Money and Society in Poland and Lithuania in the 16th and 17th Centuries

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1. Introductory Remarks

The only safe conclusion one can draw about the social distribution of money in early modern Poland is that it was not uniform. If a scholar poses more searching questions he encounters a wide gap in the sources available to him. This is the main reason why it is still impossible to produce a Polish monograph that would match Frank Spooner's work on the French monetary system.[1] One can only hope that in time some new way of using this fragmentary material will be found or, less probably, that some fresh evidence will be unearthed. The principal records of the state treasury have been lost, and there is scarcely any valuable information on coining. One must rely on secondary information which can only lead to hypothhetical rather than firm conclusions. However, and this may be a justification for taking up this particular topic, there is abundant evidence on the role played by money in the relationships between men and between social groups.

As this is a *sujet-fleuve*, on which some limitations must be imposed, I shall focus my attention on rural rather than urban

[1] F. Spooner, *L'Économie mondiale et les Frappes Monétaires en France 1493-1680*, Paris 1956.

society, and in particular on the nobility. First, this is a more unusual approach than concentrating upon towns and commerce; second, and most important, I strongly believe that the way in which the nobility, and in particular the high nobility (the *magnates*), lived and spent their money played a crucial role in the circulation of money both on a national and a local scale. These are the reasons for the particular structure of my paper, which is designed to stress the characteristic features of the social and economic structure of Poland and Lithuania.

2. The Supply of Money

The student of the Polish monetary system must pay particular attention to the balance of trade, and in doing so he is likely to be influenced predominantly by what was happening in Gdańsk (Danzig) and Elblag (Elbing). In Gdańsk he will find abundant — if often doubtful — statistics for prices and quantities of goods, whereas there is little similar evidence available for inland areas.

The flow of precious metals through the country can be broadly sketched as follows.[2] During the 16th century the sea trade brought a high percentage of money to the country. A huge relative surplus of exports diminished at the turn of the century and even dwindled away in some years of the critical first half of the seventeenth. The balance of inland trade was less favourable for the country's economy. Little can be learnt about trade with Silesia, in which commerce with Bohemia, Austria and Saxony was concentrated. It seems that the Polish trade balance was mainly passive in that direction, because of the large quantities of cloths and haberdashery which she imported. Only oxen were an important export item, but the massive export of oxen to Silesia, Saxony and the Rhine was ended by the Thirty Years War.

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[2] M. Bogucka, *Handel zagraniczny Gdańska w pierwszej połowie XVII wieku* (Le Commerce extérieur de Gdańsk dans la première moitié du XVII[e] siècle), Wrocław 1970. Miss Bogucka's conclusions are based on toll registers from Gdańsk. (When the titles of books or papers are translated into French a French summary and a French title are included). A. Mączak, *The Balance of the Polish Sea Trade with the West, 1565-1646*, « The Scandinavian Economic History Rewiev », 1970, based principally on the Sound toll registers.

Much less evidence is available about the trade balance with Muscovy. Wax and furs were exchanged for industrial goods, some of which (or even most) were re-exported from the west. In east-west transit commerce it is generally very difficult to calculate the involvement of the country's economy in the continental trade.

It was the south-east, or Oriental, trade that drained Poland of the money which it earned through the Baltic. No customs figures are available but every scrap of evidence suggests a heavy export of gold and silver. At the end of the 16th century Poland introduced a special duty on the export of gold and silver, which was perceived only on the Turkish frontier. The situation was illustrated by individuals like John Sanderson, a pilgrim and merchant who was well informed about conditions in Constantinople: « Divers merchaunts are come latelie out of Poland; they have brought wyer, lattin plates, knives; nether coniskins nor tinne, but most redie mony ».[2a] Mountain robbers in the Carpathians trimmed their caps with English golden Nobles, which were obviously also destined for Turkey.

Various factors that will be discussed later caused changes in the Polish trade balance. Baltic exports, which were predominantly grain and timber, fluctuated according to supply rather than overseas demand. Prices, on the other hard, were highly dependent on general European trade cycles and in the second half of the 17th century the fall in the value of exports was a result of both diminishing quantities and unfavourable prices. However, the decrease in the export surplus was due primarily to the rise in imports, and imports are closely connected with the social distribution of profits from foreign trade and with the social distribution of income in general.

This was even more true for the import trade from the Turkish dominions. In the war with Turkey Poland became more and more dependent on oriental luxury goods that became fashionable among the gentry. The expensive silks (also imported from Venice), Persian carpets, arms and armour, as well as spices which poured

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[2a] *The Travels of John Sanderson, Works issued by the Hakluyt Society*, 2 Series, vol. LXVII, 1930, p. 169.

into Poland through both the Baltic and Turkey, had no equivalents in Polish commodities.

Although indirect and never satisfactory, there is abundant evidence that for the country as a whole the era of an active balance of trade ended in the first decades of the 17th century and that the fateful 1620's marked the beginning of a prolonged period of a passive trade balance.[3] Recent research has produced sets of economic statistics marking the vicissitudes of the country's economy, which were always expressed in terms of the changes in the balance of foreign trade. The coining policy and the money market of most of the 17th century gave rise to serious problems in the supply of gold and silver, which resulted in a permanent monetary crisis.

This demand could hardly be met by local silver mining. The output of silver from the Olkusz mines did not exceed 0.3 tons per year between 1574 and 1577 and reached its peak, i.e. 0.8 to 1.3 tons annually, between 1606 and 1609.[4] These quantities were, however, smaller than the changes in the yearly balance of sea trade. Almost all the non-commercial items on the Polish balance of payments are to be written on the debit side of the account sheet. Contemporary opinion was troubled by the tributes which were paid to the Tartars in order to prevent their incursions, and the question of the *annates* and other payments to Rome was constantly raised by Polish Protestants and even by some anticlericals Catholic.

Foreign travel was another debit item. Foreign travellers were by no means rare in Poland but they were not heavy spenders. Fynes Moryson, who visited this country in the 1590's, stressed the cheapness of food there (with the exception of spices, which were more expensive than the meat or fish they seasoned) and the

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[3] A. Maniкowski, *Zmiany czy stagnacja? Z problematyki handlu polskiego w drugiej połowie XVII wieku* (Le Commerce de la Pologne entre 1660 et 1700 - période de stagnation ou de transformation?), « Przegląd Historyczny », vol. LXIV, 1973, fasc. 4; A. Mączak, *op. cit.*

[4] D. Molenda, *Produkcja srebra w Polsce w XVI i XVII wieku* (Silver Production in Poland in the 16th and 17th centuries), *Społeczeństwo, Gospodarka, Kultura* (Society, Economy, Culture. Studies in Honour of Marian Małowist), Warszawa 1974, p. 228 f.

poor living conditions outside the larger towns.[5] At the same time foreign travel could be a disastrous drain on a nobleman's purse. The Grand Tour or several years of study at a foreign university, became obligatory for young men from the upper stratum of the nobility from the mid-sixteenth century and was fashionable until the late seventeenth at least. It is important to note that even the richest magnates tried to limit such expenses; fathers were motivated not only by such moral reasons as frugality but also by often justifiable suspicious of their sons' tutors. However, it is very amusing to read of how one of the greatest European landlords, Prince Christopher Radziwiłł, ordered a tutor to re-make his young master's clothes in Munich in the German fashion.[6]

All figures can be misleading, but even a rather frugal Grand Tour was equivalent to the income from one or more estates. In two and a half years in Munich, Stanisław Lubomirski, the son of a rising magnate, spent with his modest group of servants about 4,950 *zloty*, which was equivalent to the income from about ten medium sized villages. Less wealthy noblemen spent less but even so the financial burden of foreign studies could be a crushing burden on their estate. Two young orphans called Goździe, spent 3,815 *zl.* during their journey to Strasbourg and Leiden between 1595 and 1599. During these four years, their guardian was able to raise 5,800 *zl.* from their estate, so foreign travel swallowed up about two-thirds of that sum.[7] A traveller, however, had to be virtually independent of his family's trusteeship in order to be able to spend really large sums. This was the case with Prince Boguslaw Radziwiłł who spent hundreds of thousands of *zloty* during his long military and political apprenticeship in Germany, France and the Netherlands: between 1642 and 1644 the managers of his Lithuanian estates sent to him abroad 230,000 *zl.* (i.e., 77,000 ducats), which amounted to almost half of his fabulous income.[8]

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5 F. Morvson, *An Itinerary, containing his ten years' travel...*, Glasgow, 1907-1908, *passim* (in particular vol. II p. 29, III p. 471, IV p. 33).

