

Demesne lordship and rural society in early modern East Central and Eastern Europe: comparative perspectives

by Markus Cerman

Abstract

The original concept of East-Elbian ‘demesne lordship’ (*Gutsherrschaft*), coined more than a century ago, provided the basis for later interpretations that assumed the existence of a fundamental divide between the early modern agrarian systems of Western and Eastern Europe. Within this ‘agrarian dualism’, East Central and Eastern Europe became associated with the rise of a commercial demesne economy and a strengthening of landlord powers over the rural population. While not ignoring the negative consequences of demesne lordship, recent approaches deal with the experience of lordship at the village level and point to the variety of agrarian structures within East Central and Eastern Europe. The results challenge traditional images of a general imposition of a ‘second serfdom’ and long-term economic stagnation and backwardness. The research focus has recently shifted to a reassessment of the social and legal conditions of the villagers and of the performance of the demesne and the tenant economic sectors in a comparative European perspective, casting further doubt on the existence of uniform ‘agrarian systems’ and ‘agrarian dualism’.

New approaches to European rural history have resulted in a revived interest in the phenomenon of early modern East Central and Eastern European rural societies that in English used to be called ‘second serfdom’. The use of this term in English-language studies has recently been challenged as a misnomer. By contrast, most historical writing in Central and Eastern Europe abandoned the idea of a uniform agrarian system in the early modern period and its characterization as ‘serfdom’ quite some time ago, tentatively in the 1970s and decisively, after a paradigmatic shift of research, in the early 1990s.

Originally, the theory of ‘demesne lordship’ (which may serve as an approximate translation for the terms used elsewhere: German *Gutsherrschaft*, Czech *velkostatek*, Polish *ustrój folwarczno-pańszczyźniany*) assumed a set of rural institutions that set apart forms of lordship in these areas from the ancien régime types of the seigneurial system in Central, Western and Southern Europe which were primarily based on the extraction of cash rents. Legally and socially, demesne lordship was associated with strong landlord rights, including elements of jurisdiction, which were used to impose restrictions on tenant mobility, to undermine tenant property rights and to exploit villagers in terms of rents and market monopolies. Economically, it was marked by the rise of a commercial demesne economy of directly managed farms and

other enterprises such as seigneurial breweries or distilleries. Demesne farming is particularly associated with the existence and use of high labour rents (*corvée*, forced labour services), which tenant farmers, smallholders and cottagers were obliged to supply.

None of these features has remained exempt from qualification and revision by the detailed empirical research undertaken since the mid-1980s and, particularly, the 1990s. This is also illustrated by the articles that follow. As relatively little of this more recent research by Czech, Danish, Estonian, German, Hungarian, Polish, Russian and Swedish historians, all of which questions the existence of a uniform system of demesne lordship, has entered either English-language historical syntheses of European History or specialized studies of (Western) European rural history (despite the availability of excellent, well-informed English-language surveys and first-hand empirical research¹), some of the following pages are devoted to outlining the major challenges to traditional understanding that have emerged from this research. This survey then sets the context for a discussion of the conclusions of the individual case studies published in this part of the *Review*.²

I

Ever since the term 'demesne lordship' (*Gutsherrschaft*) was coined by Georg Friedrich Knapp in 1887 to explain the differences in agricultural patterns in the nineteenth-century German Empire,³ it has been used to describe the specific seigneurial regime emerging in East Central and Eastern Europe during the later middle ages and the early modern period. In later studies, the approximate border line of demesne lordship along the river Elbe became associated with a more general European 'agrarian dualism', backed in rare unanimity by such diverse historical approaches as German writing on the 'agrarian constitution' after 1945, world-system theories of development and 'underdevelopment', or theories focusing on social property relations, by Malthusian, Marxist and Smithian readings of European pre-modern economic history alike. Pending further research on this phenomenon, this

¹ See W. W. Hagen, 'How mighty the Junkers? Peasant rents and seigneurial profits in sixteenth-century Brandenburg', *Past and Present* 108 (1985), pp. 80–116; id., 'Seventeenth-century crisis in Brandenburg: the Thirty Years' War, the destabilization of serfdom, and the rise of absolutism', *American Historical Rev.* 94 (1989), pp. 302–35; id., 'Village life in East-Elbian Germany and Poland, 1400–1800: subjection, self-defence, survival', in T. Scott (ed.), *The peasantries of Europe, from the fourteenth to the eighteenth centuries* (1998), pp. 145–89; id., *Ordinary Prussians. Brandenburg Junkers and Villagers, 1500–1840* (2002); E. Melton, 'Gutsherrschaft in East Elbian Germany and in Livonia, 1500–1800: a critique of the model', *Central European Hist.* 21 (1988), pp. 315–49.

² The papers were originally contributions to a session entitled 'The development of the rural economy and the 'demesne lordship' (*Gutsherrschaft*): East-central

Europe, c.1500–c.1800' presented at the XVth World Economic History Congress at the University of Utrecht in 2009. The author is indebted the editors of the *Agricultural History Review* for the opportunity to publish this collection and in particular wishes to thank Richard Hoyle for his generous support. Three further contributions to the session, organized by Markus Cerman and William W. Hagen, are not included in this collection. Two authors withdrew and C. P. Rasmussen's paper was published as 'Innovative feudalism. *Gutsherrschaft* and *Koppelwirtschaft* in Schleswig-Holstein in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries', *AgHR* 58 (2010), pp. 172–90. Publication was made possible thanks to the financial support of the Austrian Federal Ministry of Science and Research and the Scouloudi Foundation.

³ G. F. Knapp, *Die Bauernbefreiung und der Ursprung der Landarbeiter in den älteren Teilen Preußens* (2 vols, 1887).

agreement may well have fitted the contemporary Iron Curtain divide as a master narrative, because while criticism of the idea of a structural ‘dualism’ was latently present in Eastern European research undertaken after 1945 and was repeated explicitly in the 1970s and 1980s by, for instance, some East German authors,⁴ the critique of dualism was only really taken up by Western researchers close to or after 1989.

There is no definite agreement about the factors causing the rise of demesne lordship during the later middle ages and after, although there is a broad understanding that lower population density and the effects of the late medieval crisis, the secular rise of grain prices during the sixteenth century and the relatively stronger position of noble Estates vis-à-vis territorial princes and towns (paired with lower levels of urbanization) were influential. Disagreement arises as to whether domestic developments or the rise of export markets for agricultural goods were of greater importance. While some areas such as Poland or Brandenburg participated as exporters in the emerging international grain market in the sixteenth century,⁵ others, like the Czech Lands or Hungary, either did not, or exported goods not primarily associated with demesne farming. A comparative empirical approach does not only question the ‘export hypothesis’ but also reveals problems with regard to the other general factors mentioned. For instance, there were areas and territories in East Central Europe such as Lower Silesia, Upper Lusatia, Bohemia, Moravia and areas of Little Poland in which there was a dense urban network, rates of urbanization were high and population density approached Western European levels. These characteristics could not prevent the establishment of demesne lordship and of a demesne economy.⁶

Leaving aside, for reasons of brevity, older traditions of legal and territorial history, research on demesne lordship has been carried out almost continuously over the last 120 years. The concept of ‘demesne lordship’ consists of two separate features, first, the lordship aspect, i.e. the exercise of strong seigneurial rights over tenants and villagers, and secondly the ‘demesne economy’, the seigneurial involvement in managing farms often worked by tenant labour. Studies following the approach of ‘agrarian constitution’ have mainly concentrated on the first aspect, landlord power, and emphasized that aspect of demesne lordship over its commercial elements.⁷ Alternative approaches emerged with the interest in economic, social and rural history in the Eastern European people’s republics after 1945. Challenging the broadly Malthusian interpretations mainly interested in norms and types of landlordship, these schools concentrated on concrete empirical case studies and issues such as the development of social structure; the extent, organization and importance of the

⁴ See G. Heitz, ‘Wirtschafts- und sozialgeschichtliche Aspekte der “zweiten Leibeigenschaft”’, in V. Zimanyi (ed.), *Studien zur deutschen und ungarischen Wirtschaftsentwicklung* (1985), pp. 43–51.

