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### Manor estates\*\* in the context of changes in the economic situation of Poland in the 14<sup>th</sup>–17<sup>th</sup> centuries

**Summary:** Considering “Folwark” (Manor) as one of components of an estate, the authors focus on its development and changes in form of its organization, against a background of a changing economic situation. They treat the 14<sup>th</sup> and the 16<sup>th</sup> centuries as a time of prosperity and the 15<sup>th</sup>, 17<sup>th</sup> centuries as a period of decrease in demand for agricultural products. Big “Folwark”, understood as an estate connected with a local market, emerged during the 14<sup>th</sup> c. mainly as a result of great land estates’ reorganization. Its concomitant was the gradual and equivalent removal of feudal rent’s point of gravity from

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\*\* T/N: The phenomenon, and consequently the term, “folwark” has no counterpart in the English agrarian and ownership structures. Its closes equivalents are “manor house” – understood as the building, “manor demesne” for the part of the farm, which was governed and cultivated directly by the owner, and “manor estates” for the entirety of the farm with all its lands and facilities.

a rent in money to labour (e.g. Lesser Poland). This was caused also by an insufficient supply of money in peripheral parts of Poland.

A villein manor in the middle gentry's estate appeared on the turn of 15<sup>th</sup> and 16<sup>th</sup> centuries as a result of peasant holdings' crisis, as they were not able to sell their products and get money to pay a rent, gradually being changed into a labour. It is concomitant was peasants' aiming to make services lower by diminishing an area of tillage. The following correlation can be noticed: the villein manor – "folwark" – developed faster in the regions less connected with the market and predominated by big rental peasant holdings. It was different in parts of Poland predominated by big rental peasant farms, situated in the territories of a greater demand for agricultural products. In regions connected with the market (e.g. East Pomerania) manors of the great landowners did not make use of villein services, but of a hired labour. The change of service forms from a money-rent to labour resulted from worsening of the sales conditions. The increase in both kinds of rent in the 16<sup>th</sup> c. was caused by a growth of peasants' profits as a result of improvement in the economic situation in Poland, caused by an external demand for grain. The money-rent predominated in periods of prosperity and greater supply of money; the villein labour predominated when the economic situation was not good. Regions connected with the Gdansk market developed in a different way than the rest of the country – they were predominated by peasant rental economy and hired manor; the last aimed to displace peasants from the selling market.

**Keywords:** manor estate, economic history, villain estate

By the 16<sup>th</sup> c., manor estate, understood as a farm specializing solely in cultivation or cultivation and breeding, organized and operating for the benefit of its noble owner, had risen from a position of secondary importance to playing the primary role in the village structure, and even, if we follow the sources, in the entire Polish economy.

As the point of departure for further analysis, we take the 14<sup>th</sup> c., commonly deemed the time of economic prosperity in Poland.<sup>1</sup> It is supported by such phenomena as: continuous development of the settlement

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<sup>1</sup> Cf., e.g. J. Topolski, *Gospodarka polska a europejska w XVI–XVIII wieku*, Poznań 1977, pp. 59–60; B. Zientara, A. Mączak, I. Ihnatowicz, Z. Landau, *Dzieje gospodarcze Polski do roku 1939*, Warszawa 1988, p. 134; J. Kurtyka, *Odrodzone Królestwo. Monarchia Władysława Łokietka i Kazimierza Wielkiego w świetle nowych badań*, Kraków 2001, p. 189.

network, the onset of which can be traced to the 13<sup>th</sup> c., settlement locations in the times of Casimir the Great, accounting for c.a. 100 towns and numerous investments in buildings and facilities, such as churches, town walls, castles.<sup>2</sup> Similarly, the 16<sup>th</sup> c. is held in high esteem among researchers studying the economic development. The reason was the growth in the farming sector stemming from the possibility to export the surplus yield of crops to the Western European markets.<sup>3</sup> On the other hand, the signs of stagnation, which appeared at the end of the 16<sup>th</sup> c., resulting from basing the system on external demand on crops, were also observed in the studies.<sup>4</sup>

The 15<sup>th</sup> c., however, remains a mystery. The assessments of the economic phenomena then at play tend to be contradictory. It is possible that the positive opinions on the state of the country's economy were connected with the political success of territorially growing Jagiellonian empire.<sup>5</sup> We, however, are of the opinion that the 15<sup>th</sup> c. saw the dusk of prosperity in the field of agricultural production paired with insufficient money supply.<sup>6</sup> All of that eventuated in a crisis of feudal economy, regarding small and middle-sized farms. The fall in demand for the crops, or perhaps decreasing

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<sup>2</sup> J. Kurtyka, *Odrodzone Królestwo*, pp. 193–194.

<sup>3</sup> A. Wyczański, *Polska w Europie XVI stulecia*, Warszawa 1973.