6 M. Zachara, T. Majewska-Lancholc (eds.), *Instrukcja Krzysztofa II Radziwiłła dla syna Janusza* (Krzysztof Radziwiłł's Instruction for His Son Janusz), « Odrodzenie i Reformacja w Polsce », vol. XVI, 1971, p. 179.

7 Biblioteka Polskiej Akademii Nauk, Cracow, MS 3262.

8 Archiwum Główne Akt Dawnych, Warszaw, Archiwum Radziwiłłow, XXIX 24.

3. Foreign Trade and Luxury Consumer Goods

Any attempt to calculate the G.N.P. or amount of money circulating in the country would have a margin of error so wide as to call into question the very value of such calculations especially if they cannot be verified against other independent evidence, as Andrzej Wyczański, who tried to compute the value of foodstuffs produced in Poland (i.e., excluding Lithuania the Ukraine and Ruthenia) around 1580 was well aware. His results may, however, be useful for comparison with the value of expensive consumer goods at the same time, which leads us directly to the main subject of this paper.[9] It is worth comparing Wyczański's estimates with some rather conservative import statistics showing the demands of particular social classes.

Table 1 contains estimates of the principal consumer goods which were imported by both land and sea to Poland around 1580.

Table 1

ESTIMATES OF CLOTH AND WINE IMPORTS TO POLAND IN THE 1580's

Goods	Quantities	Average Price	Value (*zl.*)	Comments
Cloth, Silesian	100,000 pieces	8 *zl.*	800,000	Prices estimated according to retail quotations in Polish towns
Moravian, Lusatian, Czech	13,000 »	12 »	156,000	Prices estimated according to retail quotations in Polish towns
Dutch, English & other; Baltic imports	20,000 »	32 »	620,000	Prices estimated according to retail quotations in Polish towns
Wines, Baltic imports only	7,000 ohms	+	87,000	Baltic imports estimated according to prices in ports of departure +45% for freight & merchants' profit

A. Mączak, *Między Gdańskiem a Sundem. Studia nad handlem bałtyckim od połowy XVI do połowy XVII w.* (Between Gdańsk and the Sound. Studies in the Eastland Trade, 1550-1650), Warszawa 1972, p. 96 ff. Rearranged.

[9] A. Wyczański, *Studia nad konsumpcją żywności w Polsce w XVI i w pierwszej połowie XVII w.* (Etudes sur la consommation des vivres en Pologne au XVI[e] et pendant la première moitié du XVII[e] siècle), Warszawa 1969, p. 218.

These figures are by no means a complete estimate of luxury and semi-luxury imports. One cannot specify the quantities of Hungarian wines or the value of imported spices. 1,663,000 *zl.* — the total of the table — is therefore a very conservative figure for expensive imports, and could easily be raised to two millions. For the same period Wyczański's estimates of agricultural produce was 45,000,000 *zl.* + 20 per cent for industrial products and services, total = 54,000,000 *zl.* Both groups of figures refer to roughly the same western provinces of the Polish-Lithuanian state, although some of the imports were sent through Poland to Lithuania. One may also assume that expensive imported goods in the 1580's lowered the G.N.P. by 4 per cent.

Who were the consumers? They were obviously only a narrow stratum of the population. Wines were at that time still an extravagant rarity and not all noblemen drank them often. Silesian cloths were more evenly distributed. They were given as payment in kind to manorial managers or clerks; they are to be found in the inventories of lesser nobles and even of average townsmen. It is important that all these features changed quickly during the following decades; and this is the only factor we may be sure of. In the 17th century imports of "colonial goods" (i.e., spices, sugar etc.) gained in strength. « Within my memory », harangued Sir Ivan Mieleszko, the Castellan of Smolensk at the 1587 *Sejm* (Parliament session), « there were no such titbits . . . Hungarian wines were unknown, malmsey was only little tasted, one drank mead and good old aquavit, but there were plenty of pennies . . . ».[10] However, after the lifetime of that conservative gentleman successive generations of noblemen consumed more and more foreign luxuries. Table 2 shows the development of "colonial" imports to Gdańsk, Elbląg and Königsberg.

The composite (weighted average) prices of colonial goods, as expressed in silver or any constant currency, hardly changed. In a period when prices rose dramatically (until the 1620's at least) they became increasingly cheaper and probably more evenly

[10] J. U. Niemcewicz (ed.), *Zbiór Pamiętników o dawnej Polsce* (A Collection of Memoirs on Old-Time Poland), Puławy 1822, p. 80.

TABLE 2

IMPORT OF "COLONIAL GOODS" TO GDAŃSK, ELBLĄG AND KÖNIGSBERG
(three-year averages for selected years)

Ports	1565/'75/'85	1595/'05/'15	1625/'35/'46	1675/'85/'95
Gdańsk	31,000	156,000	928,000	2,490,000
Elbląg	2,000	7,000	15,000	2,000
Königsberg	0	10,000	228,000	487,000

See Table 1. Rearranged. Included only goods expressed in pounds (other goods could not be compared). Based on the Sound toll registers.

distributed. But this was by no means an even distribution. Wczański's studies of the consumption of foodstuffs suggest that we are discussing not so much the consumption habits of various social classes, but rather of separate consumer groups. It is obvious that the lord himself ate better than his servants, but at the same time a servant's fortune at table depended heavily on the quality of the house, to which numerous 18th century memoirs, as well as Wyczański's figures bear witness. The increase in the consumption of expensive foods may possibly be explained by the fact that firstly, these goods were purchased by more people so their distribution became more uniform; secondly, the tables of the wealthy were better set in the 17th than in the preceding century; and thirdly there were more wealthy households than before, but the rest of population did not eat better.

Everything we know about social change in these times speaks against the first explanation, although the growing wealth of a few commercial urban centres, like Gdańsk, Elbląg, Toruń and some smaller ones should be stressed. On the contrary, the gap was widening between the richer landowners and the rest of the population, in particular the peasantry and lesser gentry. The mass of the urban population was also divided, the majority sharing the fate of the declining rural classes. The courts of the increasingly wealthy magnates and noblemen, then, attracted considerable, and sometimes even large, numbers of servants, retainers and "clients". As a further illustration we need only quote pages from Thorsten Veblen's *Theory of Leisure Class* or the comments made by Lawrence

Stone or Hugh Trevor-Roper.[11] So one may accept our second and third explanations: that there were more and larger courts with many, greedy and hungry dependent consumers. This applies to food consumption, clothes, servants' and retainers' liveries, and even to arms and uniforms purchased in bulk for private troops. Very probably the social and economic polarization of society led to an increased demand for imported goods. Many retainers and commoners fared better than other people, who lived independently of the nobles' courts.

Another reason why this social development contributed to the consumption of imported goods, was the relatively close links between the large landed estates and the Baltic ports. Those goods that were inaccessible for the independent small or middle landowner proved relatively or even absolutely cheaper for the magnate, who sold his grain and timber at favourable Gdańsk prices and bought cloth, spices, and wines, there, so avoiding the retailers.[12]

All this helps to explain why even the highly active balance of sea trade did not cause a spectacular rise in prices in Poland.[13] The influx of precious metals did not saturate the economic system, for the unique structure of the demand for and supply of luxury goods directed a large share of the surplus abroad.

4. The Magnates Involved in Exporting and Importing Goods

I have mentioned the direct contacts between the large inland estates and the Baltic coast and its ports. Only a few inland towns prospered from this trade, for usually most of the money acquired from the sale of grain was spent on the spot, in Gdańsk, or Königs-

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[11] L. Stone, *The Crisis of the Aristocracy, 1558-1641*, Oxford 1965, pp. 201-217 & al.; H. R. Trevor-Roper, *The General Crisis of the Seventeenth Century*, « Past & Present », vol. 16.

[12] W. Kula, *Théorie économique du système féodal. Pour un modèle de l'économie polonaise 16e-18e siècles*, Paris-La Haye 1970, p. 94.

