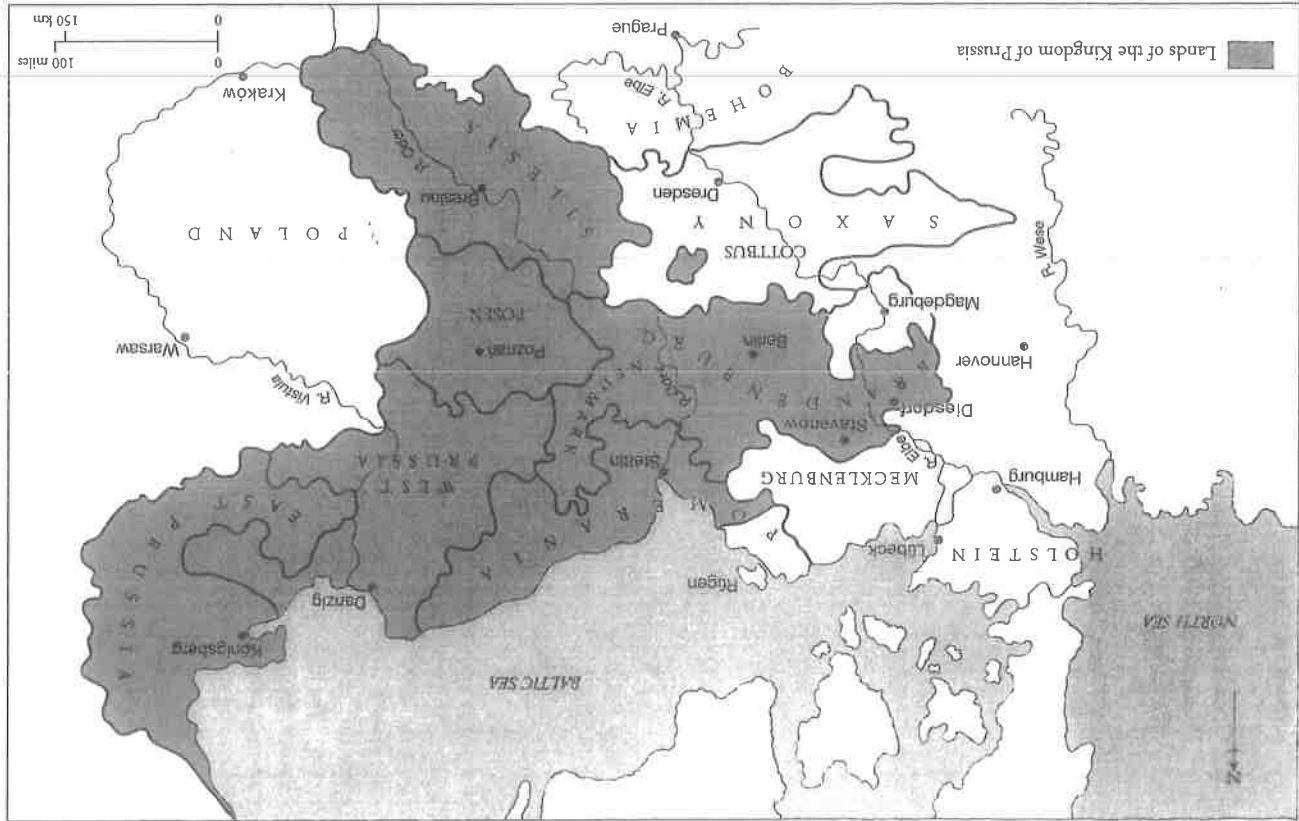
Village Life in East-Elbian Germany and Poland, 1400–1800: Subjection, Self-Defence, Survival

William W. Hagen

HISTORIOGRAPHICAL TRADITION: THE VIEW FROM THE MANOR HOUSE

The story that these pages examine figures in popular and scholarly tradition as one of coercion and injustice: the imposition upon the villagers of north-eastern Germany and the Polish lands, at about the time when Columbus first sailed, of a centuries-long subjection, even as their counterparts in western Europe shook off medieval bondage; and the transformation of their noble landlords from benevolent or benign neighbours into harsh or tyrannical masters.¹ Its reflection can be found in the verses of an anonymous Polish poet of the early seventeenth century, 'The Peasant's Lament Over the Nobility':

1. The notes accompanying this essay are not exhaustive. Literature in German and Polish is cited below. In English, see Hans Rosenberg, 'The rise of the Junkers in Brandenburg-Prussia, 1410–1653', *American Historical Review* [hereafter: *AHR*], 49 (1943), pp. 1–22, 228–42; F. L. Carsten, *The Origins of Prussia* (Oxford, 1954) and *idem*, *A History of the Prussian Junkers* (Aldershot, 1989); Edgar Melton, 'The Prussian Junkers, 1600–1786', in H. M. Scott (ed.), *The European Nobilities in the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries*, vol. II: *Northern, Central, and Eastern Europe* (London, 1995), pp. 71–109; Robert J. Frost, 'The nobility of Poland-Lithuania, 1569–1795', *ibid.*, pp. 183–222; Stefan Kieniewicz et al., *History of Poland* (Warsaw, 1968), chs 5–12; Stefan Kieniewicz, *The Emancipation of the Polish Peasantry* (Chicago, 1969); Andrzej Kaminski, 'Neo-serfdom in Poland-Lithuania', *Slavic Review*, 34 (1975), pp. 253–68; Leonid Zytkowicz, 'Trends of agrarian economy in Poland, Bohemia and Hungary from the middle of the fifteenth to the middle of the seventeenth century', in Antoni Mączak et al. (eds), *East-Central Europe in Transition: From the Fourteenth to the Seventeenth Century* (Cambridge, 1985), pp. 59–83; Jacek Kochanowicz, 'The Polish economy and the evolution of dependency', in Daniel Chirot (ed.), *The Origins of Economic Backwardness in Eastern Europe, Economics and Politics from the Middle Ages until the Early Twentieth Century* (Berkeley, CA, 1989), pp. 92–130; Jerome Blum, 'The rise of serfdom in eastern Europe', *AHR*, 42 (1957), pp. 807–36; Arcadius Kahan, 'Notes on serfdom in western and eastern Europe', *Journal of Economic History*, 33 (1973), pp. 86–99. For critiques of world-system and other neo-Marxist approaches to early modern developments in east-Elbian Europe, see Kochanowicz, 'Polish economy'; Jerzy Topolski, 'Continuity and discontinuity in the development of the feudal system in eastern Europe (Xth to XVIIIth centuries)', *Journal of European Economic History*, 10 (1981), pp. 373–400; Edgar Melton, 'Gutsherrschaft in East Elbian Germany and Livonia, 1500–1800: a critique of the model', *Central European History* [hereafter: *CEH*], 21 (1988), pp. 315–49; William W. Hagen, 'Capitalism and the countryside in early modern Europe: interpretations, models, debates', *Agricultural History*, 62 (1988), pp. 13–47. On the landlord–village relationship in Brandenburg, see *idem*, 'How mighty the Junkers? Peasant rents and



Map 6.1 The Prussian region in 1793

Our lords are a great woe to us,
they fleece us almost like sheep.

You can never sit in peace,
unless maybe you forget the bad things
over a mug of beer.

Pay your rents, the watchman's fees, the tribute —
chickens for using the meadows;
I don't know anymore what all we don't owe:
wheat, acorns, hops and nuts —
we stuff the sacks for the landlords.

Friend! Neighbour! They're beating down harder,
every year they raise the labour services,
now we have to work in pairs.

But, of course, the fine lords still know how
to adorn themselves.

It's not enough that you work yourself into a sweat,
the balliff is busy with his cane.

But just go to complain, his lordship will thunder at you:
'Get out, you thief, what are you snivelling about!'

Framing the charge in the language of liberal modernity, Hans Rosenberg sternly wrote in 1978 that the east-Elbian German landlords gained their ends at the cost of 'the legal and social degradation, political emasculation, moral crippling, and destruction of the chances of self-determination of the subject villagers'.³

Nor did the abolition of the early modern manorial regime and the villagers' legal disabilities in the nineteenth century undo the damage. The aristocratic large estates, worked by subservient labourers, survived in both eastern Germany and Poland until the aftermath of the Second World War, when expropriation, plunder and Communist land reform finally destroyed them. The persistence into the twentieth century in both countries of an agrarian sector dominated by conservative large landowners figures pervasively in explanations of the failure of liberal democracy to take root there.

seigneurial profits in sixteenth-century Brandenburg', *Past and Present*, 108 (1985), pp. 80–116; 'Seventeenth-century crisis in Brandenburg: the Thirty Years' War, the destabilization of serfdom, and the rise of absolutism', *AHR*, 94 (1989), pp. 302–35; 'The Junkers' faithless servants: peasant insubordination and the breakdown of serfdom in Brandenburg-Prussia, 1763–1811', in Richard Evans and W. R. Lee (eds), *The German Peasantry. Conflict and Community in Rural Society from the Eighteenth to the Twentieth Centuries* (London, 1986), pp. 71–101; and 'Working for the Junker: the standard of living of manorial laborers in Brandenburg, 1584–1810', *Journal of Modern History*, 58 (1986), pp. 143–58.

2. 'Lament chłopski na pany', quoted in Jerzy Topolski, 'Rozwój folwarku pańszczyźnianego (1453–1655)', in Władysław Rosiński (ed.), *Dzieje wsi wielkopolskiej* (Poznań, 1959), p. 47.

3. Hans Rosenberg, 'Die Ausprägung der Junkerherrschaft in Brandenburg-Preußen, 1410–1618', in *idem, Mächteiten und Wirtschaftskontinuitäten. Studien zur neueren deutschen Sozial- und Wirtschaftsgeschichte* (Göttingen, 1978), p. 82. On Rosenberg's heavy impact on German historiography, see William W. Hagen, 'Descent of the Sonderweg: Hans Rosenberg's History of Old-Regime Prussia', *CEH*, 24 (1991), pp. 24–50.

This chapter will show that the regime of commercialized manorialism that rose to predominance in sixteenth-century Poland and east-Elbian Germany did indeed impose heavy burdens on its village subjects. Yet it does not advance historical knowledge, whether of early modern or modern Europe, to exaggerate the landlords' powers, as the historical literature has very strongly tended to do. One of the costs of this approach is to disable the villagers as historical subjects. Another is to reduce the social and political history of central Europe to the expression and institutional embodiment of aristocratic interest alone. The result is a one-eyed view.

It is striking that, while enormous scholarly effort has gone into researching the regime of early modern manorialism in Poland and east-Elbian Germany, the history of the villagers themselves remains largely unwritten. They figure as the landlords' labour force, paying feudal rents in fieldwork, tribute-grain and cash for their village land-tenures or house-leases. In recent years, historians have taken an interest in their efforts to resist seigneurial exploitation. But to an overwhelming degree their role in the historical literature is that of the legally subordinated, hard-pressed and largely passive economic subject — *homo oeconomicus subditus*.

Interpreting the Rise of the Manorial System in Early Modern East-Elbian Germany

A virtue of the literature is its broad view of the system of commercialized large-estate agriculture worked by subject villagers in east-Elbian central Europe — or, in shorthand, the east-Elbian manorial system — from its origins in the fifteenth century to its abolition in the nineteenth. This approach reached its first culmination in the influential work of Georg Friedrich Knapp, notably his paradigm-setting book of 1887, *The Peasant Emancipation and the Origin of the Rural Labourers in the Older Parts of Prussia*.⁴ Like Max Weber and other late nineteenth-century scholars, Knapp sought to explain the strength in his day of the east-Elbian landlords and the misery of their agricultural labourers through a historical analysis of the large-estate system. Knapp's work, reinforced by his many able students, conveyed an interpretation subsequently embraced and refined in the standard literature, and familiarized in English through the works of Hans Rosenberg and F. L. Carsten. This approach, because of its critical stance toward the expansion of the landed nobility's powers over the villages, may be called the liberal critique. Since its interpretive predominance is still largely intact, a summary of its essential propositions will be useful, the more so as its empirical strength persists, except in certain respects that will be duly considered. The limitations of the liberal critique lie less in what it emphasizes than in what it screens out.

4. Georg Friedrich Knapp, *Die Bauernbefreiung und der Ursprung der Landarbeit in den älteren Theilen Preußens*, 2 vols (Leipzig, 1887). On Knapp, and the entire tradition of German scholarship on noble landlordism in the east-Elbian lands, see the valuable work of Heinrich Kaak, *Die Gutsherrschaft. Theoretisch-historische Untersuchungen zum Agrarwesen im ostelbischen Raum* (Berlin, 1991).

Knapp and his followers argued that, in the medieval German colonization from the twelfth to the fourteenth century of the previously Slavie east-Elbian lands, the village farmers were settled (or, in the case of the pre-existing Slavie cultivators, resettled) on extremely good terms, as personally free, hereditary possessors of sizeable farms owing moderate, fixed rents to their overlords, whether princely, ecclesiastical or noble. But, as the political position of the German rulers in the east weakened, the nobility usurped, partly or wholly, their powers of taxation and jurisdiction over the villages. When, later still, the eastern nobility lost their functions as feudal warriors and, likewise, in consequence of the Protestant Reformation, their access to comfortable ecclesiastical livings, they turned to large-scale farming. In the sixteenth century, they widened their previously modest familial manor farms into broad estate demesnes, aiming to produce surpluses for sale on the urban markets of Europe where, because of the sixteenth-century 'price revolution', agricultural commodity values were rising rapidly.

The east-Elbian landlords gained the additional acreage they needed by more or less high-handed enclosure into their demesnes of lands belonging to their village subjects. The all-important labour needed to work the now-extensive domanial fields they obtained by imposing upon the surviving village farmers heavy, hitherto unknown, weekly labour-rents, carried out by the fullholding farmers with their own teams of horses or oxen, or rendered in manual labour by the villagers whose smaller holdings did not allow the maintenance of draught animals sufficient for work at the manor.

In this way, the landed nobility, who unselfconsciously bore the late medieval and Renaissance name of Junkers, ceased to be their village subjects' protective neighbours, but became their exploitative overlords instead. Attaining predominance in the assemblies of the Estates in their several principalities — in Schleswig-Holstein, Mecklenburg, Brandenburg, Pomerania, Silesia, Lusatia and the eastern Baltic duchy of Prussia — the nobility forced the fiscally weak rulers to ratify laws blocking the subject farmers' previous easy sale of their holdings and departure from the villages. Other laws anchored the weekly labour services the landlords were imposing on their subjects who, should they attempt to flee, could now be recovered by their masters and forcibly returned. The landlords strengthened the powers of their seigneurial courts, which heard in the first instance all cases involving their village subjects, by pressing the territorial princes to restrict or abolish the villagers' right of appeal against seigneurial decisions to the higher courts.

The east-Elbian rulers found approval of such legislation easier since they themselves were the masters of numerous large estates, in the form of the Crown lands, whose extent had mushroomed through the secularization of Church lands in the Protestant Reformation. Thus they too were, on a large scale, Junker landlords, with subject villages of their own. As for the nobility themselves, the Reformation added to their already robust powers patronage rights over the churches in their bailiwicks, ensuring that the villagers' pastors would keep their eyes cocked for signals from the manor house.

The rise of the manorial system spelled disaster for the towns of German east-Elbia, above all because the Junkers broke urban monopolies on beer and spirits production as well as on the grain trade. Instead, the nobility forced the products of their breweries and distilleries on their subject villages, while selling their export-destined grain surpluses directly to Baltic or western European wholesalers, cutting out the local middlemen. Town growth faltered, and with it the capacity to resist Junker political predominance, as well as the ability to absorb significant numbers of immigrants, whether legal or runaway, from the oppressed villages.

In seventeenth-century Brandenburg-Prussia, the devastation wrought by the Thirty Years War and other military crises raised a regime of militarized princely absolutism from the smoking ashes. The landlords bartered support for the new political order, which from their viewpoint had the defect of requiring payment by their village subjects of heavy new state taxes, in exchange for princely concession to them of more despotic seigneurial powers in the countryside. In other regions, such as Mecklenburg, where rulers failed to gain mastery over the noble Estates, the landlords availed themselves cost-free of similar expanded authority. Consequently, everywhere in German east-Elbia the late seventeenth and eighteenth centuries witnessed the high noon of Junker domination of the villages and the darkest night of their rural subjects' legal degradation, material impoverishment and cultural despair.

At this point, the Knapp school looked to the absolutist monarchy of Brandenburg-Prussia, for it seemed that only a powerful and efficient government could have enacted the reforms necessary to curb noble exploitation of the countryside. In his zeal to strengthen the fisc and expand the army, Frederick William I (r.1713-40) aimed to improve the countryman's lot, raising his productivity and so also his taxable potential. The enlightened autocracy of Frederick II (r.1740-86) took steps to abolish hereditary subjection in the villages, widen the rural commoners' access to the royal appellate courts, limit noble enclosure of village land, reduce labour services and register the villagers' manorial obligations in legally enforceable contracts, as well as to eliminate communal three-field agriculture by separation of manorial from village land and by adoption of fallow-free rotations on individualized landholdings of landlord and subject farmer alike.