⁵ For Poland see the contribution of Piotr Guzowski, pp. 312–27.

⁶ For a more detailed discussion of theories explaining the rise of demesne lordship and their shortcomings see M. Cerman, ‘Explaining the rise of the early modern demesne economy (*Gutswirtschaft*) in East-central Europe: a critique of existing models’, presented

at the annual conference of the Economic History Society, University of Warwick (2009). This will appear as ch. 3 in a textbook on the agrarian development in East-central and Eastern Europe: M. Cerman, *Villagers and lords in Eastern Europe, 1300–1800* (forthcoming).

⁷ F. Lütge, *Geschichte der deutschen Agrarverfassung vom frühen Mittelalter bis zum 19. Jahrhundert* (1963); id., ‘Grundherrschaft und Gutsherrschaft’, *Handwörterbuch der Sozialwissenschaften*, (12 vols, 1959–65), IV, pp. 682–8; F. W. Henning, *Landwirtschaft und ländliche Gesellschaft in Deutschland* (1979).

commercial demesne economy, both for seigniorial income and economic development; levels of rents and levies; arable yields; tenant property rights and property transfer patterns; rural economic development; and on villagers' resistance and unrest, including everyday conflicts or 'lower forms' of class struggle. In a sense, the post-war schools in Eastern Europe were more interested in the economic consequences of demesne lordship than, for instance, those in West Germany, and so the economic, social and legal aspects of the villagers' situation received greater attention. Throughout there was still a tendency to understand them as victims of powerful social structures and forces rather than as active participants in shaping local conditions.⁸

Comparative efforts by Eastern European research also resulted in a rising awareness of greater regional differentiation in the model of demesne lordship.⁹ Not everywhere in Eastern Europe, for instance, was a commercial demesne economy established to its fullest extent. It was found that there was considerable variation in the legal status or property rights of the villagers between individual territories. More attention was given to the economic elements of the system that could help to differentiate between individual manifestations of demesne lordship but also between demesne lordship and other types of seigniorial regimes mainly or purely based on the extraction of cash rents.

Despite a relatively undisputed understanding of the general characteristics of demesne lordship and the demesne economy, the different approaches disagree over the importance of its individual features. Four elements seem to be central to any characterization of demesne lordship in early modern East Central and Eastern Europe: (i) the existence of a commercial demesne economy under direct seigniorial management; (ii) the establishment of mobility restrictions for the rural population; (iii) the quality of villagers' property rights; and (iv) the existence of labour rents.¹⁰

⁸ Cf., e.g., H. Harnisch and G. Heitz (eds), *Deutsche Agrargeschichte des Spätféudalismus* (1986); G. Heckenast (ed.), *Aus der Geschichte der ostmitteleuropäischen Bauernbewegung im 16.–17. Jahrhundert* (1977); P. Horváth, *Poddaný ľud na Slovensku v prvej polovici XVIII. storočia* (1963); St. Inglot (ed.), *Historia chłopów polskich* (2 vols, 1970), I; J. Kahk, *Peasant and lord in the process of transition from feudalism to capitalism in the Baltics* (1982); A. Klíma, *Manufakturní období v Čechách* (1955); A. Mączak, H. Samsonowicz and P. Burke (eds), *East-central Europe in transition. From the fourteenth to the seventeenth century* (1985); L. Makkai (ed.), *Jobbágytelek és parasztagazdaság az örökös jobbágytság kialakulásának korában* (1966); A. Míka, *Poddany lid v Čechách v první polovině 16. století* (1960); Zs. P. Pach, *Die ungarische Agrarentwicklung im 16.–17. Jahrhundert. Abbiegung vom westeuropäischen Entwicklungsgang* (1964); J. Petrůň, *Poddany lid v Čechách na prahu třicetileté války* (1964); J. Varga, *Jobbágyrendszer a magyarországi feudalizmus kései századaiban, 1556–1767* (1969). For historiographical surveys see H. Kaak, *Die Gutsherrschaft.*

Theoriegeschichtliche Untersuchungen zum Agrarwesen im ostelbischen Raum (1991); M. Cerman, 'Agrardualismus in Europa? Geschichtsschreibung über Gutsherrschaft und ländliche Gesellschaften in Mittel- und Osteuropa', *Jahrbuch für Geschichte des ländlichen Raumes* 1 (2004), pp. 12–29; Hagen, 'Village life'.

⁹ H. Harnisch, 'Probleme einer Periodisierung und regionalen Typisierung der Gutsherrschaft im mitteleuropäischen Raum', *Jahrbuch für Geschichte des Feudalismus* 10 (1986), pp. 251–74; Heitz, 'Aspekte'; W. Rusiński, 'Some remarks on the differentiation of agrarian structure in East Central Europe from the 16th to 18th century', *Studia historiae oeconomicae* 13 (1978), pp. 83–95.

¹⁰ H. Harnisch, 'Die Gutsherrschaft. Forschungsgeschichte, Entwicklungszusammenhänge und Strukturelemente', *Jahrbuch für Geschichte des Feudalismus* 9 (1985), pp. 189–240; R. Sundhaussen, 'Zur Wechselbeziehung zwischen frühneuzeitlichem Außenhandel und ökonomischer Rückständigkeit in Osteuropa. Eine Auseinandersetzung mit der Kolonialthese', *Geschichte und Gesellschaft* 9 (1983), pp. 544–63.

As this list already clearly shows, the existence of 'serfdom', or 'second serfdom' for that matter, was not constitutive of demesne lordship. In fact, most European historiographies now avoid the term in the context of the early modern rural history of East Central and Eastern Europe. Together with the rising awareness that demesne lordship did not represent a uniform 'agrarian structure' throughout the area, studies also made it clear that Eastern Europe was certainly not a homogenous area of a single '(second) serfdom'. Even so-called 'Marxist' approaches, which referred to the term first coined by Friedrich Engels in a letter to Karl Marx,¹¹ tended to question the applicability of the concept, although there were supporters as well. As a result, a rigid distinction prevails between the limited number of regions in which early modern serfdom occurred and all others where rural power relations were not characterized by personal bondage. Serfdom of the rural population developed during the late sixteenth and early seventeenth century in the Duchies of Schleswig-Holstein (particularly in the south-eastern parts, where a commercial demesne economy was established), Mecklenburg, Pomerania and individual districts of the Electorate of Brandenburg (Uckermark, New Mark and the area of Cottbus).¹² With regard to the situation in Estonia, Livonia and Russia, where harsh manifestations of demesne lordship existed in certain regions, the status of the rural population as 'serfs' is questioned by some of the recent literature. For instance, by the time of peasant emancipation in Russia (1861), less than half of the rural male population lived in subjection on noble and church estates and only half of this group (i.e. less than a quarter of all village households in Russia) was obliged to render labour rents.¹³ The fact that the practice of serfdom varied greatly over time adds a further objection to those authors who assume a general institutionalization. Serfdom, even where it was legally sanctioned, was not established by a single act and, once established, did not last unchanged until the agrarian reforms and peasant emancipation. On the contrary, serfdom was the result of a gradual development; it was only installed for a very limited period of time and underwent constant change in its concrete consequences.