<sup>4</sup> J. Topolski, *Gospodarka polska a europejska*, p. 61; idem, *Przełom gospodarczy w Polsce XVI wieku i jego następstwa*, Poznań 2000; A. Nowak, *Początki kryzysu sił wytwórczych na wsi wielkopolskiej w końcu XVI i pierwszej połowie XVII w.*, Warszawa–Poznań 1975; idem, *Przeobrażenia struktury społecznej ludności wiejskiej w Polsce w okresie panowania systemu folwarczno-pańszczyźnianego (XV–XVIII w.). Próba ujęcia modelowego*, in: *Badania nad historią gospodarczo-społeczną w Polsce (Problemy i metody)*, Warszawa–Poznań 1978, p. 142.

<sup>5</sup> B. Zientara, A. Mączak, I. Ichnatowicz, Z. Landau, *Dzieje gospodarcze Polski*, pp. 224–225; J. Wyrozumski, *Czy późnośredniowieczny kryzys feudalizmu dotknął Polskę?*, in: *Homines et societas. Czasy Piastów i Jagiellonów. Studia historyczne ofiarowane Antoniemu Gąsiorowskiemu w sześćdziesiątą piątą rocznicę urodzin*, T. Jasiński, T. Jurek, J.M. Piskorski (eds), Poznań 1997, pp. 103–113; recently A. Wyczański, *Gospodarka wiejska w Polsce XIV wieku w ujęciu liczbowym (Próba oceny)*, “Roczniki Dziejów Społecznych i Gospodarczych” 2002, vol. 62, p. 187 (conclusion).

<sup>6</sup> Z. Morawski, *Ziemia, urzędy, pieniądze. Finanse szlachty łęczyckiej w końcu XIV i pierwszej połowie XV w.*, Warszawa 1993; M. Dygo, *Czy w Polsce późnośredniowiecznej był kryzys gospodarczy?*, “Przegląd Historyczny” 1989, vol. 80 (4), pp. 753–764.

efficiency of production, manifested itself in a growing number of vacancies, both in the fields cultivated by peasants and for the benefit of the noblemen.<sup>7</sup>

The medieval manor estate was the subject of interest for researchers mostly as a point of reference for the modern era manorial farming system (Pl. *system folwarczno-pańszczyźniany*) in agriculture, in which the majority of the landowners' income was derived from cultivation of their own arable land. In this approach, three statements were assumed as tenets that do not require proving:

1. the decrease in noblemen's income from socage due to currency devaluation pushed them to develop their manorial estates;
2. serfdom, promulgated in the 15<sup>th</sup> c., was a necessity and was an additional burden on the village population;
3. the nobility played the leading role in spreading the manorial system.

Seeking the origins of manorial farming system and the so called "second serfdom", a few theories, each usually based on one dominant factor, have been proposed:

- 1/ "military" – the change of military service organization (replacing personal service with mercenaries) allowed the noblemen to attend to their own estates;
- 2/ "monetary" – devaluation resulted in a drop in the rent and need to seek new sources of income;
- 3/ "vacancies theory" – in the 14<sup>th</sup> and 15<sup>th</sup> centuries, the nobility faced the need to cultivate the vacant fields;
- 4/ "market theories" – emphasising the demand for the agricultural produce on the internal and international (export) market;

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<sup>7</sup> S. Mielczarski, J. R. Szaflik, *zagadnienie lanów pustych w Polsce w XV i XVI w.*, „Studia i Materiały do Dziejów Wielkopolski i Pomorza” 1956, vol. 1 (2), pp. 55–103; J. Topolski, *Gospodarstwo wiejskie w dobrach arcybiskupa gnieźnieńskiego od XVI do XVIII wieku*, Poznań 1958, p. 112 and passim; W. Rusiński, *Pustki – problem agrarny feudalnej Europy*, „Roczniki Dziejów Społecznych i Gospodarczych” 1961, vol. 23, pp. 9–50.

5/ “socio-political theories” according to which the rise of the nobility to the dominant position in the country enabled them to force peasants into serfdom.<sup>8</sup>

The economic activity of the nobility, including the studies of the organization of the estates, only recently has become a subject of interest in the Polish medieval studies.<sup>9</sup> For the noblemen, their estates were of primary importance as a requirement to achieve their status. It is supported by the fact that the surplus money was mostly invested in land. The estates’ location and size spoke of one’s social status and ability to participate in the social and political life.

Until the dusk of the 14<sup>th</sup> c. the land ownership was based on the allodial lands.<sup>10</sup> It changed radically when the Jagiellonians, who *en masse* pledged the royal lands to the nobility, ascended to the throne.<sup>11</sup> The lands, located in the king’s dominion, often became the major component of the estates belonging to the most influential noble families. It led to a great unprecedented economic stratification among the nobility in the 15<sup>th</sup> c.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> Previous ideas concerning the origins of manor estates according to: W. Rusiński, *Drogi rozwojowe folwarku pańszczyźnianego*, “Przegląd Historyczny” 1956, vol. 47 (4), pp. 617–655; B. Zientara, *Z zagadnień spornych tzw. “wtórnego poddaństwa” w Europie Środkowej*, “Przegląd Historyczny” 1956, vol. 47 (1); J. Topolski, *Wielki przewrót w gospodarce europejskiej w XVI wieku: Przyczyny rozwoju i struktura gospodarki folwarczno-pańszczyźnianej*, in: idem, *Gospodarka polska a europejska*, Poznań 1977, pp. 71–84.

