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Serfs' Obligations in the Eastern Part of Southern Podlasie in the 19th Century

*Powinności pańszczyźniane chłopów
we wschodniej części Południowego Podlasia w XIX w.*

ABSTRACT

The manorial-serfdom system was predominant in Southern Podlasie until the early 1860s. Very few villages were based on the monetary rent system. Most of the local landowners showed little interest in investing in new technologies, and they associated improvement in their prosperity with the exploitation of the mandatory labor of peasants. Therefore, the latter were burdened with numerous obligations. The primary one was a fixed weekly corvée, which varied significantly in its extent and was not always correlated with the area of land used by the peasants. Additionally, during periods of intensified agricultural work, especially the harvest, peasants were required to work extra days of corvée. Working them off caused the peasants to have little time to tend to their own crops in the appropriate period. The working day was usually regulated by the sunrise and sunset, although at some estates, peasants were allowed to start work between 5 and 7 in the morning. Corvée work was not valued very high. Peasants rarely showed open opposition to performing these duties since the court cases they filed often ended with their defeat. In this situation, they avoided diligently fulfilling their imposed obligations,

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which landowners tried to force them to perform through legal regulations, rewards, and punishments. The landowners were interested in maintaining the existing system, and leasing land to peasants for rent was regarded as harmful to their (i.e. landlords') interests.

Key words: peasants, manorial-serfdom system, corvée, South Podlasie

STRESZCZENIE

Na Południowym Podlasiu do początku lat sześćdziesiątych XIX w. zdecydowanie dominował system gospodarki folwarczno-pańszczyźnianej. Jedynie nieliczne wsie były oczynszowane. Miejscowi właściciele ziemscy w większości nie byli zainteresowani inwestowaniem w nowe technologie, a poprawę swojego dobrobytu wiązali z wykorzystywaniem przymusowej pracy chłopów. W związku z tym, ci byli obciążeni licznymi powinnościami. Podstawową z nich była stała pańszczyzna tygodniowa, która była znacznie zróżnicowana pod względem wymiaru, nie zawsze skorelowanego z arealem użytkowanej przez chłopów ziemi. Dodatkowo w okresach nasilenia prac polowych, przede wszystkim żniw, chłopów obowiązywały dni pańszczyzny dodatkowej. Ich odpracowywanie powodowało brak czasu chłopów na zajmowanie się swoimi uprawami w odpowiednim do tego okresie. Dzień roboczy z reguły regulowały wschody i zachody słońca, chociaż w części majątków pozwalano chłopom stawać do pracy między godzinami 5 a 7 rano. Praca pańszczyźniana była nisko wyceniana. Chłopi rzadko okazywali otwarty sprzeciw wobec wykonywania tych powinności. Procesy sądowe kończyły się bowiem ich przegranymi. W tej sytuacji unikali oni sumiennego wykonywania nałożonych na nich obowiązków, do czego z kolei starali się zmusić ich zapisami prawnymi, nagrodami i karami właściciele ziemscy. Ci ostatni byli zainteresowani trwaniem istniejącego systemu, a oczynszowanie chłopów traktowali jako działanie szkodliwe dla swoich interesów.

Słowa kluczowe: chłopi, gospodarka folwarczno-pańszczyźniana, pańszczyzna, Południowe Podlasie

INTRODUCTION

For centuries, the manorial-serfdom system was inseparably connected with the lives of peasants inhabiting the Polish Republic (Commonwealth). Until the early 1860s, in the Kingdom of Poland, the majority of landowners used the corvée labor of peasants, who, since 1807–1809, had already had personal freedom, and were, at least in theory, bound to the manors only by economic ties¹. The corvée duties that they performed were a form of payment for the lease of land they used, which was the property

¹ The regulations of 1818 prohibited peasants from leaving their village without the consent of the village head, who was actually the owner of the village, or his representative. J. Gmitruk, *Udział chłopów w powstaniu listopadowym*, in: *Powstanie listopadowe na Podlasiu 1830–1831*, ed. J. Flisiński, Białą Podlaska 1993, p. 31.

of landowners². A similar situation predominated in Southern Podlasie³, where only in isolated cases villages paid monetary rent. Initially, these were some villages in government estates, such as Kopytnik. Over time, the remaining villages on state lands (for example, Kropiwki, Lubenka, Ortel Królewski) were also subjected to rent payments.)⁴. There were also privately-owned villages that employed monetary rent-payments, for example, Lipniak (1806), or individual farmers in serfdom-based villages who had special privileges⁵. The situation of townspeople-farmers was, in turn, complicated⁶. In some towns, they were only subjected to a weekly corvée at the turn of the 18th and 19th centuries (for example, Rossosz), which, in any case, often led to numerous conflicts.