[13] This was the question raised by E. F. Heckscher in connection with A. E. Christensen's research on the Sound toll registers. See A. Attman, *The Russian and Polish Markets in International Trade, 1500-1650*, Göteborg 1973, p. 118 ff. for a report on the controversy.

berg, on foreign goods or the products of local industry. In this way the inland towns were excluded from commercial dealings as neither their commercial skills nor transport facilities were needed. So what happened to the money?

One must rely upon available evidence, although the phenomenon was very widespread. The early 17th century provided the extreme case of Albrecht Władysław Radziwiłł, a Lithuanian magnate, who sent some 40 to 250 *lasts* of rye annually down the River Niemen to Königsberg. Five account sheets in *zloty* kept by his managers for the years 1626-1629, 1631 and 1634 provide the following figures (total for five years):

TABLE 3

THE CASH BALANCE OF PRINCE ALBRECHT WŁADYSŁAW RADZIWIŁŁ's COMMERCIAL CONTACTS WITH KÖNIGSBERG
(overall figures for 1626-1629, 1631, 1634; in *zloty*)

Income from sales	57,046	Tolls & customs	2,952	
Income from freight	26,992	Salaries of the crew	5,929	
		Other expenditures	3,688	
		Total transport costs		12,569
		Purchases of cloth & other textiles	13,867	
		Fruits & spices	4,483	
		Other foodstuffs	4,329	
		Salt	12,327	
		Other goods	2,734	
		Total purchases		37,740
Total gross income	84,038	Debts paid		26,469
Total deficit	1,449	Interest on debts		8,709
Grand Total	85,487	Grand Total		85,487

(Based on an unpublished M.A. thesis by MARIA BRZOZOWSKA, *Rafting on the River Niemen and Commercial Contacts of the Radziwiłł Manors with Königsberg in the First Half of the 17th Century*, Warsaw 1970).

Of course the business was not a total loss. Purchases amounted to 44.9 per cent of the total gross income; debt and interest payments accounted for 41.2 per cent. If the Prince sank deeper and deeper into debt, it was due to heavy purchases. The balance sheet, however, does not reveal the entire state of affairs. It includes 5,197 *zl.* for the cash income of Princess Mirska (in 1634), but shows she made purchases totalling only 1,263 *zl.* and had no

debts (or at least did not pay them). This means that money did not flow up the river. Much of it found its way into the pockets of Königsberg and Elbląg merchants; only about 3.5% was paid to customs officers and another 11.4% went for the salaries of numerous sailors and their skippers or covered losses caused by accidents. Foodstuffs were brought from home in large quantities so that they could be sold in Königsberg or left until the following year.

All these costs were covered by the freight rates, and the magnates seemed to hold a monopoly over the river Niemen. A.W. Radziwiłł gladly provided space on his boats for his less well-to-do neighbours' timber or ash. In years of poor harvests, shipping remained profitable only through hiring out river boats. When harvests were abundant, less room was available for customers. On the average, the income from freight was twice that of the overal transportation costs.

The next table (4) represents the cash for the transport of grain and other goods from another large estate down the river, this time from the extreme south-east corner of the Vistula Basin. Again it was the case that Sieniawski's steward brought from Gdańsk in cash not more than 6.5% of the gross income. Freight

TABLE 4

THE CASH BALANCE OF ADAM MIKOŁAJ SIENIAWSKI's COMMERCIAL CONTACTS WITH GDAŃSK

(estimative data for 1715, in *złoty*)

Income from sales		27,930	Tolls, customs & bribes	4,820	
Income from freight		41,600	Salaries of the crew	6,143	
			Market value of food supplied for crew	7,271	
			Operation costs	1,576	
			Alms & Holy Masses	46	
			Other expenditures	70	
Total gross income		69,530	Total transport costs		19,926
Total net income	*ca.*	4,500	Purchases of goods	*ca.*	45,000
Grand Total	*ca.*	65,000	Total expenditures	*ca.*	65,000

(Estimated according to J. BURSZTA, *Le commerce entre Sieniawa s/San et Gdańsk... à partir de la fin du XVII^e jusqu'à moitié du XVIII^e siècle*, « Roczniki Dziejów Społecznych i Gospodarczych », vol. XVI, 1954, in Polish with a French summary).

services were more important here than the sale of the estate's products and 60% of the gross income was obtained from rafting.

A third example occurred much later, and reflect a different situation, that of a lord interested in getting cash, and also different times. 1772 witnessed the First Partition of Poland and in Spring 1773 river shippers faced a unique situation; the Prussians were occupying Royal Prussia, and although Gdańsk remained Polish, it was separated from the rest of the country and burdened by heavy tolls. The shipping manager of Princess Ludwika Lubomirska had to pay tolls and customs to officers of all the three foreign powers: Austria, Russia and Prussia, and from his notes it is difficult to distinguish the times when he paid tolls from those when he was a victim of the extortion practised by imaginative and greedy soldiers. In contrast to the previous accounts, the debts are trivial and Princess Ludwika obviously had little interest in industrial imports (besides those mentioned above, there was

TABLE 5

THE CASH BALANCE OF PRINCESS LUDWIKA LUBOMIRSKA's TRANSPORT OF GRAIN, POTASH AND POPPY SEED TO GDAŃSK, 1773

Cash taken from home	3,000	Tolls, custom & bribes	7,317	
Income from sales	77,772	Crew salaries	6,426	
Ships (etc.) sold	1,072	Manager's salary	1,384	
		Food for the crew	561	
		Other sailing expenses	224	
		Repairing of ships	291	
		Weighing and measuring	358	
		Maintenance of granaries	122	
		Purchases of:		
		Cloth & other textiles	904	
		Spices	8,355	
		Wines	7,238	
		Herrings	990	
		Belts (?)	756	
		Total purchases	19,599	
		Debts paid	2,873	
		Remaining expenses	1,000	
		Unclear items	2,502	
		Total expenses		42,667
		Cash brought back home		37,790
		Paid to the Princess' treasury		387
Grand Total	81,844	Grand Total		81,844

(Biblioteka Jagiellońska, Cracow, MS 6603-II).

also some tin, iron, cotton wicks, ropes, cheap pottery, a kettle . . .), and sought spices and wines (the Hungarian goods were probably easily obtainable at home). For our purposes, it is important to note that 49% of the income was brought home in cash.

Prince Bogusław Radziwiłł has been already mentioned as a heavy spender abroad. Table 6 shows some entries concerning his business in Königsberg which support what we have already stated.

One of the very few existing account sheets for lesser magnates,

TABLE 6

SOME ENTRIES FROM THE CASH BALANCE OF PRINCE BOGUSŁAW RADZIWIŁŁ's ESTATES' TRANSPORT OF GOODS TO KÖNIGSBERG, 1643-1644

(in *zloty*)

1643	Income from sales ('forest goods')	20,130			
			Transport expenses (part of?)		1,200
			Crew salaries		200
			Manager's salary		200
			Manager's board and lodging in Königsberg (10 weeks)		200
			Manager's necessary expenses		267
			Messenger to Königsberg		20
			Debts paid		8,044
1644	Income from sales:		Cash expenses for lard &		
	'forest goods'	12,649	other food for crew		1,734
	rye	6,817	Manager's food for 10 weeks		300
			Debts paid		3,846
			Paid to a Jew for preparation of 'forest goods'		4,220
			Purchases in Königsberg:		
			Silverware	2,153	
			Copperware	6	
			Salt	4,760	
			Spices	500	
			Kitchen battery	213	
			Tin	255	
			Table cloths (Dutch)	386	
			Wine vinegar	45	
			Codfish	16	
			Lock	15	
			Glass (incl. freight)	77	
			Storage in Königsberg	379	
			Total purchases		8,805
	Total	19,466	Grand Total		18,905

(Archiwum Główne Akt Dawnych, Warszaw, Archiwum Radziwiłłow XXXIX, 24).

or rich squires, that of Castellan of Bełz for year 1618, does not permit us to make a clear assessment of his rafting expenses and profits. It is, however, illuminating because it illustrates the complex nature of the money circulation connected with grain exports from far inland. The Castellan brought grain (mostly rye) from Lublin — an important inland commercial centre — and from a small township, Bełżyce, which he sold wholesale in Gdańsk, where he bought herrings, then wine in Toruń, to sell them then in Warsaw and Lublin.[14]

What is most important, all the existing balance sheets reveal that the ports were great sources of money. The second source was the great fairs which were held in Jarosław, Lwów (for the South-East) and Poznań or Toruń (for the North-West). In terms of social classes, then, the principal route for the money supply was the more or less direct connection between the merchants of Gdańsk (also of Königsberg, of Riga etc.) and the great land-owners of the hinterland.