<sup>9</sup> J. Kurtyka, *Posiadłość, dziedziczność i prestiż. Badania nad późnośredniowieczną i uczesnonowożytną wielką własnością możnowładczą w Polsce XIV–XVII*, “Roczniki Historyczne” 1999, vol. 65, pp. 161–194; J. Wroniszewski, *Szlachta ziemi sandomierskiej w średniowieczu. Zagadnienia społeczne i gospodarcze*, Poznań–Wrocław 2001.

<sup>10</sup> J. Wroniszewski, *Szlachta ziemi sandomierskiej*, pp. 19–20, older literature there.

<sup>11</sup> A. Wyczański, *Rozdawnictwo dóbr królewskich za Zygmunta I*, “Przegląd Historyczny” 1953, vol. 44 (3), pp. 281–308; cf. Numerous works by J.S. Matuszewski and A. Sucheni-Grabowska.

<sup>12</sup> It is exemplified by the widening wealth gap observed in the amount of dowry among Sieradz nobility in the 15<sup>th</sup> c.; cf. A. Szymczakowa, *Szlachta sieradzka w XV wieku. Magnifici et generosi*, Łódź 1998, p. 412. At the beginning of the 15th c. the proportion between the lowest and highest dowries among the average and wealthy nobility was 1:5, while at the end of that century it reached 1:65.

In the late Middle Ages, the noble estates of great and average size were arranged around groups of a few villages. The model of such an estate included some solutions, implemented in the first half of the 14<sup>th</sup> c., namely:

- 1/ creating a uniform territory;
- 2/ acquiring a town charter based on the Magdeburg law;
- 3/ location of the town on the Magdeburg law;
- 4/ building a castle – a residence and a centre of power;
- 5/ establishing a parish structure, with the right of patronage over the church held by the nobleman.<sup>13</sup>

According to such a model, Casimir the Great reorganized the royal dominion. It was inspired by the king's closest circle of some enlightened noblemen, who had already put such a model into practice in their own estates, as early as in the 14<sup>th</sup> c.<sup>14</sup> The dynamics of dissipation of the changes remains unclear, although the process was undoubtedly prolonged in time.

Only a limited number of sources show the role of the manor demesne in the model above. Initially, the fields located there constituted the supply base for the court, providing the agricultural produce for the people and feed for livestock (horses in particular). It is difficult to assess its role in the overall income structure of a knight, though it can be presumed it was ancillary in comparison to the income generated by the land tenure.<sup>15</sup> The economic changes happening since the turn of the 12<sup>th</sup> and 13<sup>th</sup> centuries, spreading of settlements based on the Magdeburg law, and the location of the villages where villeins lived, all resulted in decreasing the

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<sup>13</sup> Cf. F. Sikora, *Ropczycki zespół osadniczy w średniowieczu. Z badań nad kazimierzowskim modelem osadniczo-urbanistycznym*, "Teki Krakowskie" 1996, vol. 3, pp. 73–96; J. Kurtyka, *Posiadłość, dziedziczność, presitz*, pp. 190–191; J. Wroniszewski, *Szlachta ziemi sandomierskiej*, p. 20 and following; the origins of that process are elaborated by: S. Gawlas, *O kształt zjednoczonego królestwa. Niemieckie władztwo terytorialne a geneza społeczno-ustrojowej odrębności Polski*, Warszawa 1996, p. 78 and following.

<sup>14</sup> J. Wroniszewski, *Szlachta ziemi sandomierskiej*, pp. 22–23 – gives the example of the group of villages in Tarnów area.

<sup>15</sup> A. Rutkowska-Plachcińska, *W sprawie charakteru rezerwy pańskiej w okresie gospodarki czynszowej*, "Przegląd Historyczny" 1957, vol. 49 (3), pp. 411–435.

acreage devoted to the manorial demesne, cultivated for the benefit of the landowner, in favour of the villein's farms.

The rent-based economy did not provide favourable conditions for large manorial demesnes. It was not necessary, as the crux of the tenure system was in fact the decentralization of farming.<sup>16</sup> One of its results was scattering of the fields farmed by the landlord. Since the beginning of the 14th c. (the previous period is not covered by the sources), such field scattering can be observed, paired with their relatively small acreage (usually, two łans – hides [T/N: in medieval Poland *łan* – *hide* was a unit of land given to the peasant as a tenure]). The situation occurred even in the case when the neighbouring villages belonged to one nobleman. Each, from the legal perspective, was a separate unit. Two ways to cultivate the royal lands by the nobility could be observed. The first involved separation of fields and cultivation by the group of peasants called “zagrodniczy” [T/N: peasants with land, similar to e.g. Scottish cotters] or hired hands compensated with a portion of the yield (e.g. every fourth sheaf – a practice which survived until the 16<sup>th</sup> c.). The second was implemented in the villages located on the Magdeburglaw and with regular arrangement of fields and was the so called “jutrzyna” (jugerum, Lat. *Jugerum*) which involved cultivation by each peasant of a portion, small in this particular case, of the land belonging to the landowner. At first, it constituted a part of the peasant's *hide*, which was in fact a form of socage (tenure paid with the yield).<sup>17</sup> With time, in the 14<sup>th</sup> c., this second form evolved into a villeinage of a sort. At first, within the land allotted to peasants, two *hides* of noble land were delimited. Grubbing, weeding, and finally, cultivation were the duties of peasants. Later, the work devoted to the jugerum fields was performed in the landowner's manor demesne, also in the other villages. The change was a direct result of organising the noble lands into groups of villages surrounding the central manor house and demesne and liquidation of the smaller manor estates in the particular villages (by giving them to peasants). Such trends neatly

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<sup>16</sup> T. Tyc, *Początki kolonizacji wiejskiej na prawie niemieckim w Wielkopolsce (1200–1338)*, Poznań 1924, pp. 98–102.