The aim of the article is to present the obligations of serfs – owners of farms and the problems associated with their implementation in the eastern part of Southern Podlasie in the 19th century (until the abolition of serfdom in the years 1861–1862)⁷. The common features distinguishing the area in question were mostly poor or very poor soils⁸, which produced low crop yields, and the generally negligible interest of landowners in introducing innovations in the management of their estates, apart from very few exceptions, e.g. the Łoski landowners of Kostomłoty. On the basis of source data, the author formulates a research hypothesis that the serfdom system was a burden on the peasants, thereby making it difficult for them to properly cultivate 'their' land and it did not motivate them to conscientiously perform the imposed obligations.

² T. Mencil, *Wieś pańszczyźniana w Królestwie Polskim w połowie XIX wieku*, Lublin 1988, p. 36.

³ The term 'eastern part of South Podlasie', refers to the areas of the then Biała and Radzyń districts, which comprised the eastern part of the Podlaskie Voivodeship (Guberniya) in the years 1816–1844.

⁴ Archiwum Państwowe w Radomiu [hereinafter: APR], Zarząd Rolnictwa i Dóbr Państwowych Guberni Radomskiej, Kieleckiej, Lubelskiej, Siedleckiej [hereinafter: ZDP], ref. no. 13938; ref. no. 21014.

⁵ Archiwum Państwowe w Lublinie [hereinafter: APL], Komisja Województwa Lubelskiego i Rząd Gubernialny Lubelski [hereinafter: KWLiRGL], ref. no. RGL, skarb. 244, no pagination, The Table... of the villages of Lipniak and Zbójno... 1846.

⁶ The author groups peasants and townspeople-farmers together, since their legal status in the first half of the 19th century was virtually identical.

⁷ In 1846, Tsar Nicholas I's decree abolished forced unpaid labor (*darmochy*), arbitrary exactions (*gwalty*), and compulsory hiring in the Kingdom of Poland. J. Rutkowski, *Historia gospodarcza Polski do 1864 r.*, Warszawa 1953, p. 311.

⁸ At the time, they were referred to as the 3rd and 4th rye classes. The land was cultivated using a three-field or four-field system, with a two-year fallow period. On the poorest soils, rye was sown only once every three years. APR, ZDP, ref. no. 15539.

Dorota Michaluk lately expressed the opinion that Polish historiography 'has recently devoted less attention' to the peasant question⁹. It is debatable whether this thesis is true with regard to the historiography that studies the fates of peasants in the Polish Commonwealth (Republic) in the pre-partition period. While in earlier times the manorial-serfdom economy was generally assessed negatively, opinions on this matter are now divided. However, recent studies have devoted less attention to the analysis of serfdom in the first half of the 19th century in the Kingdom of Poland¹⁰. In the case of the eastern part of Southern Podlasie, in recent years the burdens of serfdom have been primarily discussed in the works on the history of individual localities¹¹.

A scientific analysis of problems associated with the lives of serfs in the first half of the 19th century, including those living in the eastern part of Southern Podlasie, is difficult because of the scarcity and first of all one-sidedness of source materials. It is comparatively easy (albeit not in all cases) to find archival materials concerning the acreage of the land the peasants used, or related feudal obligations (service tables, inventories of landed estates, etc.). However, there are significant problems in acquiring information about the daily lives of peasants and their attitude towards their work since the vast majority of illiterate peasants practically did not produce ego-documents, e.g. diaries, in the 19th century. Nor did they keep any economic documents for their farms: they did record the acreage of specific crops sown, the harvest yields, the quantities of and revenues from goods sold etc., not to mention their opinions on the pressing issues

⁹ D. Michaluk, *Wstęp*, in: *Chłopi na ziemiach dawnej Rzeczypospolitej do czasów uwłaszczenia*, ed. D. Michaluk, Ciechanowiec–Warszawa 2019, p. 9.

¹⁰ More has been written recently about peasants in the Grodno Guberniya (Governorate) during this period. Worth mentioning here are inter alia the studies by Siarhiej Tokć, *Czy pańszczyzna była przyczyną chłopskiej biedy? (na przykładzie Grodzieńszczyzny w pierwszej połowie XIX wieku)*, in: *Chłopi na ziemiach*, pp. 357–376.

¹¹ A. Buczyło, *Chłopi we wsiach królewskich guberni łomaskiej w świetle inwentarza z 1789 roku*, in: *Chłopi na ziemiach*, pp. 87–104; S. Piątkowski, *Między tradycją a modernizacją. Chłopi dóbr rządowych powiatu włodawskiego w okresie przemian społeczno-gospodarczych I połowy XIX wieku*, in: *Włodawa i wieś nadbużańska w epoce nowożytniej*, eds. A. Bem, A. Duszyk, Radom–Włodawa 2007; J. Onyszczyk, *Kodeń od siedziby magnackiej do osady gminnej (dzieje ośrodka od drugiej połowy XVIII wieku do odzyskania niepodległości)*, Warszawa–Kodeń 2016; D. Tarasiuk, *Zrozumieć przeszłość. Dzieje Horodyszcza od czasów najdawniejszych do 1944 roku*, Lublin 2019; idem, *Dzieje parafii w Opolu wpisane w dziedzictwo regionu, Podedwórze–Lublin 2010*; idem, *Wisznice. Z dziejów miasteczka i okolic do 1918 roku*, Lublin 2010; idem, *Zrozumieć przeszłość. Dzieje Horodyszcza od czasów najdawniejszych do 1944 roku*, Lublin 2019; idem, *Parafia w Horbowie. 1516–1939*, Horbów–Lublin 2016; A. Hucz, *Zarys dziejów dóbr włodawskich Zamoyskich w latach 1837–1917*, in: *Włodawa*.

