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VAGABONDS¹ IN THE POLISH NOBLES' COMMONWEALTH
IN THE CONTEXT OF STUDIES ON LIFE CYCLES

Although scholars have not researched the topic of vagabonds in any depth, it does hold a rather important place in studies about the society of old Poland. Vagabonds is a category which is often treated like a sack – one which includes all aspects of social life that are inconsistent with those presented in syntheses, as well as people's belief in the clear class divisions which supposedly characterized Poland before the partitions. The vagabonds' place seems to be on the margins of society; a motley crew of runaway peasants, beggars, criminals and prostitutes.

This article is aimed at presenting the current state of research concerning this social group and present a new way of perceiving it. The suggested approach is, on the one hand, based on studies on how socially-marginalized people functioned in early modern France and Poland – a subject with which historiography in the West is familiar – and on a new analysis of Polish source materials, which relates primarily to Poland under the reign of Stanisław August Poniatowski. Although Polish historians are familiar with these materials, they can now be analysed using quantitative methods to interpret the role of vagabonds in the society of the Polish Nobles' Commonwealth.

The article is divided into four parts; the first presents Polish historiographical publications concerning vagabonds. Results of studies depicting groups of people similar to those not classified as belonging to any particular class, with no permanent home (vagabonds) in western European societies are presented in the second part. The next section

¹ Vagabonds is the term the translator has adopted to describe "ludzie luźni", i.e. "loose people" – a term which is specific to the Polish language and covers all those people who did not fit into the class system of the early modern Republic (translator's note).

contains new findings which, in the author's opinion, undermine some of the general opinions concerning this group which can be found in Polish historiography. The last part presents the conclusions and resulting new assumptions.

1.

Any presentation of Polish studies on the subject of vagabonds has to start with reservations regarding the texts selected as reference materials. It is no great exaggeration that almost all publications describing the functioning of rural areas in feudal times, social mobility, criminality and class barriers can be deemed relevant to the issues discussed herein. Such studies were already being written as early as in the 19th century, and although they do not usually make any direct mention of vagabonds, they do allude to issues closely related to them. Some of these publications were referred to in this context by the authors of later publications and can still be considered a valuable source of inspiration. However, if such a broad perspective were adopted, it would lead not only to transforming the text into an extended review of dozens of monographs and articles, but would also obscure the issue under discussion. Therefore, the present discussion will be limited to works which directly refer to vagabonds or related categories of people, and which often contain these terms in their titles. The reader will quickly notice that all the articles were published after the Second World War, when there was strong interest in the lower echelons of society during the Polish Nobles' Commonwealth.

Nina Assorodobraj's monograph *Początki klasy robotniczej* [The beginnings of the working class], first published in 1946, has a very important role in starting up and engendering discussions about vagabonds.² Although the title may suggest a slightly different topic, it is devoted to the functioning of social pariahs during the reign of Stanisław August Poniatowski, while any discussion on manufactories and forced labour, although important, are less emphasized. The author's analyses were based on wide and diversified source materials covering both censuses, as well as court documents and articles in the press. It should be noted that some of these materials were destroyed during the war which makes the study even more valuable.

² N. Assorodobraj, *Początki klasy robotniczej. Problem rąk roboczych w przemyśle polskim epoki stanisławowskiej*, ed. 2, Warsaw 1966.

Assorodobraj emphasized the flexibility of the group of people it describes, the diversity of the activities in which they engaged: being hired on a day-to-day basis, being in service, being employed as craftsmen or in trade, as well as a multitude of other ways of earning a living which bordered on the illegal. When presenting the social and national background of vagabonds, the author pointed to a variety of social groups, apart from peasants, which included Jews and de-classed gentry (Pol: *szlachta*). This observation is important given later works which focus almost entirely on the peasantry (Pol: *włościanstwo*). To-date, her estimates relating to the income of labourers, raftsmen and people in service (servants) are very valuable. According to Assorodobraj, the picture presented by such people – who populated King Stanisław August's Noble Republic in such high numbers – in her monograph allows them to be classified as a separate class of hired workers. This social status emerged as a result of the socio-economic changes taking place at that time, and was characterized mainly by the irregularity of the work performed, the brevity of the periods of hire and frequent changes of residence. In the author's opinion, the feeling of impermanency resulted in this group of people being characterized by a culture of extreme and senseless consumption, totally impervious to any future needs, and with a penchant for fun and alcohol.³ While recognizing that this group of people was living on the margins of the society of that time, Assorodobraj also emphasized its importance for the economy, which could not “make do” without seasonal or permanent hired workers”.⁴ In such situation, these vagabonds were on the one hand desirable, sometimes even the object of fierce competition among employers, yet, on the other hand, they were allegedly idle with a tendency to come into conflict with the law. This led to the emergence of various policing systems as well as systems for overseeing order, depending on the conditions: forcing people to work, or using force to get rid of them.⁵ This state of affairs, which existed throughout the whole of the early modern period, and during the decline of the Noble Republic evolved as a result of the development of a modern police force and efforts to control hired labourers and restrict their mobility. The author associated such processes with the beginnings of industrialization and placed them in the broader context of the changes taking place throughout the whole of Europe.

³ Ibid., pp. 124–127. It remains open, whether the author did not rely excessively on the optics of the court sources and publications used.

⁴ Ibid., p. 128.

⁵ Ibid., pp. 128–130.

Later works devoted to the subject of vagabonds, although often relating to a broader chronological context – and in many respects important – were not as valuable as the afore-mentioned monograph. This appraisal relates chiefly to publications which appeared during Stalin’s ideological offensive. Stanisław Śreniowski’s “*Zbiegostwo chłopów w dawnej Polsce jako zagadnienie ustroju społecznego*” [The Social issue of Peasant Escapes in Old Poland) is a good example. Focusing mainly on legal issues, dating back to when the statutes of Kazimierz the Great were in force, the author emphasized the escalation of tying peasants to the land. However, even he admitted that subsequent legal regulations related mainly to farmers, i.e. the most important group in rural areas, but not the most numerous.⁶ Śreniowski identified vagabonds with people on the margins of society, and good-for-nothings, but at the same time he was aware of the strong negative connotations associated with the latter term. Whereas the word “vagabonds” was intended to indicate the attitude to socio-economic conditions, “good-for-nothings” emphasized people’s attitude to the whole legal system which is why the term “vagabonds” also related to members of the gentry living in towns—as they too were living outside their attributed *locus*. As the author emphasizes: “all these vagabonds and good-for-nothings were guilty of a specific crime, the crime of abandoning the role attributed to them by their masters and the Noble Republic—a crime against the interests of the nobles/gentry”.⁷ On the other hand, servants, especially those hired for longer periods, usually on annual contracts, were not considered to be vagabonds.⁸ Legislation was mainly intended to indicate an aversion to people who hired themselves out for short periods, and who took advantage of the high labour costs at harvest time, in that time earning as much as an ordinary farmhand did throughout the year. Of course, these advantageous periods when the market conditions were good, were followed by months of temporary and varied employment for much lower rates, and often only for upkeep, but those short periods in which experienced harvesters could earn so much further inspired the gentry to take initiatives aimed at eradicating this state of affairs. However, the situation was paradoxical, as many estates, especially in Wielkopolska [Greater Poland], were unable to function without hiring additional labour. The differences in economic development led to differences in legislation. Whereas in Ruthenia

⁶ S. Śreniowski, *Zbiegostwo chłopów w dawnej Polsce jako zagadnienie ustroju społecznego*, Warsaw 1948, pp. 18–19 and 26.

⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 89.

⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 27 and 84.

escapes were definitively controlled, in Wielkopolska and Masovia attempts were made to prevent seasonal escapes.⁹

Śreniowski focused mainly on the issue of class struggles viewed in the light of escapees, as the book's title informs us which has consequently led to a dangerous narrowing of the perspective. Even in the light of some of the given examples, treating each instance of leaving the village as an escape, which is interpreted as a "seasonal flight/abandonment/escape", "recurring escape", etc. is somewhat controversial. The practice of being hired for seasonal work outside one's native village was so widespread and universally tolerated that it should not be termed a flight/desertion. The flight/desertion of servants who were employed in manor-houses was governed by separate laws and should not be equated with the flight/escape of peasants who were tied to the land.¹⁰

Another monograph by Stanisław Śreniowski, published nine years later, was even more ideologically biased and full of manifestations of class struggle. The peasants were described in a manner reminiscent of the kulaks. It was because of them that in the 17th century "the economic commodity of the peasants was based on exploiting poorer categories of peasants, mainly domestics, vagabonds, peasants without land or a house (komornik) and peasants with insufficient land to sustain themselves (zagrodnik)".¹¹ Hired labourers were considered to be vagabonds who were – "not in fact (however, illegally) [...] serfs, at least while they were vagabonds. They were fugitives from their masters' estates, peasants who became wage-earners (akin to members of the proletariat) when they left their estates; they were usually without a permanent place of residence, which protected them against new bonds of serfdom".¹²

Seasonal workers were also treated like vagabonds, irrespective of whether they had their own farms in other villages. Unlike Nina Assorodobraj, whose argumentation was far more complex, Śreniowski claimed that it is difficult to "talk about a labour market in a system in which serfdom existed, except perhaps vagabonds".¹³

Józef Gierowski had a similar view to those of Śreniowski. In his short book about the countryside in the early modern period a lot of space is devoted to the nobility's oppression of the peasants and signs of class struggle. One of the study's undoubted merits is that it draws

⁹ Ibid., pp. 79–83, 85 and 99.

¹⁰ Ibid., pp. 70, 98–99 and 109–110.

¹¹ Ibid.; *Wież polska w połowie XVII w.*, Warsaw 1957, p. 28.

¹² Ibid., p. 29.

¹³ Ibid., p. 30.

attention to the regional differences in the situation of vagabonds. Although members of the aforementioned group were also considered to be mainly fugitives from villages, the author also drew attention to the existence of the phenomenon of temporary migration to look for seasonal work, which cannot be considered equivalent to an escape. This led Gierowski to formulate two definitions of the group under discussion – a wide and a narrow one. In the first definition he considers vagabonds to be people who are without a permanent place of residence, who lead a “free life”; while the second also included people who had small duties connected with serfdom and who could therefore temporarily wander off looking for work and then return to their place of permanent residence. In view of this second perspective, a significant percentage of the inhabitants of early modern villages were potential vagabonds, with the exclusion of farm owners. Additionally, some of the townsmen and gentry could also be considered vagabonds.¹⁴

Stanisław Grodziski’s monograph, which was published in 1961, contained fewer simplifications. The author was again able to evoke the work of pre-war historians without the need to immediately condemn them. However, Grodziski continued to classify vagabonds as a group existing on the margins of society. The very existence of this category was, according to the author, the result of the pathological manner in which the agricultural economy functioned (i.e. home farms) as well as secondary serfdom and the escape of peasants under the power of the nobility.

One of this publications chief merits is the in-depth and comprehensive review of the legal acts relating to this issue, as well as to draw attention to vagabonds not only in rural but also in urban areas. At the same time, however, the monograph contains a number of unresolved contradictions. The most important of these concerns the very definition of vagabonds, which in the opinion of Grodziski – a legal historian – is a very important, but at the same time a very difficult, and perhaps unresolvable issue. In this monograph it is difficult to find a clear explanation of who was and who was not a vagabond, thus rendering the discussion on the number of people in said group questionable.¹⁵ Sometimes the author made statements which are inconsistent with the regulatory acts quoted in the monograph, for example by

¹⁴ J. Gierowski, *Kartki z rodowodu biedoty wiejskiej*, Warsaw 1951, pp. 10–12.

¹⁵ In fact such an attempt was made in the study, but in practice it led to listing categories comprising the vagabond social group, divided into *largissimmo* and *stricto* sense categories; S. Grodziski, *Ludzie luźni. Studium z historii państwa i prawa polskiego*, Kraków 1961, pp. 51–52.

eliminating servants from the group termed vagabonds, although he himself included them in this category.¹⁶ The second problem was due to the indication of recurrent serfdom as a reason for the existence of vagabonds, while discussing the occurrence of similar social groups in countries such as France and England. Since recurrent serfdom did not exist in such countries, how can the occurrence of representatives of this group there be explained? It would seem that any indications of “re-feudalization” and class oppression as a reason for the presence of vagabonds was more the result of the author’s initial assumptions than his analysis of the source materials.¹⁷

Two selections of lawsuits published by Zofia Turska¹⁸ also contributed to shaping the contemporary image of vagabonds. Although they included modest analytical introductions, because the people testifying were clearly identified as being vagabonds, they imposed a similar perspective on other researchers who used court materials dating from the times of Stanisław August Poniatowski. It should be emphasized that in many later publications historians limited themselves to only quoting the cases published by Turska. These source materials should be regarded as ideologies – already at the introductory stage, and to some extent also in terms of the selection of materials. However, even those introductions included many pertinent observations; in them Turska underlined the universal presence of vagabonds, whom she categorized into people not related to any place of residence (the “runners”, “wanderers”, “good-for-nothings”) and the vagabonds proper, only partially detached from their farms and social groups – sons of large peasant families, smallholders or landless peasants, or landless members of the gentry. It is worth noting that although the titles of some testimonies included the word “vagabond”, the term did not appear in the contents of the testimony itself – it was added by the editor.

When discussing the arbitrary attribution of those testifying to the category of vagabonds, Mirosław Frančić followed in the footsteps of

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 43.

¹⁷ Some of Grodziski’s strongest opinions may not have reflected his position accurately and could have – to some extent – been the result of the ideological atmosphere of the time. However, this does not alter the fact that the book was often referred to and has played a major role in shaping the dominant image of vagabonds in historiography. Therefore, it has to be subjected to a polemic even if the author’s views could have been less rigid and more nuanced. This comment also relates to other works referred to herein.

¹⁸ *Z rontem marszałkowskim przez Warszawę. Zeznania oskarżonych z lat 1787–1794*, monograph by Z. Turska, Warsaw 1961; *Oskarżenia oskarżają. Wieś osiemnastowieczna w mrokach kronik sądowych*, monograph by Z. Turska, Warsaw 1961.

Zofia Turska. Viewed against the background of the works described above, which often related to the Republic of Poland in its entirety and covered several centuries, his study of Kraków in the second half of the 18th century may at first glance seem far more modest. However, his use of a wealth of sources enabling a statistical analysis and the drawing of relevant conclusions, determines its value. The 1,270 testimonies he analysed, which were made before the Commander-in-Chief of the Kraków town hall guard [Pol: hetman ratuszowy] gave a picture of an extremely mobile social group. The decision made by the author to analyse only vagabonds is a little problematic when using the results. Therefore, he removed all the testimonies of people he did not consider vagabonds. Despite the obvious arbitrariness of such action, which was mentioned by the author himself,¹⁹ this decision led to rendering it impossible to compare vagabonds with other social groups. Even more important for these deliberations is the fact that there was a fundamental methodological error in the procedure he used for selecting the population used for research. In wanting to describe the margins of society which he only knew about from literature, he selected only those cases from among the court's entire documentation, which were consistent with the definition of vagabonds he had adopted, only to conclude that it really was a group from the margins of society. By adopting this method of research there was no chance of his initial assumptions being contested. However, these criticisms do not undermine the book's very positive appraisal, which was based on extensive source materials analysed using statistical methods, which had hitherto only been considered from the perspective of legal history.