<sup>17</sup> J. Wroniszewski, *Szlachta ziemi sandomierskiej*, p. 50 and following.

fitted into the modernisation of the large and middle-sized estates in progress since the first half of the 14<sup>th</sup> c.

The modernisation is best illustrated on the example of church lands, which led the way in its implementation and popularization.<sup>18</sup> It may be connected with the need to manage and put to use fairly large amounts of crop acquired by means of tithe among the landowners in the clergy. Their participation in the market conducted to further intensification of production among other landowners. At the beginning of the 15<sup>th</sup> c., a similar solution was implemented in large noble estates, particularly those within the field of influence of Kraków's agglomeration market. A modern manor estate comprised entire villages, moving peasants to other lands belonging to the nobleman. The estates supplied produce to the local market, but, when the conditions were favourable, their owners, in cooperation with Kraków merchants, ventured to float the crop down the Vistula river to export it as well.<sup>19</sup>

The reasons behind the manor's, a small and middle-size noble estate, evolution from the "noble soil" to an extensive commercial farm elude clear interpretation. It occurred in the transition period of the dusk of prosperity of the 13<sup>th</sup>–14<sup>th</sup> c., subsequent stagnation, and, in the middle of the 15<sup>th</sup> c., a full-fledged agrarian crisis. It can be also deemed an extension of prior modernization of the noble lands in the 14<sup>th</sup> c. However, surprisingly enough, the role the serfdom played in manor's cultivation was increasing. We suppose the explanation may be a relative weakness of the monetary system (lack of money in circulation).<sup>20</sup> In the areas where there was enough money, like Prussia, and selling the crop yield was more profitable, the manors based on contractual, paid work were being established (e.g. Teutonic manor estates in Żuławy, near Gdańsk).<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> Ibidem, p. 63 and following.

<sup>19</sup> A. Sochacka, *Jan z Czyżowa namiestnik Władysława Warneńczyka. Kariera rodziny Półkoźców w średniowieczu*, Lublin 1993, p. 196 and following.

<sup>20</sup> Z. Żabiński, *Systemy pieniężne na ziemiach polskich*, Wrocław–Warszawa 1981, pp. 50–57.

<sup>21</sup> B. Geremek, *Ze studiów nad stosunkami gospodarczymi między miastem a wsią w Prusach Krzyżackich w pierwszej połowie XV.*, "Przegląd Historyczny" 1956, vol. 47 (1), p. 53 and following.



In the 16<sup>th</sup> c., the villages with land tenure were still being settled on the edges of the areas subject to intensive settlement (Chełmno land, Podolia, Volhynia, later, Ukraine). It was a common practice among the landowners in the manors located closer to the markets.<sup>22</sup> In some areas, e.g. Łęczyca and Sieradz land, some forms of rent economy, including manor estates, survived the crisis of the 15<sup>th</sup> c. and persevered through the prosperous 16<sup>th</sup> c. only to encounter crisis at its end.<sup>23</sup> The situation was parallel in Greater Poland Krajna and Chojnice area where weaker connections with Gdańsk market hindered the development of manor estates until the second half of the 16<sup>th</sup> c.<sup>24</sup>

One consequence of the emergence of large commercial manor estates was an increase in the extent to which peasants were burdened with villeinage. The first accounts of regular, weekly service in the landowner's demesne date back to the end of the 14<sup>th</sup> c. and pertain to the church lands (1387, 1388)<sup>25</sup> and royal land (1398),<sup>26</sup> which were large estates. It is of particular importance as the popularisation of regular service (at first, 1 day per week per one hide of land) is directly ascribed to the evolution of the feudal rent economy towards a manorial/villeinage based system. Contrary to the common stance in the literature, the introduction of a weekly service or increasing the irregular one (rise in the total number of days yearly) did not entail additional burden on peasants. It was imple-

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<sup>22</sup> An example of such behavior is the economic activity of Konstanty Wasyl Ostrogski, cf. T. Kempa, *Konstanty Wasyl Ostrogski (ok. 1524/1525–1608), wojewoda kijowski i marszałek ziemi wołyńskiej*, Toruń 1997, pp. 171–189.

<sup>23</sup> S.M. Zajączkowski, *Początki folwarku w ziemiach łęczyckiej i sieradzkiej (do początków XVI wieku)*, "Roczniki Dziejów Społecznych i Gospodarczych" 1970, vol. 31, pp. 2–43.