they faced. As a rule, the lawsuits concerning peasants that were heard in communal courts have not survived. Moreover, one might suspect that decisions issued in some cases were not even recorded. In this situation, information about the lives of peasants is obtained mainly from scattered indirect sources produced by representatives of the higher social classes, e.g. from the aforementioned estate inventories, interrogation records from various investigations, or parish registers. In court documents one can come across interesting opinions about peasants expressed by the manorial administration or clergy. It should be also added that the number of available sources varies depending on the estates or even individual villages that belong to them. The present article is based on similar sources.

THE RANGE OF CORVÉE OBLIGATIONS

In the first half of the 19th century, in Southern Podlasie, the vast majority of peasants and townspeople-farmers performed serfdom obligations. Their essential form was weekly corvée labor. Juliusz Willaume wrote that in the area of Lublin in the early 19th century it averaged 2 days of draft labor (i.e. using draft animals) and two days of foot labor from a 20 morga farm (one morga equaled 1.4 acre)¹². The analysis of the weekly corvée load imposed on peasants in Southern Podlasie indicates that these burdens varied across different landed estates and were not necessarily correlated with the area of land cultivated by the peasants. Moreover, land allotments were also diversified, e.g. in the Wola Wereszczyńska estate, peasants held only 11 morgas, 5 morgas of which of arable land) whereas in Wołoskowola they held 36 morgas each (of which, over 19 morgas of arable land). Similarly, the amount of grain sowed annually varied significantly, ranging yearly from 6 to 13 bushels (*korzec*) per peasant household¹³.

The weekly corvée labor in the area in question ranged from one to six days for 'full-arable farms.' The highest workload was recorded inter alia in Horbów, where in 1818 it was noted that 'every peasant holding a quarter (0.35 hectare) of continuous land owes three days of male corvée labor per each week and the same amount of household servant

¹² J. Willaume, *Z dziejów wsi lubelskiej przed uwłaszczeniem*, "Annales UMCS. Sectio F" 1955, 10, p. 114.

¹³ APL, KWLiRGL, ref. no. RGL, skarb. 244, no pagination, The Table... villages Lipniak and Zbójno... 1846.

labor as the manor commands'¹⁴, but at the same time it was stipulated that it could be reduced in certain cases ('lack of family [*niesiemistość*]¹⁵ and poverty')¹⁶. The most common was a four-day corvée, under which peasants were required to perform two days of foot labor and two days of work with draft animals per week throughout the year. This was the standard in places such as Jabłoń, Kolano, Rowiny, Rusile, and Zienki¹⁷. On the Sosnowice estate, peasants had to perform two days of draft labor and one day of foot labor¹⁸. In turn, on the Włodawa estate in 1826, peasants were obliged to perform three days of regular corvée labor, without the form being specified¹⁹. In the former royal village of Bokince (Bokince [Królewskie (Royal)]), every farmer owning a homestead plot performed two days per week of foot corvée or corvée using draft animals²⁰. In Wisznice, townspeople-farmers performed one day each of corvée with draft animals and foot service per week²¹. Since 1802, the residents of the town of Horodyszczce were obliged to perform one day of corvée labor per week throughout the whole year²². Furthermore, the forms of corvée labor were not always specified. Various conversion rates were applied: for example, a plow day (using draft animals) could be exchanged for one or two foot days (manual labor)²³. Sometimes it was specified whether foot corvée was to be performed by men or women. For example, in Dańce, peasants performed two man-days

¹⁴ It should be observed that it is difficult to connect the area of full-size land with a specific number of, corvée labor days because in some localities the entire cultivated area was classified as continuous, while in others it was formally divided into continuous and rent-paying.

¹⁵ *Niesiemienistość* – Lack of family.

¹⁶ Archiwum Główne Akt Dawnych w Warszawie [hereinafter: AGAD], Archiwum Warszawskie Radziwiłłów [hereinafter: AWR], XXV, ref. no. 1180/2, fol. 13.

¹⁷ APL, KWLiRGL, ref. no. RGL, skarb. 244, no pagination, The Table showing the remuneration, duties and obligations of farmers settled in villages and towns, residing in the villages of Lipniak and Zbójno... July 30, 1846; ref. no. RGL, skarb. 243, no pagination, The Table showing the remuneration in Jabłoń... 1846; Archiwum Szlubowskich, ref. no. 62, fols. 285–286.

¹⁸ Archiwum Państwowe w Lublinie. Oddział w Chełmie [hereinafter: APL OCH], Hipoteka we Włodawie [hereinafter: HW], ref. no. 2/84, no pagination, a certified true copy of the act of lease of the Sosnowiec estate... 1840.