From the 1960s, Polish historiography gradually began to lose interest in the subject of vagabonds. It is difficult to point to any new works based on original materials dating from later times.²⁰ However, the group under discussion was referred to in popular academic publications and syntheses. Bohdan Baranowski's study on "roadside people", addressed to a wide audience, included many comments about vagabonds and groups which the author considered were related to them, such as good-for-nothings, vagrants and tramps. These people were defined as existing outside the social classes of the old Polish society.

¹⁹ M. Frančić, *Ludzie luźni w osiemnastowiecznym Krakowie*, Wrocław 1967, p. 9.

²⁰ One exception is the short text by Jerzy Michalski, *Problematyka ludności luźnej w pierwszej połowie panowania Stanisława Augusta*, in: *Cała historia to dzieje ludzi... Studia z historii społecznej ofiarowane profesorowi Andrzejowi Wyczańskiemu w 80-tą rocznicę urodzin i 55-lecie pracy naukowej*, ed. C. Kukło, P. Guzowski, Białystok 2004, pp. 311–322.

Some of them were derelicts from very varied environments, and the rest were children of the poor – the predecessors of the working classes.²¹ At the same time, however, some of the prevalent stereotypes were undermined in the book. Above all Baranowski emphasized that the regulations tying peasants to the land were not enforced at that time. Only farmers could be considered to be a group with limited mobility. In practice, the poor were free, as the landowners had no technical means of preventing their migration, which was often seasonal.²² Baranowski also formulated the hypothesis that articles were published about vagabonds not because of their increasing number but due to the development of police institutions and better reporting.²³

Although syntheses concerning society in the times of the Polish Nobles' Commonwealth usually mention vagabonds, they do it in a very simplified manner and omit any nuances which were brought up even in the ideologically biased works dating from the 1950s and 1960s. Of course, there is the argument that in the case of textbooks this was inevitable, due the complexity of the issue, which deserves whole monographs on the subject, which cannot be discussed on a few pages, however in this case the simplifications seem to have gone too far.

In a study by Antoni Mączak, vagabonds were contrasted with the rest of the population which had a permanent place of residence and described as an element which destabilized the social order. Although he acknowledges their economic role, more space is devoted to the attempts made to control them.²⁴ Jerzy Topolski, on the other hand, associated vagabonds with the hired workers living in towns. In his opinion, this group whose ranks were swelled by runaway peasants, constituted a large and mobile community, which often also sought employment in rural areas. Topolski's profile of vagabonds is ambiguous, and even self-contradictory. On the one hand, he described them as the most numerous group living on the margins of society who, as a result, were excluded from the group with occupations requiring more complex skills, although they were very mobile geographically. This group included raftsmen, carters, stallkeepers, travelling craftsmen and clerics. Furthermore, when discussing the situation which prevailed in the 17th century, he emphasized that

²¹ B. Baranowski, *Ludzie gościńca w XVII–XVIII w.*, Łódź 1986, pp. 6 and 52.

²² *Ibid.*, pp. 46–49.

²³ *Ibid.*, p. 42.

²⁴ I. Ihnatowicz et al., *Spółeczeństwo polskie od X do XX wieku*, ed. 4, Warszawa 1999, pp. 291–294.

those who remained in the same place enjoyed the same recognition as other townsmen.²⁵

Authors of the latest textbooks give schematic descriptions of this group of people, which only shows the complexity and problems associated with this category of people when confronted with other studies. And so, Urszula Augustyniak identifies vagabonds as people from the margins of society and describes them as outlaws, a group which appeared due to the declassing of the peasantry, as well as the bourgeoisie and gentry. They were associated with beggars and tramps, and often suspected of spying. Augustyniak's textbook does not refer to their substantial economic role, except for the mention of forced labour.²⁶ On the other hand, Mariusz Markiewicz draws attention to the fact that many vagabonds were engaged in honest work, and therefore this group cannot be unequivocally identified as being on the margins of society. However, while including many occupational categories, such as raftsmen, itinerant craftsmen and carters (but eliminating servants under contracts) in the group of vagabonds, the author devoted most of his attention to people who were unquestionably associated with the margins of society, such as prostitutes, beggars and criminals.²⁷

2.

The social and economic interpretations of vagabonds presented above can be described as undergoing a specific debasement in Polish historiography. The starting point of this process is the relatively complex picture drawn by Nina Assorodobraj. In subsequent studies, the group was described as being close to or even identical to the margins of society, with emphasis being placed on class conflict, and significantly less attention being paid to their economic importance. Recently, syntheses have been published, in which the discussion centres on beggars and harlots.

Depicting vagabonds as people on the social margins, fugitives and criminals who – as people uprooted from their social milieu – were supposed to threaten the established order, not only simplifies the

²⁵ J. Topolski, *Polska w czasach nowożytnych. Od środkowoeuropejskiej potęgi do utraty niepodległości (1501–1795)*, Poznań 1999, pp. 79, 525 and 759.

²⁶ U. Augustyniak, *Historia Polski 1572–1795*, Warszawa 2008, pp. 289–290.

²⁷ M. Markiewicz, *Historia Polski 1492–1795*, Kraków 2004, pp. 168–172.

picture drawn by Assorodobraj (and even by Grodziski and other later scholars), but also contradicts the results of many studies about similar groups of people conducted in the West. The studies depict a social category characterized by significant mobility, but at the same time one which has broken free all ties and structures, but which often plays an important role on the labour market.

Above all it should be noted that the fact of peasants taking on hired jobs outside their native farms or migrating to towns – temporarily or permanently – which is described in Polish historiography as evidence of the destructive impact of the folwark-based system in which farm owners were unable to live off their own farms – can be interpreted differently. The possibility of obtaining employment outside the native village is proof of the existence of a labour market, a vibrant economy, as well as the circulation of money. It suggests the existence of a process which Jan de Vries calls “the industrious revolution”.²⁸ Studies on 18th-century Flanders showed that small farmers often perceived additional gainful employment as a method of stabilizing their economic situation and investing in their own farms. In more than 90% of the cases in which a small farmer was employed by his wealthier neighbours, he was paid not in cash or goods, but in the form of services provided for his own farm in the form of animals for ploughing or other farm work, or the transport of goods.²⁹

If servants are to be included in the group termed vagabonds, their work could also be interpreted as a form of investment. This relates mainly to so-called life-cycle servants, i.e. people who took up employment as servants in the period between leaving their native farm and setting up their own farm. Therefore, their work was not a permanent occupation in which they engaged until their death, but a temporary occupation, like the experience of many young people in Europe.³⁰

²⁸ J. de Vries, *The Industrious Revolution. Consumer Behavior and the Household Economy. 1650 to the Present*, Cambridge 2008.

²⁹ T. Lambrecht, *Peasant Labour Strategies and the Logic of Family Labour in the Southern Low Countries during the 18th Century*, in: *La famiglia nell'economia europea secc. XIII–XVIII/The Economic Role of the Family in the European Economy from the 13th to the 18th Centuries*, ed. S. Cavaciocchi, Firenze 2009, pp. 645–646.