In all the other Eastern European territories serfdom was never established. Instead, contemporary sources as well as modern historical studies use variants of the concept of 'subjection' (German *Untertänigkeit*; Czech/Slovak *poddanství*; Polish *poddaństwo*; Hungarian *jobbágyság*), which stresses that the relationship between demesne lord and villagers was primarily tenurial (i.e. based on the tenure of land and holdings, as in the west, and not on personal bondage).¹⁴

¹¹ K. Marx/F. Engels, *Karl Marx, Frederick Engels: collected works*, (50 vols, 1975–2004), XLVI, p. 400; compare also XXXV, p. 706.

¹² J. Klußmann (ed.), *Leibeigenschaft. Bäuerliche Unfreiheit in der frühen Neuzeit* (2003).

¹³ E. Melton, 'The Russian peasantries, 1450–1860', in Scott (ed.), *Peasantries of Europe*, pp. 227–66; id., 'Gutsherrschaft'; A. Stanziani, 'Serfs, slaves or wage earners? The legal status of labour in Russia from a comparative perspective, 17th–19th centuries', *J. Global History* 3 (2008), pp. 183–202. For Livonia see also L. Arbusow, 'Das Bauernrecht des sog. Budberg-Schraderschen Landrechtsentwurfs von 1740 in ursprünglicher

Gestalt', *Mitteilungen aus der livländischen Geschichte* 25 (1937), pp. 377–404.

¹⁴ L. Enders, *Die Uckermark. Geschichte einer kurmärkischen Landschaft* (1992); L. Enders, 'Brandenburg', in J. Klußmann (ed.), *Leibeigenschaft. Bäuerliche Unfreiheit in der frühen Neuzeit* (2003), pp. 40–62; 48; Hagen, *Ordinary Prussians*, pp. 36–7; Melton, 'Gutsherrschaft', p. 332; T. Scott, 'Wandel und Beharrung der Untertänigkeit. Die südwestdeutsche Leibeigenschaft/Leibeigenschaft in komparativer Sicht', in M. Cerman and R. Luft (eds), *Untertanen, Herrschaft und Staat in Böhmen und im 'Alten Reich'* (2005), pp. 299–321.

Hence, the terms *demesne lordship* or *subjection*, as used by local historiographies, are far more appropriate than '(second) serfdom'. Due to some of the consequences of stronger forms of subjection, such as mobility restrictions, a clear distinction between a tenurial relationship and personal bondage is not always straightforward. Nevertheless, to confuse the two would be wrong. For instance, a comparative analysis shows that the introduction of mobility restrictions was not based on the understanding that the rural population was in personal bondage, but evolved out of the economic considerations of lords who were confronted with deserted farm holdings and the unpaid rent of villagers who left.¹⁵

II

Research in the past three decades has strengthened the doubts expressed in the historical schools of the former people's republics that Eastern European agrarian structure could be understood as a uniform system of rural repression and enserfment. A greater emphasis on aspects of the history of everyday life based on micro-historical approaches since the late 1980s has helped to re-evaluate the nature of *demesne lordship* and how it operated in a local context. Studies identified and addressed aspects of the independent decision-making by villagers and their institutions that were formerly all but ignored due to the assumption of a general oppression by the seigneurial powers. The drive of empirical case studies since the 1950s to investigate the actual economic organization of the *demesne* economy and the development of the *demesne* and subject economy, that is, to question the image derived from normative sources only, has been continued and now includes a much greater consideration of social historical aspects.¹⁶

This new research has established that large 'full' tenant farm holdings, those of between 20 and 40 ha. of land (50 to 100 acres) or more, displayed a marked commercial orientation. It refutes the prevailing image of a wretched 'peasant economy' whose development was undermined by seigneurial intervention and exploitation, and instead emphasizes successful market participation.¹⁷ Apart from the favourable development of grain markets, e.g. during the sixteenth or eighteenth centuries, long-term stagnation (and reduction in real terms) of

¹⁵ See here the discussion in Cerman, *Villagers and lords*. For a survey of measures id., 'Venkovské společnosti a agrárně-dějepiscké tvoření modelů v nové perspektivě. Srovnávací analýza středoevropských agrárních struktur od 14. do 17. století', *Časopis Matice moravské* 120 (2001), pp. 337–95.

¹⁶ Cerman, 'Agrardualismus'; M. Cerman and H. Zeitlhofer (eds), *Soziale Strukturen in Böhmen. Ein regionaler Vergleich von Wirtschaft und Gesellschaft in Gutsherrschaften, 16.–19. Jahrhundert* (2002); Hagen, 'Village life'; H. Kaak, 'Vom Erbzinsrecht zur Leibeigenschaft – Entstehung agrarischer Zwangsformen im frühneuzeitlichen Brandenburg', *Zeitschrift für Weltgeschichte* 8 (2007), pp. 71–103; Melton, 'Gutsherrschaft'; J. Peters (ed.), *Gutsherrschaft als soziales Modell.*

Vergleichende Betrachtungen zur Funktionsweise frühneuzeitlicher Agrargesellschaften (1995) including his introduction, 'Gutsherrschaftsgeschichte in historisch-anthropologischer Perspektive', pp. 3–21; id. (ed.), *Gutsherrschaftsgesellschaften im europäischen Vergleich* (1997); id., 'Gutsherrschaftsgeschichte und kein Ende. Versuch einer Auskunft zu aktuellen Ergebnissen und Schwierigkeiten in der Forschung', in E. Münch and R. Schattkowsky (eds), *Festschrift für Gerhard Heitz zum 75. Geburtstag* (2000), pp. 53–80.

¹⁷ Hagen, 'Village life'; H. Harnisch, 'Die Gutsherrschaft in Brandenburg. Ergebnisse und Probleme', *Jahrbuch für Wirtschaftsgeschichte* 4 (1969), pp. 117–47, esp. pp. 125–6; Harnisch, 'Probleme', p. 266; Melton, 'Gutsherrschaft', pp. 341–9.

rents in cash and kind supported the economic position of tenant agriculture.¹⁸ In several regions, successful proto-industrialization developed and was integrated into the demesne economy rather than being obstructed by it.¹⁹ In addition, studies reveal other forms of highly successful livelihood diversification strategies, for instance, in those Russian regions less favourably placed for continuous agriculture,²⁰ or in participation in small-scale trade or commercial agricultural specialization.²¹ The results of systematic research on the living standard of the rural population²² not only undermine traditional assumptions but should encourage comparative approaches of rural history between Western and Eastern Europe on the lines of the general reflections in Hagen's paper in this issue. Existing studies comparing Western and Eastern European rent levels of the tenant agricultural sector have already brought to light surprising results that deserve a closer investigation.²³

The assumption of a general 'backwardness' in Eastern European agriculture due to the establishment of demesne lordship determined that agricultural innovations were long overlooked or did not receive the level of attention necessary to call into question the overall idea. In more recent research, both demesne and tenant agriculture have been painted in a more favourable manner and found to reveal greater dynamism and innovation than previously thought. For one thing, demesne farming adapted to market conditions and often alternated between direct management and leasing. There is also a new interest in the professional