Unlike his predecessors, who had hailed the Prussian monarchy's enlightened policies, Knapp found the Prussian absolutists' efforts more successful in concept than execution, principally because of the opposition of the corporate nobility and their spokesmen within the bureaucracy, if not — as later, more hard-boiled historians held — because the Hohenzollern rulers themselves esteemed the nobility's interests above those of the common people. Similarly, when after Napoleon's crushing defeat of Prussia in 1806 an era of state-initiated liberal restructuring began in earnest, the nobility's conservative opposition steered the all-important agrarian reform onto tracks which ensured their own survival on highly favourable terms. The villagers' legal disabilities disappeared, but the fullholders among them gained in freehold the family farms

they cultivated only upon surrender of one-third or one-half of their arable to the landlords in compensation for the cessation of all feudal rent payments, including the well-hated labour services.

As for the small-scale village farmers, whose rent had been exacted in manual labour, in most cases their claims to freehold tenures in the course of the 'peasant emancipation' of 1807-16 were denied. The landlords were now free to evict them and enclose their holdings into the estate demesnes. Often, the evicted smallholders had no choice but to accept resettlement as full-time manorial workers on small, seigneurially owned cottage holdings. Thus they joined the ranks of the legally free rural labourers whose worsening poverty created the glaring social problem in the agrarian east that inspired Knapp and others to investigate the history of east-Elbian manorialism. For other smallholders who avoided eviction, the Revolution of 1848 brought them a belated right to freeholds against monetary payments funnelled by the state to the landlords. While many exercised this right, and so entered alongside the previously emancipated largeholders the new class of free village farmers in nineteenth-century east-Elbia, the weightier outcome of the conservatively biased reforms was to expand the Junker estates greatly and create for their unhindered exploitation on the now free labour market a large class of landless workers.

Such, in broad strokes, is the liberal analysis of the rise of the Junker estates in German east-Elbia, which with varying accents remains today the dominant interpretation of the subject in west German and Anglo-American scholarship. Its principal flaw is its relegation of the history of the villagers themselves, and their efforts to ward off seigneurial and state-orchestrated onslaughts, to the invisible wings of the historical stage. Correspondingly, it greatly overestimates the Junkers' capacity to exercise their untrammelled will, while misinterpreting their aims and achievements at a number of points. It continues nevertheless to frame scholarly debate, in part through the analytical vocabulary it introduced into use, even when, as regularly occurs in the Anglo-American literature, its terminology is misunderstood or mistranslated.

The Knapp school emphasized a basic dualism in German agrarian history and society. *West* (and south-west) of the Elbe river there had prevailed from the High Middle Ages a regime that Knapp and like-minded scholars termed *Grundherrschaft*. This concept translates into English as 'lordship over land', and was meant to convey the concept of seigneurial authority – princely, ecclesiastical, and especially noble – over subject villagers, establishing the basis for lordly claims to rents payable by the villagers. Since the exercise of such lordship did not entail the maintenance of large-scale seigneurial demesne farms, its economic benefits were confined to receipt of the villagers' rents in cash or kind. *Grundherrschaft* thus amounted to the feudal landlordism that predominated in western Europe following the liquidation of early medieval manorialism after the eleventh century.⁵

The agrarian constitution east of the Elbe Knapp termed *Gutsherrschaft*, or 'manorial lordship' (from *Gut*, here meaning a large estate). This form of

5. An excellent recent survey of medieval developments is offered by Werner Rösener, *Peasants in the Middle Ages* (Urbana, IL, 1992 [German original: 1985]).

seigneurialism prompted the landlords to claim from their subjects, not only in cash and kind, but above all labour services, which were essential to the functioning of the demesne farms from which the lordships drew their principal incomes. The sway of such lordship encompassed the villages from which it drew labour services, and its very existence presupposed the establishment of a large-scale domanial economy run from the manor house. Typically *Gutsherrschaft* rested upon the lordship's possession also of judicial lordship (*Gerichtsherrschaft*), whether legally acquired or usurped from the feudal ruler. In those cases where manorial lordships succeeded in fastening strict personal serfdom (*Leibeigenschaft*) upon their subject villagers, the manorial lords (*Gutsherren*), apart from being simultaneously judicial lords (*Gerichtsherren*), were also lords disposing of the persons of their enserfed villagers (*Leibeirren*). But in east-Elbia this last term was a rarely encountered import from the west. It was instead in scattered regions in west and south Germany that lordship over subjects' persons (*Leibherrschaft*) had survived as a separate form of authority, distinct from lordship over lands or judicial lordship.⁶

A third essential term in Knapp's vocabulary was *Gutswirtschaft*, not to be confused with *Gutsherrschaft*. It translates simply as 'manorial (or domanial) economy', and refers to agricultural production based on large demesne farms worked by compulsory labour services of subject villagers. *Gutswirtschaft* was the economic expression and objective of *Gutsherrschaft*. 'Manorial lordship' (*Gutsherrschaft*), rather than being the opposite of 'lordship over land' (*Grundherrschaft*), was instead a particular form of it. The former arose out of the latter, which – as seigneurialism – was an almost universal condition in medieval and early modern Europe, as the adage 'no land without a lord' (*nulle terre sans seigneur*) signalled.⁷

Manorial lordship was a much more powerful form of noble authority over subject villagers than a noble landlordism contenting itself with the levying of rents in cash or kind. Manorial lordship reduced the villages to appendages of the domanial economy. The manorial courts dominated the village communes, judging the individual villagers as economic subjects of the manor as well as in their private lives. Where personal serfdom prevailed, manorial lordship extended to full-scale control over the villagers' lands and farmsteads, and over their rights of marriage and inheritance as well.

In the Knapp school's eyes, the history of German east-Elbia from the late Middle Ages presented the unhappy spectacle of the rise of an ever more powerful manorial lordship. An originally benign *Grundherrschaft* yielded to a *Gutsherrschaft* in the service of a manorial economy or *Gutswirtschaft* to which the independence, dignity and prosperity of the village farmers and cottagers were subordinated and sacrificed. Nineteenth-century liberalism failed to right these

6. On these matters, see the classic works, developing the Knapp tradition, of Friedrich Lütge, *Geschichte der deutschen Agrarverfassung* (Stuttgart, 1963) and Günther Franz, *Geschichte des deutschen Bauernstandes* (Stuttgart, 1970), as well as Peter Blickle, *Deutsche Untertanen: Ein Widerpruch* (Munich, 1981).

7. Accordingly, as Kaak suggests, the alternative in economic terms to *Gutsherrschaft* would be *Zinsherrschaft*, or 'lordship based on money rents' (*Zins*), including also natural rents in grain or livestock. In the latter mode, the labour services central to 'manorial lordship' would figure only marginally or not at all. Kaak, *Gutsherrschaft*, pp. 429ff.

wrongs. Instead, the manorial economy survived in modern dress, with anti-democratic effects of the worst kind.

The villagers themselves, in this interpretation, figure primarily as victims. Many of them were evicted from their farms to make way for the enlarged seigneurial demesnes of the sixteenth century or, after the ravages of seventeenth-century war, never recovered their familial holdings, which the large estates engrossed or rented to new tenants on degraded legal terms. The landed villagers' unmarried children were forced into compulsory, ill-paid labour as servants on the manor or, if they lived as landless cottagers or lodgers in the villages, were subject to miserly wage statutes promulgated in the Junkers' interest. Often their house rents required unpaid manorial service, especially from women. Where, as in Brandenburg-Prussia, heavy state taxes converged with seigneurial rent, the few shreds of comfort the villagers had salvaged before the Thirty Years War vanished. The common-folk trudged through the final century and a half of the manorial system in bone-grinding poverty, ever more of their children unable even to aspire to a life of threadbare self-sufficiency as members of landholding households, but condemned instead to the ranks of the ill-housed landless. The benevolence of individual estate-owners or state-demesne managers could at best diminish the pain of such an existence. Nor could villagers easily exchange it for the opportunities and risks of urban life. Release from seigneurial subjection, even if legally possible, might be costly, while the lack of village artisan workshops and schooling left most rural youth no alternative but to work in agriculture.

Since its formulation, the liberal critique has gained strength by the addition, pioneered by Wilhelm Abel, of a dimension of quantitative economic history. The development of fluctuating market opportunities, slowly evolving embedded in a framework of fluctuating market opportunities, slowly evolving agrarian technology, and shifts in the interrelationships of land, labour and capital. Identification of the demographically driven long-range cycles in the western and central European pre-industrial economy established, in the concept of the 'late medieval crisis' of the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, the socio-economic matrix out of which the east-Elbian manorial system emerged. This work discovered that, at their origins, the expanded noble demesne farms arose less through enclosure of settled village farmland than through absorption of village land abandoned through late medieval depopulation. Likewise, economic analysis of the robust growth cycle of the 'long sixteenth century' (c.1480-1620) clarified the conditions under which the manorial system grew to thriving maturity before succumbing to the ravages of the 'crisis of the seventeenth century'.⁸

This work reinforced, rather than challenged, the Knapp school's narrative. The economic history literature has paid some attention to the village farmers in their capacity as market producers and manorial labourers, but it has not

8. See Wilhelm Abel, *Agrarstrukturen und Agrarverhältnisse: Eine Geschichte der Land- und Ernährungswirtschaft Mitteleuropas seit dem hohen Mittelalter*, 3rd edn (Hamburg, 1978), and idem, *Die Wägen des angehenden Mittelalters* (Stuttgart, 1976). Cf. Peter Kriete, *Spätfudalismus und Handwerkerkapital. Grundlinien der europäischen Wirtschaftsgeschichte vom 16. bis zum Ausgang des 18. Jahrhunderts* (Göttingen, 1980) [English translation 1983].

attempted to track their long-term rents or household standards of living. Such work perhaps appeared unpromising, given that the broad picture of the villagers' plight seemed already known, and that piecing together such patterns at the micro-level was arduous work from patchy sources.⁹

After 1949, an alternative to the liberal critique emerged in the massive Marxist-Leninist literature which scholars in the German Democratic Republic published during the forty years of its existence. Yet upon closer inspection it is clear that the effect of this work was primarily to reformulate the basic narrative of the Knapp school in the language of Marxism, and so to attempt to validate the Marxist analytical method as such, rather than to replace the dominant western interpretation. Friedrich Engels himself had, in the late nineteenth century, analysed the rise of the Junkers as the consequence in the sixteenth century of the successful imposition upon their village subjects of the 'second serfdom' - the first serfdom having been that of the early medieval western European manorial system that slowly withered away after the eleventh century. But in this, as in other respects, there was little the Marxist-Leninist history of east-Elbian manorialism could add to the story of seigneurial exploitation which the liberals had already told. Scholars in the GDR argued that the Junker economy needed to be understood as a component of the capitalist mode of production burgeoning within the 'late feudalism' of early modern Europe. They argued that absolutism was a political system reinforcing seigneurial exploitation of the villages with the power of a militarized state that, in most respects, was but an executive committee of the nobility. Accordingly, they took an acid view of the efforts of eighteenth-century enlightened absolutists and early nineteenth-century liberal reformers to 'emancipate' the subject villagers from the estate-owners' grasp. Yet, none of these perspectives was foreign to the Knapp school's analysis, especially in the more stringent, anti-Junker and anti-Hohenzollern forms it assumed after the First World War.

It is true that GDR scholars emphasized the class struggle between landlords and villagers as liberal historians rarely did. But, in the absence in early modern east-Elbian Germany of great 'peasant wars', such as that in south and west Germany of 1525, it remained only to speak of 'the lower forms of the class struggle', attaining at most the dimensions of local rent strikes and occasional attendant violence. Moreover, the fundamental importance to the constitution and maintenance of the feudal mode of production which Marx had assigned to 'extra-economic coercion', exerted by political elites against the subordinate classes and especially the tributary villagers, established a theoretical roadblock preventing GDR scholars from ascribing to such subaltern resistance any real power to better the lot of those engaging in it, or to bring about structural changes leading to the demise of the manorial system itself.

9. See Friedrich Wilhelm Henning, *Dienste und Abgaben der Bauern im 18. Jahrhundert* (Stuttgart, 1969), and the economic history literature cited in Hagen, 'Working for the Junker' and 'Capitalism and the countryside'. Cf. idem, 'Der bäuerliche Lebensstandard unter brandenburgischer Gunsterrschaft im 18. Jahrhundert. Die Dörfer der Herrschaft Stavenow in vergleichender Sicht', in Jan Peters (ed.), *Gutsbesitz als soziales Modell. Vergleichende Betrachtungen zur Funktionsweise frühneuzeitlicher Agrargesellschaften* (Munich, 1995), pp. 179-96.

THE PEASANTRIES OF EUROPE

One consequence of this perspective was that, despite its partisanship for the labouring classes, GDR scholarship neglected the study of incomes and consumption standards among the subject villagers, just as it rarely ventured into the realm of family structure and popular culture. In the end, it produced, not a new interpretation of early modern east-Elbian manorialism, but a Marxist-Leninist version of the older story. Buttressed by much valuable empirical research, it reinforced the liberal stress on top-down processes initiated by or on behalf of the landed nobility at the expense of the villages and towns.¹⁰

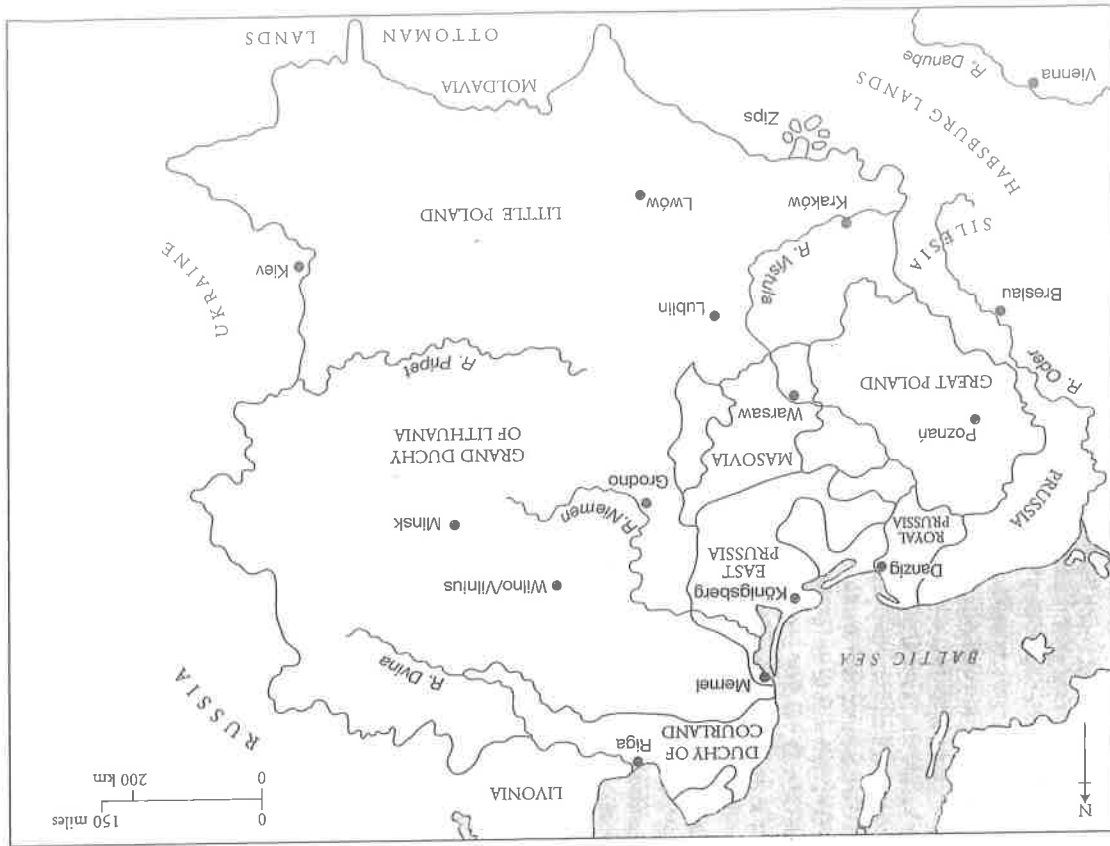
Modelling Manorialism in Early Modern Poland

In no central or eastern European land did noble landlordism and village subjection hold more untrammelled sway than in the Polish Commonwealth, nor in the historical literature is any other such system more notorious for its abuses and impoverishing effects upon the common people. Because its militarized and absolutist neighbours carved up the decadent Polish state among themselves in the three partitions of 1772, 1793 and 1795, spectacularly wiping a vast and venerable aristocratic monarchy off the map, judgement of the manorial system has long been tied to the part it played in the demise of a once robust and expansive country. During the partition era (1795–1918), the vital importance to Polish nationalism of the nobility and noble-born intelligentsia lent the issue of the gentry-dominated pre-partition agrarian system a political significance more urgent still than the debates in Germany over the Junkers' past. And, since the mobilization of the villagers was crucial to the nationalist movement, the memory of their suffering under the old regime was an extremely delicate matter.