³⁰ J. Hajnal, *European Marriage Pattern in Historical Perspective*, in: *Population in History. Essays in Historical Demography*, ed. D.V. Glass, D.E.C. Eversley, London 1965, pp. 101–143; id., *Two Kinds of Preindustrial Household Formation System*, “Population and Development Review” 8, 1982, pp. 449–494; P. Laslett, *The Stem-Family Hypothesis and its Privileged Position*, in: *Population and Social Structure. Advances in Historical Demography*, ed. K.W. Wachter, E.A. Hammel, P. Laslett, New York 1978, pp. 89–111; A.S. Kussmaul, *Servants in Husbandry in Early Modern*

Therefore, being a servant and frequent changes in one's place of residence in that period may be interpreted as being a sign of the ills of the social and economic system, and exclusively the fate of children of the poor. In real life, however, this was the experience of many members of early modern societies; it was to some extent the equivalent of a school education, and at the same time, an opportunity to accumulate the assets needed to set up one's own household in the future. Moreover, these people sometimes met up with masters who had gone along the same path in their youth. Being employed in service by a large number of young people was therefore quite natural and did not lead to social marginalization. In recent years' studies undertaken in Poland have led to the conclusion that the existence of life-cycle servants was also characteristic of old Polish society.³¹

Western European studies clearly indicate that vagabonds did not have to be loners. For example, there is data attesting to the fact that almost 80% of all the people arrested for vagrancy in Graz in 1790 described themselves as living in relationships. Of course half the relationships were not formalized, and one man even had two "concubines". More importantly, children – usually an only child – were often mentioned in these testimonies.³²

Although vagabonds is a subject that has not yet been widely discussed in Polish literature, works by western European authors concerning similar social categories show some interesting patterns. Being a pauper or vagrant was largely age-related. Around the age of 50, along with deteriorating health, when people could no longer perform the hard work they had previously undertaken or engage in seasonal migration, many of those at the bottom of the social ladder began their old age under the threat of poverty. Since these people had only earned small incomes, it was impossible to put any money

England, Cambridge 1981; A. Burguiere, *Pour une typologie des formes d'organisation domestique de l'Europe moderne (XVI^e–XIX^e siècles)*, "Annales. E.S.C." 41, 1986, no. 3, pp. 639–655; T. de Moor, J.L. van Zanden, *Girl Power. The European Marriage Pattern and Labour Markets in the North Sea Region in the Late Medieval and Early Modern Period*, "Economic History Review" 63, 2010, no. 1, pp. 1–33.

³¹ C. Kukło, *Czy w Polsce przedrozbiorowej służba domowa była etapem w życiu człowieka?*, in: *Spoleczeństwo w dobie przemian. Wiek XIX i XX. Księga jubileuszowa profesor Anny Żarnowskiej*, ed. M. Nietyksza et al., Warsaw 2003, pp. 205–212; R. Poniat, *Służba domowa na ziemiach Polskich w epoce pre- i industrialnej*, w: *Rodzina, gospodarstwo domowe i pokrewieństwo na ziemiach polskich w perspektywie historycznej – ciągłość czy zmiana*, ed. C. Kukło, Warsaw 2012, pp. 243–260.

³² G. Ammerer, *Heimat Straße. Vaganten im Österreich des Ancien Régime*, Wien–München 2003, pp. 262–267.

aside for their old age.³³ Poverty was therefore associated with their life cycle. Some people were very vulnerable to poverty in childhood (especially orphans), when they themselves had young children (especially single mothers), and in old age.³⁴ In such situation, in addition to attempts at seeking help from family or charitable institutions, they could also take up poorly-paid work, which gave them a chance of physical survival, or was associated with breaking the law. Improving one's lot by wandering off to look for work was a possibility for healthy people. Therefore, it comes as no surprise that the vagabonds registered in the archives in Lyon, dating from between 1769 and 1777, were usually men – mostly between 20 and 29 years of age. They were often agricultural labourers, although some were textile workers and craftsmen.³⁵

The work by Jean-Pierre Gutton referred to above, devoted to early modern Lyon is also worth recalling because of his analysis of the terminology used to describe the poor. He emphasizes that the term “pauvre” in 18th-century France was far from explicit. It was used mainly to describe someone who was suffering but not necessarily in an economic sense. Contemporary dictionary definitions of the term indicated it meant lack of property and work. On the other hand the authorities perceived all people without property, and thus forced to undertake gainful employment, as being poor, which in consequence would mean the majority of the population.³⁶ On the other hand, the term “mediant” was used to describe people who because of poor health were unable to earn their keep, even if they did work. The term “vagabond” was used to describe people without a permanent residence, who frequently changed the place in which they stayed. In their case, the terms “sans aveu” and “libertin” appeared in the documents. This multiplicity of terms, comparable to the chaos which can be observed in Polish sources dating from that time, is simplified by Gutton by using the following definition: “the poor, and most of the time also beggars, remained a part of society and were thus acknowledged by their contemporaries;

³³ O.H. Hufton, *The Poor of Eighteenth-Century France 1750–1789*, Oxford 1974, p. 111.

³⁴ S. Williams, *Poverty, Gender and Life-Cycle under the English Poor Law 1760–1834*, Woodbridge 2011, p. 129.

³⁵ J.-P. Gutton, *La société et les pauvres. L'exemple de la généralité de Lyon 1534–1789*, Paris 1971, pp. 160–161.

³⁶ As a point of interest, it should be noted that the term “poor” was understood in a similar manner in early modern England; see G.B. Boyer, *An Economic History of the English Poor Law 1750–1850*, Cambridge 1990.

on the other hand vagabonds were defined by their lack of social ties, a home and being on the margins of society”.³⁷

The works referred to herein allow a number of criticisms to be made regarding Polish research on the subject of vagabonds. Above all, when the term is used in the broad sense, i.e. when it also includes servants and farmhands, the group cannot be considered equivalent to people on the margins of society, nor can its existence be considered one of the ills of the feudal system. People engaged in these occupations were frequent in early modern Europe and their high mobility was considered natural and not an aberration. Secondly, seeking employment away from the family farm was a common occurrence, thus proving the existence of a developed labour market – it did not have to indicate fleeing from destitution. Thirdly, because the presence of such groups was recorded everywhere, it was a phenomenon that could not have been the effect of recurrent serfdom and having to cultivate the master’s folwark-based farm; rather it should be related to the normal functioning of the economy in those times, in which a mobile workforce—mainly consisting of young people – was necessary. Fourthly, being a vagabond or even a tramp was not always associated with persistent solitude and the inability to start a family. And, last but not least, fifthly, membership of the group under discussion was usually temporary and was connected with the stage the individual had reached in his life cycle.

3.