We are now confronted with new questions. A comparison of the meagre sums brought back from Baltic ports, with the large sums spent by the magnates leads us to seek other sources of money and I shall return to this problem later. We must also ask what happened to this money and we must, therefore, see the courts of the nobles as the centres of money circulation.

5. The Noble Courts as Centres of Consumption

There is a clear contrast between manorial accounts and inventories, on the one hand, and the expense sheets of the great noblemen's courts, in which innumerable small entries abound, on the other. The accounts are strictly divided into cash and goods sections and in most of these sources nothing that has been left unsold is expressed in cash terms. The goods section is by no means marginal, on the contrary, keeping cash expenses low seems to be the principal rule of husbandry.[15] What can be obtained from

[14] Biblioteka P.A.N., Cracow, MS 3262, p. 148.
[15] W. Kula, *op. cit.*, chap. III & VI.

one's own estates, was usually abundant; what had to be purchased with ready money was always scarce.

Precious metals of all kinds were a sign of prestige. They were still used in the rather mediaeval way which in the West was slowly giving way to a more economical lifestyle.[16] The cultural change that occurred in Western European countries during the 1620's, hardly touched the Polish Republic. Whereas the English aristocracy disbanded their retinues and even thought of limiting their personal expenditure, their Polish counterparts still, and perhaps increasingly, displayed splendour of a rather anachronistic sort. Even Italian, French, and Dutch-educated magnates followed local traditions in order not to offend public opinion. From the mid-17th to the mid-18th centuries in particular, the Polish Baroque way of life strongly deviated from Western patterns.

Polish noblemen travelling abroad during the 17th century were often puzzled by the sober way of life of Italian nobles who were obviously rich but less ostentatious. The best example is that provided by the Jesuit tutor of the brothers Grudziński after their long (1655-1659) Grand Tour through the European Continent. « The strange Home Behaviour of Lords and Gentleman in Italy and in Spain » — runs the title of a special paragraph devoted to this problem. « One does not see the great fortunes they have (*e contra* among us). Although they have numerous coaches, in towns they use only two horses, except for long journeys . . . Saddle and harness even for the most expensive horses are only occasionally decorated with gold and silver thread . . . Servants are paid weekly and not given board. Even their Lordships make do with little, even the Pope used to eat for some three Giulii. Banquets are very rare and served to a very limited number of participants. They squander courageously for confectionery . . . Nobody keeps a large orchestra, only one or two musicians. They do not sit long at the table, either for drink or for conversation. Servants eat at their own expense, they do not hobnob with each

16 H. R. Trevor-Roper, *op. cit.* The Author's remarks on extravagant spending in the royal courts also apply to the Polish magnates' courts.

other. In Rome servants often do not live with their lord, only some do ».[17]

It would not be difficult to find contrary evidence, but the tutor's (and most probably also his master's) way of thinking seems to reflect a true cultural gap between the societies. A quarter of a century later, King John III Sobieski summed up his first impressions of Austria in a letter sent to the Queen. « . . . if they [i.e., the Austrians] will judge us on our appearance, they will think us *pour plus riches que ne fut Crésus, et pour plus magnifiques de ce siècle*, the livery of our servants [chamberlains], pages and lackeys more than beautiful, our horses richly dressed, our houses . . . decorated with cloth of gold . . . They, however, have not a single mottle of silver on their horses, their clothes are simple (half German, half Hungarian), their carts are simple; no pages, no lackeys seen as yet. The Prince of Saxony was yesterday in a simple red garment, with a crimson sash and simple thrum . . . ».[18]

Nevertheless the Polish heavy cavalry, the hussars, wearing leopard skins over the half-cuirass, with their long lances and decorative wings, were able to inflict a decisive blow to the Turkish army and relieve the siege of Vienna. It is well known, however, that the immense booty from the Vizir's camp outside Vienna greatly contributed to the Polish nobles' growing taste for the Oriental. « Tents, carts they are all mine — the King was happy to inform his French wife in the next letter — *et mille d'autres galanteries fort riches . . . Il n'y a point de comparison avec ceux de Chocim* [an earlier victory, 1673, over the Turks]. Several quivers decorated with rubies and saphirs alone may be valued at several thousands ducats . . . ».

But it is time to follow the Poles back to their homes. If the Polish nobleman cultivated traditional social virtues, it was not a continuation of mediaeval ways. The rapid concentration of

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[17] Biblioteka im. XX Czartoryskich, Cracow, MS 3031, p. 579. Cf.: « And in those countries [*i.e.*, Italy] *frugalitas* is more appreciated among people than *prodigalitas*; among us the other way around . . . », writes an expert pilgrim and traveller Michael Radzwiłł ("the Orphan"), 1603. Archiwum domu Radziwiłłów, ed. by A. Sokołowski, Kraków 1885, p. 60.

[18] Jan Sobieski, *Listy do Marysieńki* (Letters to Mary), ed. by J. Kukulski, Warszawa 1970, pp. 509, 520.

landed property in many parts of the country uprooted many country gentlemen and increased the social differences between the propertied classes. Both old and new members of the upper stratum of landowners, who can be only partly identified with the members of the Senate (i.e., the Upper House), now needed more *noble* retainers than ever. A research programme on the subject is now in progress and we cannot draw on representative figures but it is beyond doubt that service of this kind increased during the 17th and most of the following century. This was of crucial importance for the distribution and circulation of money.

Servants in the lord's home were paid only partly in cash. Part, and often most, of their salaries consisted of free board for themselves and for their own servants as well, while a limited number of their horses were maintained in the lord's stables. The more important the position of a retainer the less formally dependent he was on the lord. The richer the mansion the more nobles it housed, including the sons of neighbouring gentlemen who learned how to behave properly and nobly, and earned their lord's favour for life. They received hardly any salary in cash but, if they succeeded in satisfying the lord, they were often given land for rent or some other reward. An influential magnate had numerous means of rewarding lesser noblemen without paying them directly. But still the pay-roll of courtiers represented an important item in the great noble's court expenses. In the latter part of the period under discussion the lords' obligations were increasingly shifted on to the state: their *clients* were given lucrative, or simply prestigious and attractive, offices and honours.

5. The State and Its Creditors

At this point we touch on the role of the state. If, as Professor Habakkuk has observed, eighteenth-century England as reflected in aristocratic memoirs looked like a federation of country houses, the Polish « commonwealth of Gentry » was one, at least from the middle of the 17th century.[19] Central institutions were less

[19] H. J. Habakkuk and A. Goodwin (ed.), *The European Nobility in the Eighteenth Century*, London 1963 (quoted from Harper Torchbook ed., 1967, p. 4).

developed than in many other kingdoms and the king had restricted opportunity to appoint new men. Commoners were virtually excluded from competition for appointments but there was much social climbing among the nobility. The treasury was empty and creditors of all sorts were reimbursed with royal estates or single manors, or at least were repaid directly from the gross income of the estates. This system, which was once quite common in Europe, was particularly widespread in Poland until the late 18th century. Civil servants were paid poorly or not at all, and gained their daily bread and butter by nibbling at parties. Higher officials were given Royal estates for life or for a period and became what might be called shareholders in the state. Such « payment in kind » instead of money was an important social factor. When the king appointed a newcomer, the successful climber soon became as good a magnate as any other. Rewarding in kind perpetuated the social and political system more strongly than any custom of purchasing honours, as was so widely developed in England, France, and, principally, in Spain and in the Italian dominions of the Spanish Hapsburgs.[20]

In Poland nobody expected the state to pay its larger debts in cash, for only the leases of customs posts or salt mines approximated to any payment in cash.[21] This might look very similar to the financial practice of absolute states, were there not now and then a particularly glaring feature to stress the difference. This difference is clearly reflected in the different system of financing ambasadors. In countries like Denmark every envoy prepared a detailed list of his expenses, and supplied proofs such as inkeepers' bills, and his declaration was duly inspected. In Poland an envoy was generally expected to cover his expenses out of his own purse but could expect that his obligations would be paid back in the form of honours, influence with the court and of course with

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20 This system became a bone of contention between both Houses in the 1550's and 1560's. The Senators were and remained principal possessors of royal estates.