¹⁹ AGAD, Archiwum Zamoyskich [hereinafter: AZ], ref. no. 2735, fol. 66.

²⁰ APR, ZDP, ref. no. 13008.

²¹ D. Tarasiuk, *Wisznice. Z dziejów miasteczka i okolic do 1918 roku*, Lublin 2010, p. 50.

²² AGAD, Akta osób i rodzin, ref. no. 234, fol. 23.

²³ AGAD, AZ, ref. no. 2735, fol. 82.

and one woman-day per week. Sometimes one man-day was converted into two woman-days²⁴.

Permanent corvée was a fundamental burden borne by the peasants, however, not the only one they took upon. Additional days of corvée labor were required, and – it should be emphasized – these primarily fell during the harvest period. Before the changes introduced by the 1846 law, which limited peasant obligations, there existed the so-called *łłoki* [*gwalty*] (compulsory group labor) i.e. the obligatory requirement for all able-bodied members of a peasant household (except for one person) or a designated number of them, to report for work on the manor land. Depending on the estate, they applied to healthy individuals aged between 13, 14 or 15 years old, or 15 to 50 or 60 years old. The Horbów estate inventory recorded the following in 1818: 'annually a *łłok* or twelve days of *gwalt* (compulsory labor) performed in the following way, i.e. both in spring and in autumn for plowing with a draft animal and its driver, or on foot if without an animal, as ordered by the manor, for mowing meadows and drying hay with one person from each cottage going out to work; for the harvest: four days to be worked off by the family members capable of working, with one person left in the cottage to guard the farmstead and keep watch over the fire'²⁵. Sometimes it was specified how many people from a given cottage were required to report for work on the manorial land. After Adam Czartoryski purchased the Horbów estate, the rules for performing *gwalty* (compulsory labor) were strictly defined: they were replaced with the so-called summer corvée. Peasant farms had to work off: 4 days with an ard (wooden plow); 4, 8 or 16 days during the harvest; 2 days with a scythe and 2 days for hay raking²⁶. The peasants of Motwica were obligated to work additionally as many as 30 days annually²⁷. In turn, in the Opole estate the *łłoki* amount was 6 days (four persons from each peasant farm) and the same number of days with two persons per day²⁸. The Wisznice peasants had to work 19 auxiliary days, including 3 draft (draft animal) days during the harvest²⁹, whereas in Kostomłoty, farmers worked off only 6 additional days

²⁴ AGAD, AWR, XXV, ref. no. 1165.

²⁵ AGAD, AWR, XXV, ref. no. 1180/2, fol. 13.

²⁶ APR, ZDP, ref. no. 20591, no pagination, The General Record of Profits... for 1832/1833... June 30, 1832.

²⁷ APL, KWLiRGL, ref. no. RGL, skarb. 243, no pagination, The Table... village Motwica 1846.

²⁸ APL, Archiwum Szlubowskich, ref. no. 62, fols. 285–286.

²⁹ D. Tarasiuk, *Wisznice*, p. 50.

during the harvest³⁰. In 1846 *łłoki* were exchanged for a specified number of days of additional corvée.

To this was added the so-called compulsory service, especially burdensome because it usually applied during the harvest seasons. At times, this obligation reached enormous dimensions, for example in Motwica until 1846 it amounted to as many as 70 days per year from each peasant household³¹.

Before the performance tables were compiled in 1846, there were numerous additional duties, varying in individual estates, e.g.: night guard duty (*stróża/stróżka* – performed by male/female guards respectively), watch duty, weeding cabbage, cleaning and spinning flax, transporting wood, cultivating hemp, washing and shearing sheep, milking manorial cows, etc. Peasants were also obligated to deliver various dues in kind to the manor (i.e. grain, roosters, hens, geese, eggs, or semolina) and to pay rents, fire insurance and taxes³².

THE TIME-CONSUMING NATURE OF CORVÉE LABOR

The agricultural economic system of that time required a very large input of work. It should therefore come as no surprise that fulfilling serf obligations was time-consuming, which manifested itself, inter alia, in the length of the workday, including corvée. The workday began with reporting at the workplace and ended with leaving it. During the so-called 'cold' season (from the beginning of November to the end of March) it lasted as a rule from dawn until dusk, with a one-hour-break for dinner. During the so-called 'summer' season (from April to October) peasants were theoretically required to report to work at the manor farm at sunrise, i.e. in July at around 4 a.m. according to the Warsaw time of that period³³. In reality this varied. While in the Trajanów demesne the binding duration of the workday was from sunset to sunrise³⁴, already an entry in the 1786 inventory of the Horbów estate stated that corvée

³⁰ APR, ZDP, ref. no. 14421, fols. 27–31.

³¹ APL, KWLiRGL, ref. no. RGL, skarb. 243, no pagination, The Table... village Motwica 1846.

³² For more see: T. Mencil, *Wieś pańszczyźniana w Królestwie Polskim w połowie XIX wieku*, Lublin 1988; D. Tarasiuk, *Wisznice*, pp. 52–55; idem, *Dzieje parafii w Opolu*, pp. 25–26; idem, *Zrozumieć przeszłość*, pp. 75–76; idem, *Parafia w Horbowie*, pp. 45–48.