Also information from 18th-century sources relating to Polish lands presented in the first part of the article is not fully consistent with the image of vagabonds derived from known works by social and legal historians. Even the court documents which are often referred to in the studies often contradict the conclusions which historians have drawn from their analyses. Above all, they show a huge diversity in the jobs the vagabonds could perform during their working life. This can be seen in the statistical schedules listed in Table 1. They are based on testimonies given during Stanisław August Poniatowski’s reign before the Commander-in-Chief of the town hall guards (*hetman ratuszowy*) in Kraków and the Marshal’s Procurator (*instygator marszałkowski*) in Warsaw. These documents are, therefore, well known to historians. Turska and Frančić used them when describing vagabonds. Although

³⁷ J.-P. Gutton, *op. cit.*, pp. 7–12.

the table only includes data from a sample, and not the entire collection which has survived to this day, it well reflects the respective patterns. The tables show that the people testifying, apart from performing the kind of work usually associated with vagabonds, i.e. as servants, hired workers or farm labourers, they were also quite often engaged as craftsmen, they rented land or buildings for economic purposes and worked on their own farms. This group also included tutors, tradesmen and soldiers. On the other hand, beggars and prostitutes, i.e. the groups most widely discussed in textbooks on vagabonds, are not very numerous here. More importantly, each person who testified worked in several places. Studies undertaken on other materials also confirm the significant mobility of people employed in service. An analysis of the composition of farms (with regards to the number of people in the household) taken from two consecutive censuses dating from 1790 and 1791 showed that only 36.8% of all the farmhands, both male and female, were included in both censuses.³⁸

Table 1. Occupations held during a person's life cycle according to testimonies given in Kraków and Warsaw at the end of the 18th century. (in %)

		Kraków	Warsaw
Sources of upkeep – in percentages	Servant without any further specification	37.6	19.0
	Farmhand and other people in rural service	9.2	6.6
	Hired worker	7.8	7.3
	Soldier	5.6	5.5
	Person caring for farm animals	4.9	3.4
	Apprentice	3.9	3.8
	Craftsman in a guild	3.4	6.5
	Employee of a tavern or public house	2.9	5.3
	Boy	2.8	5.3
	Footman	2.3	5.1
	Farm owner	2.0	0.4
	Journeyman	1.8	1.7
	Cook	1.5	2.2
	Mason	1.2	1.5
	Gardener	1.1	1.2
Tradesman	1.0	4.2	

³⁸ K. Rzemieniecki, *Rodzina i gospodarstwo chłopskie w ziemi wieluńskiej i powiecie ostrzeszowskim w końcu XVIII wieku*, "Przeszłość Demograficzna Polski" 29, 2010, pp. 53–55.

	Raftsmen	0.9	1.1
	Tutor	0.9	1.6
	Carter	0.6	1.5
	Beggar	0.3	0.6
	Prostitute	0.2	0.6
	Other sources of income	8.1	15.5
Number of total sources of income		894	1379
Number of people testifying		298	371
Average number of jobs per person testifying		3.0	3.7

Source: AGAD, Archives of the Kingdom of Poland [hereinafter: AKP], cat. nos. 162, 302, 311–314; AP Kraków, Acts of the Municipality of Kraków [hereinafter: AMK], cat. nos. 889, 891, 893, 894 and 896. Please note: The table gives information about occupations which the defendants performed according to their own testimonies. For the purpose of the analysis, the answers were limited to 22 categories. The list of occupations in the testimonies themselves is of course longer, and occasionally also includes courtiers, rabbis and monks.

The people testifying were also often employed in various jobs. Sometimes these job sequences were consistent with our knowledge of the labour market in those times, i.e. an apprentice became a journeyman, and then a master, and after many years farmhands became farmers, but there were also cases of a non-standard history of employment. This relates to prostitutes who again became servants, millers who became carpenters, thieves who tried to engage in wholesale trading.³⁹ Their stories show a high degree of flexibility in the labour market, the relative ease with which enterprising individuals could change jobs from those associated with vagabonds or even the margins of society to more honourable ones. On the other hand, however, we also see examples of the progression from relative prosperity to destitution. All these stories indicate the existence of surprisingly large variety of people within the categories described as vagabonds, and the relative ease of being able to slip into a given category and then exit it.

In terms of the social background of the representatives of this group, even the cases published by Turska give rise to concerns. Although she uses the term “fugitive serf” several times in her publications, an analysis of the contents of the relevant source materials raises doubts as to the adequacy of this term.⁴⁰ It seems that the manner in which the

³⁹ AGAD, AKP, cat.no. 314, p. 45; AP Kraków, AMK, cat. no. 893, p. 207; AP Kraków, AMK, cat. no. 891, pp. 1–8.

⁴⁰ *Z rontem...*, p. 76. Bartłomiej Dziubiński, described as a fugitive serf, had run away from his village, but due to being conscripted into the Austrian army; this sometimes also happened to individuals from other social classes.

people testifying left their villages was not at all dramatic and was not associated with running away. Moreover, there are no examples of the landowners pursuing their serfs. If such a situation did occur, it was connected with a search for a fugitive servant who had run away before his contract expired, and not to a serf fighting for personal freedom. In many instances the so-called fugitives returned home, between jobs, which they would not have done had they been sought-after fugitives.

Before the war, Józef Rafacz indicated the high mobility of peasants from Małopolska (Lesser Poland), who could not be restrained within the boundaries of their villages. The peasants he described engaged in trading activities even great distances away, and concluded binding contracts away from their family's lands. It is impossible to talk about peasant serfdom if they were capable of negotiating with their masters, of resisting them, both individually and as a group, and if they independently disposed of their possessions. Even if there were strict regulations which provided for e.g. the death penalty for running away from the village, in practice these punishments were not exercised. As Rafacz noted: "Legal regulations per se should be distinguished from their practical implementation. It is clearly discernible that a whole series of restrictions were either not enforced in practice, or at least not that rigidly".⁴¹

Although peasants were formally tied to the land, in practice "in the 18th century a relatively lively migration of peasants"⁴² was noted. If a serf ran away no attempt was made to hang him and his possessions were not confiscated, even though the law allowed such actions. In practice his only punishment was the loss of his farm, which was usually passed on to the next of kin, thus recognizing the peasants' right to the succession of land. However, the serfs often returned home after several years and in general such travel was considered natural.⁴³

Rafacz's observations relating to the Sucha Beskidzka estates can be confirmed by examples from other estates and regions. The court records for the Jazów group of villages include the case of Szymon Karbowiczak, who sold the cottage he had built when he went into service. When the new owner left the cottage empty, the owners of the manorhouse installed a man called Michał Podbiński in the cottage, which he too abandoned it after several years. The next tenant died, but before his death managed to plant an orchard; his widow remained in the

⁴¹ J. Rafacz, *Ustrój wsi samorządnej małopolskiej w XVIII wieku*, Lublin 1922, pp. 112–120.

⁴² *Ibid.*, pp. 122–123.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, p. 127.

cottage. For a while Podbiński again lived there, and even made a few improvements. Years later, the original owner returned and demanded extra money, claiming that he had not received the full amount due when the transaction was executed. The inhabitants of the village recognized his claim and ordered Podbiński to pay an additional 3 tymf (Polish silver zloty), while reaffirming his ownership rights. The widow who was still living in the cottage was made to leave, but was to be paid 2 tymf for her husband's trees.⁴⁴ This clearly shows that even if someone left a village for a long time, it did not have to lead to loss of ownership rights and did not thwart his chances of returning. Not only did the interested parties perceive it in this way, but so did the village community and the owners of the manor-house. This phenomenon is well depicted in the example of Karol Bożek who ran away from his village with his family. A new farmer was found to replace him and the village community decided that if Brożek was to come back, he would not be allowed to return to his former farm, but should receive another abandoned farm instead.⁴⁵

This liberal attitude, demonstrated by rural communities and owners to peasants leaving landowners' properties and towards those who had insufficient land to sustain their families, could not only be due to social consensus and calculations made from a business perspective, but also from the realization that there was little else that could be done in such situations. Even an averagely well-off member of the gentry had little chance of finding, and even less of bringing back a peasant who had absconded the village without permission. The only sanction available was to deprive him of his inheritance. Owners of large estates acted in a like manner. Despite the fact that in the code published for Warmia, there was a ban on servants and day labourers leaving Royal Prussia, the respective sanctions cannot be deemed particularly severe. Individuals who failed to observe the ban lost their rights to inherit farms and to resettle there after they returned.⁴⁶ Moreover it can be assumed that those people who did return to their native villages after many years were allowed to take up farming if they so wished although the land allotted to them would probably differ, perhaps be less attractive and would require more work.