21 Salt mines were part of the most desirable leaseholds and contributed to the pecuniary gain of their possessors. Small payments were discharged in cash, often by directing the payee to a particular source of revenue (a royal estate, a salt mine, a customs house). Also stipends were often connected with a source of revenue.

royal estates conferred either for a time or for life. These details were commonly known and were explained with particular clarity by a Polish nobleman of Livonian ancestry to a German traveller from Franconia, when they met in a Stettin inn. Heinrich Denhoff had been sent as an envoy and was paying for his own funds. If successful, he would be granted « *aine Starosday mit 20,000 f.* », i.e. a royal estate of 20 thousand *zloty* yearly value, for three years, or even for six and more.[22] And this was by no means an exception.

6. The Size of Monetary Transactions

I believe that one may distinguish a general, if unwritten, rule that governed the use of money in relations between men outside the sphere of production and commerce. Money seemed to be indispensable in the exchange of petty goods and services, but it was much less so in large-scale transactions involving goods. The more direct and informal relationship between people, the lesser the role played in it by money. Some examples drawn from areas beyond the traditional sphere of discussion on money circulation will illustrate this.

Only a few account books of great noble households are available, although many may still be buried in the archives. Often they do not offer complete information on the expenses and incomes of the estates, simply because they represent the circumstances of one particular treasurer, and either one learns about a particular manor, or else about the lord's own household (the court). For my purposes the latter sources are of much greater value.[23] What were the sources of income or — to be more exact — the origins of the money coming into the lord's coffers? We already know that the direct sale of grain and "forest goods" did not bring him ready cash. And here I would stress a factor whose importance is not fully realized by students of Polish economic life in the 16th and

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22 Philipp Mainhofers, *Reise-Tagebuch* . . ., [1617], « Baltische Studien », vol. II, 2, 1834, p. 99.

23 Only manorial accounts have been much used by scholars; other evidence remains virtually untouched, since research has concenttated, until very recently on agriculture.

17th century: the leasing out of whole estates. This seemed to be the easiest way to accumulate income in the form of ready money and also to increase incomes.[24] Two representative cases illustrate this. Krzysztof Opaliński, a rich and highly cultured, ambitious magnate, was badly in need of ready money in the autumn of 1644. « *Et haec causa* », he wrote to his brother, « I am leasing out in order to have money when I need it . . . Now, after I have a yearly income and after putting out [estates] for three more years I have a feeling there will be a jingle. Last year was only a test but still it brought 70,000 more than my expenses (although you rebuke me), and has shown such an income that what had used to bring ten thousand, now fetches fifteen, sixteen, and some estates even twenty ».[25] And now to Krzysztof Radziwiłł, one of the richest Lithuanian landlords. His controllers had found that two estates, Newel ans Siebierz, when put out to lease might bring at least twice as much as before. « This brings an advantage that instead of dispensing cheese in order to get salt and salt to get cheese, now even in the first year Newel and Siebierz are making at least 6,000 or even more (all expenses included) . . . and still two servants [i.e. managers, now estate farmers] will serve at no particular expense ».[26]

Leaseholders could not work miracles and neither can they all be accused of being careless farmers; they were compelled to run the estates so that they yielded cash rather than income in kind. When they sent grain or timber down the river, these most probably were not sufficient to purchase all the luxuries that were so dear to the magnates' heart. The only large income entries in all the cash balance sheets I have inspected were, however, land annuities. The scope and importance of this practice and its fate in the 18th century deserve close study. The evidence I present

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[24] If my thesis on leases is valid, it opens new questions that ought to be answered by comparative research on estates belonging to the Church, and the State, as well as to private owners.

[25] R. Pollak (ed.), *Listy Krzysztofa Opalińskiego do brata Łukasza* (Krzysztof Opaliński's Letters to His Brother Lucas), Wrocław 1957, p. 240, 6 October 1644.

[26] Krzysztof Radziwiłł to his son Janusz, 29 November 1636, Archiwum Główne Akt Dawnych, Archiwum Radziwiłłów IV 25, 324, 682.

here is limited, but the account sheets belong to some of the richest and most influential of the great nobles.

The cash balance book of Chancellor Jan Zamoyski (1579-1582), omits the income from his own estates. The Chancellor had then reached the peak of his political influence, but his landed properties and income were only in its prime (Table 7). In 1598 (Table 8) his fortunes were much greater and his expenses were no longer affected by war conditions. The lists ought not to be compared directly, because the Chancellor omitted most items connected with the family and his own living expenses. Two items may however, be stressed: travel costs and the repayment of debts.

Travel contributed strongly to the development of the money sector of the economy. There was a tendency to avoid spending money when travelling through the country, but with questionable success. Noblemen took with them their own beds, tapestries, and even food. Servants prepared the inns and the lord's own cooks prepared his food. This was because a travelling nobleman

TABLE 7

CHANCELLOR JAN ZAMOYSKI's CASH BALANCE, 1579-1582
(in *zloty*)

Ready cash	2,137	*In opera pia* (small alms given to the handicapped, to students, wounded soldiers, Muscovite prisoners)	361
Income from leases of Royal estates	29,166	Grants to the Church	782
King's grants for covering war expenses	29,703	Family expenses	11,183
Income from ecclesiastical estates	515	Clothing	1,321
Loans	15,879	House utensils & furniture	4,884
Grants from noblemen	3,395	Servants' salary	3,005
clergymen	984	Food and drink	27,421
burghers	619	Personal expenses of the Chancellor (medicines, soap, threads & needles, laundry, barber etc.)	1,839
Jews	162	Light	237
Total grants	5,162	Taxes	4,247
Small income (19 items)	6,383	Repayment of debts	2,791
Other income	6,448	War expenses	36,344
Total income	95,393	Other expenses	95
Total deficit	3,047		
Balance	98,440	Total expenses	98,440

[From A. TARNAWSKI, *Działalność gospodarcza Jana Zamoyskiego*, Lwów 1935, checked with Archiwum Główne Akt Dawnych, Archiwum Zamoyskich 251/9].

TABLE 8

CHANCELLOR JAN ZAMOYSKI's ESTIMATES OF EXPENSES FOR THE PERIOD 11th JANUARY THROUGH 24th JUNE 1598

(in *złoty*)

Repayment of debts	29,342
Maintenance of courtiers	3,293
Wine	1,500
Spices	1,180
Maintenance of troops and horses	6,117
Craftsmen and buildings	3,186
Taxes	5,115
The *Sejm* (Parliamentary session)	10,000
Small expenses (living costs of two retainers)	155
Reserved for other expenses	4,000
Total	63,888

(A. TARNAWSKI, *op. cit.*, p. 300. Taxes signify land annuities paid for royal estates leased by the Chancellor; however, he paid only less than half of what was legally due from him).

had to take into consideration the scarcity of facilities available along the road; on the other hand the custom (or fashion) of travelling with one's own carpets, furniture and food probably discouraged innkeepers from investing in their business. However, travel always meant spending money. Lesser nobles had to buy everything on the spot and were always worried about the cost of living. The fabulously rich enjoyed, and must have displayed, impressive wealth. Travelling to the *Sejm* session (which from the end of the 16th century was held mainly in Warsaw) was at the time a large — or even the largest — item on a lord's expense sheet. This was also usually an important political event. Every magnate had to appear with a proper, and splendid retinue in order to show his wealth and power. According to a contemporary estimate, which probably rather exaggerated the figure, the 1585 session cost Chancellor Zamoyski the equivalent of 16,000 ducats; in 1598 his treasurer's estimate amounted to a third of that sum: in 1601 the Chancellor took with him 31 sacks of coins worth about 6,000 ducats, almost half his ready money at that time. In the 17th century such expenses grew more than proportionally to the inflation of the Polish currency.[27] What we have said about

[27] Chancellor Jan Zamoyski's business activities have been throughly studied by Tarnawski (see Table 7).