<sup>24</sup> K. Mikulski, *Osadnictwo wiejskie województwa pomorskiego od połowy XVI do końca XVII wieku*, Toruń 1994, p. 102–103; S. Hoszowski (ed.), *Lustracja województwa pomorskiego 1565*, Gdańsk 1961, pp. 36, 41, 42, 76, 77.

<sup>25</sup> *Zbiór dokumentów małopolskich* [A collection of documents from Lesser Poland] published by S. Kuraś, I. Sułkowska-Kuraś, Wrocław 1969, vol. 4, issue 1078a; *Antiquissimi libri iudiciales terrae Cracoviensis*, published by B. Ulanowski, Kraków 1884 (Starodawne prawa polskiego pomniki, vol. 8), issue 4709.

<sup>26</sup> *Zbiór dokumentów małopolskich* [A collection of documents from Lesser Poland] published by S. Kuraś, I. Sułkowska-Kuraś, Wrocław 1974, vol. 6, no 1623.

mented on the basis of an agreement between them and the feudal lord and was imposed in place of a rent. In villages where villeinage or compulsory service was introduced, the rent was a few times lower than in the “socage” ones. The amount of the overall rent and service burden also depended on the farms’ yield and was much higher in the vicinity of the market. The progressive devaluation was also a factor.

In the second half of the 15<sup>th</sup> c., both large manor estates and the one-day weekly service had become a standard in large church estates in Lesser Poland.<sup>27</sup> Comparatively less is known of the noble estates of that time. We can presume that the fundamental role was still played by the socage. It stands in opposition to the belief among most of the scholars that it was the nobility who stood behind the changes towards the manor/villeinage based feudal economy. Its development should be ascribed not to any social class (either clergy or nobility), but to the ownership type. It first developed in the church estates, then in royal, and finally, noble ones. In the 15<sup>th</sup> c., as far as the lands of the lesser nobility are concerned, in the majority of the villages, there were the “old” type of the manor demesnes, and in half of them there were two or three of manors. It was a result of land fragmentation. Meanwhile, in the large estates, for each “new” type of the manor demesne, there were three to five villages supporting it.<sup>28</sup> It can be gathered that in smaller estates with smaller manor demesnes, the villeinage was economically inefficient. Contrary to the commercial manors, they usually served the purpose of supplying the court. They were cultivated by the “zagrodnicy” type of peasants or hired hands paid with a share of the yield. The rent constituted the core of the noblemen’s income.

The growing significance of regular service in the structure of tenure in the second half of the 15<sup>th</sup> c. is interrelated with the economic condition of peasants’ farms. They changed as a result of the emerging economic crisis, the reasons for which, in the case of Poland, remain unclear. Some researchers even question its existence whatsoever, though its consequences can easily be traced in the sources, e.g., in the form of bankruptcy of minor

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<sup>27</sup> Cf. A. Przędziecki (publ.), *Joannis Dlugossii Liber beneficiorum dioecesis Cracoviensis*, Kraków 1863–1864, vol. 1–3.

<sup>28</sup> J. Wroniszewski, *Szlachta ziemi sandomierskiej*, pp. 66–67.

noble estates, concentration of land and money in a group of a few noblemen. Another illustration of a plummeting value of the estates is pledging the royal domain. The universality of this practice all over Europe further confirms the crisis hypothesis.<sup>29</sup> The signs of the upcoming prosperity in the 16<sup>th</sup> c. ultimately led to lifting the debt burden, which once again confirms a direct relationship between the practice of pledging the royal domains and some broader economic trends.<sup>30</sup>

The situation in the neighbouring Czech and Hungary was also of no little importance for the situation in Poland in the 15<sup>th</sup> c. Their impact on Polish economy is best exemplified by the fact that they were the major source of funding and currency (Prague groshen; Czech: *pražský groš*; Hungarian forint). Depleting the sources of metals for minting the coins in those countries at the end of the 14<sup>th</sup> c. was a major factor in the shortage of money in the following century, and the political crisis (Hussite Wars) only exacerbated the problem. In the course of the 15<sup>th</sup> c. the value of money, particularly minted coins, grew incessantly, while the prices of agricultural produce, measured in silver (calculated for the period between 1440 and 1490) consistently fell until the level prior 1380.<sup>31</sup>

Meanwhile, we can observe some changes in the size of the peasant farms and growing wealth discrepancies in the countryside – the number of smallest and largest farms grew. In some areas, (e.g. Masovia) at the beginning of the 16<sup>th</sup> c., the half- *hide* sized farms comprised  $\frac{3}{4}$  all farms.<sup>32</sup> The reason can be traced to the falling profitability of the field cultivation. Unable to acquire satisfactory income, peasants abandoned half of their

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<sup>29</sup> Cf. A. Wyczański, *Rozdawnictwo dóbr królewskich*, p. 304.

<sup>30</sup> A. Sucheni-Grabowska, *Odbudowa domeny królewskiej w Polsce 1504–1548*, Wrocław–Warszawa–Kraków 1967; idem, *Monarchia dwóch ostatnich Jagiellonów a ruch egzekucyjny, cz. I: Geneza egzekucji dóbr*, Warszawa 1974.

<sup>31</sup> Z. Żabiński, *Systemy pieniężne na ziemiach*, pp. 34, 54 and following.