¹⁸ Enders, *Uckermark*; P. Guzowski, *Chłopi i pieniędzy na przełomie średniowiecza i czasów nowożytnych* (2008); Hagen, 'How mighty'; id., 'Village life'; id., *Ordinary Prussians*; H. Harnisch, *Bauern-Feudaladel-Städtebürgertum. Untersuchungen über die Zusammenhänge zwischen Feudalrente, bäuerlicher und gutsherrlicher Warenproduktion und den Ware-Geld-Beziehungen in der Magdeburger Börde* (1980); id., 'Peasants and markets. The background of the agrarian reforms in feudal Prussia East of the Elbe', in R. J. Evans and W. R. Lee (eds), *The German peasantry. Conflict and community in rural society from the eighteenth to the twentieth centuries* (1986), pp. 37–70; H. Kaak, *Eigenwillige Bauern, ehrgeizige Amtsmänner, distanzierte fürstliche Dorfschergen. Vermittelte Herrschaft im brandenburgischen Alt-Quilitz im 17. und 18. Jahrhundert* (2010), pp. 331–7; Melton, 'Gutsherrschaft', pp. 341–9; J. Peters, *Märkische Lebenswelten. Gesellschaftsgeschichte der Herrschaft Plattenburg-Wilsnack, Prignitz 1500–1800* (2007), pp. 231–51.

¹⁹ M. Cerman, 'Gutsherrschaft und untertäniges Gewerbe: die Herrschaften Frýdlant und Liberec in Nordböhmen', *Jahrbücher für Geschichte Osteuropas* 47 (1999), pp. 2–19; id., 'The organization of production and trade in proto-industrial textile production in early modern East-central Europe. The role of seigneurial influence and sub-contracting', in F. de Guy and J. W. Veluwenkamp (eds), *Entrepreneurs and institutions in Europe and Asia, 1500–2000* (2002), pp. 215–36;

K. Gestwa, *Proto-Industrialisierung in Rußland. Wirtschaft, Herrschaft und Kultur in Ivanovo und Pavlovo, 1741–1932* (1999); E. Melton, 'Population structure, the market economy, and the transformation of Gutsherrschaft in East Central Europe, 1650–1800. The cases of Brandenburg and Bohemia', *German Hist.* 16 (1998), pp. 297–327.

²⁰ E. Melton, 'Proto-industrialization, serf agriculture and agrarian social structure: two estates in nineteenth-century Russia', *Past and Present* 115 (1987), pp. 69–106; id., 'Russian peasantries'.

²¹ Cf. the studies of Erich Landsteiner and Alexander Panjek in this issue.

²² Cf. P. Guzowski, 'A changing economy: models of peasant budgets in fifteenth- and sixteenth-century Poland', *Continuity and Change* 20 (2005), pp. 9–26; W. Hagen, 'Working for the Junker: the standard of living of manorial laborers in Brandenburg, 1584–1810', *J. Modern History* 58 (1986), pp. 143–58; id., 'How mighty'; id., 'Village life'; id., *Ordinary Prussians*; Melton, 'Gutsherrschaft'; D. Štefanová, 'Ökonomie der Altenteiler in einer gutsherrlichen Gesellschaft, Herrschaft Frýdlant 1558–1750', in S. Lesemann and A. Lubinski (eds), *Ländliche Ökonomien. Arbeit und Gesellung in der frühneuzeitlichen Agrargesellschaft* (2007), pp. 251–86.

²³ Guzowski, 'Changing economy'; F. W. Henning, *Dienste und Abgaben der Bauern im 18. Jahrhundert* (1969).

management of the demesne economy, which, at least for larger estates, emerged in the sixteenth century at the latest.²⁴ For instance, case studies of magnate estate complexes in Bohemia highlight the success of seigniorial investment in a commercially profitable demesne economy in the second half of the sixteenth century.²⁵ On the basis of his Brandenburg research, Hagen has identified two periods of demesne expansion, one extensive (in the sixteenth century), another intensive (in the eighteenth century), based on the adoption of new techniques, management practices and forms of operation that helped to lift the Brandenburg demesne and tenant agriculture to amongst the most productive in the area.²⁶ In sixteenth-century Schleswig-Holstein and early eighteenth-century Mecklenburg, demesne farming started a pronounced change of agricultural techniques and field systems by introducing convertible husbandry in the form of *Koppelwirtschaft*. Originally designed for the more dairy-oriented Holstein demesnes, the system was adapted to the more grain-based Mecklenburg environment and produced dramatically improved yields. From there it spread into Brandenburg during the eighteenth century in yet another form.²⁷ Apart from more systematic and partly state-led projects of agricultural reform and settlement expansion,²⁸ we know of many smaller measures, particularly on princely estates, to improve management practices and techniques in demesne farming. Their effects need to be studied in greater detail.²⁹

The existence of labour rents (*corvée*) was one of the main justifications for generally declaring agriculture to be 'traditional' and 'backward' in regions of demesne lordship. Labour rents were identified as a serious burden for tenant agriculture, obstructing its development and, by their assumed lower productivity (which yet awaits conclusive empirical testing),³⁰ holding back the demesne sector as well. However, just as Eastern Europe was never a compact zone of a 'second serfdom', there is also reason to doubt that forced labour services were always the only – or even the dominant – source of labour for the demesne economy. Demesnes

²⁴ J. Čechura, *Adelige Grundherrn als Unternehmer. Zur Struktur südböhmischer Dominien vor 1620* (2000); Enders, *Uckermark*; Hagen, *Ordinary Prussians*; Kaak, *Bauern*; Peters, *Lebenswelten*; D. Schleinert, *Die Gutswirtschaft im Herzogtum Pommern-Wolgast im 16. und frühen 17. Jahrhundert* (2001); A. Vári, 'Der Großgrundbesitz als Konfliktgemeinschaft. Herrschaftsbeamte ungarischer Großgrundbesitzer im späten 18. und frühen 19. Jahrhundert', in J. Peters (ed.), *Gutsherrschaftsgesellschaften*, pp. 253–73.

²⁵ Čechura, *Grundherrn*.

²⁶ Hagen, *Ordinary Prussians*; id., 'Two ages of seigniorial economy in Brandenburg-Prussia: structural innovations in the 16th century, productivity gains in the 18th century', in P. Janssens, B. Yun Casalilla (eds), *European aristocracies and colonial elites* (2005), pp. 137–53.

²⁷ H. Dade, *Die Entstehung der mecklenburgischen Schlagwirtschaft* (1891); H.-H. Müller, *Märkische Landwirtschaft vor den Agrarreformen von 1807. Entwicklungstendenzen des Ackerbaues in der zweiten Hälfte des 18. Jahrhunderts* (1967); Rasmussen, 'Innovative feu-

dalism'; G. Schröder-Lembke, 'Die mecklenburgische Koppelwirtschaft', *Zeitschrift für Agrargeschichte und Agrarsoziologie* 4 (1956), pp. 49–60.

²⁸ See the discussion of the classic Oder- and Warthebruch enterprises in eighteenth-century Brandenburg-Prussia in Heinrich Kaak, 'Ländliche Bevölkerung in Brandenburg zwischen Anpassung und Offensive – Wege der sozialen und wirtschaftlichen Behauptung von Dörfern im zentralen Oderbruch zwischen 1720 bis 1850', *Zeitschrift für Agrargeschichte und Agrarsoziologie* 52 (2004), pp. 84–102 and id., *Bauern*.

²⁹ W. Eckert, *Kurland unter dem Einfluß des Merkantilismus. Ein Beitrag zur Staats- und Wirtschaftspolitik Herzog Jakobs von Kurland (1642–1682)* (1927), pp. 101–2, 106–7; Enders, *Uckermark*, pp. 496–7; Schleinert, *Gutswirtschaft*, p. 57.