⁴⁴ *Księgi sądowe wiejskie klucza jazowskiego. 1663–1808*, study by S. Grodziski, Wrocław 1967, p. 133.

⁴⁵ *Księga sądowa Uszwi dla wsi Zawady. 1619–1788*, ed. A. Vetulani, Wrocław 1957, pp. 195–196.

⁴⁶ *Ustawa krajowa biskupa Adama Stanisława Grabowskiego z 4 lipca 1766 roku*, introduction by J. Kielbik, trans. M.I. Sacha, Olsztyn [2010], pp. 6–7.

This reality was well described with respect to rural areas in Masovia under the serfdom system. Studies showed there was considerable mobility among the inhabitants. An analysis of the data for the years 1774–1795 from 10 villages leads to the conclusion that in the period under discussion only 29% of all farms remained in the hands of the same farmers or their successors. In turn, 46% were in the possession of new owners, although sometimes these could be the former owners' sons-in-law. As the author of the study states: "in times of serfdom, it was just as easy to receive a farm as it was to lose it".⁴⁷ On the other hand, hiring farmhands and servants was necessary when the demographic stability of a family, i.e. additional workforce in the form of offspring, was achieved a dozen or so years after establishing a family.⁴⁸

Interesting light is also thrown on vagabonds by the 1795 Kraków census, called the "*Prussian Census*" [Spis Pruski] in which households were the basic unit. They are presented in tabular form, and the following categories were discerned: property owners (*posesjonaci*), residents, vagabonds, children, servants, clerics, the poor, students; further they are classified according to gender. The distinction between property owners, residents and vagabonds provides the most valuable information since these categories reflect the socio-economic stratification of Kraków's inhabitants in the way perceived by people living at that time. The term "property owners" (*posesjonaci*) describes those who owned real estate within the town. This group included a large portion of Kraków councillors, merchants, masters of wealthy guilds. The term "residents" was used mainly to describe merchants and craftsmen who did not own houses. Sporadically it referred to representatives of other professional categories, and it should be assumed that in this case, the people must have been particularly affluent. The people who were classified as being "poor" in the census rarely lived in their own households. The vast majority were allocated to other households: private, religious orders and hospitals.

From the point of view of this analyses, the fact that a clear distinction is made between vagabonds and others is of the utmost importance. Special cases are omitted in the article, when the category included people who were not permanent residents of Kraków, irrespective of their affiliation and wealth. Property owners who were members of the gentry are thus classified, even if they had a number of manor-houses.

⁴⁷ A. Woźniak, *Kultura mazowieckiej wsi pańszczyźnianej XVIII i początku XIX wieku (wybrane zagadnienia)*, Wrocław 1987, pp. 63–69.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 106–107.

Attributions, which otherwise threw a light on the phenomenon of understanding vagabonds as being people from elsewhere, were eliminated from any further statistical analyses.

Table 2. Affiliation of representatives of particular occupations to social categories in Kraków in 1795.

Occupation	Description of the head of the household				Total
	Poor	Vagabond	Resident	Property owner	
Market trader		70	5		75
Servant		68	1		68
Tenement administrator		63	4		67
Publican		33	14	1	48
Hired worker		27			27
Cook		26			26
Carpenter		19	3		22
Mason		16	7	3	26
Band player		14	0	1	15
Laundress		14	1		15
Fruit farmer		14	1		15
Seamstress		13	1		14
Coffee seller		12	3		15
Journeyman		11			11
Janitor		11			11
Writer		9	5	1	15
Patron		7	5	1	13
Joiner		3	14	2	19
Stallkeeper		2	7	2	11
Tailor		2	71	12	85
Painter		2	16	4	22
Cobbler/ shoemaker	1	2	107	15	125
Beggar	6	2	1		9
Furrier		1	9	1	11
Total	7	441	275	43	765

Source: AP Kraków, IT, cat.no. 551.

Please note: The table only shows occupations which were performed by vagabonds. Therefore occupations which the group did not perform were omitted from the table.

The list of occupations performed by heads of households listed in Table 2 again shows large variations among vagabonds. This category includes a number of craftsmen (such as carpenters), people providing services and engaged in petty trade (publicans, stallholders, “women making coffee”), tutors, independently living journeymen, housekeepers.⁴⁹ The distinguishing factor is therefore the performance of less valued and less well-paid jobs. At the same time, however, it should be stated that this principle was not always binding and that representatives of a given category were sometimes classified either as “residents” or “vagabonds”. This was true, for example, of masons, 16 of whom were classified as vagabonds, 7 as residents and 3 as property owners. We can only speculate that the people preparing the census based their classifications on their knowledge of the wealth and social prestige of particular persons.⁵⁰ It transpires that even beggars, instead of being classified as poor could, in the opinion of the authors, be vagabonds, or even – in one instance – a resident. In this light it should come as no surprise to learn that shoemakers and cobblers were assigned to as many as four categories. The involvement of vagabonds in guilds can be seen in the example of claims filed by Kraków flour sellers. In 18th-century Kraków bakers sometimes bought flour from vagabonds,⁵¹ in 1774, flour sellers, who were legally authorized to make such sales, demanded that the 18 vagabonds engaged in such dealings adopt the municipal laws and join their corporation. What is interesting is that there were two times more illegal flour traders than official ones.⁵²

Data related to the size of households in Fig. 1 contradicts the image of vagabonds as being lone refugees from rural areas, who had broken away from the social structure. It transpires that in less than 15% of the cases, they lived in single-person households. Although this result is lower than in the case of people referred to as residents or property owners, it is still impressive. More importantly about 60% of vagabond households consisted of more than 2 people; i.e. not just a married couple and, although still lower than in other social groups – households

⁴⁹ This term was used to describe people who managed homes on behalf of their absent owners.

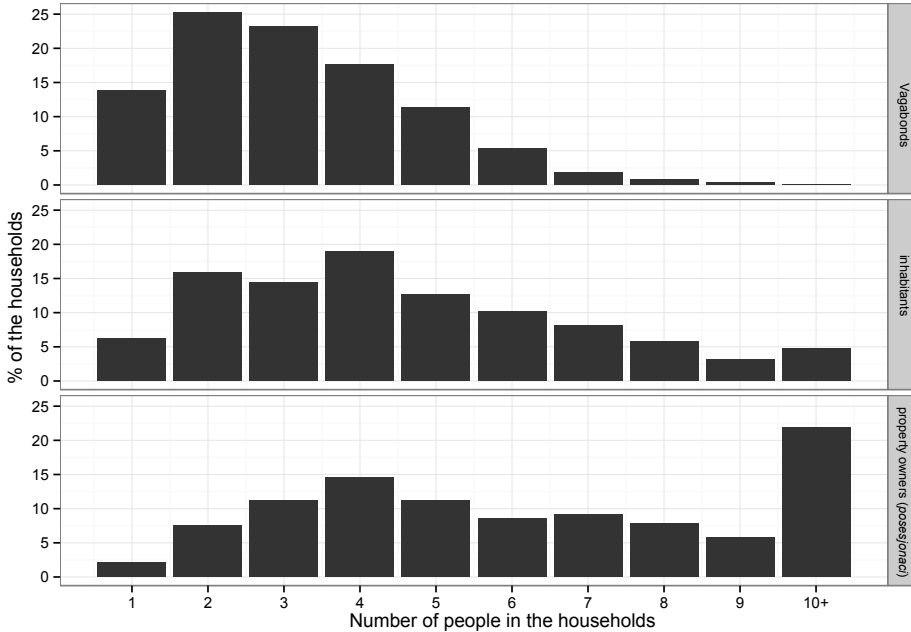
⁵⁰ The phenomenon of being well-oriented in the economic position of one's neighbours was described in detail by A. Wyczański, *Uwarstwienie społeczne w Polsce XVI wieku*, Wrocław 1977. It was also underlined by A. Laszuk, *Taryfy podatkowe zwierciadłem struktur społecznych*, in: *Między polityką a kulturą*, ed. C. Kukło, Warsaw 1999, pp. 183–198.