In the inter-war years, the social and economic historian Jan Rutkowski (1886–1949) developed an analysis of early modern Polish manorialism, contrasted with other central and eastern European agrarian systems, that acquired in Polish scholarship a paradigmatic status similar to the Knapp school's in Germany.¹¹ The German-Polish comparison was never far from Rutkowski's thoughts, particularly since German influences played a decisive part at several

10. Works of synthesis characteristic of GDR scholarship are Joachim Herrmann *et al.*, *Deutsche Gesellschaft in 10 Kapiteln* (Berlin, 1988), esp. ch. 4, and Günter Vogler and Klaus Vetter, *Preußen. Von den Anfängen bis zur Reichsgründung* (Berlin, 1979). On GDR historiography on east-Elbian agrarian society and economy, see Kaak, *Güterwirtschaft*, chs 5–6. The GDR literature on east-Elbian peasant resistance is of considerable empirical value. For references to it, as well as for a reconceptualization of the problem, see Jan Peters, 'Eigensinn und Widerstand im Alltag. Abwehrverhalten ostelbischer Bauern unter 'Fettdiktator', *Jahrbuch für Wirtschafts-geschichte* [hereafter: *JWg.*] (1991/2), pp. 85–103.

11. See Rutkowski's book-length essay of 1921, 'Poddaństwo włościan w XVIII wieku w Polsce i niektórych krajach Europy', in idem, *Wzrost europejskiej późnego feudalizmu (XVI–XVIII w.)* (Warsaw, 1986), pp. 25–215. This is a collection, edited by Jerzy Topolski, of some of Rutkowski's principal articles. The essay here cited is an exceptionally knowledgeable comparative study of peasant subjection in eighteenth-century Poland, Germany and France. On Rutkowski's career and accomplishments, see Topolski's introduction, pp. 5–24, and his book, *O nowym modelu historii. Jan Rutkowski (1886–1949)* (Warsaw, 1986). See also Rutkowski's general economic history of Poland, *Historia gospodarcza Polski*, vol. 1: *Czasy przedrozbiorowe*, 3rd edn (Poznań, 1947), a valuable work available in French translation as *Histoire économique de la Pologne avant les partitions* (Paris, 1927). Important too is his substantial essay, 'Le régime agricole en Pologne au XVIIIe siècle', *Revue d'Histoire Économique et Sociale*, 14–15 (1926–27), pp. 473–505, 66–103.



Map 6.2 The Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth in 1772

points in Polish agrarian development. In the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, the reception of the German law (*ius Theutonius*) fundamentally restructured the Polish countryside. In part this refers to the penetration into the Polish lands of the German colonization movement, in which entirely new settlements, of Germans but also of Poles, were founded on the same good terms for village farmers as obtained further west in German east-Elbia. But in part it refers to the replacement by the Polish Crown, Church and nobility of pre-existing Polish Slavic legal and economic arrangements in the already settled countryside (and towns) with the basic institutions of medieval western Europe in their German forms: the village of hereditary farmers (*Erbpächter*), mainly fullholders (*Höfensbauern*) but including also landed cottagers (*Kosäten, Gärtner*); the village commune, based on the three-field system of arable cultivation, governed by a mayor (*Schulze*), mayoral court, and aldermen (*Schöffen*); the seigneurial lordship (*Grundherrschaft*), possessing demesne land for self-provisioning but confining its exactions upon the villagers primarily to money rents and dues in kind; and, in the towns, the self-governing and self-adjudicating council, representing the semi-autonomous merchant and artisan guilds.

Controversy, fuelled by scarcity of evidence, still envelops the question of the character of the pre-existing agrarian constitution which German-law settlement and resettlement eclipsed. It seems that prior village farm tenures had been precarious, whether because of Polish custom or because the reception in eleventh- and twelfth-century Poland of western European seigneurial immunities facilitated the enserfment of the villagers. In any case, the German-law tenures – entailing property ownership, freedom of movement and full access to the courts – were far superior, but did not everywhere prevail over the villagers' earlier disabilities, especially not in central and eastern Poland.¹²

Nevertheless, the post-German law, late medieval era in Poland was one of robust population growth and advancing prosperity for the nobility, burghers and villagers alike. This was still more the case since Poland, presumably because of its still relatively sparse and weakly urbanized population, escaped the torments of the bubonic plague which struck western Europe and the German lands in the mid-fourteenth century, with severe recurrences into the fifteenth century. Poland, by contrast, though sporadically singled by war, benefited in the fifteenth century from great victories over the Teutonic Knights, securing it the lands at the Vistula mouth with Danzig (Gdańsk) and other thriving towns. At the same time, Polish expansion south-eastwards into the Ukraine, begun a century earlier, opened new frontiers for noble landlordism and villagers who abandoned marginal lands or objectionable conditions further west.

Against this background, Rutkowski's explanation of the boom in the sixteenth century of expanded demesne farming worked by compulsory labour

12. On medieval Poland and the reception of German law, see Benedykt Zientara, Antoni Mączak *et al.*, *Dręgie gospodarcze Polaków do roku 1539* (Warsaw, 1988), chs 2–3, and Zientara's *Młodość terrac: the thirteenth-century breakthrough in Polish history*, in J. F. Federowicz (ed.), *A Republic of Nobles. Studies in Polish History to 1864* (Cambridge, 1982), pp. 28–48. Cf. Piotr Gorscki, *Wzrost i Akrupitacja: rural economy, lordship, and the origins of serfdom in medieval Poland*, *Slavic Review*, 42 (1983), pp. 14–35, and Richard C. Hoffmann, *Land, Liberty, and Lordship in a Late Medieval Countryside. Agrarian Structure and Change in the Duchy of Wrocław* (Philadelphia, 1989), parts 2–3.

retains its persuasiveness. The tendency of the older German literature, with its focus on 'manorial lordship' (*Gutsherrschaft*), was to emphasize the coercive political powers of the east-Elbian nobility in the rise of early modern manorialism, assigning to economic incentives a secondary – if not negligible – role. To Rutkowski, as to other Polish scholars after him, the crucial development was the *convergence* of increasingly strong seigneurial authority over the villages with access to new and highly profitable grain markets in western Europe (and, secondarily, to reinvigorated home markets). As Rutkowski showed, pointing to Sicily and the German North Sea coast, export opportunities in the absence of the villagers' legal subjection to seigneurial authority did not produce a system of manorialism such as emerged in east-Elbia. But, as a look at Russia revealed, neither did subjection of the villages produce this result in the absence of strong market incentives. The nobility needed to perceive their advantage in organizing large-scale demesne production to gain profitable access to foreign markets (as the Polish landlords did *via* Danzig), and to possess the authority to extract new and greatly increased labour services from their village subjects.¹³

The Polish nobility were even more successful than their counterparts in German east-Elbia in fastening their control, as the mightiest of the Estates of the realm, upon the princely power. By 1572 the kings of Poland had been reduced to elective status, while the relatively very numerous class of the nobility (*szlachta*) governed the land through a gentry parliament (*sejm*) whose class-bound republicanism eventually deadlocked the central government. Power devolved to the seigneurial bailiwick to a far greater extent even than in the aristocratic German quasi-republics of Schleswig-Holstein, Mecklenburg or Pomerania. Such a thorough-going 'manorial lordship' arose in Poland that Rutkowski and others saw small point in debating, as scholars interested in German agrarian dualism did, its relation to other types of lordship. Instead, the prime concept in the Polish literature became the 'system of manorialism with compulsory labour' (*system folwarczno-pańszczytny*), where *folwark* [from the German *Vorwerk*] denotes a demesne farm and *pańszczyzna* the unpaid manorial service of the subject villagers). Anchoring the system was peasant subjection, or *poddaństwo*, a term linguistically equivalent to the German *Untertänigkeit*, inasmuch as both derive from 'subject' (*poddany, Untertan* [Latin *subditus*]).

While in east-Elbian Germany gradations of subjection remained important, in Poland the term *poddaństwo* came by the eighteenth century at the latest to convey a meaning equivalent to English 'serfdom'; to its adjectival form the words 'free' (*wolny*) or 'loose' (*luźny*) were routinely opposed. Rutkowski observed that seigneurial authority over the villages grew so strong that monarch-wide legislation concerning landlord-village relations and the villagers' subjection ceased early in the sixteenth century to define local conditions, if it ever had before. Polish manorialism developed as a highly decentralized manifestation of customary law, governed by seigneurial courts beyond which after 1518 the

13. See, apart from Rutkowski's works cited above, his 'Geneza usroju folwarczno-pańszczytnego w Europie środkowej od końca sredniowiecza', in idem, *Wzrost europejskiej*, pp. 216–24.

subjects of the nobility could not appeal to royal adjudication and which until 1768 exercised in law, if rarely in practice, powers of capital punishment.¹⁴

By the eighteenth century, the Polish villagers' subjection was a hereditary personal attribute that extended beyond occupants of village farms to all rural groups, from unhusband workers to millers and estate officials (though legally free persons were found in all ranks). Extension of subjection to landless persons opened the way to sale of villagers apart from the landholdings they occupied, reducing them to near-slavery. This was a boundary sometimes crossed, although the mass of village subjects never experienced removal through sale to new lordships. For them, manorial lordship meant land tenure by indeterminate leasehold (*dzierżawa bezterminowa*), hereditary by custom but not by law and exposing them to the risk — doubtless sometimes realized — of being transferred at the manor's will from their paternal holding to a less desirable one. The manor hired the landless among them as workers or servants at low statutory wages. None could marry or otherwise leave the lordship without seigneurial permission, seemingly often denied. Unless they could claim free status, all were liable to legally unlimited demands for unpaid labour service, though in practice this varied with custom and with the capacity of households to maintain a labour surplus in excess of that needed for their own survival and reproduction.

Such was Polish serfdom, properly so called because it inherited in the manor's disposition over the persons of its subjects (*Leibeigenschaft*), as opposed to the liabilities entailed by occupancy of subject farms in those areas of east-Elbian Germany where milder forms of subjection prevailed. If we set aside for later discussion the ambiguities of the German situation, the question arises why the legal and tenorial rights of the Polish villagers should have deteriorated more drastically than those of their east-Elbian German counterparts. In both cases the starting point for the rise of early modern manorialism and its attendant village subjection was the situation defined by high medieval German-law settlement. This had conferred strong rights, not to say freedom itself, upon the rural common people.

To this question Rutkowski had no clear answer. Its resolution called for a more exact understanding of the step-by-step rise of the large estates than surviving records seemed to allow. But Rutkowski, like many other Polish scholars,

14. In the late eighteenth century, two-thirds of the subject villagers lived under the legal jurisdiction of the nobility, while the rest lived in roughly equal measure under the Church and the Crown. Rutkowski, 'Poddanie włościan', p. 60. In 1578 the *aged referendaryski* was established as a royal court of appeals from decisions of the manor-courts on the Crown estates, but governmental leasing of these estates to noble tenant-farmers, and the alienation into the hands of the magnate nobility of provincial governorships and the Crown lands attached to them, greatly weakened the royal government's ability to protect its village subjects. *Ibid.*, p. 160. See also Andrzej Wyczański, *Wzrost polskiego adwocata* (Warsaw, 1969), p. 173. On the villagers' legal status in general, see also Zientara and Męczak, *Dzięcię gospodarze*, pp. 136ff., 154ff.; Andrzej Wyczański, *Poliska Rzeczpospolita Wschodnieka*, 2nd edn (Warsaw, 1991), pp. 39ff.; Edward Trzyna, 'Wtorne Poddanie', in Stefan Inglot, *Historia chłopów polskich*, vol. I: *Do upadku Rzeczypospolitej szlacheckiej* (n. p., 1970), pp. 309ff. The last important monarchy-wide legislation concerning the terms of peasant subjection in Poland to which the literature customarily refers were the decrees of the diets of Bydgoszcz and Toruń in 1520–21, fixing as the minimum level of the landed villagers' weekly manorial service, in the absence of higher local norms, of one day weekly. Wyczański, *Wzrost*, p. 147.

was more interested in the manorial system's connection to the eighteenth-century partitions. Here the bloodlettings Poland repeatedly suffered between the mid-seventeenth century and 1772 must be remembered. This succession of disasters registered the defeat of Renaissance Poland's answer, in the form of the decentralized, cavalry-armed, gentry-dominated parliamentary monarchy, to the challenge of early modern state-building. It likewise witnessed the impoverishment, alongside the repeatedly plundered common people in town and village alike, of the lesser nobility, while the magnate aristocracy, long a powerful presence in the country, rose during the seventeenth century to primacy.

In putting their ravaged estates back into operation, the Polish nobility frequently replaced vanished fullholding peasants with halfholders or cottagers, sparing themselves the cost of rebuilding and equipping the larger farms with livestock and other working capital. Often they took advantage of the desertion of their villages to seize the best of their vanished subjects' farmland for themselves. The result, emphasized by Rutkowski, was an eighteenth-century village farmer class with smaller holdings on poorer soils than before 1648, but with labour rents driven up by the impossibility of fully repopulating the Polish villages before the late eighteenth century. The Polish towns, deprived of the custom of once robust villages, fell into deep decadence. Thus was the tax-base of the state perforated with weakness.

How, in such extremity, could the reform-minded nobility rejuvenate the Commonwealth and ward off the partitions? Rutkowski, like others unwilling to succumb to historical inevitabilism, thought that the impediment to reform lay in the deficient will of the self-satisfied conservative aristocracy, corrupted by foreign blandishments and bribes. In itself, the existence of the manorial system could not explain Poland's misfortunes, for clearly variations of the same system underlay the absolutist musculature of the country's militarized and bureaucratized tormentors.¹⁵

After 1949, Polish Marxist historiography received Rutkowski's legacy respectfully. His concept of Polish manorialism, and of the declining welfare of the subject villagers under its sway, found confirmation and deepening in the massive scholarship devoted after the war to pre-partition Poland. It was consistent with Polish tradition (and with Lenin's emphasis on intra-class polarization) to treat the rise of the magnate aristocracy, at the gentry's and poor nobility's expense, as the crucial social and political dynamic of the old Commonwealth. But the impoverishment of the villagers, and the long decline after the 1640s of grain exports to the west, taken together with the dissolution of the state amid foreign conquest, challengingly posed the question of the 'transition from feudalism to capitalism' in its Polish form.¹⁶

15. Rutkowski, 'Poddanie włościan', pp. 191ff.; *idem*, 'Gospodarstwo podłoże rozbiorów Polski', in *Wzrost europejskiej*, pp. 375–86.

16. In the synthetic literature on early modern Polish rural society, the closest approximation to the Marxist-Leninist paradigm is offered in the above-cited compendious works, not without their merits, edited by Inglot, *Historia chłopów polskich*, and (for a regional example) by Rusański, *Dzięcię wsi wielkopolskiej*. For a recent critique of interpretations stressing the triumph of the magnate class, see Frost's above-cited 'Nobility of Poland-Lithuania'.

Undoubtedly the most interesting, though not the most orthodox response came from the economic historian Witold Kula, whose *Economic Theory of the Feudal System: Towards a Model of the Polish Economy 1500–1800* (1962) presented an analysis of Polish manorialism driven by export opportunities offering Polish large landowners uniquely favourable terms of trade across a period of 300 years. The *szlachta* landlords cashed in on such opportunities through piecemeal incorporation of the villagers' land into their demesnes and a corresponding rising exploitation of unpaid village labour. The de-urbanizing effects of this process meant that, when after 1772 the noble exporters gradually lost forever their western markets, there was no home base from which capitalist development through agricultural modernization and industrialization could proceed. In nineteenth-century Poland, once the partition governments had imposed 'peasant emancipation', capitalist estate agriculture developed thanks principally to the abundant cheap labour of the liberated landless or smallholding villagers, while industrialization depended largely on infusions of non-Polish capital. This outcome hardly looked like the robust triumph of the bourgeoisie.¹⁷

Kula's emphasis on the manorial system's dependence on export markets provoked challenges. It was objected that in the sixteenth century domestic demand was equally important, while after 1750 population recovery helped revitalize home markets and so opened the road to domestic growth, as well as to the liquidation of village subjection, which an abundant labour supply rendered superfluous. Many villagers in the sixteenth century, and again in the eighteenth, possessed a greater degree of personal freedom and material well-being than the Rutkowski-Kula script allowed. Still, no one rejected the fundamental story of the villagers' long-term degradation, especially since civil war and foreign aggression unquestionably rained great destruction on the land after 1648.¹⁸

THE VIEW FROM THE VILLAGE

German and Polish historiography on early modern manorialism have much in common. Both concentrate on the landed nobility. Princely power figures as a

17. Witold Kula, *An Economic Theory of the Feudal System: Towards a Model of the Polish Economy 1500–1800* (London, 1976 [Polish original: 1962]). On Kula and his legacy, see Jacek Kochanowicz, 'Czy tylko historia gospodarcza? Jubileusz Witolda Kuli', *Kronika Wierzyty*, 1 (1985), pp. 129–46, and idem, 'La Théorie Économique ... Après Vingt Ans', *Acta Poloniae Historica*, 56 (1987), pp. 197–211. Kochanowicz develops the interpretive tradition founded by Kula in his above-cited 'Polish economy' as well as in 'L'Exploitation paysanne en Pologne à la charnière des XVIIIe et XIXe siècles. Théorie, Histoire, Historiographie', *Acta Poloniae Historica*, 57 (1988), pp. 203–37, and in *Spor o teorię gospodarki chłopskiej. Gospodarstwo chłopstwa w teori ekonomii i w historii gospodarczej* (Warsaw, 1992), ch. IV ('Gospodarstwo chłopstwa w epoce przedprzemysłowej').