<sup>32</sup> H. Wajs, *Powinności feudalne chłopów na Mazowszu od XIV do początku XVI w.* (w dobrach monarszych i kościelnych), Warszawa 1986, p. 49; cf. J. Rutkowski, *Statystyka zawodowa ludności wiejskiej w drugiej połowie XVI w.*, “Rozprawy Akademii Umiejętności. Wydział Historyczno-Filozoficzny” 1918, vol. 61, p. 337; W. Rusiński, *Pustki*, tab. 1, p. 21; G. Jawor, *Ekonomiczne i społeczne aspekty zbiegostwa ludności wiejskiej na ziemi lubelskiej w XV w.*, “Roczniki Dziejów Społecznych i Gospodarczych” 1987, vol. 48, pp. 139–151.

*hide*, diminishing their farms to the size sufficient to sustain their families. In such a case, they resorted to paying tenure with their work instead of money. It is further evidenced by a tendency among peasants to move from the villages where the rent was paid with socage to those where the dues were mostly served in the landowner's fields.<sup>33</sup>

It is also worth to review the common interpretation of the legal documents regulating the weekly dues, particularly the bills by the local governments/dietines (Pl. *sejmiki ziemskie*), since 1477 and sejm (Eng. *Parliamentary gathering*) held in 1520. They established the work in all types of the estates at one day per week.<sup>34</sup> So far, in the literature, it was considered an increase in peasants' work burden. We, however, are of the opinion that the bills served the purpose of securing the lesser nobility estates from the outflow of settlers to the newly colonised areas and larger estates. It was, in fact, a maximum burden imposed on peasants, not the minimum. Peasants suffered only in this way that the landowner could choose the way the rent was paid – in nature or as socage.<sup>35</sup>

The crisis of the peasant side of the farming industry heavily impacted the development of the manor estates' acreage. In estates where the majority of the peasant's farms were small and poor, the manor demesne developed more rapidly than in those where the farms were big, rich and actively participating in the local market exchange. The peasant's practice to abandon parts of their farms undermined the sources of noblemen's primary income – socage. The acreage of abandoned fields increased and including them in the demesne was the necessary condition of sustaining the income of the noble court. Thus, the villeinage rose in importance even in the smaller noblemen's estates, where the position of the major source of income shifted towards the manor demesne. The process was in no way smooth. The desolation of peasants' parts of the villages often resulted in the ultimate collapse of the manor there operating.

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<sup>33</sup> J. Wroniszewski, *Szlachta ziemi sandomierskiej*, p. 53 and following.

<sup>34</sup> L. Żytkowicz, *Próby regulacji pańszczyzny w Polsce w latach 1477–1520*, "Roczniki Dziejów Społecznych i Gospodarczych" 1984, vol. 45, pp. 1–20.

<sup>35</sup> J. Wroniszewski, *Szlachta ziemi sandomierskiej*, pp. 62–63.

The departure from the tenure paid in money due to deteriorating conditions on the markets for the peasant producers is, for example, corroborated by the organization of the Malbork royal estates (Pl. *ekonomia malborska*). The manor estates there located were based on the hired work, and tenure dues paid in money, which was the result of tight relations with the market. Both court and peasants' agricultural production were on the rise.<sup>36</sup>

The growing export of crops since the beginning of the second quarter of the 16<sup>th</sup> c. had rejuvenated the internal market as well. It mostly involved the large estates which participated in the Gdańsk market (Royal Prussia, Kuyavia, Masovia, later Lesser Poland) and positively influenced the economic stance of lesser and middle-class nobility as well as the wealthy peasants. They took over the role of the supplier for the newly developing local markets. Paradoxically, it may have been the increased tenure rent that boosted the productivity of the agricultural production. The relations between the nobleman's court and the countryside were mostly characterized, similarly to the Middle Ages, by significant flexibility and reflected the economic reality. The increase in socage was tantamount to the increase in the peasant farms' income in the time of prosperity. Thus, we observe the rise in the rent both paid with socage and weekly service.<sup>37</sup>

The development of the manorial system in the 16<sup>th</sup> c., dynamic in terms of time and space, stemmed from a demand for Polish crops in Western Europe. As late as in the first half of the 16<sup>th</sup> c., the port in Gdańsk had closer trade connections only with the producers from Royal Prussia and Masovia. Only in the second half of that century did the Gdańsk market

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<sup>36</sup> A. Mączak, *Gospodarstwo chłopskie na Żulawach w początkach XVII wieku*, Warszawa 1962; J. Szpak, *Problem wzrostu gospodarczego i efektywności ekonomiki folwarku opartego o prace najemną w Polsce XVI wieku*, in: *Studia z historii gospodarczej i demografii historycznej. Prace ofiarowane profesorowi Stanisławowi Hoszowskiemu w 70. rocznicę urodzin*, ed. J.M. Małecki, Kraków 1975, pp. 67–75; J. Rutkowski, *Pańszczyzna i praca najemna w organizacji folwarków królewskich w Prusach za Zygmunta Augusta*, "Roczniki Historyczne" 1928, vol. 4, pp. 39–58.