⁵¹ This term is used by the flour sellers themselves.

⁵² M. Gadocha, *Cech piekarzy i handel chlebem w Krakowie w okresie nowożytnym*, Kraków 2012, p. 106.

only sporadically comprised more than 5 people – nevertheless, the data differs significantly from our perception of vagabonds.

Fig. 1. Number of people in the households of basic categories of Kraków inhabitants in 1795 (in %).



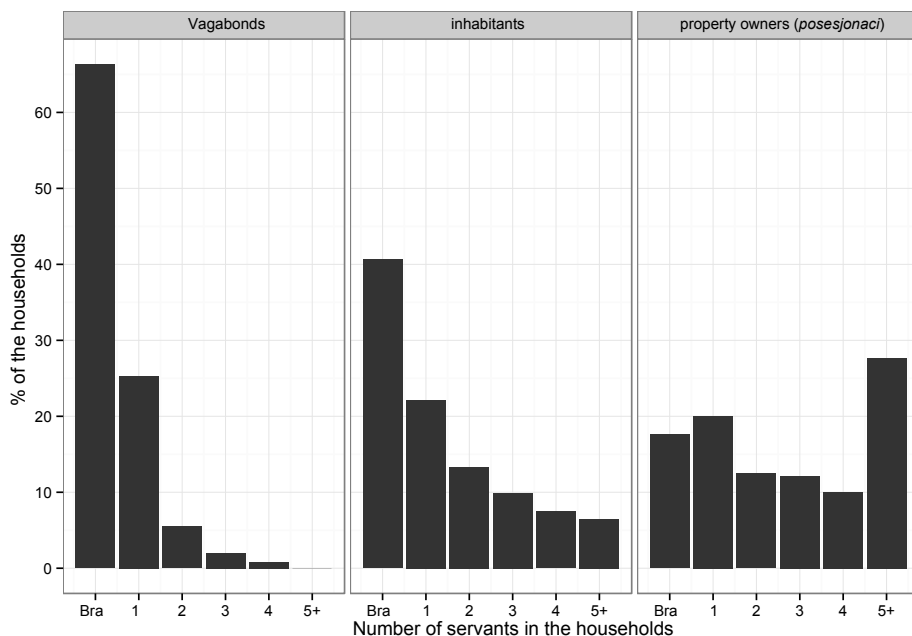
Source: AP Kraków, IT, cat. no. 551.

The data presented in Fig. 2 is even more surprising. It shows that 35% of all vagabond households employed their own servants.⁵³ As in Fig. 1, this value is significantly lower than for other categories specified in the census; it proves, however, that the general image of vagabonds is falsified. Approximately 150 members of this group who were heads of households had their own servants. Moreover, servants were not only employed in vagabond households in Kraków. An undated census (in tabular form) of the inhabitants of Poznań, probably dating from the second half of the 18th century also attests to the existence of this phenomenon. An additional column was inserted for part of the town to record the servants and children of vagabond households. Unfortunately, these groups were combined, thus precluding an in-depth analysis, but the very fact that the existence of larger vaga-

⁵³ More detailed analyses show that they were mainly women working as servants.

bond households was anticipated by the authors of the census should be considered significant.⁵⁴

Fig. 2. Number of servants in the households of the basic categories of Kraków inhabitants in 1795 (in %)



Source: AP Kraków, IT, cat. no. 551.

It would seem that the possibility of having larger families or one's own servants did not only concern vagabonds who were guild craftsmen and performed other relatively well-paid jobs. The data collected and compiled by Robert Allen could indicate the potentially favourable economic position of a significantly larger number of the representatives of this group. The author adjusted the data, using well-known publications on the history of prices,⁵⁵ in a manner which enabled extensive comparisons to be made between regions and epochs. Calculations of Allen's so-called welfare ratio are particularly useful for the analyses

⁵⁴ AP Poznań, Akta Miasta Poznania I, cat. no. 2002.

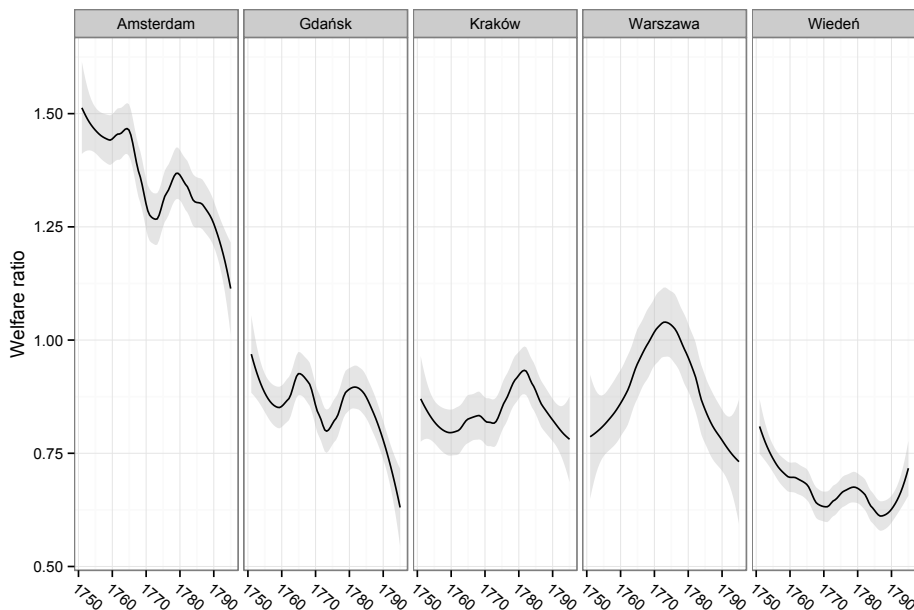
⁵⁵ T. Furtak, *Ceny w Gdańsku w latach 1701–1815*, Lviv 1935; N.W. Posthumus, *Inquiry into the History of Prices in Holland*, vols. 1–2, Leiden 1946–1964; A.F. Pribram, *Materialien zur Geschichte der Preise und Löhne in Osterreich*, Vienna 1938; S. Siegel, *Ceny w Warszawie w latach 1701–1815*, Lviv 1936; E. Tomaszewski, *Ceny w Krakowie w latach 1601–1795*, Lviv 1934.

conducted. They answer the question of how the wages of day labourers translated into the costs of the upkeep of an average household. The basket of basic products, which included mainly food and the cost of renting living quarters, was calculated on the assumption that there were three adults per household. A score of 1 meant that income equalled the expenses assumed in the model, while lower values indicated the inability to cover expenses from one person's income, which led either to their resignation from establishing a family or the need to take up paid work by other members of the household.