³³ According to the present-day summer time, it is about 4:30 a.m.

³⁴ APR, ZDP, ref. no. 13008, no pagination, Inventory of the Trojanovsky estate key... 1810.

with draft animals began at 6 a.m. and foot corvée began at 5 a.m., and only in winter they both started at sunrise³⁵. In Kostomłoty, the workday began at 6 a.m. in summer, and in winter at 7 a.m., lasting until sunset, with a several-hour rest break at midday. In the Włodawa estates peasants were required to report to work with draft animals only at 7 a.m. In all estates work lasted – usually with a two-hour lunch break – until sunset, e.g. until 8:30 p.m. in July³⁶.

It must be remembered that the duration of the corvée day should also include the time needed to travel from one's homestead to the designated workplace. In some extreme cases, when a village was situated even over a dozen kilometers from the manor farm, this was a significant additional burden. For example, peasants from Ortel Królewski complained in 1856 that they had to cover approximately 24 km a day (a round trip to the Łomazy manor farm), which exhausted their draft animals and negatively impacted their prosperity³⁷.

It should be noted that the law prohibited work on Sundays³⁸, but it was not always observed. In 1839, during an investigation in Wisznica, the Greek Catholic parish priest Tomasz Szulakiewicz accused the local squire, Ignacy Sosnkowski, of compelling peasants to work on Sundays. Testimonies from witnesses not only confirmed this practice but also revealed that the parish priest himself had previously also used peasants for labor on Sundays³⁹.

Since most work on manor farms was performed as part of feudal obligations and compulsory hire, the daily wage rates were low⁴⁰. The average rate in the area in question was 24 grosz for a day's work with draft animals, and for a day's work on foot it was 12 grosz⁴¹. There were also estates where higher wages were paid, e.g. in the Sosnowice estate (1840) peasant labor was valued as follows: a day with draft

³⁵ AGAD, AWR, XXV, ref. no. 1175, np. pagination, Inventory... June 24, 1786.

³⁶ D. Tarasiuk, *Praca w życiu włościan pańszczyźnianych z powiatu włodawskiego w XIX wieku*, in: *Nad Bugiem we Włodawie. Historyczny i kulturowy portret miasta i mikroregionu*, eds. M. Kołacz-Chmiel, R. Lesiakowska, Lublin 2024.

³⁷ APR, ZDP, ref. no. 21014, no pagination, Pismo sołtysa Ortela... 1856.

³⁸ To respect Greek Catholic holidays, the Government Commission for Internal Affairs and Public Enlightenment issued a decree in 1819, containing a list of holidays comprising 28 days, during which 'common rural labor and self labor' could not be performed. "Dziennik Urzędowy Województwa Podlaskiego" 1819, no. 12, pp. 103–105.

³⁹ APL, RGP, ref. no. 72, fol. 140.

⁴⁰ On pay rates for peasant work, see: J. Willaume, *op. cit.*, p. 118.

⁴¹ APR, ZDP, ref. no. 20591, no pagination, The general rekord of profits... for 1832/1833... June 30, 1832; AGAD, AZ, ref. no. 2735, fol. 66. For comparison; At that time a goose in Włodawa cost 15 grosz, rooster – 12 grosz, hen – 10 grosz, and an egg – half a grosz.

animals – 30 grosz, mowing, threshing with a flail in summer – 15 grosz, raking or threshing with a flail in winter – 10 grosz, weeding – 6 grosz, digging potatoes – 1 grosz per a quarter (i.e. ca. 24.5 kg)⁴². Even higher wages were paid in Jabłoń (1846), 45 grosz for a day with an ard, 30 grosz to mowers, and 15 grosz for a day with a rake⁴³.

Meanwhile, it must not be forgotten that alongside the aforementioned obligations peasants devoted their time to cultivating the land which they had the right to use. Regrettably, there are very little source material on this subject at our disposal. However, it is evident that serfs, particularly during the harvest season, had little time to cultivate their fields.

LABOR PRODUCTIVITY OF PEASANTS

From the perspective of landowners, the labor productivity of the serfs was a major problem. Poorly nourished and chronically exhausted, especially during the harvest season, peasants tried to perform the work imposed on them on the manor farms with as little effort as possible. For that reason, in order to induce the peasants to work more efficiently, a definite-size *corvée* became widely adopted, that is a minimum amount of specific work that had to be fulfilled within a single workday. The required workload could vary across individual estates. Typically, during one workday with a draft animal, one had to, for example, plow a farm morga (i.e. 200 *pręt* or ca. 37 ares), or thresh with a flail 30 sheaves of rye or 45 sheaves of spring grain, plus shake out the straw, and carry both grain and straw to a designated place, or simply thresh 60 sheaves of winter grain or 90 sheaves of spring grain (Wisznice estate), or thresh with a flail 30 sheaves of rye, or 45 sheaves of spring grain, and shake out the straw, and carry both grain and straw to the designated place, or simply thresh 60 sheaves of winter grain or 90 sheaves of spring grain (Wisznice estate), or thresh 30 sheaves of winter grain or 60 sheaves of spring grain (Dobratycze estate)⁴⁴.

