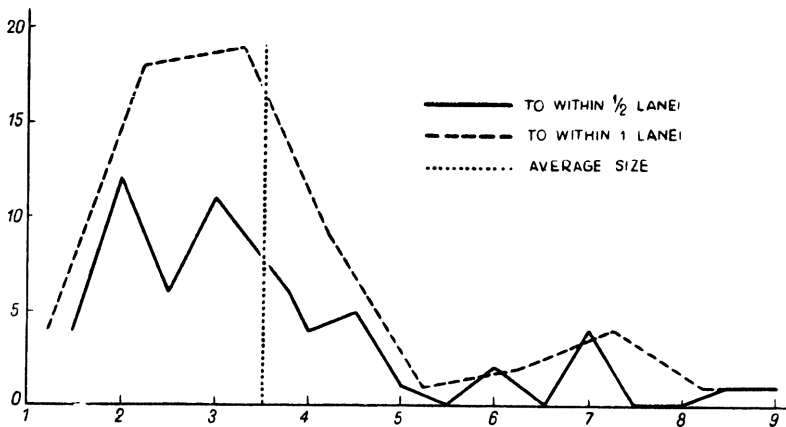


Andrzej Wyczański, *Studia nad folwarkiem szlacheckim w Polsce w latach 1500—1580* [*Studies on the Demesne Land of the Gentry Estates in Poland 1500—1580*], Warszawa 1960, 286 pages.

Up to recently, our knowledge of the Polish agrarian system of the 16th century was based mainly on records relating to the landed property. Our conclusions were based upon inspection records, inventories and less frequently on accounts of the royal and church estates. Although it was fully realized that no complete picture could have been obtained that way, separate elements of this picture were, of necessity, made to fit the other kinds of property. After the war, when private archives of the former magnates had been made generally and easily accessible, new possibilities were opened of research on the conditions prevailing in some large estates. Similar fa-

cilities regarding smaller and medium-sized estates we were provided by the State Archives after the war, when a card index of the subjects relating to agrarian history, contained in the nobility court records of the 15th—18th centuries (some thousands of volumes of which had been preserved), was made available to scholars. Wyczański's work is the first attempt at using these records for a systematic study of medium-sized gentry estates.

As he worked mainly on inventories, very often brief and fragmentary, the author did not use the descriptive method. In effect, he provided us with a novel method and arrived at some figures which could not have been calculated with the use of the formerly applied methods. 'It seems,' he writes, 'that without the use of the language of figures, any words could be used more or less at pleasure to explain the important meaning of historical processes. Figures (whether accurate or approximate) can always be accepted or rejected; they make possible logical reasoning and their accuracy can be tested — the only criterion by which to judge a scientific method' (p. 6). This takes it to extremes. A thesis like this can be only applied to some problems, as it has been pointed out in the general discussion at the Cracow congress of historians in 1958. But it suits the sources and the range of problems discussed in the reviewed work.



Graph 1. The size of demesne (Wielkopolska, Western Part)

Abscissae: size of demesne in lanes

Ordinate: percentage of demesne lands of a given size

Wyczański has found some 130 records of the inventory type, which could be used, to a higher or lesser degree, as the basis for assessing numerical data. Most of the records related to Western Wielkopolska (Great Poland), which was not without influence on his preliminary and final conclusions. The other sources were for Wyczański of a secondary character and he used them for comparison, particularly when large property was concerned. Chapter I 'The Origin and Development of the Demesne' is of an introductory character. The author expounded and supported the thesis (previously advanced by Bujak, Grodecki and others) according to which the demesne lands on the estates of the gentry originated from the medieval *praedium militare*.<sup>1</sup> Wyczański

<sup>1</sup> Cf. A. Mączak, *Polsische Forschungen auf dem Gebiete der Agrargeschichte des 16. und 17. Jahrhunderts (1945—1957)*, 'Acta Poloniae Historica', vol. I, p. 37 ff.

has made a thorough search of the earlier episcopal *libri beneficiorum* for the 16th century demesne lands known to him, and succeeded in finding there almost all of them. He has found, too, that the area of peasant land in the villages containing the same demesne lands was not diminishing, at least not before the 1570s or 80s. Similarly, the process of buying out the lands belonging to the *sculteti* can be hardly referred to the medium-sized property.

For Wyczański, the acreage of the *folwark* is a fundamental element. He discusses it in the following chapter, working on direct information (very scanty), or on estimates based upon the quantities of grain used for sowing, the crops, the numbers of farm animals and the amounts of works available. The last two methods give rise to most doubts. The quantity of grain used for sowing is a generally more stable element than the crops, and this is most important. The indices themselves are given in a much generalized and approximate form and just have to be accepted (wheat — 5, rye — 5, barley — 6, oats — 4).