TABLE 9

SUMMARY OF JOHN ZAMOYSKI's EXPENSES
FROM 19th JULY 1647 THROUGH 1st JULY 1648

		per cent
The Lord's voyages and his messengers etc.		10.5
Servants' salaries		11.4
Alms, gifts, payments in kind		11.0
His Lordship's horses, also those to others as gifts		3.6
Mansions, houses in Cracow and Lublin		1.1
Craftsmen		1.3
Payment of debts, purchases of landed estates, redemption of securities		26.9
"The Law" (various legal expenses)		4.5
Trifles (iron, wax, paper, fuel etc.)		1.3
One quarter of the income from leases of royal estates (in fact, much less)		1.3
The Academy (a college in Zamość)		1.4
Beer		0.3
Loan from a Zamość burgher (money taken by His Lordship when starting on a journey)		20.6
Payments to clergymen and to ecclesiastical institutions		4.8
Total expense	376,803 *zl.*	100.0
Total income	241,620	64.2

(Archiwum Główne Akt Dawnych, Archiwum Zamoyskich 2519, p. 119. Some items are obviously missing, e.g., military expenditure. The Table gives an idea of the treasurer's method way of grouping expense items).

TABLE 10

SUMMARY OF JOHN ZAMOYSKI's EXPENSES
1st MAY 1649 THROUGH 1st JANUARY 1653

		per cent
His Lordship's travelling expenses abroad		25.1
His Lordship's travelling expenses, mostly through Poland (on his way back)		2.6
Salaries		12.1
Military expenditure		15.1
To merchants for textiles, spices and furs		10.4
Legal expenses		6.9
Interest paid		4.7
Hungarian wines		4.0
Debts paid		3.5
Rent on leases of royal estates		2.8
Gifts		2.6
Monthly pay to household troops, artillerymen, foresters and others		2.3
Other items		7.9
Total expenditure	875,574 *zl.*	100.0

(Archiwum Główne Akt Dawnych, Archiwum Zamoyskich 2159, p. 123. Here, in contrast to Table 9, the entries have been regrouped and selected and minor items omitted. There are mistakes in the adding up of the expense total that do not alter the result. From midsummer day 1649 to the end of the 1650 the "yearly income" from lease rents was only 55,120 *zl.*; 77,261 were withheld. Expenses during that time were 219,628 *zl.* The treasurer believed that the royal estates might give his lord less than 162,000; income of about 140,000 is lost because of the Cossack uprising. Total debts were more than 775,000; *Ibidem*, p. 140-146).

Prince Bogusław Radziwiłł's spending abroad may be repeated about Chancellor Zamoyski's grandson and heir, Jan. From 1 May 1649 to 30th December 1652 his expenses for foreign travel amounted to 27.7% of his income and about 80,000 ducats, about twice as much as he was willing to spend on war in that critical period of the Cossack uprising and Tartar raids.

There were usually several important items of expenses: the lord's prestige expenses, his usually generous gifts to noblemen, and last but not least his private army that was always present on important occasions. After the first « free election » of the king in 1573, the army was all too often used either to bring pressure to bear or else to balance the other lords' displays of power. A foreign professor at the Academy of Zamość, Robert Bruce expressed his amazement in his report sent to Queen Elizabeth of England in 1598: « The Senators beare theire owne charges, and therefore are at wonderfull expense in their greate traynes which followe them . . . », and his outrage: « It is a matter of greate daunger in theire Dietts, Conventes and iudgements, that according to the auncient custome of Northerne nations whose reason is in theire fyste, they comme into the Senate armed, where considering the deadly feude of greate famelyes . . . it is a wonder they comme not to strokes to the manifest ruine of the state . . . ». He mentioned a rival of Chancellor Zamoyski, the Palatine of Kiew, « whoe came to the Diet with 7000 horse ». « The Chancellor must keep many men by his side, bestow upon them, honour them, what means very much expense. He has this Diet on his own shoulders . . . If he came here not so *potenter*, everything would look poorly », stated his friend, the Crown Marshal, to the King in 1585.[28]

This might lead to the extreme conclusion that large landowners played a crucial and decisive role in the system of money circulation throughout the country. They pumped large quantities of money from abroad (through their leaseholders), and either spent it abroad,

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[28] *Relation of the State of Polonia and the United Provinces of That Crown Anno 1598*, ed. C. H. Talbot, in the series: « Elementa ad Fontium Editiones », vol. XIII, Romae 1965, p. 95; A. Tarnawski, *op. cit.*

mostly on luxury goods, or else introduced precious metals into circulation inside the country.

A detailed register of cash expenditure kept by the Duke of Ostróg's treasurer in 1635-1637, contained four and five figure entries under income, while the expenses were much smaller. Between 6 May an 26 June 1636, 20,000 *zl.* (i.e. 3,630 ducats) were spent, in 419 instalments of an average 48 *zl.* Between 1 February and 28 March of the following year 40,525 *zl.* (also a single item of income) were spent on 622 items that is an average 65 *zl.* In fact the items were usually even smaller and consequently more numerous. Average figures were artificially enlarged by putting together the « weekly maintenance » of the court, which was usually 650 to 750, but often up to a thousand *zl.* Also soldiers' pay was noted as a single entry (about 500 *zl.* per month).[29]

Philanthropy in Poland and Lithuania was not regulated by state laws, but was organized mainly on mediaeval lines by town corporations; only Gdańsk adopted, on a limited scale, such Dutch social inventions as workhouses. In a predominantly Catholic country the rich constantly gave alms, usually small coins. It is very difficult to trace this pious expenditure in the sources (see, however, *opera pia*, Table 7).[30] During the centuries in question a particular kind of almsgiving was developing: a wandering friar, called the *kwestarz*, or the charity collector, visited with a cart all the mansions and country residences in the neighhbourhood of the monastery. This was to become one the most characteristic features of the "old life", which was later recalled by many a nostalgic diarist and writer. The collector's success and reputation depended on his social talents; he was often a hard drinker (this may have been his occupational disease) and a conversationalist who could also offer sound advice. His success was measured by the number of sacks of grain, flitches of pork or lard, and heads of calves or sheep with which he returned to the monastery, and much less often did he collect any money.

[29] Archiwum Państwowe Miasta Krakowa i Województwa Krakowskiego, Archiwum Sanguszków, 104, p. 55 ff., 114 ff.

[30] In the late 18th century Prince Adam Jerzy Czartoryski, neither an overpious nor generous person, had an alms-purse always at hand. K. KOŹMIAN, *Pamiętniki* (Memoirs), Warszawa 1972.

Still more generous charity resulted in the foundation of churches, and monasteries, and the building of chapels. These pious endowments were subject to the general rules of economic behaviour. The nobleman was likely to bestow on an ecclesiastical institution his land, and timber, and other building materials as well as the labour of his serfs, but not money. However, money was usually needed to pay the artists', architects', sculptors', or painters' fees. Also if a nobleman wanted to buy a Holy Mass, he was expected to pay cash.[31]

7. The Credit and Short-Term Fluctuations of the Money Supply

The part played by credit in the expenses of noble households also deserves consideration. The credit market is too big a problem, and still too little studied, to be treated here. I shall therefore mention only some striking features of the credit market so far as it affected agriculture, landownership, and the social aspects of money circulation.

The student of rural in pre-industrial Poland is often tempted to believe that credit was more widespread than the circulation of ready money. His observations would strongly support the statements of R. H. Tawney in his introduction to Thomas Wilson's *Discourse upon Usury*.[31a] In extreme cases — and these were by no means rare — credit (or usury) offered peasants the only, if dearly bought, chance of survival. This happened in particular when seed was scarce, when food was exhausted before the harvest or in times of plague. But credit was hardly ever cheap and the peasantry was at the mercy of usurers of various kinds. Probably the least merciless was the lord himself who, after all, was interested in keeping peasant households running. More dangerous were the lord's stewards, who often practised usury, the village innkeeper or the miller, who was usually the village potentate, if he was

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31 Julian U. Niemcewicz, recalling in the early 19th century his childhood in western Lithuania, tells of his overpious father who distributed little purses of money right and left to pay for Masses.

31a R. H. Tawney (ed.), Thomas Wilson, *A Discourse Upon Usury*, London 1925.

not too dependent on the landowner. At the turn of the 16th century, estate administrators seem to have been alarmed at the indebtedness of the tenantry. The surveyors of the estates of the See of Włocławek inquired into their tenants' debts. Both the evidence they collected, and that concerning other estates, has shown that many tenants were deep in debt and — what is even more important — that some tenants were also making substantial profits as village usurers. Credit relationships greatly contributed to social change in the countryside and enabled shrewd village Shylocks to accumulate a fortune.[32] Perhaps on the lowest level no money was involved; what a tenant needed was not cash but rather seed, a tool, or an ox. Even clothes were often made at home or exchanged for other goods within the village; although little or no evidence remains of such agreements on a national scale, there was from the turn of the 16th century a marked decline in the market for cheap clothes, which were previously sold mostly to the peasantry and poor townsmen. Tenants lived on the margin of a money economy: state taxes were not as heavy as the dues demanded by the lord, and the lords were much less interested in their tenants' meagre ready money than in their labour and rent in kind. Only the next stage of accumulation involved money, and this is true both for the usurer and for the lord.