18. For modifications of Kula's framework, see the above-cited works by Kochanowicz; for challenges to it, see the above-cited works by Andrzej Wyczański, as well as Jerzy Topolski, 'The manorial-estate economy in central and eastern Europe in the 16th and 17th centuries', *Agricultural History*, 48 (1974), pp. 341–52; idem, 'Sixteenth-century Poland and the turning point in European economic development', in Federowicz, *A Republic of Nobles*, pp. 70–90, and Topolski's above-cited 'Continuity and discontinuity'.

more or less ineffectual brake on the estate-owners' aggressive pursuit of their private self-interest, while the village farmers and labourers play, mostly passively, the injured parties. Clerics and other members of the learned class were complicitous in the villagers' misfortunes. Merchants and artisans viewed them in impotence or indifference. No doubt, the structural development of the early modern east-Elbian nobility, and their relation as a class to state power, are important themes. But the rural commoners' history is more than the negative reflection of the Junker and *szlachta* landlords' ascent.

To gain a village-level perspective, the material well-being of the nobility's subjects should not be inferred from the disabilities of their legal status. Instead, their condition must be understood, in the case of landholding farmers, in terms of the rents burdening their holdings and, in the case of labourers, in terms of their *real wages*. This requires the long-term tracking of rents and wages, a task the German and Polish literature alike has left incomplete at best, as well as the empirical reconstruction of the productive powers and consumption patterns of the village household.

The social world of the villagers possessed autonomy, despite the efforts of landlords, clergy and state to mould and regiment it. The country people's aspirations and accomplishments were kinship-bound, so that the analysis of household and family life looms large. The tools of historical demography are useful, especially to balance health and longevity against disease and mortality. To piece together from sources transcending demographic data — that is, from probate, judicial and seigneurial records — multi-generational histories of individual households offer more nuanced insights than population analysis alone can provide, but this is difficult to accomplish for periods before the later seventeenth century. Still, much about social and communal life emerges from the records concerning both individual fates and collective actions which are abundantly housed in judicial archives. These sources allow more study of the interplay between communal and individual identity than has yet occurred. The promise of such work has been realized in recent social and cultural ethnographies of the east-Elbian countryside, as well as in studies of gender issues. The investigation of village resistance to higher authority, whether confined within judicialized boundaries or expressed in collective or individual insubordination and violence, has yielded valuable results, but can also be carried farther.¹⁹

The pages below do not suffice to discuss all such work. Instead, they examine early modern manorialism from the villagers' perspective, especially that of the families of large and small farmers among them, who until the late

19. See the works, inspired variously by social and cultural anthropology and gender analysis, of Karl S. Kramer and Ulrich Wilkens, *Völkchen in einem holsteinischen Gutbezirk* (Neumünster, 1979); Jan Peters, Hartmut Harnisch and Lieslott Enders (eds), *Märkische Bauerngeschichte des 18. und 19. Jahrhunderts. Selbstzeugnisse von Milchviehhauern aus Neubrand* (Weimar, 1989); Silke Götsch, 'Alle für einen Mann ... Leibwage und Widerständigkeit in Schleswig-Holstein im 18. Jahrhundert' (Neumünster, 1991); Ulrike Gleixner, 'Der Mensch und 'der Kerl'. Die Konstruktion von Geschlecht in Urzuchtsverfahren der Frühen Neuzeit (1700–1760)' (Frankfurt am Main, 1994); and the collection of articles edited by Peters, *Gutsberrschaj als soziales Modell*. See also the social and cultural analysis offered in Lieslott Enders, *Die Uckermark. Geschichte einer kernmärkischen Landschaft vom 12. bis zum 18. Jahrhundert* (Weimar, 1992).

eighteenth century composed the great majority of rural society. The aim is to grasp the strengths and weaknesses of the villagers' position in the successive stages of the manorial system both in east-Elbian Germany and Poland. It is premature to offer macro-level models, even within these spheres of central and eastern European agrarian society. The argument instead proceeds by discussion of localities that are strongly bathed in empirical light. Such settings are not necessarily exemplary, though in some respects they may be. But any more all-encompassing interpretations will need to account for the conditions they reveal, as well as for other more or less widespread characteristics which they do not exhibit. Rural history has always revelled in local diversity and particularity, but uniqueness is easily exaggerated. Human circumstances vary by degrees, and are always open to comparison.

The Villagers in the Late Middle Ages

Recent research upholds the long-established view that medieval villagers in east-Elbian Europe who were settled – or whose pre-existing settlements were reorganized – under the provisions of the German law enjoyed, though within a system of seigneurialism, strong personal and tenurial rights. The fullholders possessed, according to soil fertility, one or two hides (*Hufen* or *lany*) of arable land – the hide usually at seventeen hectares (or 42.5 acres) – along with shares of the village meadows and woods. Rents, at the moment of settlement, were fixed, while labour services on the modest and uncommercialized home farms of the local lordship were minimal – a few days annually of ploughing, some work in the seigneurial harvests, some road and other construction work, some haulage to nearby towns.²⁰

This is the backdrop the English-language literature customarily hangs out to the Junkers' and Polish *szlachta's* imposition in the late fifteenth and early sixteenth century of the regime of manorialism with its heavy labour rents. But the picture is incomplete in two ways. In the high medieval period following the German-law settlement movement, population growth, monetary depreciation, and mounting pressures on princely and seigneurial incomes pushed rents upward. Then, in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, eastern Germany suffered demographic catastrophe followed by considerable political violence. The resulting depopulation and falling agricultural commodity prices dragged village rents down. Although Poland was spared a western-style crisis, regional warfare and frontier expansion to the south-east seem to have worked also toward a late medieval reduction of the charges in rent and taxes weighing

20. In Polish the hide was also known as *ślad* or *włoka*. On the positive quality of German-law settlement see Enders, *Uckermark*, pp. 60ff.; Hoffmann, *Land, Libertas, and Lordship*; Benedykt Zientara, 'Rozkвіт feudalizmu (XIII–XV w.)', in Zientara and Mączak, *Dzieje gospodarcze*, pp. 79–134; and Zientara, 'Melioratio terra'. For a dissenting view, see Hartmut Harnisch, 'Die Landgemeinde im ostelbischen Gebiet (mit Schwerpunkt Brandenburg)', in Peter Blicke (ed.), *Landgemeinde und Stadlgemeinde in Mitteleuropa. Ein struktureller Vergleich* (Munich, 1991), pp. 309–32. For a persuasive rebuttal of Harnisch's argument, see Lieselott Enders, 'Die Landgemeinde in Brandenburg. Grundzüge ihrer Funktion und Wirkungsweise vom 13. bis zum 18. Jahrhundert', *Blätter für deutsche Landeskunde*, 129 (1993), pp. 195–256.

upon the village farm. In other words, before early modern manorialism bestrode the stage, rural society had passed through a centuries-long development distancing it greatly from the pristine dawn of the east-Elbian German-law movement.

In Brandenburg, for example, post-colonization levies in the early thirteenth century on the typical fullholding of two hides of land amounted to seigneurial rent in cash equivalent to the market value of a few bushels of rye or barley, together with the tithes, soon to be translated from an ecclesiastical to a princely income, and a sporadic tax (the *Bedel*). But in 1279–82, the margrave gained his vassals' assent to a permanent *Bedel*, calculated as a 10 per cent surcharge on a rent and tithes burden by then reckoned at twenty-four bushels per hide, which amounted to a very sizeable share of a village farm's grain surplus. Yet, in the following decades, in the midst of monetary devaluation and intermittent civil war, the exactions from the village farm rose higher still, while the beleaguered margraves pawned or otherwise surrendered to the noble landlords the incomes from the tithes and the princely tax.

In the mid-fourteenth century bubonic plague struck a society already suffering from relative overpopulation and low agricultural productivity. The Brandenburg land census of 1375 reveals that the burden of rents and taxes had recently begun to reverse its ascent, as village farmers left their holdings uncultivated and abandoned (*wüst*) because of death, or movement to more fertile holdings now available, or flight to avoid a virulent 'feudal gangsterism' that raged long into the fifteenth century. A study of farm rents in forty-one Brandenburg villages that remained under cultivation at the time of the successive censuses of 1375, 1450 and 1480 shows that the sum of all levies, measured in bushels of rye, fell absolutely from 1375 to 1450 by 29 per cent. Even allowing for the imposition in 1450 of a new tax on village holdings, rents in 1480 stood 17 per cent lower than a century before. It strengthened the advantage that village farmers derived from this trend that seigneurial rents had fallen faster than grain prices.²¹

A similar pattern emerges from a recent study of central Silesia, a land whose early medieval Polish character was in the late Middle Ages slowly yielding to Germanization under the impact of immigration and socio-cultural influences from the west following the introduction of the *ius Theutonius*.²² Further east, in the heartlands of the Polish Commonwealth, the population escaped the waves of plague that swept toward but did not engulf Silesia, just as it also avoided the civil war ravaging north-eastern Germany and Silesia as well. In the Polish heartlands population growth from the mid-fourteenth century to the late sixteenth century was extremely robust, averaging 3.8 per cent yearly over this long period.²³ Not surprisingly, a recent analysis of village rents and taxes in the central region of Mazovia identifies late medieval developments in Poland differing considerably from the Silesian and Brandenburg pattern. In general, German-law villages in Poland housed farms smaller than those in east-Elbian Germany: among fullholders, one hide rather than two hides of land. This

21. Hagen, 'How mighty the Junkers?', pp. 85–93.

22. Hoffmann, *Land, Libertas, and Lordship*, pp. 127, 213, 297, 323ff.

23. Zientara and Mączak, *Dzieje gospodarcze*, pp. 138–9.

difference may derive in part, as Polish historians' estimates of village farm surpluses suggest, from higher soil fertility in Poland than in north Germany.²⁴

But it also seems plausible to suppose that Poland's escape from the Black Death and its subsequent rapid population increase, coupled with widespread adoption of the German law in a form permitting (though not requiring) partible inheritance, had the effect of reducing the average size of village farms in comparison with east-Elbian German conditions, where ecological considerations buttressed impartible inheritance practices. In Mazovia, at the end of the fifteenth century, the very numerous halfholdings – or farms with but a half-hide (about twenty acres) of arable – probably overshadowed larger holdings. Abandoned farms were not uncommon, but they had mostly been absorbed by the demesne farms of the crown, Church and multitudinous nobility. In most villages, seigneurial rents were payable in bushels of grain. The average levy per hide in 132 villages was nearly ten bushels, though payable in oats, commonly reckoned at half the value of bread-grains. Money rents (*zrywy*) per hide averaged thirty-six Prague *grošy*, the common coin of the day. This payment had risen, to offset devaluation, from twelve *grošy* in the mid-fourteenth century. Accompanying these charges were a tax of nine *grošy* per hide and the tithe on crops, collected *in natura*.

Mazovian villagers had been, since 1421, subject to seigneurial claims to one day of weekly manorial service, and in 1500 perhaps one-third of them were performing this work, or hiring farm servants in their stead. The example of numerous villages which had monetized their tithe and labour service obligations shows that, on average, commutation of labour services cost the farmer thirty-three *grošy* per hide, or about the same sum the average cultivator paid in cash in seigneurial rent.²⁵ Apart from pointing to the economic significance at this early date of weekly labour service, these data suggest altogether that late medieval Polish rents were, in contrast to east-Elbian Germany, comparatively high. This was, presumably, largely because no population collapse on the western European model had occurred in Poland, where the fifteenth century was one of eastward colonization, urban development and, after the Commonwealth in 1466 had secured its conquest of Royal Prussia with Danzig from the Teutonic Knights, expanding timber and grain exports via the Baltic to western Europe.²⁶

High farm rents in cash and kind could signal good farm incomes, just as low rents could signify poverty. If the villagers' material well-being is to be judged, evidence on the movement of rent must be paired with information on household property-holding and consumption patterns. In the sixteenth

24. Hubert Wajs, *Podmiotowość feudalna chłopów na Mazowszu od XIV do początku XVI wieku (w dobrach manorskich i krolowatych)* (Warsaw, 1986), pp. 46ff.; on village farm yields, see Leonid Żytkowicz, 'Ochrona gospodarki folwarczno-pańszczyźnianej (XVI–XVIII w.)', in Ingot, *Historia chłopów polskich*, pp. 257–83.

25. Mazovian data from Wajs, *Podmiotowość feudalna*, pp. 46ff., 75ff., and 153ff. Seigneurial demands on village labour in Mazovia, the stronghold of a numerous smallholding nobility, were likely to have been heavier than elsewhere in Poland.

26. Zielenka and Maczak, *Dejiny gospodarstwa*, pp. 135ff.; Marian Malowist, 'Constitutional trends and social developments in central Europe, the Baltic countries, and the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth', in Jarosław Pelenski (ed.), *State and Society in Europe from the Fifteenth to the Eighteenth Century* (Warsaw, 1981), pp. 71ff.

century, the proliferation of seigneurial courts administered by officials trained in the Roman law produced written records, often gathered together in protocol books, of household inventories and inheritance settlements. Some of these, from the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries, have survived, but have not yet been employed to draw the fine-grained picture of household kinship and property relations which the denser documentation of the late seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, including parish registers, allows. For earlier periods, the historian confronts much patchier princely and seigneurial records.

From east-Elbian Germany the records of the prosperous nunnery of Diesdorf, in the Brandenburg Altmark on the west bank of the Elbe, throw some light on the servants employed at the convent's home farms and on the farmers inhabiting its thirty-three subject villages in the middle and late fifteenth century. Most of the villagers cultivated fullholdings of two hides. Their tenures were hereditary leaseholds (*Erbpacht*), allowing them to buy and sell whole farms among themselves. At the moment of sale, a symbolic bough would be exchanged from seller to buyer, who paid for the two barrels of beer drunk by the transacting parties and their neighbours. The convent took its share as a usually modest entry-fine levied on the buyer. The seller might continue to live on the farmstead in separate retirement quarters (*das Altheil*), as was customary when generational transfers occurred. The convent did not require its farmers to secure substitutes before they quit their holdings, but in the absence of buyers it would itself acquire the farms for future resale. Keen on fully occupied villages, the convent recognized the claims of heirs to farms as late as ten – or even thirty – years after their parents' death.²⁷

The farmers in this cloth-producing region, like the convent, kept good numbers of sheep. Wearing swords and spurs, they rode their saddled horses (unless, as easily happened, these were plundered by local knightly highwaymen). In the periodic court-sessions at the convent, the village mayors sat as jurors, and only if they could not agree on the customary law did the convent administrator (*Probst*) or his bailiff (*Vogt*) take command.

The farmers' grain rents, their principal burden, had by the late fifteenth century fallen significantly since the census of 1375. Money rents, remnants of privatized taxation, were low, although current taxes in the form of single levies were sporadically heavy. Manorial labour service, apart from haulage, amounted to a few days annually of ploughing and harvest work. Occasionally feudal violence engulfed the region. In 1467 the convent noted of one village's rent obligations that 'they give nothing this year, because the Duke of Saxony took everything they had'. Still, Diesdorf's historian thought the farmers were 'favourably situated'.²⁸ Among the convent's steadily employed housed servants at its two demesne farms, there were foremen (*Hofmeister*) and mistresses of the female workers (*Meyerschen*) who also supervised the dairy work. There were

27. Gottfried Wentz, *Das Wirtschaftsleben der altmärkischen Klöster Diesdorf im angehenden Mittelalter* (Berlin, 1922), passim. On the late medieval Altmark, see also Evamaría Engel, 'Lehnbürger, Bauern und Feudalherren in der Altmark um 1375', in eadem and Benedykt Zientara, *Feudalstruktur, Lehnbürgertum und Fernhandel im spätmittelalterlichen Brandenburg* (Weimar, 1967), pp. 37–191.

28. Wentz, *Wirtschaftsleben*, pp. 55, 102.

numerous herders, wagon drivers, stablemen, and ploughmen with teams of horses and oxen. On occasion, the mounted servants would be supplied by the convent with swords and spurs for their boots. A numerous group of rural artisans and occasional wage-workers lived as landed cottagers in the villages near the demesne farms.

In the sixteenth century Diesdorf was secularized and converted to large-scale demesne farming based on its subject farmers' heavy new unpaid weekly labour services. But, like other east-Elbian German lordships, entry into the age of early modern manorialism did not change it unrecognizably. In that transition very many late medieval arrangements remained the same or changed only slowly: the subject villagers' farms, though now burdened by new labour rents; the manorial workforce; the administrative structure of the lordship itself.