<sup>37</sup> J. Wroniszewski, *Szlachta ziemi sandomierskiej*, pp. 58–63. In Pomerania, the effect of such phenomena was the introduction of the so called "ransom" (Pl. *okup*) in place of the rent paid in labour in the wealthiest villages.

reach the entire area of Lesser Poland.<sup>38</sup> The distance from Gdańsk, which was a centre of the regional market, directly influenced profitability, which in turn affected the character of the manor estates established at that time. The further from the town, the higher was the cost of transport and lower were the prices of crops.<sup>39</sup> This dominance of Gdańsk as an intermediary in the crop trade resulted in production only being economically justifiable in the direct vicinity of the port: in Żuławy and the Lower Vistula valley. That is why the most intensive forms of field cultivation were established there. In those areas, a manor estate as a form of organisation of production was inferior to the emphyteutic settlement, highly profitable with little or no costs. It is, then, clearly visible that in areas where positive economic impulses were paired with a growing productivity of the peasant farms the tenure was again paid with money in the form of socage as a primary tax burden. We can conclude that until the economic breakdown at the end of the 16<sup>th</sup> c., both manor estates and peasants' farms had enjoyed the time of prosperity. The development of manors, with the exception of the overpopulated areas, did not occur at the cost of peasants.<sup>40</sup> Using them as the free workforce, the nobility transferred only a small portion of cost to them. As long as economy was booming, the rent burden lowered the profitability but in no way did it threaten the existence of the individual farms.<sup>41</sup>

The issue of a regress or even a breakdown of the manorial system, the beginning of which can be traced to the end of the 16<sup>th</sup> c., appears to be more complex. The origins of the regress can be ascribed to reaching the soil productivity limits due to crop monoculture, which resulted in lower yield. This, in turn, resulted in the fall in crops export and greater

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<sup>38</sup> Z. Guldon. J. Muszyńska, *Splaw wisłany i niemeński a gospodarka folwarczno-pańszczyźniana w szlacheckiej Rzeczypospolitej*, in: *Prusy Książęce i Prusy Królewskie w XVI–XVIII w.*, ed. J. Wijaczka, Kielce 1997, pp. 251–261, particularly fig. 1 and 2, pp. 252–253.

<sup>39</sup> We can draw such a conclusion from the work by S. Mielczarski, *Rynek zbożowy na ziemiach polskich w drugiej połowie XVI i pierwszej połowie XVII wieku. Próba rejonizacji*, Gdańsk 1962.

<sup>40</sup> K. Mikulski, *Osadnictwo wiejskie*, pp. 76–80, particularly tab. 17, which shows a clear increase in peasants' acreage in the 16<sup>th</sup> c. in Pomerania

<sup>41</sup> Cf. A. Nowak, *Przeobrażenia struktury społecznej ludności wiejskiej*, passim.

exploitation of peasants in the manors.<sup>42</sup> The second model explaining the regress ascribes it to the economic crisis of the 17<sup>th</sup> c. in the Polish lands, change of balance of trade exchange, previously favouring Poland, negative effects of the commercial revolution, and the fall in the profitability of crop export.<sup>43</sup> Both models strike us as one sided in seeking the foundations of the manor estates' crisis, as they try to identify one major underlying cause.

We would like to scrutinise the phenomenon on the example of lesser nobility from Royal Prussia. In the second half the 16<sup>th</sup> c., the nobility in this province successfully adjusted their estates to the changing economic situation to meet the soaring demand for crops. In the areas directly connected to the Gdańsk market, a unique, in comparison to the rest of the Polish lands, economic entity emerged – a manor based on both hired hands and villeinage without resorting to work by well-to-do peasants who owned a plough. The farms belonging to the latter were seen as a competition, which led to liquidation such farms and adjoining them to the manor. At the foundations of the estates' operation lay the work of their own servants, hired hands usually coming from Masovia, particularly during the times of heavy fieldwork, and peasants, who, leasing the land, served their dues working in the manor. The higher production costs were compensated by higher, in comparison to those further from Gdańsk, prices of crops. Such a manner of operation was only possible in the times of prosperity and high profits from agricultural production. It collapsed in the wake of economic breakdown in the 17<sup>th</sup> c., which brought plummeting export revenues and soaring production cost all, ultimately, leading to economic crisis which struck the middle nobility.<sup>44</sup> It was particularly painful in Royal Prussia. While in other lands of the Commonwealth the consequences of the crisis were transferred, for some time, to peasants by

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<sup>42</sup> J. Topolski, *Gospodarka polska a europejska w XVI–XVIII wieku*, passim.

<sup>43</sup> W. Kula, *Teoria ekonomiczna ustroju feudalnego. Próba modelu*, Warszawa 1962.