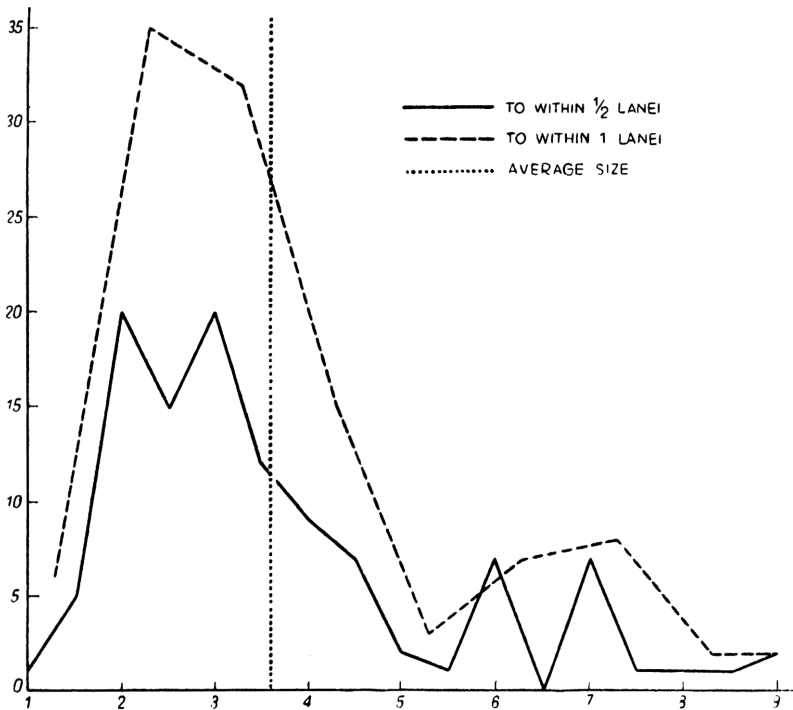
The most frequently used method of assessing the acreage is that of the numbers of farm animals and the amounts of works. So, if we know the numbers of peasants and of horses or oxen belonging to the landlord, we can estimate the area of land which it was possible to cultivate. Unfortunately, because of numerous gaps in the sources hypothetical indices have to be often accepted, which diminishes the reliability of the conclusions. In effect, Wyczański comes to 60.5 hectares<sup>2</sup> as the average demesne for the country as a whole, with the corresponding figures for separate provinces varying slightly from 58.8 to 67.2 hectares. The last mentioned figure should, by the way, be corrected and the national average would then stand at 59 hectares (145.5 acres).<sup>3</sup>

The acreage assessed by the author has been accepted as the basis for all other conclusions with which the picture of a typical medium-sized demesne has been gradually built up. Wyczański writes about it as follows: 'By a typical demesne (*folwark*) we mean a sociological model, in this case an acreage which would represent the maximum of the general trends in the shaping of the size of arable in demesne lands' (p. 85). It may be contrary to the views of many historians, but I think that it is possible and purposeful to work out and examine similar 'sociological' or 'ideal' models in different situations. Whether he liked it or not, the student of the estates of the lesser and medium gentry (contrary to the studies on big landed property) would have no other way out, if he wanted (like Wyczański) to make a scientific approach to the problem, to go beyond the narrow circle of isolated and anecdotic details and arrive at some synthetic conclusions. He would be forced to do so by the scarcity of sources which practically excludes small regional studies which constitute the basis of our knowledge of the Crown, Church or higher nobility estates.

But the author has created one unique and general 'model' — a synthesis of our regional 'models.' He thinks that the further he goes in his generalization the smaller becomes the error, and he really proves his case very convincingly. However, an essential feature has been lost on this occasion, a feature illustrated by the attached graphs. It transpires from them that the 3.6 *lanei* (60.5 hectares) average for the examined four regions of Poland is by no means dominant. The statement that 68 per cent. of the estimated acreages belong to the 2—4 *lanei* category (p. 85) is correct, but it effaces a more precise observation that not one but two types of the studied cases can be determined. The first has two or three *lanei*, in most cases; I should even be inclined to put the demesne up to five *lanei* into this category. The second type can be clearly determined as of six, seven or even more *lanei*. The establishment of an abstract 'typical' demesne area of 60.5 hectares has concealed these differences, and with them perhaps important differences within the gentry. This is, in my opinion, the main charge against the author. The effects of this mistake undoubtedly affect further estimates, including the calculation of a hypothetical annual balance which crowns the study. However, since all new elements considered by Wyczański are referred

<sup>2</sup> I. e. 3.6 *lanei*. *Laneus* = 30 *morgi* (*jugera*) = 16.8 hectares.

<sup>3</sup> For more detailed substantiation of this correction and other remarks see 'Przegląd Historyczny', vol. LII, 1961, No. 2.