At the same time, the estate owners tried to encourage peasants to become more engaged in the work performed for the manor: through verbal

⁴² APL OCH, HW, ref. no. 2/84, no pagination, a certified true copy of the act of lease of the Sosnowica estate... 1840.

⁴³ APL, KWLiRGL, ref. no. RGL, skarb. 243, no pagination, The Table... village Jabłoń... 1846.

⁴⁴ Archiwum Państwowe w Lublinie Oddział w Radzynie Podlaskim [hereinafter: APL OR], HBP, ref. no. 435; APR, ZDP, ref. no. 15539, fols. 346–349; APL, KWLiRGL, ref. no. RGL, skarb. 42, fols. 32–35; D. Tarasiuk, *Wisznice*, p. 50.

persuasion, rewards and punishments. In the case of the Jabłoń estate, sources read that 'a farmer's good conduct and thrift can be the unfailing prosperity of every peasant'⁴⁵. The Wisznice estate performance table contains an entry stating that the serfs received firewood 'as a reward for the obedience of peasants employed for various tasks in the summer season'⁴⁶. The 'incentive' for more efficient work was sometimes the 'stick'. Corporal punishments were, after all, widely used. They were administered to peasants *inter alia* for various offenses by the verdicts of village heads (*wójt*), for example, in 1839 a peasant from Wisznice received 5 strokes of a birch stick for working on Sunday⁴⁷. For failure to report for assigned work peasants were tried by summary police courts, e.g. in 1819 Antoni Budziszewski accused Wasyl Kunaszyk of Kropiwki of 'obstinacy' because the latter went to work for the priest⁴⁸.

The landowners attributed the sources of peasants' poverty first of all to their faults, including evasion to conscientiously perform the assigned labor. The testimony from an 1839 investigation, written down by the estate scribe of Wisznice, reads that peasants 'typically made excuses like every peasant did to avoid the ordered travel to work', 'as always they deliberately delayed travelling', or 'did not travel on Saturday on purpose, so that the priest would forbid them to work on Sunday'⁴⁹. During the investigation Ignacy Sosnkowski accused the parish priest from the local Greek Catholic parish, Father Szulakiewicz, that 'instead of teaching his parishioners proper subordination to their superiors, he incites them and stirs them up to disobedience to the manor regarding their obligations' or "incites the peasants against their manorial duties"⁵⁰.

It was also observed that the problem to the development of which the landowners themselves contributed became widespread among the peasantry: drunkenness. At that time, a tavern operated in almost every village, where the peasants 'sought, as it were, an escape from their

⁴⁵ APR, ZDP, ref. no. 14007, no pagination, Materials for the assessment of private estate Jabłoń... 1858.

⁴⁶ APL, KWLIRGL, ref. no. RGL, skarb. 244, no pagination, The Table... village Wisznice... 1846.

⁴⁷ APL, Rząd Gubernialny Podlaski [hereinafter: RGP], ref. no. 72, fol. 140. Peasants were flogged in different situations, e.g. the Roman Catholic parish priest of Wisznice, Father Franciszek Michalski, severely beat the peasant sent by the mayor to fetch water from the parish well, the man being consequently ill for two weeks. APL, Chełmski Konsystorz Greckokatolicki [hereinafter: CHKGK], ref. no. 1046, fol. 23.

⁴⁸ APR, ZDP, ref. no. 20554.

⁴⁹ APL, RGP, ref. no. 72, fols. 138–144.

⁵⁰ *Ibidem*.

misery⁵¹. The vision of drunkenness diverting peasants from work appeared repeatedly in the sources from that period. In 1851, the Greek Catholic priest of Geś, Father Józef Zatkalić, who was in conflict with the local innkeeper, informed the authorities that 'The common people, prone to depravity [...] would rather sit in the tavern, indulging in supposed delicacies; and only when forced, they would finally come home so that, having threshed grain once more, they would have something again to pay the innkeeper'⁵². In 1839, Ignacy Sosnkowski testified that the priest forbade the faithful to work on the manor farm at Easter. The peasants took advantage of the situation, which resulted not only in the landowner's economic problems, but also 'The rebellious people, refusing obedience, spent Easter drinking heavily'⁵³. The 1826 inventory of the Włodawa estate notes that the problem lies in the peasants' stays in the district town, where, 'encouraged and persuaded by Jews, they amuse themselves with drinking alcohol and become accustomed to this addiction. They waste time and neglect their farms'⁵⁴.

Backlogs in fulfilling feudal obligations stemmed from diverse causes. They resulted both from misfortunes such as death (an ever-present feature in daily life at that time), illness, shortage of draft oxen, and the like, as well as from an unexcused failure to fulfill one's obligations. One of the documents explained the need to provide food aid to farmers by stating that 'a man who is not hungry will be able to bear greater burdens than ordinary ones'⁵⁵.