<sup>44</sup> K. Mikulski, *Kryzys średniej szlachty w Prusach Królewskich w XVII wieku i powstanie nowej elity średnioszlacheckiej na przełomie XVII i XVIII wieku (Przyczynek do dyskusji na temat modelu rozwoju gospodarczego i społecznego Polski)*, in: *Między Zachodem a Wschodem. Studia z dziejów Rzeczypospolitej w epoce nowożytnej*, eds J. Staszewski, K. Mikulski and J. Dumanowski, Toruń 2002, pp. 263–276.

increasing the rent they had to serve and thus lowering the production cost, in Royal Prussia it was not possible. In the estates belonging to the middle nobility, there were nearly no peasants. The situation deteriorated in the course of the 17<sup>th</sup> c. Particularly cogent seem to be the statistics illustrating deep changes in the economic structure of the noble settlements – between 1570 and 1700, in Pomeranian palatinate the share of villages with manors fell from 26,5% to 9,1%, while the share of manors rose from 19,5% to 46,6% of all settlements.<sup>45</sup>

This crisis among the middle nobility can also be illustrated by the example of changes in the ownership structure. In 1570, 30% of the estates in the Pomeranian palatinate were in the hands of petty nobility (Pl. *drobna szlachta*) owning only 1 village, but in 1700 it fell to 23%. An even greater drop was seen in the group of greatest interest for us – the middle nobility (with 1–2 villages) and the respective numbers were: 36% and 25% of all estates in Gdańsk Pomerania. The estates of the wealthier nobility (3–5 villages in possession) shrank only fractionally from 18% to 16%. However, the share of the estates of the wealthiest nobility (owning more than 5 villages) grew from 15 to 37% at the cost of all the groups above. Similar phenomenon could be observed in many other provinces in the Commonwealth. The share of the estates owned by the wealthiest grew, while the less well-off nobility's shrank. Poorly supplied with workforce in the form of peasants, manors belonging to the middle nobility could not stand the competition of the great, extensive estates of the magnates. The economic situation only exacerbated the problem. The outflow of money from Poland and relative changes of the prices of imported goods and the crops limited the profitability of the venture of crops export. The nobility's first reaction was to increase the production in order to cover the initial losses, but such practice, due to its extensive character, could not be sustained indefinitely.

Here, we should underline that also in the case of the crisis of the 17<sup>th</sup> c., the fall of the manorialism went hand in hand with the fall of peasant farming, as the farms were subject to the same market forces as the bigger estates. The nobility, trying to cover the losses, exploited the peasant farms even further by introducing the obligatory purchase of alcohol (Pl. *przymus*

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<sup>45</sup> Idem, *Osadnictwo wiejskie*, p. 149 (tab. 38).



*propinacyjny*) which plagued the Commonwealth in the second half of the 17<sup>th</sup> and in the 18<sup>th</sup> centuries.

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So far, in the literature, the primary position has been occupied by the development of the manor estates as they shaped the entire economy in the early modern era, ultimately leading to coinage of the term manorial farming system (Pl. *system folwarczno-pańszczyźniany*). Keeping that in mind, the researchers lost sight of the fact that the manor demesne (understood as the landowners' farm) was only one element of the estates. Its purpose, acreage, organization and income, etc. were directly connected with the organization of the entire estates and operated in a specific economic environment.

The landowner possessed both peasants' lands (which were only leased to them), and the remaining land including the water bodies, wastelands, forests, etc. After all, the "rent-based economy", just as the manorial system, pertained to the noble estates and can be subsumed into "noble economy" (Pl. *gospodarka szlachecka*).

So, the overly important role ascribed to the manor estates in shaping the Polish economic environment in the early modern era can be seen as a flaw of the literature. The connection between the manors (especially those based on the villeinage) and the villages have been seen as one-dimensional, only involving the negative impact on the situation of peasants increasingly burdened with rent, particularly the one served in the form of weekly service. However, in our opinion, the relationship was more complex and multifaceted. We can even attempt to formulate some conclusions, which can become a kernel of the proposed model of the development of the manors in the 14<sup>th</sup> to 17<sup>th</sup> centuries:

1. Commercial manors (exporting goods) were established in large estates as an effect of their reorganizing in the 14<sup>th</sup> c.
2. The shift from rent paid in the form of socage towards weekly service was evolutionary and based on their equivalence. It was a consequence of a shortage of money in circulation in the areas of Poland, which was at the outskirts of European economic centres (Italy, the Netherlands).

3. The manor demesne based on the villeinage, belonging to the middle nobility developed at the turn of the 15<sup>th</sup> and 16<sup>th</sup> c. in response to the crisis of peasant farming in the second half of the 15<sup>th</sup> c. The crisis was a result of the difficulties to sell the agricultural produce, especially in the periphery of the local markets.
4. Both the manor and the countryside reacted to the prosperity and economic slumps. In the time of prosperity, when more money was in circulation the rent was paid in the form of socage, while in the recession – with physical labour. This phenomenon can be observed throughout the entire period under scrutiny.
5. In the times of prosperity, the increase in the burden placed on peasants followed the increase of farms' profitability, while in the recession it was a manifestation of an attempt by the landowner to maintain the profit of the estates, which ultimately led to the collapse of the village and the manor estate itself.
6. The development of the areas closely interconnected with the Gdańsk market, where, until the second half of the 17<sup>th</sup> c., both money and goods were exchanged, was qualitatively different from the rest of the country. There, large, commercial peasant farms and the manors based on the hired-hands work operated competing on the market of crops. The liquidation of the peasant's farms was then a way of removing a competitor from the market rather than enlarging the manor estate.