³⁰ Methodological considerations make any analysis difficult. Cf. a judgement in favour of a productivity gap in D. Stone, 'The productivity of hired and customary labour: evidence from Wisbech Barton in the fourteenth century', *EcHR* 50 (1997), pp. 640–56.

operated on the basis of a mix of (mostly unpaid) forced labour services and wage labour (partly also compulsory).³¹ The balance between the two was subject to enormous variation between regions and periods.³² While, generally speaking, levels of labour rent were a function of the proportion of demesne land (the amount of which varied enormously chronologically and regionally), even neighbouring estates would adopt different labour practices due to local conditions or structural differences. Thus, the number of tenant farms was higher on Mecklenburg princely estates during the late seventeenth and early eighteenth century than on noble ones. To cope with the workload and to avoid overburdening the few remaining tenants, noble demesne farms were, on average, better equipped with hired farmhands and draught animals.³³ Short-term swings between wage labour and forced labour services were possible due to market downturns and a reduction of demesne farmland, which rendered existing services superfluous and promoted cash payments in lieu of services. This was the case, for instance, on early seventeenth-century East Prussian princely estates or in Schleswig-Holstein during the early eighteenth century.³⁴ Despite the introduction of serfdom and heavy labour rents, a large number of demesnes in Swedish Pomerania were operated with wage labour in the seventeenth and eighteenth century due to the lack of tenants.³⁵

In regions of a fully developed arable demesne economy, in which actual labour rent requirements could be high, there can be no doubt that forced labour usually represented a major burden for tenants and could have serious implications for how tenant farms were operated. Rather than constantly stressing the unbearable nature of labour rents as previous studies have done, and far from ignoring possible negative effects, the recent literature concentrates on the more interesting question of how tenant farms and smallholders actually coped with the demands. The finding that they could, and did so by various means, should not surprise. To begin with, decision-making in this respect was largely left to the farmers and their families. Full holdings could usually afford to hire a day-labourer and send him to work for the lord. Another possibility was that they sent one of the co-resident servants.³⁶ From the late seventeenth century, an increasing number of rural households were able to commute labour rents into cash payments (see below). At least some tenant farms were large enough to maintain an additional team of draught animals or farmhands to carry out the necessary obligations and work their own farms at the same time.³⁷ In one case of conflict, farmers in

³¹ Melton, 'Gutsherrschaft', p. 329; Zs. P. Pach, 'Zur Problematik der osteuropäischen Gutswirtschaft: Fronarbeit und Lohnarbeit auf den ungarischen Herrngütern im 16.–17. Jahrhundert', in *Studia historica in honorem Hans Kruus* (1971), pp. 154–75.

³² See for a more systematic discussion, M. Cerman, 'Constrained labour in early-modern rural East-central and Eastern Europe: regional variation and its causes', in A. Stanziani (ed.), *Labour constraints in Europe and Asia* (in press).

³³ T. Rudert, *Gutsherrschaft und Agrarstruktur. Der ländliche Bereich Mecklenburgs am Beginn des 18. Jahrhunderts* (1995).

³⁴ Kaak, *Gutsherrschaft*, p. 279; M. North, 'Lohnarbeit

und Fronarbeit in der ostpreußischen Landwirtschaft vom 16. bis zum 18. Jahrhundert', *Zeitschrift für Agrargeschichte und Agrarsoziologie* 36 (1988), pp. 1–22; id., 'Die frühneuzeitliche Gutswirtschaft in Schleswig-Holstein. Forschungsüberblick und Entwicklungsfaktoren', *Blätter für Deutsche Landesgeschichte* 126 (1990), pp. 223–42, at pp. 234–40.

³⁵ R. Schilling, *Schwedisch-Pommern um 1700. Studien zur Agrarstruktur eines Territoriums extremer Gutsherrschaft* (1989).

³⁶ See Cerman, 'Constrained labour'; Melton, 'Gutsherrschaft', pp. 328–41.

³⁷ Harnisch, 'Probleme'; Henning, *Dienste*, pp. 46–70, 116–19.

Holstein in 1706–07 stated that they could only render heavy labour services as long as it was guaranteed that they could hold farms large and profitable enough to supply them.³⁸ While, in some regions, farms had difficulties meeting demesne labour demands in peak seasons, in others they seem to have had sufficient manpower.³⁹ As a rule, the burden of labour rents meant that product and cash rents were very low by European comparison and strongly declined in real value during the late sixteenth and eighteenth century, which again suggests that future research should pay attention to comparative studies of rent and tax burdens between Eastern and Western Europe.⁴⁰

The older literature failed to appreciate that the introduction of labour rents could actually meet the rent preferences of tenants. In periods of low agricultural prices, farms and smallholdings would have difficulties raising the profits necessary to meet cash rent obligations whose real value had increased because of the depressed price level. Thus, it was logical for tenants to trade cash rents for newly introduced or increased forced labour services. In periods of higher grain prices, on the other hand, tenants would seek to avoid higher product rents and would have an incentive to retain as much production as possible for their own commercial sale and thus agree to labour rents. This reasoning points in the direction of the general conclusions of recent research. The initial increase of labour rents in the later middle ages and during the sixteenth century may have been based on negotiation and trade between lords and villagers to a much larger degree than once suspected. This means, and case studies of Brandenburg confirm this point, that lords had to offer something in return for villagers to agree to take up labour obligations (which may have been commuted for many decades) or to perform new ones. Amongst forms of compensation were reductions in cash and product rents, grants to add or lease additional land to tenant farms, or access to other agricultural resources. On several estates in sixteenth-century southern Bohemia, lords demanded new or increased existing labour rents, even if they had no immediate use for them and converted them to cash payments right away. In return, villagers secured the right of hereditary tenure. In case of a gradual extension of the demesne economy, they would start to call on them.⁴¹ Throughout all territories, however, it seems to be the case that once labour rents were introduced (with growing state backing of landlord powers), it could be increasingly difficult for villagers to defend their position against ever rising demands, all too often backed by threats and force. It would be wrong, however, to forget that the rural population maintained a bargaining position in this respect and could resort to acts of resistance and insubordination.

There were considerable changes over time in the weight of labour rents. After the Thirty Years' War, lords were largely unable to draw on their rents or increase them because of the

³⁸ S. Götsch, "Alle für einen Mann ...". *Leibeigene und Widerständigkeit in Schleswig-Holstein im 18. Jahrhundert* (1991), pp. 106, 113–14, 122–3; see Melton, 'Gutsherrschaft', pp. 341–49; H. Ch. Steinborn, *Abgaben und Dienste holsteinischer Bauern im 18. Jahrhundert* (1982).

³⁹ E. Dunsdorf, *Der große schwedische Kataster in Livland, 1681–1710* (1950), p. 169; S. Hoch, *Serfdom and social control in Russia: Petrovskoe, a village in Tambov* (1986); J. Kahk, *Peasant*, pp. 36–8, 44–8, 50–1,

57; J. Kahk, H. Ligi and E. Tarvel, *Beiträge zur marxistischen Agrargeschichte Estlands der Feudalzeit. Neue Ergebnisse, neue Probleme, neue Methoden* (1974), pp. 82–8, 115–17; D. Moon, *The Russian peasantry, 1600–1930. The world the peasants made* (1999), pp. 73–4.

⁴⁰ Harnisch, 'Die Gutsherrschaft in Brandenburg'; Hagen, 'Village life'; Hagen, *Ordinary Prussians*; Guzowski, 'Changing economy'; Henning, *Dienste*.