Graph 2. The size of demesne (four regions)

Abscissae: size of demesne in *lanei*

Ordinate: percentage of demesne lands of a given size

to these average acreages (regional and national) it is impossible to make any corrections based on the above proposed preliminary assumption.<sup>4</sup> This error of method will come to light only on one occasion, that of the interesting analysis of the Włocławek customs registers. The Włocławek customs house registered goods shipped up and down the Vistula and in consequence had records of nearly all grain exports from the upper and middle Vistula basin. After carefully sorting out the group of landlords whose wealth corresponded to that of the owners of the studied estates, Wyczański states that an average shipment amounted (in the four studied years) to 10.3–17.7 lasts (p. 207). At the same time, from the estimated average crops of an average demesne it transpires that the quantity of grain available for shipment was about 4.2 lasts. The disproportion is considerable and it is not enough to draw from it the conclusion that the 'typical' demesne could not have yielded the 'average paying' quantity of marketable grain. The author notices it and supposes that the shipments originated from relatively larger estates (larger demesne or a number of smaller) but he draws no conclusions. This would perfectly agree with the above presented cor-

<sup>4</sup> Works of this type, essential part of which consists of statistical data based upon relatively small numbers of studied objects (some 130 inventories in this case), should contain tables showing all numerical data used in the work, such as acreage, sown up areas, crops, live-stock, implements, stocks, numbers of peasants and their services, tenure rents, etc.

rection of the 'model.' The group of exporters would correspond to the owners of the seven-*lanei* (nearly 120 hectares) demesne. However, if we reach for other sources the question does not look so simple. For we can compare the names of the nobles exporting grain through Włocławek with the tax registers of the same, or nearly the same years, where the number of peasant *lanei* in possession of the given nobleman is recorded. The absence of personal names in the reviewed work makes this comparison impossible with regard to the studied estates, but the results of an analogous comparison for a number of districts show that many noblemen were exporting many times more grain than the quantities they should theoretically have had available according to Wyczański. The author shows on some examples that, as exempted from the customs duty, the noblemen were not afraid to declare that joint shipments really belonged to a number of land-owners, so it is not here that the secret lies. The discrepancies in the results cannot be explained by likely slight errors in the acreage estimates, either. So, trade in grain among the nobles, purchases of grain from peasants and co-operation with grain traders in towns (in order to evade customs) played possibly a much more important part than it is generally supposed.

Working on the tax registers it is also possible to find that some of the demesnes studied by Wyczański, for which information on labour dues was lacking, were in fact mostly using lord's own animals and hired labour. This adds support to the demand for the differentiation of the models, not only as regards the acreage. This also should not be left without influence on the final conclusions regarding the balances of the manors. The existence of the demesne lands of considerable size (and for that matter dispensing with the services of peasants) on the manors of the medium gentry is doubtless. M. Biskup has found them in Royal (Polish) Prussia on the lower Vistula which is outside the area covered by Wyczański's studies.<sup>5</sup>

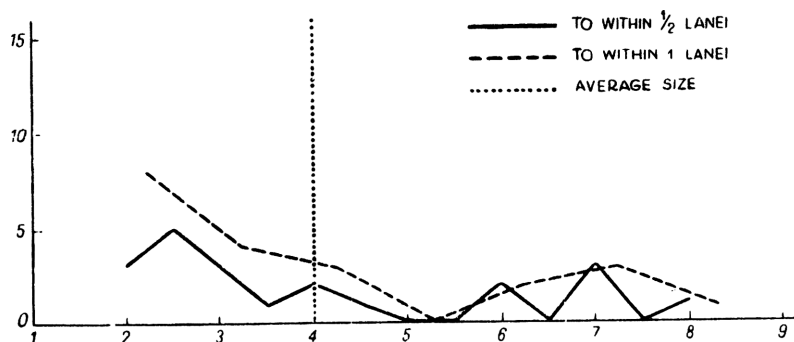
In any case, the evidence of the tax registers could have helped to add more details to the picture of the manor. I should like to avoid the routine mannerism of the reviewers consisting in widening the range of the discussed problems, contrary to the author's intentions. However, I have to state that everything that is connected with grain production and trade on the manor should have been included in the book. The treatment of grain trade solely making use of general figures, proportions and 'means' has adversely affected the argumentation. An additional chapter based on the tax and customs registers would be different from the others, as regards the method, but its absence may give rise to doubts. Why should so different results be obtained when an occasion presents itself of verifying the figures? On the other hand, it should be emphasized that in all other cases Wyczański gives careful, thoroughly prepared solutions to his problems. He checks all the results, searches for various approaches and gives penetrating explanations of the discrepancies in the figures, showing his profound knowledge of agrarian problems.