Where the usurer was a pedlar (often a Scotsman) or a merchant, his role in money circulation does not need any explanation; if he was another tenant or a steward, his wealth led, or forced, him to enter deeper into the money economy. This was a requirement of consumption, production and investment as well.

It is deplorable that so little is known about short-term fluctuations in the manorial economy in Poland before the middle of the 18th century outside the largest estates. I suspect that on some estates at least, the landowners pressed their tenants harder in the leaner years, even if they came to the rescue of those in

32 A. Mączak, *Folwark pańszczyźniany a wieś w Prusach Królewskich w XVI/XVII wieku* (La ferme domaniale et le village en Prusse Occidentale aux XVI[e]-XVII[e] siècles), « Przegląd Historyczny », vol. XLVII, 1956, p. 373 ff.; Idem, *Kredyt w gospodarce chłopskiej na Żuławach Malborskich w początku XVII wieku* (Credit and Peasant Husbandry in Malbork Fens in the Early 17th Century), *ibidem*, vol. LI, 1960, p. 285 ff.

TABLE 11

GRAIN FROM THE DEMESNE LAND AND GRAIN FROM RENTS IN THE ESTATE OF TAPIAU, 1550-1695

(sample years only)

		Index of Demesne Crops (average year = 100)	Index of Grain from Rents (average year = 100)	Grain from Rents in relation to Demesne Crops
I. 1550-1621	5 Good Harvest Years	134	115	136
	5 Mean Harvest Years	98	99	186
	5 Poor Harvest Years	68	86	253
II. 1626-1695	4 Good Harvest Years	135	106	209
	4 Mean Harvest Years	106	108	271
	4 Poor Harvest Years	60	86	382

(Approximate figures from H.H. WÄCHTER, *Ostpreussische Domänenvorwerke im 16. und 17. Jahrhundert*, Würzburg 1958, p. XII f. Period I was characterized by peace and predominance of demesne economy [ratio of demesne crops to grain rents = 4478:8950 *Scheffel* of grain]; Period II was that of wars and other plagues, until 1660, and of diminishing demesne economy [analogous ratio was on average 2625:10501]).

real distress. Table 11 shows the results of a case study concerning the estate of Tapiau in Ducal, in Eastern, Prussia. There is much better evidence for this region and rural conditions were about the same as in Poland. I have available, however, only sample data for every fifth year from 1550 to 1695. It emerges from the table that in mean years — when grain prices were high — the stewards extracted relatively more grain from tenants. This brought great hardship to the serfs and to the lords and at the same time the opportunity to make profit; profit in money this time. The same was true for the other end of the social hierarchy: on the national scale the proportion of great landowners engaged in the Vistula trade was much larger in lean than in fat years.[33]

Credit was also used by the magnates on a very large scale as a tool of their domination over the lesser nobility. The nobles had great need of credit institutions in which to place their money and from which to borrow easily and on reasonable terms. Neither the merchants in towns nor the Church could fulfil this role, particularly in more remote regions. In the 17th century Jews were deeply involved in the money business, but as borrowers. The great landlord was therefore the best banker: his fortune was

[33] A. MĄCZAK, *Export of Grain and the Problem of Distribution of National Income in the Years 1550-1650*, « Acta Poloniae Historica », vol. XVIII, 1968, p. 80 f.

a safe pledge and he could not misuse his power because any clear betrayal of the creditors' confidence might bring disaster to his influence as a politician. At the same time, as we have seen, he needed cash and was willing to give a fair interest rate, and often combined his business with other social and political interests. A creditor — or rather customer — was likely to win favours from his powerful neighbour.

Table 12 represents the scale and social distribution of lending and borrowing among the nobility during the annual fairs in Lwów, when most of the business for a large area of Ruthenia was carried on. The Church, Jews and Christian townspeople played a secondary role. The largest transactions were between magnates themselves; when they entered into business with nobles of medium fortune, ten times more often than not they were borrowers. And they did not bother about petty credit transactions with the lesser nobles, although they lent some money to them.

Once more the great landowner appears as the driving force behind money circulation. However, I have previously stressed that he dispersed the large sums he earned from his crops. This time it is the other way around: both small and large sums placed with the great landlord accumulated and were invested often, if not always, on a large scale.

One of the principal investments was the purchase of estates. The system worked as follows: the creditors of the preceding

TABLE 12

CREDIT BUSINESS AMONG THE NOBILITY AT LWÓW FAIRS, 1676-1686
(in 1000's *zł.*)

	Creditors		
	Magnates	Middle Nobility	Lesser Nobility
Debtors			
The Magnates (called *Illustrissimi D-ni*)	6,359	6 070	2
The Middle Nobility (*Generosi*)	616	6.333	21
The Lesser Nobility (*Nobiles*)	200	8	34

(M. WĄSOWICZ, *Kontrakty lwowskie w latach 1676-1686* [Les contrats de Lwów de 1676 à 1686], Lwów 1935. 1000 *zł.* at that time equalled about 63 ducats).

TABLE 13

TRANSACTIONS OF PROPERTY
AMONG THE NOBLES AT LWÓW FAIRS, 1676-1686
(in 1000's *zł.*)

	Sellers		
	Magnates	Middle Nobility	Lesser Nobility
Purchasers			
Magnates	97 (2)	79	— (1)
Middle Nobility	38 (2)	161 (36)	4 (29)
Lesser Nobility	—	1 (6)	3 (70)

(M. WASOWICZ, *op. cit.*). Smaller estate in parentheses.

table become sellers of property, and debtors became purchasers. The net balance (Table 13) is favourable for the greater nobles and unfavourable for the middle nobility: the magnates purchased twice as many estates as they sold. This in balance amounts to 9.3% of the whole turnover of the larger estates during the Lwów fairs. So one may conclude that the further extension of the large estates, which was one of the most important features of the period in Poland and Lithuania, was at least partly financed by the principal losers, the middle nobility. This conclusion, however, varies from region to region. It cannot be at present proved for some regions and was most probably a particular characteristic of only the 16th and 17th centuries.

8. THE REGIONAL DISPERSION OF MONEY

Until now I have discussed the Polish money economy in general, omitting any regional differences. These differences, however, were most probably an important factor in the money market. I shall leave aside the network of great international fairs, since for my argument the relative degree of saturation of small money in specific regions is of greater importance. The student of Polish economic history can only dream of such ample evidence as that discussed by J. G. da Silva in his chapter on the spread

of precious metals from Seville,[34] and must try to approach the subject from another angle. The sources are not sufficient to allow us to construct reliable indices of living costs. Furthermore, such an index would not make any sense when money was in many respects a secondary factor. There is, however, a windfall set of figures available concerning the salaries of milkmaids, oxherds and others working on the royal and ecclesiastical estates. The largest series of such data is for 1564-1565 for royal estates all over Poland, including its South-Eastern regions as far as concerned manorial farms. It can be checked for some years by records of ecclesiastical estates and also by less exhaustive and valuable evidence of later surveys.[35]

The sources leave no doubt that pay in cash was only a part of a salary. The *familia* were fed at the farm, some were provided with modest accomodation, and usually some clothing, linen or other payment in kind was added, too. Payment in kind usually varied enormously according to the status of the employee or worker. In contrast to compensation by money and clothing, we can only calculate very roughly the exact value of foodstuffs given to servants and workers. One should remember, however, that not every food item was a market commodity; in other words, there was not necessarily a choice of consuming or selling. Neither can one overestimate the importance of waste, theft and unequal distribution of small daily privileges in the demesne farm community. By definition these factors cannot be included in our calculations but one must aware of their existence and of the role they played in everyday country life. When spread on a map the network of figures makes a regular pattern: the highest salaries are mentioned in Royal Prussia, on the Lower Vistula, near Gdańsk. Rather schematic, uniform figures from the survey of Ruthenia (the South-East) are about two thirds of the maximum level of

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34 J. G. DA SILVA, *En Espagne: développement économique, subsistance, déclin*, Paris-La Haye 1965, p. 59 ff.