The ultimate form of expressing peasants' dissatisfaction with or their opposition to the hopelessness of their situation was the abandonment their villages, which led to the emergence of so-called 'voids (*pustki*)' – abandoned villages. The 1826 description of the condition of peasants in Różanka records that 'The poor [are suffering] because of being overburdened with land obligations and treasury taxes. Many abandon [their land], hence there are many vacant plots (voids), which impoverish the industrious peasants since they have to pay treasury taxes for them'⁵⁶.

The next issue is how landowners assessed the impact of the peasants' performance of serfdom obligations upon their (the peasants') financial situation. In general, landed estate inventories contain records about the poor condition of the peasants, for example in 1814 the leaseholder

⁵¹ Ł. Gołębiowski, *Lud Polski. Jego zwyczaje, zabobony*, Warszawa 1830, p. 108.

⁵² APL, CHKGK, ref. no. 1122, fols. 5–7.

⁵³ APL, RGP, ref. no. 72, fol. 142.

⁵⁴ AGAD, AZ, ref. no. 2735, fol. 166.

⁵⁵ APL, Archiwum Szlubowskich, ref. no. 80, fols. 51–52.

⁵⁶ AGAD, AZ, ref. no. 2735, fol. 166.

of the Wisznice estate prepared a memorandum concerning their tragic situation. The memorandum read: 'The peasant, in turn, oppressed everywhere, is first burdened by the grant of a small area of land and meadows, and moreover, with morgas located in the worst places and too large to plow [...] under such heavy burdens he must perish, his ruin hastened by this year's crop failure [...] these events place the poor peasant on the brink of utter ruin'⁵⁷. The 1826 description of the Różanka peasants in turn reads: 'the condition of peasants is poor due to cheap grain, huge taxes and overburdening with duties'⁵⁸.

CHALLENGING SERFDOM

In very few cases there was collective resistance by peasants or townspeople-farmers against the serfdom duties. Especially the legal status of townspeople-farmers in some private towns decidedly deteriorated in the late 18th century when their owners began to impose on them (townspeople-farmers) 'greater obligations and burdens by treacherous ways of voluntary service, and eventually by fierce measures and violence'⁵⁹. After the partitions, these duties were recorded in the service inventories made on the order of the Austrian authorities, who recognized the existing status quo without analyzing the legal grounds of its introduction. As a rule, the new inventories obligated townspeople-farmers to perform *corvée* on a weekly basis, e.g. in Rossosz it was to be two days per week between St. Adalbert's Day (April 23) and St. Martin's Day (November 11), and one day per week during the rest of the year⁶⁰. In Horodyszcze, however, according to the 1802 inventory, they were expected to work off one day of week *corvée* throughout the year⁶¹. The inhabitants of these towns started a legal battle against the restriction of their rights. They appealed to consecutive instances, filing appeals against the frequently adverse judgments⁶². The situation in Rossosz took an exceptional turn. After the 1811 inventory entry (illegal according to the Civil Tribunal of First Instance of the Siedlce Department)

⁵⁷ APL, Archiwum Szlubowskich, ref. no. 80, fols. 51–52.

⁵⁸ AGAD, AZ, ref. no. 2735, fol. 166.

⁵⁹ AGAD, Rada Ministrów Księstwa Warszawskiego [hereinafter: RMKW], ref. no. Akta spraw 173, p. 20.

⁶⁰ AGAD, Komisja Rządowa Spraw Wewnętrznych [hereinafter: KRSW], 3926, fols. 542–551.

⁶¹ AGAD, Akta osób i rodzin, ref. no. 234, fol. 23.

⁶² AGAD, KRSW, ref. no. 3926, fol. 269.

by Father Wincenty Ossoliński, which exempted farmers from the corvée duty, they stopped working off corvée⁶³. Despite subsequent court judgments ordering them to perform the assigned duties, they would not fulfill them, and the carried-out enforcements did not help, only, as the documents of that time read, 'their minds were excited to offer tumultuous resistance'⁶⁴. Their attitude did not change even after the intervention of the administrative authorities, which ended in great tragedy. On September 2, 1811, 32 leaders of the rebellion were imprisoned in the manor granaries. In the evening a fire spread through the buildings, 20 prisoners having lost their lives as a result⁶⁵. With time, the arrears owed by the townspeople-farmers were too great for them to pay. In the subsequent years the owners of Rossosz tried to reach an amicable settlement, demanding, however, the performance of corvée, because according to the owners its replacement with monetary rent could harm the farmers due to their backwardness and difficulty with selling farm produce on the free market. The townspeople-farmers continued to boycott corvée. It was only in 1857 that a failed attempt to replace corvée with rent paid by the farmers was made. The administrative authorities also sought another solution, the so-called 'complete buy-out'⁶⁶. The conflict brought economic losses to the landowners and townspeople, who incurred very high legal and debt-enforcement costs. In May 1860, in their letter to the Government Commission for Internal and Clerical Affairs, the representatives of the Rossosz townspeople wrote, *inter alia*, 'Freeing us from the lawsuit that has been going on with the landlords for over 58 years, through which, to this day, we have lost nearly three hundred thousand because of collected contributions, not to mention the destruction and seizures by court bailiffs, where oxen, cows, horses, sheep, swine, our apiary, and finally our clothing, everything was auctioned off'⁶⁷. The situation in Rossosz was solved only by granting land ownership to peasants.