⁴¹ Cerman, 'Venkovské společnosti', p. 381.

lack of tenants, for instance in Mecklenburg, or in the Brandenburg districts of Prignitz and Uckermark. In the eighteenth century, by contrast, rising grain demand and the increasing tenant population formed the background of a new seigneurial push to increase *corvée* to allow an expansion of demesne farming, whose demand for labour would increase also due to the spread of more labour-intensive agricultural techniques. Villagers stubbornly resisted labour rents, often refusing to perform any labour services at all as long as the dispute lasted. They were willing to enter long and costly legal battles with their lords to prove that new services were against long-standing custom and therefore illegal.⁴² In response to this, demesne lords increasingly opted out of forced labour services and turned to employing servants and wage labourers, whose supply rose and whose real wages declined due to the strong population increase after the 'Thirty Years' War. Population growth also automatically inflated the number of available service days even if lords did not increase labour rent levels per tenant farm, smallholding or cottage. Then they commuted excess services into payments in lieu, the proceeds of which were used to pay wage labourers. Recent studies confirm the older hypothesis of a gradual abandonment of *corvée* even before the state agrarian reforms and 'peasant emancipation', but its extent needs to be studied more systematically.⁴³ If this were a general trend, it would deal another significant blow against the view of an unchanging 'feudal' demesne sector. To recap: with regard to labour rents, but not only in this respect, 'serfdom' and subjection were far more determined by processes of negotiation and local bargaining than traditional approaches, which painted villagers as helpless victims of powerful overlords, were willing to acknowledge.⁴⁴

The fact that lords had difficulties in raising labour rents unilaterally after the 'Thirty Years' War indicates a further weakness in traditional interpretations of demesne lordship, which held that the war formed a turning point in the formation or intensification of a *corvée*-based demesne lordship in the seventeenth century.⁴⁵ This view was based on the assumption of an alignment of interests between the (noble) Estates and the newly emerging absolutist princely rule after 1648 at the expense of the interests of the rural population. It was adopted, among others, by two influential survey studies for Brandenburg-Prussia⁴⁶ and formed the mainstream interpretation for developments in Bohemia and Moravia.⁴⁷ For Brandenburg, thorough research by Hartmut Harnisch and Lieselott Enders showed, by contrast, that the rise of demesne lordship and of the demesne economy was complete by 1600–20. Even

⁴² Hagen, 'Village life', p. 181; id., *Ordinary Prussians*; H. Harnisch, *Die Herrschaft Boitzenburg. Untersuchungen zur Entwicklung der sozialökonomischen Struktur ländlicher Gebiete in der Mark Brandenburg vom 14. bis zum 19. Jahrhundert* (1968), p. 195; id., 'Probleme', pp. 263–5; Kaak, *Gutsherrschaft*, pp. 274–5; Kaak, *Bauern*, pp. 167–200, 291–304, 338–40; Peters, *Lebenswelten*, pp. 641–2; G. Vogler, 'Die Entwicklung der feudalen Arbeitsrente in Brandenburg vom 15. bis 18. Jahrhundert. Eine Analyse für das kurmärkische Domänenamt Badingen', *Jahrbuch für Wirtschaftsgeschichte* 1 (1966), pp. 142–74, esp. pp. 156–62.

⁴³ Cerman, 'Constrained labour'.

⁴⁴ J. Peters, 'Eigensinn und Widerstand im Alltag. Abwehrverhalten ostelbischer Bauern unter Refeudalisierungsdruck', *Jahrbuch für Wirtschaftsgeschichte* 2 (1991), pp. 85–103, here p. 91.

⁴⁵ See in detail Cerman, 'Explaining the rise'; Cerman, *Villagers and lords*.

⁴⁶ F. Carsten, *The origins of Prussia* (1954); H. Rosenberg, *Bureaucracy, aristocracy and autocracy. The Prussian experience, 1660–1815* (1958). See also Hagen, 'Seventeenth-century crisis'.

⁴⁷ M. Hroch and J. Petráň, *17. století – krize feudální společnosti?* (1976).

before 1600, demesne farming was the dominant sector of landlord income and labour rents and legislation to restrict the mobility of the rural population and to force teenage children into seigneurial agricultural service were in place.⁴⁸ Demand incentives for an extension of demesnes were also far stronger before than after 1620–50, when grain prices were low and stagnated.⁴⁹ William Hagen's studies, too, argue persuasively that lords had massively lost authority due to the upheaval caused by the war; the situation was aggravated by further wars in the 1650s and 1670s. Although there were attempts to re-establish the pre-war order of demesne lordship with the help of the absolutist state in the 1650s, landlord extraction had to compete with that of the state (a 'postwar crisis in distribution'). Bargaining power was on the side of the villagers who had to be attracted, by lower rents, for example, to take over vacant holdings and render rents and forced labour. Villagers used their temporary strength in bargaining after the Thirty Years' War to avoid the growing pressure for labour rents. Brandenburg farmers took the opportunity – and paid a great deal of money – to be freed from labour rents once and for all.⁵⁰ Arable demesne farms had to be operated with wage labour or were leased, because the necessary labour rents were not available and burdens could not be increased.⁵¹

Case studies and surveys for Bohemia and Moravia have occasionally acknowledged the importance of the sixteenth-century tightening of seigneurial relations and the emergence of demesne farming after 1550 for post-1650 developments.⁵² The seventeenth-century system of 'demesne lordship based on labour rents' (*robotní velkostatek*), therefore, cannot be regarded as a qualitatively new development. After all, a comparative framework of analysis shows that Czech demesne lords must have faced similar problems – villagers' bargaining positions after the war, resistance and competition with state taxes – preventing the unilateral increase of burdens. Detailed, recent regional case studies show a strong diversity of war impact and patterns of recovery, which undermines the idea that there was a uniform implementation of state legislation supporting the demands of demesne lords.⁵³

⁴⁸ Harnisch, 'Gutsherrschaft in Brandenburg', p. 134; id., 'Probleme', pp. 253–5, 260–1; Kaak, 'Erbzinsrecht'; see, for similar arguments, Kaak, *Gutsherrschaft*, pp. 97–103, 361–2.

⁴⁹ Enders, *Uckermark*, pp. 342–3, 358, 372, 380–3; Harnisch, 'Probleme', pp. 253, 260–1.

⁵⁰ L. Enders, 'Individuum und Gesellschaft. Bäuerliche Aktionsräume in der frühneuzeitlichen Mark Brandenburg', in Peters (ed.), *Gutsherrschaft als soziales Modell* (1995), pp. 155–78, here p. 170.

⁵¹ Hagen, 'Seventeenth-century crisis'; Hagen, *Ordinary Prussians*, pp. 69–122; Enders, *Uckermark*, 343–7, 355–7; Kaak, 'Erbzinsrecht', 84–5; Melton, 'Gutsherrschaft', 314; Peters, *Lebenswelten*, pp. 366–87, 617–33.