35 Here I have summarized the first part of my paper *Preise, Löhne und Lebenshaltungskosten im Europa des 16. Jahrhunderts. Ein Beitrag zur Quellenkritik*, Wirtschaftliche und soziale Strukturen im saekularen Wandel. Festschrift für Wilhelm Abel zum 70. Geburttstag, Bd. II, Hannover 1974, pp. 322-326. See also charts p. 340 f.

the Prussian data. The single high figure appears in Spisz, a district beyond the Tatra Mountains, which was connected with the Upper Hungarian (i.e., Slovakian) mining region. There are also pockets of higher wages around bigger towns, and generally higher figures are to be found by the Silesian border. If one takes the minimum figure (Sieradz) as a basis at 100, the highest, that of Gniew in Royal Prussia, reaches 540. In more general terms, one finds 100 (index figure) for Masovia, 100-160 for Greater Poland, 120-180 for Little Poland, 200 for Ruthenia, and finally 200-400 for Royal Prussia. Even here the differences are impressive.

I interpret these figures on the assumption that compensation in money and some clothing was instrumental in attracting labour. In conditions of serfdom the margin of mobility was not so narrow as many believe. There was a seasonal migration of rural labourers from Masovia towards Prussia and Silesia, which together with the fact that the names of servants regularly changed, shows that there was also a certain mobility and a limited freedom of choice for labourers within the village.

What in fact determined the level of compensation? The case of Ruthenia was described by Jan Rutkowski as follows: the expansion of the borderland economy and a relative shortage of settlers in Podolia and Wolhynia raised the price of labour.[36] In Prussia, on the other hand, it was not only the towns which attracted labour. On the Vistula marshes many peasant farms could not be run without several hired servants and numerous seasonal workers. It was in general a period of rapid development for Royal Prussia when the deep wounds of the wars between Poland and the Teutonic Order were healing, the boom in the export of grain and the spectacular growth of the Gdańsk agglomeration were beginning. The high compensation of rural workers in Prussia bears witness to its prosperity.

Let us turn to the area bridging Prussia and Ruthenia. The overpopulation of poor Masovia was caused not so much by high

[36] J. Rutkowski, *Pańszczyzna i praca najemna w organizacji folwarków królewskich w Prusach za Zygmunta Augusta* (*Corvée* and Hired Labour in Royal Manors in Prussia in the Times of King Sigismond August), reprinted in *Studia z dziejów wsi polskiej XVI-XVIII w.*, ed. by W. Kula, Warszawa 1956, p. 123 f.

population density as by a peculiar property structure. Numerous petty noblemen each ruled over only a few serfs; farms were small, and soil was sand. Since the factors of "land" and "population" are constant, small agricultural units create less demand for labour: the Masovian population therefore spread, colonized "The Desert" (*Wildniss*) on the southern confines of Ducal Prussia, populated large parts of other provinces and systematically exported seasonal labour. Had the compensation been high, our verdict would have been prosperity. Such was the case of Ruthenia, but the low Masovian wages signify misery.

If money compensation was an attraction, its level had to be fixed so that the lord could find it still favourable and the milkmaid (oxherd etc.) earn a socially acceptable wage. I have noted some demographic and social factors that influenced wages, but one must remember that their real value was determined by the general level of prices. In order to keep servants from running away and to attract them in the following year, farm managers supplied them with small sums of money, in particular before fairs. These figures then form very complex indices of the economic situation: the higher an index the better developed the region and the larger the role of a money economy.

9. The Social Distribution of Money and Changes over Time

These relationships and differences were a constant factor in the economy. In 1615-1616 milkmaids were paid 120 *grosz* per year on a Royal Prussian estate, whereas their counterparts throughout Masovia received only 40 to 60 *gr.* (most often 48 *gr.*). A dramatic crisis between 1620 and 1622 did not undermine this; the relative scales for salaries in Prussia remained high. However, there may have been important changes among several social groups. In Prussia, for example, the higher paid members of the *familia* seemed to fare relatively, or even absolutely, better after the debasement reforms (Table 14).

TABLE 14

WAGES AND PRICE INDICES FOR SELECTED ROYAL PRUSSIAN ESTATES 1565, 1615 & 1624

	Absolute Figure 1563, in *grosz* *	1565	1615	1625	Estate **
Deputy Steward (*podstarości*)	800	100	225	375	G
	720	100	300	417	S
Estate Clerk	600	100	200	250	G,S
Manor Manager & His Wife	240+140	100	200	211	S
Smith (working in the centre of the estate)	300	100	120	200	S
Cowherd	180	100	.	111	G
Swineherd	100	100	.	120	G
Milkmaid	100	100	.	140	G
Price of Rye		100	127	227	
Price of Shoes		100	302	373	
Grosz in One Rixdollar	33	100	128	227	

(Wages: *Lustracja województwa pomorskiego 1565* [Survey of Pomeranian Woiwodship 1565], ed. by S. Hoszowski, Gdańsk 1961; *Lustracja województw malborskiego i chełmińskiego 1565* [Survey of Woiwodships of Malbork and Chełmno 1565], ed. by S. Hoszowski, Gdańsk 1961.

Prices: J. PELC, *Ceny w Gdańsku w XVI i XVII w.* [Les prix à Gdańsk aux XVI^e^ et XVII^e^ siècles], Lwów 1937).

* Yearly money wage.

** G for royal estate of Grudziądz; S for Sztum.

General inferences should not be drawn from these figures. The pay of town officers often took the form of a fixed rent and proved to be a handicap and the overall result was inverse to the one we have indicated for the Prussian estates. On the other hand, where day labour was paid for, and where it coincided with a growing demand for labour, the outcome might have been quite favourable to workers and journeymen. But in the countryside where full pay also included food, fuel and shelter, the monetary crisis meant something else; it did not bring danger of starvation but changed the demand for small consumer goods. One may also suspect that the social hierarchy of such limited groups as the employees of estates and manors must have been changing. Otherwise how can we explain the fact that low-income (and socially wretched) groups lost so much in a relatively short time?

10. The Territorial Limits of A Money Circulation Model

The social relationships presentend above must not necessarily be limited to Poland and Lithuania. The crucial feature of my argument is the role played by the great landowners, so one must look at all those countries where great landownership not only predominated but was also more or less directly involved in export and import trades. Although the merchants of the sea ports tried and often succeeded in maintaining the monopoly of contacts with foreign customers, I suspect that this had many other consequences, such as the dependence of the lesser nobles on the great ones, patron-client relationships etc. But here the similarities decrease, for these secondary features were conditioned by the size of the country (for only in a big country with distant ports were lesser nobles so dependent on the magnates for the sale of their produce) and by the state, the weakness of which was a reason for the magnates' political and social predominance. And where else did there exist so great a country with so feeble a government? Poland in fact was the only country that could be described by Montesquieu in a paragraph of his *Esprit des Lois*:

« It [i.e., Poland] has scarcely any of those things which we call the movable effects of the universe, except corn . . . Some of the lords possess entire provinces; they oppress the husbandmen, in order to have greater quantities of corn, which they send to strangers to procure the superfluous demands of luxury. If Poland had no foreign trade, its inhabitants would be happier. The grandees, who would have only their corn, would give it to their peasants for subsistence; as their too extensive estates would become burdensome, they would divide them amongst their peasants; every one would find skins or wool in their herds or flocks, so that they would no longer be at an immense expense in providing clothes; the great, who are ever fond of luxury, not being able to find it but in their own country, would encourage the labour of the poor. The nation, I affirm, would then become more

flourishing, at least if it did not became barbarous; and this the laws might easily prevent ».[37]

It seems, then, that the role played by money best explains the economic system in question, and offers insight into social structures as well. There are few economic problems that are not social problems as well. Montesquieu presented a counterfactual hypothesis that we may perhaps be able partly to test. Several years after 1626 the Swedish invasion had cut off grain exporters from their traditional markets, and after 1772 heavy Prussian tolls discouraged the trade. The reorientation of the rural economy, the revival of towns and the development of industry from the mid-eighteenth century are phenomena that require a long-term study that would include their 16th and 17th century ancestry.

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[37] Ch. L. de Montesquieu, *The Spirit of the Laws*, translated by Th. Nugent, New York-London 1966, vol. I, p. 339.