The Villagers and the Rise of Commercialized Manorialism in the Sixteenth Century

Controversy and speculation are rife on how precisely the new manorialism arose, and how the weekly labour services were imposed upon the villagers. It was long held that the process cannot be satisfactorily reconstructed. So far as Brandenburg is concerned, such pessimism is unjustifiable. The seigneurial power to extract weekly labour services from subject villagers existed long before market opportunities, in the late fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries, convinced the noble landlords, and administrators of princely and ecclesiastical lordships, that consolidation of demesne land into large farms worked by unpaid village labour was a feasible strategy for reversing the late medieval decline of feudal incomes. Everywhere in sixteenth-century Europe the nobility turned to entrepreneurialism, especially in commercialized agriculture.²⁹

In east-Elbia, where the most profitable form of large-scale farming was cereal-crop cultivation, the propertied nobility were rich in land but poor in

29. In the German literature, no consensus on the emergence of early modern manorialism has formed. Kaak's *Güternverhältnisse* surveys established interpretive positions. For a micro-level reconstruction of the process in the electorate of Brandenburg, see Hagen, 'How mighty the Junkers?'. Cf. Peter-Michael Hahn, *Struktur und Funktion des brandenburgischen Adels im 16. Jahrhundert* (Berlin, 1979). See also Marian Makowski, 'Über die Frage der Handelspolitik des Adels in den Ostseeländern im 15. und 16. Jahrhundert', *Historische Geographische Zeitschrift*, 75 (1957), pp. 29–47; Hartmut Harnisch, 'Grundherrschaft oder Gutsbesitzerschaft. Zu den wirtschaftlichen Grundlagen des niederen Adels in Norddeutschland zwischen spätmittelalterlicher Agrarkrise und Dreißigjährigem Krieg', in Rudolf Endres (ed.), *Adel in der Frühen Neuzeit. Ein regionaler Vergleich* (Cologne, 1991), pp. 73–98. On East Prussia, see Gustav Aubin, *Zur Geschichte des gutsherrlich-bäuerlichen Verhältnisses in Ostpreußen von der Gründung des Ostpreussentums bis zur Steinischen Reform* (Leipzig, 1910); Heide Wunder, 'Zur Mentalität aufständischer Bauern. Möglichkeiten der Zusammenarbeit von Geschichtswissenschaft und Anthropologie, dargestellt am Beispiel des Samländischen Bauernaufstandes von 1525', in Hans-Ulrich Wehler (ed.), *Der Deutsche Bauernkrieg 1524–1526* (Göttingen, 1975), pp. 9–37; Michael North, 'Untersuchungen zur adeligen Gutswirtschaft im Herzogtum Preußen des 16. Jahrhunderts', *Vierteljahrshefte für Sozial- und Wirtschaftsgeschichte*, 70 (1983), pp. 1–20. On Poland, see (apart from Runkowski's above-cited works) Leonid Zytkowicz's argument in Inglot, *Historia chłopów polskich*, pp. 247ff., as well as Zytkowicz, 'Trends of agrarian economy', pp. 60–8; Topolski, 'The manorial-serf economy', pp. 341–52, and 'Sixteenth-century Poland', passim; Makowski, 'Constitutional trends', passim; Witold Kula, 'Money and the serfs in eighteenth century Poland', in E. J. Hobsbawm et al. (eds), *Peasants in History. Essays in Honour of Daniel Thorner* (Calcutta, 1980), pp. 31–2; and Kochanowicz, 'Polish serfdom', pp. 95–104.

capital to invest in plough and draught teams and in wage labour to work them. Arable farming required year-round, if intermittent labour. The rural common people, understandably, preferred cultivation of their own holdings to the life of wage-labourers living in rented housing at the manor or on the farmsteads of their village neighbours. Farm rents in the lordships' villages had fallen to low levels by the late fifteenth century, while the earnings of villagers' crop and livestock sales were starting to rise. In the lordships' eyes, village rent increases were beginning to appear justifiable. Urban markets were improving, especially further west. They could be reached by river traffic, although land transport, if paid for at free market rates, was uneconomic. But if such haulage, along with the field work of ploughing, harrowing and harvesting, were translated into unpaid labour extracted as rent, large-scale commercialized demesne farming could be made to pay a steady and – as the long sixteenth century proved – rising profit.

Could the landlords have imposed the burden and risk of such commercialized farming on their villagers, leasing out their demesne land in its entirety and collecting in return rising money rents from now more numerous subjects? Such an arrangement calls to mind on a smaller scale the landlord–tenant farmer system emerging simultaneously in England. In that case, the east-Elbian nobility would have been obliged to share the profits of the long-range grain trade on distant markets with their subject farmers and with the urban merchants to whom the villagers would have sold their crops. The abandoned village farms in east-Elbian Germany, combined with the seigneurial demesnes, comprised a large mass of land. To settle it fully at satisfactorily high rents would have taken long years.

Instead, the landlords organized compact demesne farms and compelled their village subjects, alongside a minimal corps of paid workers, to cultivate and harvest them, and to transport the threshed grain to market or port towns. They exercised their powers as jurisdictional lords (*Gerrichtsherren*) to extract unpaid construction work from their subjects, so as to raise the buildings, including even manor houses, necessary to the country gentleman's life. The new regime did not dispossess the landed villagers. Not until the late sixteenth century did forced purchases by the nobility of subject farms lead to a limited degree of expansion of demesne land at the villages' expense.³⁰

From the sixteenth-century villagers' point of view, the rise of commercialized manorialism represented less a loss of legal rights and status than a men-

30. On the question of seigneurial enclosures of village land, see Hagen, 'Seventeenth-century crisis', pp. 310–11; Siegfried Korth, 'Die Entstehung und Entwicklung des ostdeutschen Großgrundbesitzes', *Jahrbuch der Albertus-Universität zu Königsberg/Pr.*, 3 (1953), pp. 148–70; Enders, *Uckermark*, pp. 172ff.; Topolski, 'Rozwój folwarku pańszczyziowego', pp. 52ff.; Wyrzański, *Polśca*, pp. 17ff.; Zytkowicz, 'Okres', pp. 247ff.

— were treated in law as attributes of village farms under seigneurial authority, rather than as inherent in the subject farmers' persons. The disabilities they entailed could be exchanged for the liberty of a rural commoner on condition the subject farm were sold to a competent successor-farmer. But most farm-owning villagers preferred to stand their ground, defending their claims to the fruits of their labours as best they could, rather than to abandon their patrimonies for the life of a landless worker.³¹

The crucial task was to hold the new weekly labour services within manageable bounds. Often the landlords imposed these services step by step, presenting their claims first as 'requests' and later as customary 'rights'. In other cases, the new demesne farms were constructed in a flurry of heavy manorial services that were later regularized at a fixed weekly rate, with or without food and drink and varying sometimes by season, including extra labour in the harvest and a limited degree of long-distance haulage. In some cases the subject villagers in Brandenburg, in return for shouldering the much-resented manorial services, bargained down the level of seigneurial grain rents. Although these had fallen since the High Middle Ages, they usually still represented significant charges well worth reducing, whereas money rents generally declined to negligible importance.³²

By the eve of the Thirty Years War, most of the fullholders in Brandenburg, as elsewhere in German east-Elbia, rendered two or three days of weekly domainial labour with a team of horses or oxen. Frequently they sent sons or hired hands to perform this work (thereby themselves evading the seigneurial field bailiff's abuse). They bore the cost of such uncompensated manpower, as they did of the teams. They had to accept that an unmarried son or daughter whose labour was not essential to the household economy might be conscripted for a term of three years (or more) as a compulsory manorial servant, in exchange for room, board, clothing and footwear, and a meagre wage in cash (*Gesindezwangsarbeit*). Still, the subject farmers' rents in grain and cash rarely stood so high as to prevent them from profiting through sales of their surpluses from ascending commodity prices. They too, though more modestly than their landlords, cashed in on the long sixteenth century. They had not lost their right as members of village communes, recognized in law as collective legal personalities, to sue their lordships at law for tolerable conditions of manorial service. These were the principal reasons why they neither fled their holdings in large numbers (losing the capital and profits they embodied) nor rebelled *en masse* against the new regime. Over the course of 150 years manorialism rose steadily, like a flooding river, but it never wholly swamped the villages.

If in Brandenburg conditions for the subject farmers were endurable, elsewhere in German east-Elbia harsher forms of seigneurial exploitation emerged. In Schleswig-Holstein, Mecklenburg and Pomerania — weakly governed lands on the Baltic coast facing extremely favourable export markets — legislation in

the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries gradually undermined the villagers' hereditary tenures, converting them into leaseholds cancellable at landlordly will (*Leisgüter*). This removed all impediments to the enclosure of subject farms into the seigneurial demesne. By claiming in Roman-law terms that, since the subject villagers were not freeholders (*empbytautae*), they must be mere tenants at will (*coloni*), tied to the soil (*ad glebam ascriptus*) if not actually slaves (*homini proprii*), the landlords' jurists laid the legal foundation for personal serfdom (*Leibeigenschaft*).³³

The most important practical implication of these changes in law was the confinement of the villagers as individuals within the seigneurial jurisdiction, whether they held land or not. It was now possible to dispose of them or their farms, and yet to retain them in the lordship as labourers. But it is unlikely that extensive use was made of such powers before the depopulation of the Thirty Years War triggered a fierce competition among landlords for subject farmers and manorial workers. It seems that their pre-war effect was mainly to facilitate some enclosure of village farmland into the seigneurial demesne. It was essential to leave enough subject farmers on the land to supply the manorial service without which the noble estates would themselves have to bear the heavy costs in labour and draught teams necessary for their operation.

While there is evidence that, on the eve of the seventeenth-century wars, some of the landed villagers in east-Elbian Germany were faltering under the burden of labour rents, research also suggests that many others lived in tolerable material sufficiency, even in the more precarious legal conditions of the Baltic littoral. Livestock holdings, a crucial measure of capital accumulation in the villages, were frequently strong. Occasionally villagers appear among the investors in urban funded debts, a form of bank deposit. Loss of village land through enclosure is difficult to track, but the Brandenburg census of 1624, surveying the 734 villages of the Mittelmark district (a large part of the entire electorate), found that 80 per cent of the village arable land, as defined for purposes of taxation, remained in the villagers' possession. Here the nobility succeeded after 1575 in engrossing 7 per cent of their subjects' land, while they held 13 per cent from earlier times, having appropriated it after its abandonment in the late medieval crisis. Altogether, the Brandenburg villages (including those under urban jurisdiction) possessed about 60 per cent of the countryside, while the remainder comprised in roughly equal measure the demesne and forest land of the nobility and the princely household.³⁴

Among the 16,271 rural householders counted by the Mittelmark census of 1624, 46 per cent were fullholding farmers (*Bauern*), while 33 per cent were landed smallholders (*Kossäten*), many cultivating as much as one hide of land. Cottagers, possessing garden land alone, comprised only 5 per cent of village householders, while the remaining 16 per cent were shepherds and other

33. Friedrich Mager, *Geschichte des Bauerntums und der Bodenkultur im Lande Mecklenburg* (Berlin, 1955), pp. 92–7 and 63–107, passim. See also Enders, *Uckermark*, pp. 191ff.; Kaak, *Gutsherrschaft*, pp. 122ff., 247ff.

34. See Hagen, 'How mighty the Junkers?', pp. 107–8, and 'Seventeenth-century crisis', pp. 310–11; Enders, *Uckermark*, pp. 172–5; Kaak, *Gutsherrschaft*, pp. 253ff.; Johannes Schultze, *Die Mark Brandenburg*, vol. 5 (Berlin, 1969), p. 173.

31. Still fundamental on questions of legal status in Brandenburg is Friedrich Grossmann, *Über die gutsherrlich-bäuerlichen Rechtsverhältnisse in der Mark Brandenburg vom 16. bis 18. Jahrhundert* (Leipzig, 1890), esp. chs 3–4. Of comparable importance for the Uckermark region is Enders, *Uckermark*, esp. ch. III.

32. See Hagen, 'How mighty the Junkers?', pp. 97–108; Enders, *Uckermark*, pp. 161–81.

herders, millers, smiths and fishermen. These figures screen out the unhoused workers and itinerant poor, but they show that the rise of commercialized manorialism did not undermine the pre-existing German east-Elbian village structure based on large and medium-sized farms.³⁵

In Poland, the sixteenth-century subject farms supplying compulsory labour to the *szlachta's* expanded manors were smaller than their German counterparts. A picture of village conditions in a still early stage of the new regime emerges from the survey of 1564–65 of the Crown villages and estates in the governorship (*województwo*) of Poznań, in western Poland. In thirty-eight villages, there were 625 landholding farmers (*kmieci*), but on average each cultivated only seventenths of a hide (here called *ślad*), or about twelve hectares (thirty acres). Among them, 34 per cent worked holdings of one full hide, while 60 per cent held but a half-hide. Swelling the ranks of the smallholders, there were 168 'gardeners' or cottagers (*ogrodnicy, zagrodnicy*) tilling mini-farms and otherwise working for wages.³⁶

The fullholders' rents in cash and kind were low by comparison with those of the late fifteenth-century Mazovian farmers discussed above. Leaving aside taxes (moderate charges showing no tendency to rise) and the tithes (a fixed rate), rents per hide in 1564–65 amounted on average to forty-four *grozy* in cash and, in seigneurial tribute grain, to about four bushels of oats.³⁷ The corresponding Mazovian rents were fifty-six *grozy* and ten bushels of oats. But while only a minority of Mazovian farmers had rendered (at most) one day of weekly manorial service, in the Poznań governorship the fullholders in a majority of the twenty-six villages whose manorial services the census specified were obliged to supply labour with a team to the manor whenever commanded to do so. Opposed to these cases of unlimited labour services, there were a few villages with fixed quotas of two or three days weekly. Since the fourteen Crown demesne farms cultivated by these villages were still not large – each one encompassing on average only about eleven hides – unlimited services probably came closer in practice to two or three than to five or six days of weekly labour. But the liability to more crushing labour services remained.

This evidence does not prove that villagers in central and western Poland bargained down their seigneurial rents in cash and tribute grain in exchange for heavier manorial service. But they suggest that such trade-offs might have occurred. The Poznanian farmers' payments in cash and kind to the manor house were certainly minimal, so that most of their farm surplus – after tithes and taxes – remained in their own hands. Jerzy Topolski found that, in 150

villages under the jurisdiction of the archbishops of Gniezno, most of them strung across western and central Poland, the average farmer held, in 1554, thirteen head of horses and cattle of all types – a respectable number for predominantly medium-sized holdings. The Polish literature, like the German, suggests that, where farms did not shrink to the point at which no marketable surplus remained, they maintained a tolerable level of material well-being before the mid-seventeenth-century deluge of invasion and devastation washed over them.³⁸

Against the grain of earlier Polish historiography, Andrzej Wyczański has argued that, despite the Polish villagers' loss in 1518 of appellate rights against their seigneurial lordships, they retained, both individually and communally, the prerogatives of legal personality at the local level. They continued to engage in property transactions of all sorts, and in other judicial business as well. Goaded by seigneurial abuse and dispossession, they took flight more readily than villagers in east-Elbian Germany. They could normally be sure of finding protection, often on the property of a greater nobleman than their previous lordship, so that, instead of being returned as refractory subjects to the bailiwick they had fled, the new landlord would settle privately with the former landlord to retain the absconded subject. Some villagers fled alone, others with family and possessions, circumstances taken into account in such negotiations (which suggest the idea of involuntary sale). Although most flights occurred within a short radius, the drift of village deserters and legal settlers south-east toward the Ukraine and east and north into the former Lithuanian lands of the Commonwealth ensured that places were available in many villages of the old heartlands for new subject farmers and labourers.³⁹

The two centuries before the mid-seventeenth century were the golden age of the pre-partition Polish Commonwealth. Despite evidence that, to counteract falling profits, the nobility began at the end of the sixteenth century to engross village farmland and intensify unpaid manorial service, a picture roughly comparable to that drawn by the literature on east-Elbian Germany prior to the Thirty Years War is discernible. Although signs of crisis were on hand, as the homespun poem introducing this essay testified, the fullholding villagers' farms permitted household reproduction and consumption at levels above bare subsistence. The rural common people's diet was adequate or even good. Their clothing, though cut from coarse materials, displayed the same styles as the townspeople's and nobility's. Their housing was, at its best, decent, while their livestock holdings were often strong enough to withstand the rigours of manorial service and the claims upon them of heirs' marriage portions. The

35. Topolski, 'Rozwój folwarku pańszczyźnianego', pp. 56ff. But Topolski also found that, in 1603, the average number of horses and cattle on such holdings had fallen by 20 per cent since 1554, while in 1617 it was 36 per cent lower than in 1554. *Ibid.*, p. 57. See also Topolski, 'Continuity and discontinuity', pp. 394ff; Wyczański, *Wzrost*, pp. 151ff, and Zielenara and Mączak, *Drżycie gospodarcze*, pp. 148ff.