⁵² V. Ledvinka, 'Rozmach feudálního velkostatku, jeho strukturální proměny a role v ekonomice českých zemí v předbělohorském období', *Folia historica Bohemica* 11 (1987), pp. 103–32; F. Matějka, *Feudální velkostatek a poddany na Moravě s přihlédnutím k přílehlému*

území Slezska a Polska (1959); id., *Cesta poddaného lidu na Moravě ke zněvolnění* (2000); E. Maur, 'Genese a specifické rysy českého pozdněfeudálního velkostatku', *Acta Universitatis Carolinae – phil. et hist.* 1 (1976), pp. 229–58; id., 'Poddanská otázka v předbělohorských Čechách', *Folia historica bohemia* 11 (1987), pp. 133–59; A. Míka, 'Feudální velkostatek v jižních Čechách 14.–17. století', *Historický sborník* 1 (1953), pp. 122–213. See for a more detailed discussion, M. Cerman, 'Gutsherrschaft vor dem "Weißen Berg". Zur Verschärfung der Erbuntertänigkeit in Nordböhmen 1380 bis 1620', in Peters (ed.), *Gutsherrschaftsgesellschaften*, pp. 91–111; id., 'Venkovské společnosti'.

⁵³ M. Cerman, 'Bohemia after the Thirty Years' War: some theses on population structure, marriage and family', *J. Family History*, 19 (1994); pp. 149–75; Cerman and Zeitlhofer (eds), *Soziale Strukturen*; J. Grulich, *Populační vývoj a životní cyklus venkovského obyvatelstva na jihu Čech v 16. až 18. století* (2008);

Both these revisions – the bargaining background of labour rents and the probable stalling of the seigneurial push in the first decades after the 'Thirty Years' War – must be included when discussing the wider implications of recent research on the nature of power relations within demesne lordship. Far from wielding nearly absolute power over rural subjects, 'demesne lordship as a social model' (a phrase coined by the Max Planck research group, 'Demesne lordship as a social historical phenomenon', at the University of Potsdam in the 1990s⁵⁴) emerges as a set of relations shaped by persistent negotiation and conflict between villagers and lords. The possible influence of villagers on the concrete manifestation of demesne lordship forms the basis for a more positive assessment of their rights and autonomy vis-à-vis their landlords but also of the function of village institutions. This new picture is backed firmly by the evidence presented for individual aspects of this relationship in micro-histories carried out for various territories and regions of demesne lordship, including also some of those in which outright serfdom was established after 1600.⁵⁵

New approaches thus explicitly address the degree to which the concrete character of subjection and serfdom were subject to local conditions, power relations, custom, cooperation, negotiation and conflict and the nature of these continuous processes in a local context. Other recent assessments try to dismiss these advances. Yet, the accusation that the new research is 'revisionist' and plays down the consequences of subjection and serfdom seems unfounded.⁵⁶ The results quoted do not deny that the conflicts arising from these localized processes were costly, and that villagers would certainly have preferred to do without them, but the important point is that there was scope to influence local conditions, that is, that the active participation of both sides is finally acknowledged. This result is best exemplified by what the population of the Brandenburg village of Stolpe, part of a royal estate near Berlin, achieved. On 15 December 1764, the whole village went to see the administration of the royal estates located in the city of Potsdam and suggested that they take the village's demesne sheep farm on a hereditary lease for a rent of 220 Talers per year (about the value of a small tenant farm). They further indicated that they would be ready to receive their own farms, which they held in lease, in hereditary tenure, if the estate administration gave them the buildings and equipment for free. Consequently, the people of Stolpe did nothing less than to apply for a complete change

Note 53 continued

E. Maur, *Gutsherrschaft und 'zweite Leibeigenschaft' in Böhmen. Studien zur Wirtschafts-, Sozial- und Bevölkerungsgeschichte (14.–18. Jahrhundert)* (2000), pp. 189–214; D. Štefanová, *Erbschaftspraxis, Besitztransfer und Handlungsspielräume von Untertanen in der Gutsherrschaft. Die Herrschaft Frýdlant in Nordböhmen, 1558–1750* (2009); H. Zeithofer, *Besitztransfer, Generationenbeziehungen und sozialer Wandel im südlichen Böhmerwald, 1640–1840* (in press).

⁵⁴ Arbeitsgruppe Gutsherrschaft der Max Planck-Gesellschaft (University of Potsdam). Cf. Cerman, 'Agrardualismus'; J. Peters, 'Gutsherrschaft. Ein Jahrzehnt Potsdamer Forschungserfahrungen', *Zeitschrift für Agrargeschichte und Agrarsoziologie* 53 (2005), pp. 77–85; id. (ed.), *Gutsherrschaft*.

⁵⁵ Cf. as collections of studies, Cerman and Zeithofer (eds), *Soziale Strukturen*; Cerman and Luft (eds), *Untertanen*; Peters (ed.), *Gutsherrschaft*; id., *Konflikt und Kontrolle in Gutsherrschaftsgesellschaften* (1995); id., *Gutsherrschaftsgesellschaften*. For surveys see: Cerman, 'Agrardualismus'; Hagen, 'Village life'; Kaak, 'Erbzinsrecht'; J. Peters, 'Neue Ansätze zur Erforschung der Geschichte der ländlichen Gesellschaft', in L. Enders and K. Neitmann (eds), *Brandenburgische Landesgeschichte heute* (1999), pp. 33–68; id., 'Gutsherrschaftsgeschichte'.

⁵⁶ L. Enders, 'Grundherrschaft und Gutswirtschaft. Zur Agrarverfassung der frühneuzeitlichen Altmark', *Zeitschrift für Agrargeschichte und Agrarsoziologie* 55 (2007), pp. 95–112, here p. 109.

of the whole agrarian system in their village: abolishing demesne farming and receiving full and hereditary ownership of their tenant farms. And their mission was a success! The royal administration finally agreed to their proposal in 1769. The only condition was that the village established plots for four new cottage households.⁵⁷

Recent empirical research also shows clearly that even under conditions of 'harsh' demesne lordship and serfdom, serfs and subjects could call upon custom to hold in check pressures that were regarded as violating their rights. By means of such resistance, Holstein villagers defended the customary tenures of their holdings or resisted further increases of labour rents. There was certainly no uniform idea of serfdom among demesne lords and legal scholars and contemporary attitudes varied tremendously. Nevertheless, a certain basic understanding that the system carried mutual obligations prevailed.⁵⁸

Village, seigneurial and state courts could be important means of conflict resolution. The engagement of serfs and subjects alike in long, tedious and very expensive court battles has been noted in rare agreement in the literature. In most territories, villagers retained the right to petition the territorial prince or turn to state courts to uphold their rights or interfere in case of unjustified seigneurial demands. Journeys, like those of Livonian subjects who travelled all the way to in Stockholm to address the high court and the king about their grievances towards their demesne lords,⁵⁹ occurred frequently all over the area. In certain territories, the ruling of state courts in favour of villagers' rights has been regarded as decisive in limiting the consequences of demesne lordship. This was the case in the Electorate of Brandenburg, where the chamber court was frequently engaged to resolve conflicts about villagers' property rights, their duties or their access to common resources or lakes.⁶⁰

Contrary to previous accounts, secure property rights of the subject population seemed to have been the rule in East Central and Eastern European demesne lordship.⁶¹ Older research concluded that the expropriation of tenant farms and the forceful confiscation of subject land (German *Bauernlegen*) to increase demesne farmland had traditionally been overstated. The extent of secure property rights, the existence of *de facto* security of tenure even in cases of restricted tenurial rights – such as tenures for a limited number of years – and the ways in which tenants could dispose over their properties and holdings, have been the subject of recent empirical investigations, for instance, in Bohemia, Brandenburg, Moravia and Poland.⁶²

⁵⁷ H. Zückert, 'Vielfalt der Lebensverhältnisse in unmittelbarer Nachbarschaft. Die "Gleichzeitigkeit des Ungleichzeitigen" in brandenburgischen Dörfern', in Peters (ed.), *Gutsherrschaftsgesellschaften*, pp. 311–21, here pp. 316–17.