The lawsuit in Horodyszcze ended differently: in 1815 the townspeople-farmers concluded a provisional agreement with the landowner Jan Dionizy Frankowski, under which they committed themselves to fulfilling

⁶³ AGAD, KRSW, ref. no. 3922, fols. 13–15.

⁶⁴ AGAD, RMKW, ref. no. 173, fols. 6–8.

⁶⁵ *Ibidem*. In the registers of the Greek Catholic parish of Łomazy one death certificate recorded that 18 inhabitants of Rossosz were burned to death by accidental fire 'on September 2, AT 10 p.m'. APL, Akta stanu cywilnego parafii greckokatolickiej w Łomazach, ref. no. 1, p. 54.

⁶⁶ AGAD, KRSW, ref. no. 3926, fol. 151.

⁶⁷ AGAD, KRSW, ref. no. 3926, pp. 500–501.

the obligations recorded in the inventory of 1802⁶⁸. The legal dispute continued, however. It ended as late as in 1855, when the Governing Senate definitively dismissed the claims of the townspeople⁶⁹.

In the case of villages, the situation of peasants was far worse if they instituted a similar litigation. This is illustrated by the case of the village of Choroszczyńska, which was part of the government estates and had privileges that exempted its inhabitants from *corvée* duties. The many-years long legal dispute with the new owners of the village ended in the early 1840s with the expulsion of over 60 farmers from their farms by Choroszczyńska's then owner Ignacy Sosnkowski⁷⁰.

CONVERSION OF CORVÉE INTO RENTS

In the period in question, the processes of rentification of peasants took place on the government estates. In 1841, because the government demesne of Łomazy was included in the hereditary land grant, the colonization of its villages in six years was ordered, to be followed by rentification. In Lubenka, the separation of colonies and conversion into rents was accomplished as late as in 1852⁷¹. In the same year the village of Kropiwki also introduced rent payments⁷². More serious problems were caused by the colonization of the nearby village Ortel Królewski, which began in 1850, and, as the peasants wrote, it offered hope that 'we will be free from serfdom'⁷³ and that 'the local circumstances, due to the lack of conversion of *corvée* into rents, not only cannot lead us to greater prosperity but, to the contrary, bring about a greater decline with each passing year', since peasants awaiting relocation did not invest in their farm buildings. In 1856, the delays in colonization and conversion of *corvée* obligations into monetary rents were explained by the relevant authorities by the lack of possibility to separate government estates from private ones. Meanwhile, the peasants performing *corvée* at the manor in Łomazy 10 km away submitted a petition, which said that 'they beg for mercy and liberation from serfdom'. The rentification of peasants in that

⁶⁸ APL OCH, HW, ref. no. 3/23, no pagination, Sentence of the Civil Tribunal of the Lublin Governorate (Guberniya)... 3/15 May, 1852.

⁶⁹ AGAD, KRSW, ref. no. 3490, pp. 216–271.

⁷⁰ APR, ZDP, ref. no. 15539, fol. 12.

⁷¹ APR, ZDP, ref. no. 21014; ref. no. 21024.

⁷² APR, ZDP, ref. no. 13938.

⁷³ APR, ZDP, ref. no. 21014, no pagination, Letter of Ortel peasants... 1856.

village was carried out as late as in 1862⁷⁴. In the Horbów estate, *corvée* and other obligations in kind were abolished in 1855. From that day on, the peasants, who began to be officially called colonists, were obligated to pay monetary rent for the lease of land⁷⁵

CONCLUSIONS

The analysis of the data presented above permits a conclusion that the manorial economy was the dominant agricultural system in Southern Podlasie. The obligations imposed on peasantry and townspeople-farmers varied (1–6 days of week *corvée*) and were not always correlated with the area of land cultivated by the peasants. The working day was generally regulated by sunrise and sunset, although in some estates peasants were allowed to start work 'only' between 5 and 7 a.m. The work was undervalued compared with the prices of the purchased goods. According to documents, peasants rarely offered open opposition to performing their duties as court cases invariably ended in their defeat. Under these circumstances they evaded the diligent execution of the duties imposed on them, which the landowners tried to enforce through legal changes, rewards, and punishments. The serfdom system was one of the factors that contributed to rural poverty. The fundamental difference between payment of the dues for the land used by peasants under the serfdom system and the monetary rent system and was not the amount of the required labor but a certain degree of freedom in choosing the time of its performance. The *corvée* system was inconvenient, especially during the harvest season, when fulfilling of the significantly increased obligations at that time made it difficult for peasants to gather crops from their own fields. Landowners were interested in maintaining this system and treated the enfranchisement of peasants (conversion of *corvée* into rents) as an action detrimental to their interests.

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