36. Wyczański, *Politeka*, pp. 39–43; *idem*, *Wzrost*, pp. 134ff, 177ff. On flight from the villages and other forms of resistance, see Jozef Leszczyński, 'Walka chłopów z uciskiem i wyzwiskiem feudalnym (XVI–XVIII w.)', in Ingłot, *Historia chłopów polskich*, pp. 398ff, and Jacek Kochanowicz, 'Between submission and violence: peasant resistance in the Polish manorial economy of the eighteenth century', in Forrest D. Colburn (ed.), *Everyday Forms of Peasant Resistance* (London, 1989), pp. 34–63.

35. The 1624 cadastre was published in Grossmann, *Über die güterherrlich-bäuerlichen Rechtsverhältnisse*, pp. 109–38. See table IX, p. 138.

36. Computations from Andrzej Tomczak *et al.* (eds), *Instrucja Wójcickiego Wzrostu i Kujawskich 1564–1565, Część I* (Bydgoszcz, 1961), pp. 124–210.

37. The quantity of approximately four bushels derives from the average payment of 1.6 *amiarin*, a measure equal in 1659 to two bushels (that is, to two *torze nielopolitane*). The Polish bushel, though very variable, in this case approximated to the Brandenburg bushel. See the metrological table in Czesława Ohryzko-Włodarska (ed.), *Instrucja Wójcickiego Wzrostu i Kujawskich 1659–1665, Część I*, p. XXXVII. On metrological questions in early modern Poland and generally, see Witold Kula, *Measures and Men* (Princeton, NJ, 1986 [Polish original: 1970]).

access of village children to urban trades and education was better than in the eighteenth century.⁴⁰

The Villagers in the Seventeenth-Century Crisis

The seventeenth-century wars, prolonged in Poland into the early eighteenth century, cut deep wounds in the central European rural world. Although modern scholars exaggerated the resulting population losses, wherever the armies penetrated, death through violence, hunger and epidemics stalked the countryside. Many villagers survived through flight, but at the cost of impoverishment and homelessness following abandonment of the farmstead. Masses of villages burned to the ground. Many still stood abandoned decades after the wars ended, their fields overgrown and, often, home to wolfpacks that had appeared after the fighting started.

A consequence of the wars that has only recently received due attention was the widespread collapse of seigneurial authority in the villages. As the noble landlords — along with ecclesiastical and state domain administrators — failed in their self-legitimizing obligation to protect their subjects from harm and hunger, the villagers took to their own devices. They stopped paying rents and taxes, and abandoned manorial service; they moved from one short-term leasehold to another, depending on the drift of war; they drove the price of wage labour through the ineffectual ceilings of the frequently readjusted wage statutes. When peace returned, they contracted with their old or with new landlords to rebuild and occupy the abandoned farms, provided they were granted a period of freedom — commonly six years — from rents and taxes. A practice maddening to the landlords was the desertion by some such settlers of their holdings after the free years had passed, so as to seek out another lordship which would sign them on anew as unencumbered colonists.⁴¹

The landlords reacted with an aggression born of their own ruin and loss of authority. In German east-Elbia, they pressed government authorities to ratify and generalize the doctrines of personal serfdom that had been seeped into the area before 1618, but whose future strength was then still unpredictable. New servile legislation proliferated in the mid- and late seventeenth century. In Poland, such laws were unnecessary, since the seigneurial courts had since 1518 possessed full discretionary authority over the subject villagers' tenurial rights and duties. Here the rigours of serfdom developed by stages from local usages. But undoubtedly Polish landlords adopted more stringent practices in the post-1648 period.

The new laws authorized landlords to recover farmers who had fled during the wars, so that they could be compelled again to cultivate their ancestral

40. See the computation of the improving terms of domestic trade for Polish village farmers in the sixteenth century in Andrzej Wyczański, 'Czy chłopu było źle w Polsce XVI wieku?', *Kwartalnik Historyczny*, 85 (1978), pp. 633–7, and 627–41, passim; Wyczański, *Wielki*, pp. 151–69; Topolski, 'Rozwój folwarku pańszczyźnianego', pp. 56ff.

41. Hagen, 'Seventeenth-century crisis', pp. 314ff. To judge from the standard literature, this subject still awaits treatment in the Polish context.

holding or other lands assigned to them. They also aimed to sweep aside the subject farmers' pre-existing tenurial rights, which when good had allowed sale of holdings and departure from the lordship. It sought to override pre-existing rents and labour services, which had varied with the strength of tenurial rights (although in practice many weak tenants had rendered only moderate dues and services). The landlords wished to hold their subjects within the seigneurial bailiwick, whether they occupied landholdings or not, and to have a free hand in moving them from one farm to another, which in some cases allowed expansion of the manorial demesne onto more fertile, formerly village soils. They aimed to evade earlier limits on the compulsory service of unmanorial farm-workers, and to extend the term of duty indefinitely.⁴²

This seigneurial offensive rightly looms large in the literature. Yet its efficacy is questionable. From the villagers' perspective, the crippling obstacle to effective resistance to landlordly aggression was the life-threatening poverty to which war and its scourges had so often reduced them. In this condition, many had little choice but to bow to seigneurial power, so as to gain the foothold of a farmstead, even at the cost of personal subjection, tenurial insecurity and heavy feudal rents. Polish court records of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries register numerous cases of submission to hereditary serfdom (*poddaństwo*) on the part of legally free individuals. Mostly these were marriages by men into subject households, entailing their subordination and that of their future children to seigneurial authority. For such people, the freedom of the open road must have seemed illusory.

Legislation on serfdom permitted landlords to hunt down absconded subjects, but there were limits to this tactic, set by the revenge which desperate and embittered subjects could take on the lordships through theft, mutilation of livestock, or arson. The long-prevailing post-war labour shortages meant that flight to less demanding landlords remained a strong option, especially since the police powers even of such a burgeoning absolutist regime as Brandenburg-Prussia were from the villagers' viewpoint gratifyingly inadequate. Under these circumstances, it behoved the estate-owners to offer reasonable terms to new subjects settling in their villages. These included *de jure* or *de facto* hereditability of the farms they would rebuild, seigneurial provision of construction timber, and moderate labour services following the initial free years.

It was also common, and of long-lasting importance, that the landlords frequently found themselves obliged to supply their new tenants with essential farm equipment, tools, furniture, and a basic contingent of livestock (typically four horses, a cow, a sow and a few sheep). This 'iron stock' (German: *Hofwebr*, Polish: *zapłóg*) reified the seigneurial claim to ownership of the holding, and was exempt from inheritance settlements among the villagers. The frequency of this arrangement testified to the villagers' post-war penury, and unmistakably

42. *Ibid.*, pp. 324ff.; Goswami, *Über die gutsherrlich-bäuerlichen Rechtsverhältnisse*, ch. 4; Kaak, *Gutsherrschaft*, pp. 327ff.; Enders, *Uckermark*, pp. 336ff.; Rutkowski, *Historia gospodarcza*, pp. 250ff.; Ziemiańska and Maczak, *Dzieje gospodarcze*, ch. 5; Trzyna, 'Wzrost poddaństwa', pp. 363ff.; Wyczański, *Poliska*, pp. 290ff.; Władysław Rusiński, 'W dobie upadku gospodarczego (1655–1795)', in Rusiński, *Zarys mit wiekopisnej*, pp. 69ff.; Kochanowicz, 'Polish economy', pp. 103ff.

signalled the decline in their earlier strong property rights. But it entailed costs to the landlords, not only at the start, but later, when expired livestock – especially draught teams – needed replacement, or when the subject farmers' houses needed renovation. Because many lordships were mired in debt, such renewal of their subjects' working capital was highly unwelcome to them, so that in many villages housing grew shabby and ramshackle and the horses used in manorial service old and feeble. This was a reason, especially among the lesser nobility, for the inferior productivity, by comparison with sixteenth-century standards, of eighteenth-century estate agriculture.⁴³

While the literature emphasizes the harsh legal subjection of post-1648 villages, the spread of manorial production based on seigneurial draught teams and permanently employed manorial servants, whether freely or compulsorily recruited, tells a somewhat different story. These comparatively self-enclosed manorial systems figure in German historiography as *Eigenwirtschaften*, in opposition to 'partial' manorial economies depending mainly on the landed villagers' unpaid weekly labour (*Teilbetriebe*). While they existed earlier wherever domanial production lacked sufficient subject farmers, the manor based on wage labour (for even compulsorily recruited workers commanded a wage) proliferated in the post-war decades when the village farms were still unoccupied or under reconstruction. In Brandenburg, it was not until the early eighteenth century that the landlords could abandon such more or less self-sufficient production and compel their subjects to reshoulder the pre-war burdens. Even then, it was sometimes impossible to rescind fully concessions on labour services granted in the resettlement period.⁴⁴

In Mecklenburg and the north-eastern Brandenburg district of the Uckermark, draconian post-war servile legislation impeded repopulation. In Mecklenburg the number of farmers shrank drastically to those who survived the Thirty Years War and whose landlords could reassemble them as a village labour force. Outsiders did not enter the land seeking colonists' holdings, while many Mecklenburgers fled to regions where better tenures were available (as in neighbouring Brandenburg). The remaining farmers' holdings grew quite large (four or six hides), with sizeable households of family members and resident servants, and with large livestock holdings to perform the heavy daily labour services with two or more servants. Many *Eigenwirtschaften* arose, especially when in the eighteenth century crop rotations which reduced or eliminated fallowing and increased fodder production were adopted on the nobility's demesne farms. The profitability of this change, and the reduction it entailed in grain-crop cultivation, enabled many estate-owners to dispense altogether with the old regime of unpaid manorial service. Instead, especially in the late eighteenth century, numerous largeholding subject farms were enclosed into the estate demesnes, while their occupants were reduced to cottagers living from wage

labour on the estates, working alongside the increasing number of permanently employed wage-labourers housed at the manors.⁴⁵

In the Uckermark, the Prussian regime conceded the nobility's juridically flimsy claim that personal serfdom (*Leibensschaft*) was locally customary. Armed with this ruling, the Uckermark Junkers depressed many an unfortunate among their surviving villagers into semi-bondage. Yet, as in Mecklenburg, the existence of strict serfdom impeded repopulation. The estate-owners began settling unoccupied farms with personally free, short-term leaseholders (*Pachtbauern*). Such farmers, working on contracts of three or six years, owned their own livestock and equipment, and often paid substantial sums for their leases. Lacking heritable tenures and liable to punitive non-renewal of their contracts, they did not trouble their lordships with the lawsuits over rents and services which communities of subject but hereditary farmholders in Brandenburg frequently initiated. As the villages gradually replenished their ranks, the logic of holding labour immobile by juridical means weakened. After the mid-eighteenth century, legal references to serfdom yielded to the language of subject status (*Untertänigkeit*), while the number of personally free leaseholders and labourers came to predominate.

As in Mecklenburg, abandonment in the Uckermark of three-field agriculture in favour of new rotations encouraged a move away from the regime of manorial service toward self-sufficient estates worked by wage labour. For the subject farmers, and often for the short-term leaseholders as well, this meant payment of a fee commuting the labour-service obligation into cash (*Dienstgeld*, or 'service money'). The Uckermark thus offers a good illustration of the linkage between labour shortages, weak capitalization of estates, poor markets, and personal serfdom. When these conditions of the long post-war depression yielded to economic growth in the demographically reinvigorated eighteenth century, with its rising commodity prices and opportunities for technological improvement in agriculture, the utility to the estate-owners of personal serfdom, never very great, lost its strength. But, as in Mecklenburg, the lasting legacy of strict serfdom was the disappearance, or drastic reduction, of hereditary tenures among the farm-holding villagers.⁴⁶

In Poland, the wounds of war never altogether healed before 1772.⁴⁷ Although there were some prosperous moments in the century after 1648, the landlords' export markets in the west were far less absorbent and profitable than they had been earlier. Only the magnate producers, who could expand their volume of production, kept a secure foothold on foreign exchanges. But, like their lesser colleagues, they found it increasingly advisable to process their grain crops into beer and liquor to sell to their subjects at the seigneurial tavern. The

45. Mejer, *Geschichte des Bauerntums*, pp. 141ff.; Kaak, *Gutsherrschaft*, pp. 134ff., 257ff.

46. Hartmut Harnisch, *Die Herrschaft Baitzenburg* (Weimar, 1968), pp. 138ff.; Enders, *Uckermark*, pp. 451ff., 504ff.

47. For recent estimates of post-1648 population losses in Poland, see Zientara and Maczak, *Dzieje gospodarcze*, pp. 233ff.; Wyczański, *Poliska*, pp. 290ff.; Kochanowicz, *Spór o terań*, p. 118; Irenei Gleysztorowa, *Wstęp do demografii staropolskiej* (Warsaw, 1976), pp. 189–90. Gleysztorowa's book, equipped with a detailed summary in French, is the principal general study of early modern Polish demography.

43. Hagen, 'Seventeenth-century crisis', pp. 324ff.; Wyczański, *Poliska*, pp. 293–303.

44. See the evidence and literature cited in Hagen, 'Seventeenth-century crisis', pp. 321ff. For additional instances of *Eigenwirtschaften*, see Renate Schilling, *Schwedisch-Pommern um 1700. Studien zur Agrarstruktur eines Territoriums extremer Gutsherrschaft* (Weimar, 1989).

landlords' alcohol monopoly (*propinacja*), sometimes underpinned by truck-system payments to workers, loomed ever larger on the credit side of their ledgers, though its effects on the villages were often deadly.⁴⁸

Post-war depopulation was locally extreme, while decapitalization among the middle and lesser gentry impeded the resettlement of their villages, given the need to equip them with housing and livestock. As a result, many Polish estates found it necessary, in the absence of full villages, to move temporarily to the more self-sufficient *Eigenwirtschaft* mode of operation. When the subject farms were resettled, it was often as inexpensive smallholdings. For the larger-scale subject farmers (*emiecie*) the seventeenth-century crisis spelled a permanent and severe diminution of their ranks. In some regions of the country, particularly in the west and north, the nobility began settling foreign colonists in their villages. In heavily taxed Brandenburg-Prussia, as elsewhere in German east-Elbia, many responded to this opportunity, arriving in Poland to carve out medium or large farms as personally free hereditary leaseholders, often paying (alongside fixed money rents) commutation fees instead of rendering manorial service. Since many of the first such settlers had been recruited from the Low Countries to reclaim swampy land, the free colonists in general were often called 'Hollanders' (*oleńcy*), though most were German, and some were Poles.

This wave of settlement assumed quite large proportions, creating in the neighbourhood of the Polish villagers, living in personal serfdom, a growing body of free farmers. Rapid population growth in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, accelerated by potato cultivation, reduced the significance of legal subjection. Landlords could find the labourers and tenant farmers they needed, whether free or not, while the villagers' mobility and income opportunities were now constrained less by seigneurial coercion than by competition among themselves for work.

The Villagers in the Eighteenth Century

As numerous travellers reported, the passage across east-Elbian Germany into Poland marked a steady deterioration of material conditions. The villages grew more ramshackle, the towns sleepier and more agrarianized. Among the common people, the comfortable minority shrank in number while the ranks of the miserable swelled.⁴⁹ Yet the study of village living standards and well-being across this broad terrain has only begun. Certainly it mattered whether a villager lived under the mighty kings of Prussia or the feeble kings of Poland. In Prussia, military interest ruled that landlords should not evict their subject farmers (whose sons served in the army) and engross their land into the domainial economy. Neither should they crush their villages under seigneurial rent, for it

48. See Jerzy Lukowski, *Liberty's Folly. The Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth in the Eighteenth Century*, 1697-1795 (London, 1991), chs 2-3, and Kula, *Economic Theory*, ch. 4. Cf. also Antoni Maczka, 'Money and society in Poland and Lithuania in the 16th and 17th centuries', *Journal of European Economic History*, 5 (1976), pp. 69-104.

49. Larry Wolff, *Inventing Eastern Europe. The Map of Civilization on the Mind of the Enlightenment* (Stanford, CA, 1994), *passim*.

was the middling and large farmers whose taxes were the fiscal linchpin of the absolutist system.