His reasoning in all his studies, which are only seemingly separate, consistently leads from the acreage, through the organization of the demesne farming (particularly problems of manpower), the branches and results of production, the above discussed problems of trade, to the last chapter devoted to the profitability of the demesne farming. On every occasion the author collects separate measurable elements from which he intends to work out a general account and strike a balance. But this is perhaps not the most important. The evidence that the manors in all regions had to use a great deal of hired labour seems irrefutable. Moreover, the amount of hired labour demand must have reached hundreds of working days in a year. If a 3.6-*lanei* *folwark* in Mazowsze (Masovia) needed some 350 work days in addition to the works supplied by the sup and almost landless cottars, the noblemen's demands that seasonal migrations to Silesia and Prussia should be stopped assume a concrete meaning. The question of the home and foreign market for agricultural produce of the demesne farming has been presented in an objective and matter-of-fact manner.

<sup>5</sup> M. Biskup, *Atlas historyczny Polski. Prusy Królewskie w drugiej połowie XVI w.* [Historical Atlas of Poland. Royal Prussia in the Second Half of the 16th Century], Warszawa 1961. The manuscript was kindly made available to me by the author.

It should be pointed out that Wyczański was perhaps the first to make a tentative comparative analysis of prices in various parts of the country. It leads directly to a balance, which, in turn, has to be based on the prices and wages. But it is precisely on this occasion that generalization is particularly striking. The author uses the average prices for the years 1551—1580 (which in fact are the averages for the years 1561—1570; p. 231 ff.). Seasonal fluctuations have not been taken into account, though they must have played an important part in the calculations. No allowance has been made for the differences between good and bad harvests.

Students of agricultural history are usually very sceptical about 'average' balances. Undoubtedly too little space in the reviewed work has been devoted to fluctuations and their effects, although they were characteristic of agriculture of that time and play a very important part in economics. And yet, the final estimate of the income, in spite of considerable differences in separate cases, perfectly fits the average tenure rents. This provides a convincing proof that the author's estimates are (in accordance with his reservations) generally correct.



Graph 3. The size of demesne (Małopolska)  
Abscissae: size of demesne in *lanei*  
Ordinate: percentage of demesne lands of a given size

To what kind of manor do these estimates relate? All the time we have been dealing with 21 manors in Małopolska (Little Poland), 16 in Mazowsze, 16 in Eastern Wielkopolska and as many as 59 in Western Małopolska. This is the ratio (21 to 16 to 16 to 59) applied to all overall estimates for four regions. It may seem justified when we consider all of the 112 inventories.<sup>6</sup> But why should Western Wielkopolska figures weigh more than those of Małopolska? Should not a different coefficient be found, based on the number of manors existing in each region? The problem is not just academic, as it can be seen from comparisons with Rutkowski's figures for the royal estates (after *Badania nad podziałem dochodów*). When comparing total income per demesne farm (p. 249) it can be seen at a glance that Western Wielkopolska is of greater importance, as far as gentry's manors are concerned, while for the royal estates it is large incomes obtained in other regions (Mazowsze and Małopolska) that play the decisive part.<sup>7</sup>

<sup>6</sup> Not 113 as erroneously shown in the total of the table on p. 84. In the penultimate column of the same table it should be 407.0 instead of 406, and in the last column 3.59 should be rounded up to 3.6.

<sup>7</sup> In the previously mentioned table the arithmetic mean for 4 regions would be 254.1 zlotys, whereas the weighted mean — 300.7.

When drafting a balance sheet of a demesne farming, the author rightly treats it as a purely theoretical quantity, useful only for transpositions. He makes two transpositions. As it had to be expected, the change from the mixed economy (labour services plus hired labour) to the purely hired labour economy would result in a drop in income, estimated by Wyczański at 34%, with the wages, productivity and maintenance cost (for men and animals) unchanged. A 126% expansion of the *folwark* acreage as a result of evictions of the peasants would bring a rather modest — 39% — increase in incomes, accompanied by a large number of new problems facing the owner (p. 260). It can be indirectly concluded from this that the existing state of affairs was the most advantageous from the point of view of the owners. It seems, however, that the method worked out by Wyczański could make it possible to consider a number of variants of this optimum. If we consider certain investments (working on large property accounts), if we examine possibilities of developing stock-breeding at the cost of agriculture, if we take into account the prevailing rate of interest and credit terms, always working on theoretical models and basing on the presented figures and methods, we would perhaps arrive at a basis for a more penetrating economic analysis of the Polish feudal economy. It is an undoubtedly urgent task to continue the author's studies in the chronological sense, too, since the number of available inventories relating to the later decades grows in geometrical progression.

The question of comparative studies, which could be conducted in other countries, remains open. Wyczański's treatment of the subject, because of its statistical character, can provide a better basis for comparisons than any other works of a descriptive character.

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