Of course these calculations could only be made due to the author adopting many simplifying assumptions, and the sources on which they were based, which comprise price histories which were published ages ago, were controversial and rightly criticized.⁵⁶ This did not, however, alter the fact that the data amassed by Allen comprised a very interesting proposition and basis for analyses which historians had not believed possible. The schedules presented in fig. 3 relating to selected town centres indicate irrefutably that in towns of the Commonwealth, the income earned by unskilled workers could at times be quite significant and in certain periods allowed a single worker to maintain three people. Even if it transpired that these amounts were lower, which was often the case at the end of Stanisław August Poniatowski's reign, it was still enough to pay for the upkeep of two adults. Although Polish towns were not as good as Amsterdam in this respect, compared with Imperial Vienna they were surprisingly good. In such situation the existence of multi-person vagabond households or their sporadically employing servants does not seem strange at all. Obviously not all representatives of the said group were able to work as builders, which is where the majority of the data on wages collected by Allen comes from, and even people who were physically in good shape could not count on being employed on building sites during the winter; however, this observation does not minimize the significance of the data presented. Moreover, although vagabonds who undertook the duties of servants or farm workers usually received lower wages in cash, they could, in return, expect to cover their maintenance costs so, in general terms, were not actually earning that badly.

⁵⁶ W. Kula, *Problemy i metody historii gospodarczej*, Warsaw 1963, pp. 518–520.

Fig. 3. Welfare ratio calculated for unskilled workers in selected European towns in the second half of the 18th century.



Source: R.C. Allen, *The great divergence in European wages and prices from the Middle Ages to the First World War*, “Explorations in Economic History” 38, 2001, fascicle 4, pp. 411–47.

Please note: The graph shows the trend refined using locally weighted polynomial regression, which is a slightly more complicated equivalent of the moving average. The surrounding grey area indicates a 95% confidence interval.

4.

The picture presented above is at odds, in many respects, with known works by Polish historians which shows a mobile, minority group called “vagabonds”, living on the edge of poverty and which did not participate in any social life. In these studies this group is shown in contrast to the majority of people who were settled, often tied to the land, defined as “commoners”. In reality, vagabonds were not pushed to the margins of society, nor was the general population as immobile as we are inclined to believe.

Moreover, if someone – following in the steps of the authors of earlier works – tried to calculate the percentage of vagabonds in whole populations, including those in service and hired workers, such analysis would have to begin with significant reservations concerning the stability of the results. Data derived from various types of censuses

reflect – similarly to photographs – the state which is observable at a particular moment and this can result in many difficulties when used to describe the dynamics of social phenomena. Therefore, another statement needs to be added to the observation that a certain part of the population works as servants or hired workers at a given moment. It is very likely that many heads of households listed in the censuses had worked as servants or day labourers, had often changed their place of residence and migrated over considerable distances. Some of them were yet to experience such situation in the future. Although they had nothing in common with vagabonds (in any meaning of the term) when the census was carried out, this state of things may only have been temporary. A large part of the old Polish society consisted of vagabonds, not on a permanent but temporary basis.

It should also be noted that the inclusion of a person in this category may not have been the result of his objective characteristics but his relationship to the place of residence of the authors of the records in which he was described. While a raftsman was engaged in rafting he was certainly not a tramp, nor was he a vagabond. However, after he had completed his work he was again considered a member of one of these social categories – he was certainly perceived in this way by the authorities of the towns through which he travelled. This, however, changed when he returned to his home to spend the winter with relatives. From the point of view of the village community, and perhaps the feudal authorities too, he was considered a local. Many representatives of other occupations, especially those related to transport, may have been in a similar position. It would seem, therefore, that the picture of vagabonds which dominates in Polish historiography is too static and does not take into account changes in occupation throughout a person's life cycle. This is the case despite the requests made many years ago by Andrzej Wyczański.⁵⁷ This is an expectation which is worth fulfilling.

The position of vagabonds described herein (if the term is still worth using) from the time of reign of Stanisław August Poniatowski may be considered to partly reflect the results of the work of 16th-century historians. Similarly to the farm servants described by Anna Kamler,⁵⁸ in the 18th century, peasants' children had no difficulty in finding employment with other farmers; they left their native villages and migrated, sometimes over considerable distances. Vagabonds continued to consti-

⁵⁷ A. Wyczański, *Spoleczeństwo*, in: *Polska w epoce Odrodzenia*, ed. A. Wyczański, Warsaw 1970, p. 143.

⁵⁸ A. Kamler, *Chłopi jako pracownicy najemni na wsi małopolskiej w XVI i pierwszej połowie XVII wieku*, Warsaw 2005.

tute an important group on a relatively open and flexible labour market. As the 16th century differed little in this respect from the second half of the 18th century, the question arises about the alleged dissimilarity of the 17th century which, in the opinion of many authors, was supposed to be characterized by the increased attachment of peasants to the land and depriving them of the freedom of movement. It is possible that in this instance our image of the past is overly pessimistic and reliant on prescriptive acts or publications, and not on a sound analysis of mass sources. Let us hope that such studies will in time be undertaken.

Of course, it could be argued that the second half of the 18th century was characterized by a complete break with earlier periods in which vagabonds were mainly fugitives from villages generally known from historical literature. The fact is that the comments presented herein relate to the reign of Stanisław August Poniatowski which is when the source materials used in the analyses were published, but to some extent they also refer to earlier periods. The very existence of the phenomenon of life-cycle servants necessitated the wide and socially acceptance of the mobility of young people. It should not be assumed that Polish towns which, throughout the early modern period, required an influx of migrants from the countryside, not only to boost its demographic development but also to maintain the population, were to a large extent inhabited by fugitives hiding from their feudal overlords. Moreover, the basic works concerning vagabonds – books by Nina Assorodobraj, Zofia Turska and Mirosław Frančić – are largely based on materials dating from Poniatowski's times. One more request should be added to the current demands for reviving Polish studies on the labour market, social mobility and individuals' life cycles – to explore the feudal rural areas in Polish historiography in a scope wider than the many times refuted⁵⁹ but still functioning image of slave-like serfdom dating from the times of feudal oppression.

⁵⁹ A. Wyczański, *Czy chłopu było źle w Polsce XVI wieku?*, KH 85, 1978, no. 3, p. 627–641; P. Guzowski, *Chłopi i pieniądze na przełomie średniowiecza i czasów nowożytnych*, Kraków 2008.

Radosław Poniat

Vagabonds in the society of the Polish Nobles' Commonwealth
in the context of studies on life cycles

(Summary)

The purpose of the article is to present a new interpretation of the role played by vagabonds in the society of the Polish Nobles' Commonwealth divided into estates. The proposed approach on the one hand bases on studies concerning the functioning of socially marginalized people in early modern France and Poland, with which Western historiographers are acquainted, and on the other on a new analysis of Polish source materials mainly relating to the times of Stanisław August Poniatowski.

The article is divided into four parts, the of which first presents the output of Polish historiography on the topic of vagabonds. The results of studies describing groups similar to people who were not classified as belonging to any estate and had no permanent home (vagabonds) in Western societies are presented in the second part. The last section contains new findings which undermine some of the universal opinions of Polish historiographers. The last part presents conclusions which indicate greater social mobility than had been previously assumed and the significance of vagabonds in the functioning of the labour market.

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