The rulers of Prussia maintained a network of state army granaries that stabilized the domestic economy by driving up low prices through purchases and pulling down high prices through sales. The royal domainial estates, leased to middle-class tenant farmers, encompassed a large portion of the countryside, and exhibited progressive techniques that many private estates emulated. Villagers with hereditary tenures could and often did collectively resist their lords' demands through court action.⁵⁰

These circumstances helped preserve the largeholding farmers as a class. For this protection – or '*Bauernschutz*' – the villagers paid a price, not only in the taxes and conscription weighing upon them, but also in the laws sanctioning their lords' compulsory recruitment of their unmarried and supernumerary sons and daughters as manorial labourers. Nor should the interests of the villages be identified too narrowly with those of the landholding farmers. Population growth during the High Middle Ages, the sixteenth century, and the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century expanded the ranks of the lower village strata – the cottagers with marginal landholdings and the nearly or wholly landless – much more rapidly than those of the half- and fullholders. The long-run tendency in German east-Elbia, and especially in Brandenburg-Prussia, was toward polarization between the proportionally ever-smaller class of self-sufficient farmers and the growing numbers of those who depended more or less vitally on wage labour.⁵¹

Neither can the Brandenburg-Prussian heartlands stand for all of German east-Elbia. In Schleswig-Holstein, Mecklenburg, Swedish Pomerania and in Lusatia, severe forms of personal dependency prevailed, tenurial rights were flimsy and rents heavy. Within the Prussian borders, the regions of relatively strong village rights – the Brandenburg Altmark and Mittelmark, the Magdeburg district, middle and lower Silesia – contrasted with areas of weak rights in the Uckermark, the New Mark to the east of the Oder river, Prussian Pomerania east of the Oder mouth, and Upper Silesia. The countryside in far-flung East Prussia exhibited a complex mix of legally secure and insecure villagers.⁵²

50. Gustavo Corni, 'Absolutistische Agrarpolitik und Agrargesellschaft in Preußen', *Zeitschrift für historische Forshung*, 13 (1986), pp. 285-313. On the villagers' access to the appellate courts, see Hagen, 'Junkers' faithless servants', *passim*.

51. Yet, compared with Europe west of the Elbe, the relative size of the self-sufficient farmer class in north-eastern Germany (with such regional exceptions as Mecklenburg) was large. On growth of the landless classes, see Jan Peters, 'Ostelbische Landarmut – Sozialökonomisches über landlose und landarme Agrarproduzenten im Spätféudalismus', *JfWZ*, 5 (1970), pp. 97-126; Hartmut Harnisch, 'Bevölkerung und Wirtschaft. Über die Zusammenhänge zwischen sozialökonomischer und demographischer Entwicklung im Spätféudalismus', *JfWZ*, 13 (1975), pp. 57-87; Hagen, 'Working for the Junker', *passim*. Rutkowski argued that the Prussian landlord, in return for acceptance of state policy protecting the existence of the relatively large farms of their village subjects, won state acquiescence in a hard-line policy toward wage labour, evident in the salience in Prussia of compulsory manorial service (*Gesindezwangsarbeit*). In Poland such compulsory service on the part of the sons and daughters of the landed villagers was largely unknown, since the heavy labours of the subject farmers sufficed to meet the landlords' needs. See Rutkowski, *Poddaństwo wiekian*, pp. 201-2.

52. On eighteenth-century East Prussia, see Aubin, *Zur Geschichte des gutsherrlich-bäuerlichen Verhältnisses*, and Henning, *Dienste und Abgaben*.

Yet precisely where the law sanctioned strict serfdom, increasingly large populations of legally free villagers arose. The lines separating the free from the subject farmers began to blur, especially where, as (at the government's encouragement) in Brandenburg-Prussia, commutation payments increasingly eclipsed the inefficient and contentious weekly labour services, the prime burden of subjection.⁵³

As for Poland, personal subjection and the diminution of holdings characteristic of manorialism's end-phase coexisted regionally with larger but backward subject farms in the east and with large, market-integrated, prosperous holdings cultivated by freemen (*oledry, gburzy*) in the west and north, including the hinterland of Danzig. A harsh regime of labour services imposed upon middle and small subject farms predominated in the Polish heartland but, except for the tithes, little remained by the eighteenth century of seigneurial rents in cash or kind, or of taxes with any bite. The small scale of subject farms, and the low levels of money rents and taxes, meant that pressure upon them to commercialize their surpluses was weak. Many more subject farmers in Poland than in Germany lived within an economy of self-sufficiency and minimal market dealings.⁵⁴

There were also differences in mentality embedded in religion and popular culture in Catholic Poland and overwhelmingly Protestant eastern Germany. Yet it is a question whether, at the level of household structure, life trajectories and material culture, the social experience of east-Elbian German and Polish villagers did not encompass more common than disparate elements. A resolution of this problem lies beyond present horizons, but a step forward can be taken by considering, at the conclusion of this essay, the villagers' condition in two eighteenth-century lordships, one German and the other Polish.

The Subject Farmers Under the Stavenow Lordship

The manor farms and villages comprising the seigneurial jurisdiction of Stavenow lay in north-western Brandenburg.⁵⁵ In the late eighteenth century, the arable land of the lordship's four demesne farms spanned 1,400 acres (560 hectares), while in seven villages the proprietors, of the von Kleist lineage, commanded three days of unpaid weekly labour with teams from each of sixty fullholding subject farms (*Hüfnerhöfe*), most of them with two hides of land, and three days

of manual labour from each of the twenty-five landed cottagers (*Kosziäten*), most of them with one hide. In 1763 there were eight households of rent-paying day-labourers (*Kätner*), living in cottages with gardens. They were employed mainly by the Stavenow lordship, but worked at other manors and seasonally for the village farmers as well. Their numbers doubled by the early nineteenth century, at which time the Kleists were also maintaining at their manor farms a steadily employed body of fifty-four estate officials and labourers, all earning room, board and wages.

The compulsorily recruited manorial servants were the unmarried sons and daughters of the fullholding farmers, living in workers' quarters and fed at a common table. The freely recruited were older, mostly married workers, living in manorial cottages of their own and receiving from the lordship annual grain stores and other food provisions, along with firewood, grazing rights and cash wages. In the villages there were small numbers of independently housed millers, smiths, tavernkeepers, linenweavers and livestock herders. But there was no proto-industrial proletariat and not even many lodgers (*Einwohner*) among the fullholders, whose dwelling space was mostly reserved for the proprietors' kin, including retired elders, and hired hands, often also relatives.

This was a village society dominated by middle-sized farms meant to be self-sufficient after payment of rent and taxes. Most of these holdings housed families that had rebuilt them, with seigneurial materials and inventories, from the ashes of the Thirty Years War. The lordship did not dispute its farmers' hereditary tenures, even if the iron stock and the farms themselves were inalienable and reassignable to new occupants in case of abandonment or incompetent management. Otherwise the farm's assets belonged to its inhabitants, who redistributed them among themselves according to law and custom upon the death of their elders and upon the occasion of their own marriages.

By farm-size, tenurial right and rent burdens, the Stavenow farmers were typical cultivators in German east-Elbia, even though there were many others with larger or smaller holdings. The Stavenowers' legal disabilities were neither crushing nor trivial. Non-inheriting children who had served their terms of compulsory service at the manor could leave the jurisdiction as free individuals, though often they only married into subject households in nearby lordships. Many such outmigrants had never been called upon to work at the Stavenow manor. Upon succeeding to the proprietorship of a village farm, the new household head swore an oath of subjection, though without losing access to the royal courts. The landless were 'protected subjects' (*Schutzuntertanen*), liable to an annual fee equivalent to a week or two of day-labourers' wages.⁵⁶

The subject farmers paid weighty tribute into the state's coffers. All able-bodied sons were recruited into the army, where they underwent basic training before being furloughed back to the villages. They were then free to work as fortune dictated, but might be recalled to active duty at any time. Only the soldier who acquired a fullholding could be sure of permission to marry and

56. The landless were also free to migrate out of the Stavenow bailiwick though — and in this the landed villagers were no different — if they did so upon receiving an inheritance, they surrendered one-sixth of it to the seigneurial court (that is, to the lordship) as a departure fine.

53. See Harnisch, *Bäuerliche Ökonomie und Mentalität unter den Bedingungen der ostelbischen Gutsheerrschaft in den letzten Jahrzehnten vor Beginn der Agrarreformen*, *Jahrb.*, 24:3 (1989), pp. 87–108. Landlords' inclination to accept commutation payments rose as population growth drove the price of free wage labour down.

54. Witold Kula, 'The seignior and the peasant family in eighteenth-century Poland', in Robert Forster and Orest Ranum (eds), *Family and Society. Selections from the Annals* (Baltimore, MD, 1976), pp. 192–203; idem, 'Money and the serfs', *passim*; see also, apart from his other works cited above, Jacek Kochanowski, 'The Polish peasant family as an economic unit', in Richard Wall *et al.*, *Family Forms in Historic Europe* (Cambridge, 1983), pp. 153–66. Cf. Wyczański, *Poliska*, pp. 292–3, 301–3.

55. This discussion is based upon Hagen, 'Der bäuerliche Lebensstandard', as well as idem, 'Seventeenth-century crisis', 'Junkers' faithless servants', and 'Working for the Junker', cited above.

discharge from the reserves, though as a farmer he now paid the direct taxes financing the steely apparatus of absolutism. Yet the heaviest levy of seigneurial rent weighed upon the farm household's labour, rather than its crops or market earnings. At Stavenow, seigneurial rents in cash and kind together with state taxes together equalled only about one-third of the average cash value in the 1730s of the typical fullholder's grain surplus (although this was not fully monetized, but largely consumed in the household).⁵⁷

In the years 1721-71 the average Stavenow fullholding, excluding young animals, counted five work horses, about five cattle, three to four pigs, and seven sheep. In these years, their value nearly doubled (to ninety-eight talers [*Reichstaler*]). One taler amounted to the weekly wage in cash of a rural day-labourer, or half the weekly earnings of a skilled worker in the towns.⁵⁸ Average farm debt also doubled, but was offset threefold by the livestock values. The value of the marriage portion paid out of farm capital to grown children rose from ten to twenty-two talers, excluding the costs of the wedding celebrations. The dowry of a young bride from a fullholder's household, including the inherited marriage portion as well as her own savings (but leaving aside the value of her bridal gown and other clothing and linen), rose from thirty-two to forty-five talers. The bridegrooms, because men's wages were higher, brought more still into their new households.

The lordship periodically appraised the subject farmers' houses and farm buildings. In 1727, among seventy-one dwelling houses, typically of fairly large dimensions and constructed with timber frames, 70 per cent were 'good' or 'new', 13 per cent were 'average', and the rest were 'bad' or 'very bad'. Thus, in 1727, 83 per cent of the houses appeared to the seigneurial appraisers in good or normal condition. Around 1771 this figure still amounted to 66 per cent. The evidence on manorial workers' diets is fuller than on the farmers', but it is clear that both groups usually ate ample portions of bread grains and vegetables, with perhaps more meat than the literature would suggest, along with herrings, fresh and dried fruit, cheese, and strong and weak beer. There are no signs of eighteenth-century famine, though the central European harvest failures of 1770-72 left scars, as did earlier bad harvests or epidemics (1709-10, 1718-19), and war years (1756-63).

Post-mortem inventories show that, in their prime, the Stavenow farmers, and especially their wives, possessed large quantities of clothing and personal linen, sometimes of fair value. Household furniture included various chests and cupboards, while beds and bedding often represented good sums. The elderly's possessions were fewer, but in most farmers' households the retired proprietor and his wife lived in separate quarters on the farmstead and received from their successors fixed annual provisions of bread grains, along with firewood, minor grazing rights, the harvest of fruit trees, and their own garden plots. These retirement portions (*das Altenteil*) were the coveted reward of

57. The household also took in untaxed earnings from the sale of livestock, garden and orchard products.
58. Account needs to be taken of the devaluation of the Prussian currency by one-sixth in 1750.

decades-long toil. The records of the seigneurial court at Stavenow show that, in five-sixths of the court-ratified retirement contracts, the elders received customary provisions.⁵⁹

The median age of fullholders at the moment of their first marriage and assumption of farm proprietorship was twenty-six, and on average twenty-eight. Women married a few years younger. The typical fullholder's career lasted twenty-one years, though 38 per cent persevered longer than twenty-five (and up to forty-seven) years. Women's high mortality in childbirth confined the average marriage to sixteen years, so that the typical farmer remarried at least once. Yet one-third of seventy-five eighteenth-century marriages lasted twenty years or more, while one-tenth reached thirty years and beyond. The average appraisal found 3.5 children in the household. The data are scattered for farm servants, but a fullholding usually employed at least one hired hand, since the two mature workers a fullholder needed could rarely be simultaneously recruited from among his children. If it housed two retirees and two hired hands, a farmstead could number as many as ten people.

Farm proprietorship passed, in four of five cases, from parents to children or stepchildren. Only one in ten successions entailed seigneurial intervention, which normally resulted in the recruitment of the nearest eligible kin. In seven of ten cases, fullholders' heirs married fullholders' children. As for life expectancy, data on farmers alone need assembling, but among 618 eighteenth-century cases from all social categories in several Stavenow villages, among adults of both sexes who lived to age thirty-nine or longer, 20 per cent subsequently died in their forties, 20 per cent in their fifties, 33 per cent in their sixties, and 27 per cent at age seventy or older. Put differently, half of all people thirty-nine and older died between forty and sixty-three years of age, while the other half died after age sixty-three.⁶⁰

After 1763, the Stavenow villages waged an embittered, decades-long struggle against the lordship's efforts to raise labour services and other feudal rents. At considerable expense, they took their case to the appellate court in Berlin, meanwhile staging local rent strikes and aiming, sporadic, low-grade violence against seigneurial officials. Government mediation satisfied neither side, but the lordship's maximal claims went unfulfilled. To take advantage of steeply rising grain prices, seigneurial managers invested in additional draught teams and hired more free wage-labourers. In this way, the manorial economy grew less dependent on compulsory labour.

When after 1806 the Prussian government enacted liberal reforms, it proved easier than expected to gain the landlords' assent to the emancipation of their subjects. As members of the widespread class of hereditary but technically non-proprietorial farmers (*erbliche Leifbauern*), the Stavenowers' compensation payments to their former landlords were sizeable. Yet they survived to become

59. In the remaining cases the court imposed restrictions because of economic difficulties facing the new proprietors at the time of the farm transfer.

60. Of course, these demographic figures would look much worse if the heavy child mortality of the period were included in the reckoning.

medium or small-scale freeholders in the dawning age of free-market capitalist agriculture. Though not a triumph, it was a feat they owed largely to their own resourcefulness to have endured as well as they did three centuries of Junker lordship.⁶¹

The Subject Farmers on the Raczyński Estates

Properties of magnate families loomed large on the Polish landscape. In western Poland, the Raczyński lineage commanded a landed fortune, and in 1756–57 part of it was set aside as a widow's portion. It encompassed one manorial seat and ten demesne farms, worked by subject farmers in fifteen villages. Apart from the income from these sources, the widow Raczyńska drew rents from three proprietary small towns and from eleven 'German villages' (*wsie niemieckie*), that is, recent settlements of free colonists.⁶²

The survey of 1756–57 treated the subject villages, inhabited by Poles, differently than it did the 'German villages'. A notation of rents per type of 'German' farmer sufficed, though sometimes the appraisers named the proprietor (occasionally dignified as *gospodarz*, meaning 'householder' or 'farmer'). In the Polish villages, the estate officials listed the inhabitants of each household, including children, servants and lodgers. They recorded the condition of their housing and draught animals, and the personal status – 'subject' or 'free' – of the household head. Neither money rents nor tribute grain figured here, nor did the surveyors describe the individual Polish villagers' labour obligations. Instead, there was but one entry concerning the manorial service, entitled 'obligations of the fullholders [*kmieci*] in this and other properties':

They work the whole year with oxen from Sunday to Sunday, and from St Wojciech's Day [23 April] to St Martin's [11 November] they add one manual worker daily. Each fullholder gives six capons yearly and 60 eggs. The halfholders [*połkownicy*] work three days weekly with oxen and do three days of weekly manual work. The cottagers [*chłopnicy*] serve as they serve everywhere. The gardeners [*zagródnicy*] send one person daily for manual labour.⁶³

61. On the eighteenth-century end-phase and nineteenth-century liquidation of Prussian neo-manorialism, see Kaak, *Gutsherrenhaft*, pp. 64ff., 396ff.; Hartmut Harnisch, 'Vom Okroberedikt des Jahres 1807 zur Deklaration von 1816. Problematik und Charakter der preussischen Agrargesetzgebung zwischen 1807 und 1816', *Jahrb. Sonderband* (1978), pp. 232–93 and *Kapitalistische Agrarreform und industrielle Revolution* (Weimar, 1984). See also the literature cited in Hagen, 'The Junkers' faithless servants' and *idem*, 'The German peasantry in the nineteenth and early twentieth century: market integration, populist politics, votes for Hitler', *Peasant Studies*, 14 (1987), pp. 273–91, as well as Edgar Melton, 'The decline of Prussian *Gutsherrenhaft* and the rise of the Junker as rural patron, 1750–1806', *German History*, 12 (1994), pp. 286–307.

62. This section is based upon an analysis of the Raczyński survey of 1756–57 reproduced in Janusz Deresiewicz (ed.), *Materiały do dziejów chłopstwa wielkopolskiego w drugiej połowie XVIII wieku*, vol. I: *Współwzajemne porównanie* (Wrocław, 1956), pp. 19–83.

63. *Ibid.*, pp. 60–1.

The halfholders and landed cottagers comprised the big majority of the landed villagers. While they were partly free to cultivate their own farms, they were basically a labour force at the manorial officials' service, living in seigneurially owned housing and working with oxen and horses mostly supplied from the manor.

At Stavenow, estate appraisals ranged over a middle ground, noting the condition of the subject farms' iron stock and housing, but focusing mainly on the fixed dues and labour services each type of holding rendered, and ignoring the internal composition of the subject household. In this case, it was principally the holding (or *Hof*) which was of value to the lordship, while in the Polish case it was the subjects themselves.

In the fifteen subject villages, the survey recorded 1,341 people living in 294 households. As the first column in Table 1 shows, there were six basic household types: fullholding farmers (*kmieci*), comprising about one in forty households; halfholders (*połkownicy* or *połkownicy*), comprising about one-fifth; cottagers with very small arable holdings (*chłopnicy*), amounting to nearly one-quarter; cottagers with gardens (*komornicy*), representing one-tenth; lodgers renting or granted quarters in a farmer's household (*komornicy*), amounting to almost one-eighth; and separately housed manorial servants and employees, accounting for almost one-third of all households. Since the number of resident children and servants varied by household type, while lodgers were scattered among the farmers' households, the distribution of the entire population by household exhibited different proportions, as the second column shows.

In these, as in most other Polish villages, the social and economic centre of gravity rested among the middle-sized farmers and the smallholding cottagers. The few households of fullholders (*kmieci*) were well-supplied with servants and with children, the older of whom they could afford to keep at home, even in a married state, rather than sending them out to work as farm servants, as the poorer households did. Likewise, the fullholders kept relatively good stables of horses and oxen, although they mostly belonged to the manor.⁶⁴ These were the Polish counterparts to the dominant class of subject farmers at Stavenow.

The Raczyński survey says nothing about elders living in retirement. The Polish pattern was rather for the farmers to remain as household heads until their death, relying as they grew older and weaker upon their grown children, who were often married and living with their families in the parental household, awaiting the moment when they would assume its management. Such arrangements seem to have prevailed not only among the fullholders but also among the numerous halfholders (*połkownicy* or *połkownicy*), whose households – with four children, one servant, and on average one lodger – were

64. Among the fullholders, 4.4 of their 5.6 oxen were owned and supplied by the manor, 2.5 of their 3.6 horses. If the class of village farmers proper on the Raczyński estates is defined as the sum of *kmieci*, *połkownicy* and *chłopnicy*, the ratio of large and medium-sized farmers to smallholders is 50:50. Rutkowski's figures for 17,375 tenures in the years 1750–52 yield an analogous ratio of approximately 60:40. His data derived mainly from Crown estates, where largeholders' tenures were somewhat more secure than under noble jurisdictions. 'Régime agraire', pt II, p. 84.

sizeable for farms in the twenty-acre range. They kept, on average, six horses and oxen, also mostly in seigneurial ownership. With these draught animals, whose pasturage was perhaps meagre, the halfholders met the lordship's requirements for ploughing, harrowing and hauling. In the peak seasons, they were summoned daily to the manor farms. It was essential that enough hands remain in the household to work the holding's own land and earn extra income through occasional wage labour.⁶⁵

The many cottagers with small arable holdings (*chłopnicy*) held a pair of oxen and a horse or two, half of these animals their own. They kept on average three children at home, while only one in three hired a servant or housed a lodger. Their obligation in the high season was to supply the manor with one or two manual workers on a daily basis. Their lesser colleagues, the cottagers with garden land only (housed *komornicy*), had still smaller households and kept no draught animals. They owed a few days of unpaid weekly manual service, often provided by women, and otherwise lived from wage labour. About half of these mostly poverty-blighted cottagers were widows or women whose husbands had absconded. The lodgers (unhoused *komornicy*) comprised even more women (86 per cent) than did the landless cottagers, but in part this followed from the customary definition of the group as essentially female. One-third were married with children, mostly farm servants' wives. A quarter of them were married without children, probably women with elderly or disabled husbands. Over 40 per cent were women living alone with children.

Finally, the manorial employees and servants comprised a variegated group. Some labourers at the demesne farms lived in the villages as lodgers, and were registered as such. In this group were counted, among others, manorial officials, such as bailiffs, scribes and foresters (22 per cent); seigneurial shepherds (16 per cent), who often possessed some property in the form of the fifth part of the flocks they tended; artisans and tavernkeepers (19 per cent), also a not wholly penurious group; and domarial ploughmen and male and female farm-workers (19 per cent). A majority of these employees were married, living more or less decently in separate dwellings with their families.

Fewer than half (48 per cent) of the manorial employees lived in personal subjection; the majority were free from compulsory labour and impediments to moving elsewhere. The seigneurial surveyors did not record the legal status of the lodgers, perhaps because they represented a doubtful asset. Among the other villagers, rates of personal subjection were extremely high, ranging from 85 per cent of the landless cottagers to 100 per cent of the halfholders. In these villages only a few had absconded: five were farmers' children, two were

65. See Kula, 'The seigneurly and the peasant family'; Kocianowicz, 'The Polish peasant family', pp. 153-63; as well as the valuable study, based on Mazovian sources, by Andrzej Woźniak, 'Małżeństwa chłopskie w XVIII-wiecznej wsi pańszczyźnianej', *Etnografia Polska*, 22 (1978), pp. 133-57, and 23 (1979), pp. 153-74. The family sizes in the Raczynski villages in western Poland reported in the text above considerably exceed Woźniak's figures (pp. 158-60) for Mazovian villages. The same is true in relation to Kochanowicz's eighteenth-century data on family sizes in southern Polish villages (pp. 155-6). The difference would seem to reflect the larger size and, perhaps, greater material welfare of farms in Great Poland in contrast to those in central and southern Poland.

Table 2: Population by household type in fifteen service villages in western Poland, 1756-1757

Household type	Household type		Population by household type		Children/hshld (avr)	Servants/hshld (avr)	Total hshld size (avr)	Horses (avr)	Oxen (avr)	good	fair	bad
	No.	%	No.	%								
1. kmiecie	8	2.7	77	5.8	4.4	2.0	9.6	3.6	5.6	2	2	4
2. półtrójnicy	58	19.7	478	35.6	3.9	1.1	8.2	2.5	3.5	20	6	30
3. chałupnicy	67	22.8	380	28.3	2.9	0.3	5.7	1.3	2.2	22	10	29
4. komornicy	31	10.6	151	11.3	2.3	-0-	4.9	-0-	3	14	13	13
5. lodgers	38	12.9	-	-	1.7	-0-	2.8	-0-	-	-	-	-
6. manorial employees	92	31.3	255	19.0	2.5	-0-	2.8	-0-	18	5	20	20
Total	294	100.0	1341	100.0	2.4	1.1*	5.2~	2.5*	3.8*	65	37	96
					2.9++	0.8+++		33%		19%	48%	

Source: Janusz Derciewicz (ed.), *Materiały do dziejów chłopstwa wielkopolskiego w drugiej połowie XVIII wieku*. Tom I. *Województwo poznańskie* (Wrocław, 1956), pp. 19-83.

- ✓ Lodgers distributed among categories 1-3.
- + Average among all households.
- * Average among categories 1-3.
- ✓ Including lodgers.
- ++ Average among parents with children.
- +++ Average number of servants unrelated by kinship to household head.

husbands of women registered as lodgers, and one was a farmer who had deserted his wife and children.⁶⁶

Some of the lordship's inhabitants voluntarily surrendered their freedom, such as Jakub Kinowski, a domanial scribe, 'who subjected himself *officiose* so as to marry his wife in the village here'.⁶⁷ In other cases, the villagers claimed free status, but long residency created a presumption of subjection. As the surveyors wrote of a watchman and his wife, 'they claim not to be subjects [*nispoddani*], and yet they have lived here for years'. But in the same village they accepted a smallholder's assertion that 'he and his wife and children are freely contracted and not subjects [*nispoddani, kontraktowni*], and they have their own farm inventory'.⁶⁸

In the absence of seigneurial court records inventorying the subject villagers' possessions, measures of the villagers' individual well-being are at present scarce. Among 188 appraised houses, 51 per cent were found to be bad, very bad, or dangerous, requiring major repairs or complete rebuilding; only 35 per cent were rated in new or good condition, while the rest (14 per cent) were average.

The maintenance of the subject farm at a tolerable level of material welfare depended on the size and age-composition of the household's labour force. Young children and incapacitated elders were liabilities, especially to the newly married couple taking possession of a farm. If such a couple could recruit brothers or sisters or other near-relations to join the household as farm servants, and if the elders could perform useful labour, the chances were fair that the household would manage until the farmer's own children could work for him as servants or otherwise contribute to the income of the household. But if such a young couple were obliged to clothe and feed non-kin servants, and maintain sickly elders and young children as well, their household could easily sink into misery at the first bad harvest.⁶⁹

Several instances of relative well-being among the subject villagers under the Raczyński lordship support this view. The halfholder and forester Jędrzej occupied a house with a good thatched roof, a timbered living room, and entry-hall and bedroom constructed of lumber. Its foundations needed repair, as did his stable. One barn was good, the other was old. He kept four oxen and three horses, all belonging to himself. With his wife he had three daughters, of whom two had been put into service (*rozporządzone*) outside the house. The third daughter and her husband served in the household as servants while

raising their two small children. Here there were no incapacitated elders, nor were the children a great burden on the four adults.⁷⁰

There was the halfholder Tomasz and his wife, of whose house, barn and stable the surveyors wrote that 'all buildings are in good array'. One of their daughters had married and moved away, but the remaining two daughters and two sons lived at home 'working for their parents as servants'. Tomasz could claim as his own four oxen and two horses. The halfholder's widow Janowa occupied with her ten children a dwelling house described as old and bad, although her outbuildings were good. The surveyors noted that 'she runs the farm' with her three oldest sons, together with the hired servant-girl Barbara. The widow had two manorial oxen as well as three of her own, together with four horses, two her own.⁷¹

In another case, a halfholder's widow managed the farm with her married son and his wife, together with a younger unmarried son. But the household also counted an unmarried servant-girl and a married farm servant with four children and a wife, who as a lodger was obliged to perform unpaid weekly lodgers' service (*konornie*) at the manor. There was the fullholder Wojciech, whose dwelling was 'properly good' (*należycie dobra*), with outbuildings 'in good array'. With his wife Regina he had three children, including a son married to a fullholder's daughter. His other children lived at home. Wojciech kept six manorial oxen and four manorial horses, and employed two male farm servants, both seigneurial subjects.⁷²

By contrast, among many bleak pictures recorded by the surveyors, there was the cottager's holding of a certain Zdzymaj, 'who has absconded'. The dwelling house was good, but the outbuildings bad. 'The woman' - Zdzymaj's abandoned wife - 'manages for herself', though she had no livestock, having traded her last animal for food. Living with her was the lodger Mateusz, with two children and a wife who performed the lodger's service. 'This Mateusz neither serves nor does anything else', probably because of illness. The housemistress's sister also lived with her, together with two daughters who served at the manor in their mother's place.⁷³ Seemingly, the absence of able-bodied men doomed the women to an impoverishment that probably grew only worse.

As for judgements on the communal well-being of these villages, the appraisers remarked of the inhabitants of Sycyno:

the whole village says that they perform labour services beyond the measure of their obligation for the tenant farmer [that is, for the nobleman leasing the Sycyno demesne farm from the Raczyński lordship]. The cottagers say that, from time to time, they haven't got enough land for bread, and that to help the people His Honour tenant farmer Zabłocki gave them, according to their need, bread and barley seed, and for that reason they are this year suffering great oppression [*wielkiego uciskania*].⁷⁴

70. Deresiewicz, *Materiały*, p. 25.

71. *Ibid.*, p. 46.

72. *Ibid.*, pp. 46, 54.

73. *Ibid.*, p. 28.

74. *Ibid.*, p. 43.

66. In one case, a halfholding farmer had married one daughter to a freeman and outsider. The lordship approved this on condition that the father would bring another young woman into his household as a worker, which he had not yet done; the farmer had a second daughter who, 'having been insubordinate' in her service to the lordship, 'absconded'. This left the household with a third daughter, identified as the studious Anna (*Scholastyka Anna*). Deresiewicz, *Materiały*, p. 42.

67. *Ibid.*, p. 30.

68. *Ibid.*, pp. 38-9.

69. Wozniak, 'Maźczeniwa', *passim*. Cf. also Kula, *Economic Theory*, pp. 72ff, and 'The seigneurie and the peasant family', *passim*. Rukowski held that landlords were likely to make concessions on labour services to very young household heads (and that in general they respected the villagers' inheritance claims on the paternal farm): *Historia gospodarcza*, p. 270. According to Wozniak 'Maźczeniwa', p. 138, the lesser gentry frequently moved their subject farmers from one holding to another. The Raczyński inventory makes no references to such practices.

Of the principal manor farm at Wyszyna, the surveyors concluded that, on average, winter sowings (usually of rye) would only yield 'one grain', that is, that average crops would only double the seed sown. From the villagers' land at Wyszyna, except for two communal fields, 'no benefit can be expected, because the harvests there have been very weak. It will be necessary to support the people, both with seed grain and with bread.' At the settlement of Proсна, however, the manorial harvests were 'as they should be' (*obrzędnie*) and, except for three enfeebled farmers, the manor would not need to provide from its own harvests for the villagers. Around Grylewo cultivation was 'as it should be', as also at Sycyno and the town of Szamocin, but at Stobnica it was 'bad' (*łicho*).⁷⁵

The survey offers some evidence that manorial servants, especially those who were married and separately housed, kept household livestock and received adequate food provisions from the manor. In the 'German villages', references were rare to ruined householders who had absconded or who could not pay their considerable money rents. They were largely free of labour services, although some replaced the commutation fees with two or three days of weekly work. While their material circumstances remain unclear, the regime of cash rents points to greater well-being than in the Polish villages. Their condition was, in all likelihood, closer to that of the Stavenow farmers.

Poverty was widespread among the Polish villagers, but survival at some tolerable level of material welfare was possible. Conditions on the Raczyński estates, in themselves ambiguous, cannot be generalized, and it will be long before a picture claiming representativeness for the pre-partition Commonwealth can be drawn. The evidence presented here suggests that, depending on the human and livestock resources of the farmstead, sufficiency could be attained. Unfortunately, the Polish Commonwealth could not guarantee the villagers' security, which easily yielded to plunder and impoverishment in times of foreign invasion and civil war.

The toll on the common people of the proverbial 'Polish anarchy', understood as governmental weakness, should be rated higher – in contrast to the impoverishing effect (real though it was) of seigneurial exploitation – than the historical literature generally allows. For many twentieth-century Polish historians, it has been easier to condemn the landlords' fleecing of their subjects than to accept that the impotence and bankruptcy of the state ruined the land and its inhabitants.

CONCLUSION

The historical literature has viewed the agrarian world of east-Elbian Germany and Poland through the eyes of the landed gentry. Both through their ancient

75. *Ibid.*, p. 80.

legitimate authority and their powers of extra-economic coercion, they worked their will upon the villages, successfully carrying out the seigneurial counter-revolution of the long sixteenth century. Yet, as this essay has argued, their triumph was imperfect, both in the period before the crisis of the seventeenth century and in the end-phase of commercialized manorialism. The subject farmers stubbornly defended their labour power and farm surpluses, whether in negotiations with the lordships exchanging natural rents for manorial services, or in striking terms for the resettlement of an abandoned or devastated holding, or through the smallest possible exertion expended in work at the manor, or rent-strikes and lawsuits, or other forms of resistance and the pursuit of minor advantages in the long tug-of-war they fought with their lordships.

From this angle, the differences in the situation and development of the Polish villages, by contrast with those in east-Elbian Germany, appear to be great in degree but smaller in kind. While the access of most subject farmers in Brandenburg-Prussia to the princely courts gave them a powerful weapon of self-defence that most Polish (and other east-Elbian German) villagers lacked, in other respects variations in legal condition from west to east were perhaps less important. The villagers were all primarily interested in leading the life of small or medium farmers, consuming the products of their labours, selling their surpluses on local markets, and fulfilling their expectations, of the life-cycle as village custom defined and culturally legitimized it. All struggled to minimize the burden upon them of seigneurial rent. All could be driven by misfortune and despair into illegal flight. The towns were not closed to them, but it was difficult to take much with them in the way of start-up capital, whether human or material, for an urban career.

This essay has stressed the importance of judging the villagers' condition by the rents they paid their lordships, by the taxes and tithes extracted from them, and by their material circumstances, as reflected in housing, accumulated property and working capital, diet, longevity, and other such measures. It can in some cases be shown that, by these standards, the villagers experienced better and worse times under the centuries-long manorial regime. The conjuncture of the moment must be understood before judgements on well-being or misery are rendered. The exogenous impact upon the rural common people of state-building or state-breakdown processes, and of the fiscal burdens and wartime toll they entailed, must also be justly weighed, without resorting to the reductive tactic of interpreting all developments in the political sphere as reflections of the interests of the landed nobility. The history of these central European villages steered not toward ineluctable, structurally determined outcomes, but rather traced a course defined, in each land, by the multi-sided rivalry of manor, village, Crown and town. In the end the villages, though battered and bruised, survived the contest.