⁵⁸ Examples in S. Götsch, *Leibeigene*; H. Kaak and M. Schattkowsky (eds), *Herrschaft. Machtentfaltung über adligen und fürstlichen Grundbesitz in der Frühen Neuzeit* (2003); J. Klußmann, *Lebenswelten und Identitäten adliger Gutsuntertanen. Das Beispiel des östlichen Schleswig-Holsteins im 18. Jahrhundert* (2002); id. (ed.), *Leibeigenschaft*.

⁵⁹ J. Kahk and E. Tarvel, *An economic history of the Baltic countries* (1997), p. 62.

⁶⁰ Cf. Enders, *Uckermark*, pp. 182–4, 193–201, 344–51, 359, 384–6, 392–8; Kaak, *Gutsherrschaft*, p. 101; id., 'Erbzinsrecht', p. 83; Kaak, *Bauern*.

⁶¹ Cf. M. Cerman, 'Social structure and land markets in late medieval Central and East-central Europe', *Continuity and Change* 23 (2008), pp. 55–100, pp. 78–82.

⁶² For instance, Cerman and Zeitlhofer (eds), *Soziale Strukturen*; Cerman and Luft (eds), *Untertanen*; B. Chocholáč, *Selské peníze. Sonda do finančního hospodářství poddaných na západní Moravě koncem 16. a v 17. století* (1999); Grulich, *Vývoj*; Guzowski, *Chłopi*; Hagen, *Ordinary Prussians*, pp. 136–48, 245–59; Štefanová, *Erbschaftspraxis*; A. Velková, *Krutá vrchnost, ubozí poddaní? Proměny venkovské rodiny a společnosti v 18.*

The results show that the villagers and their families had considerable autonomy in property transactions. Although seigneurial intervention did occur, it was limited to rare instances and systematically related only to cases in which the economic viability of holdings (meaning: the ability to pay rents and services regularly) was potentially in danger. Other cases involved individuals calling upon seigneurial interference for assistance to enforce contracts where they felt that agreements had been broken or the conditions of transfer remained unfulfilled and thus needed the intervention of a third party.⁶³

Cases of conflict with demesne lords and the handling of property transfers also shed light on village courts and their responsibilities and actions with regard to conflict resolution and a range of legal affairs. In a more general perspective, this is part of a growing interest in the role of village institutions and of the village community within demesne lordship. Studies of this area also confirm that lords had to rely on village-level cooperation to enforce their power.⁶⁴ Yet, the traditional opinion that village communities did not exist as institutions, that the powers of the privileged village officials (village headmen) had been cut and downgraded to make them mere seigneurial representatives at the village level has again been challenged by detailed empirical research. Village communities controlled considerable common resources, either on their own authority or (sometimes) in agreement with their lords. Research has revealed cases in which villages systematically enlarged common resources, for instance by acquiring deserted land, or made village land available for the settlement of cottagers, or sold individual pieces of common pastures to alleviate debt or extraordinary burdens (such as in wartime). Their function was particularly important in the event of conflicts with demesne lords, when village officials acted as representatives in negotiations. In short, in much the same way as there was an important sphere of autonomous action for individual villagers (over labour rents, market linkages, property transfers), there was also autonomy for village communities and village institutions. The denial of the existence of village communities has long prevented the analysis of everyday practice. With new micro-historical case studies, their role now gradually emerges.⁶⁵

Taken together, recent studies support existing criticism of traditional interpretations of the

Note 62 *continued*

v18. a první polovině 19. století na příkladu zapadočeského panství Štáhlavy (2009); Zeitlhofer, *Besitztransfer*.

⁶³ P. O. Christiansen, 'Die vertrackte Hofübernahme. Zur gutsherrlichen Rekrutierung von Bauern in der ländlichen Gesellschaft des östlichen Dänemark im 18. Jahrhundert', *Historische Anthropologie* 3 (1995), pp. 144–65; Hagen, *Ordinary Prussians*, pp. 136–48, 245–59; A. Pazderová, 'Gutsherrschaft und Untertanen in der Herrschaft Reichenau an der Kněžna', in Cerman and Luft (eds), *Untertanen*, pp. 177–201; Štefanová, *Erbschaftspraxis*; A. Velková, *Krutá vrchnost*.

⁶⁴ Cf. e.g. Hoch, *Serfdom*; P. Himl, *Die ‚armen Leüte‘ und die Macht. Die Untertanen der südböhmischen Herrschaft Český Krumlov im Spannungsfeld zwischen Gemeinde, Obrigkeit und Kirche (1680–1781)* (2003);

E. Melton, 'Household economies and communal conflicts on a Russian serf estate, 1800–1817', *J. Social History* 26 (1993), pp. 559–85; S. Ogilvie, 'Communities and the "second serfdom" in early modern Bohemia', *Past and Present* 187 (2005), pp. 69–119.

⁶⁵ L. Enders, 'Die Landgemeinde in Brandenburg. Grundzüge ihrer Funktion und Wirkungsweise vom 13. bis zum 18. Jahrhundert', *Blätter für deutsche Landesgeschichte* 129 (1993), pp. 195–256; id., *Uckermark*; Th. Rudert, H. Zückert (eds), *Gemeindeleben. Dörfer und kleine Städte im östlichen Deutschland (16.–18. Jahrhundert)* (2001); Štefanová, *Erbschaftspraxis*; H. Zückert, 'Die brandenburgische Landgemeinde bis zum Dreißigjährigen Krieg. Ihre Organe und Kompetenzen', in H. S. Schmidt, A. Holenstein and A. Würzler (eds), *Gemeinde, Reformation, Widerstand* (1998), pp. 25–43.

theory of demesne lordship, against the concept of a fundamental ‘dualism’⁶⁶ of early modern agrarian structures in Western and Eastern Europe. Theoretical and methodical innovations within social history make possible a long overdue ‘view from the village’ within highly diversified societies of demesne lordship.⁶⁷ Demesne lordship appears to be regionally strongly differentiated and the concrete manifestations of the system are regarded as the result of a process of everyday ‘bargaining’, which was often accompanied by conflict. The aim of recent research has been to identify the concrete scope of action and decision-making by villagers. This has clearly resulted in a new picture of demesne lordship, which differs considerably from those earlier studies that took a purely or predominantly seigneurial perspective. The effort to overcome the notion of an ‘agrarian dualism’ also resulted in research that considered a comparative perspective of societies with ancien régime structures of landlordship in Western and Southern Europe.⁶⁸

III

The studies presented here contribute to the effort to reinterpret the character and the consequences of demesne lordship. Aleksander Panjek’s article relates to the growing uneasiness with the idea of a European agrarian ‘dualism’ and poses the question of whether it makes sense to analyse developments in early modern western Slovenia in the context of the original theory. While several of the features of demesne lordship were present, such as relatively large, territorially compact noble estates and seigneurial powers of legal jurisdiction, others developed only in a rudimentary manner or were checked by the existence of secure tenant property rights or by villagers’ resistance. The article’s detailed analysis of estate valuations shows convincingly that income from villagers’ customary rents in cash and kind represented more than 50 per cent of the total landlord income and were supplemented by proceeds derived from functions of banal lordship. With regard to possible elements of demesne lordship, the conversion of unused labour rents to cash payments formed a significant share of rents in cash and kind only on individual estates. Moreover, the profit from or value of the demesne economy remained relatively marginal. Panjek argues that the relatively poor agricultural conditions were responsible for the marginal role of the demesne economy here. Also with regard to economic characteristics of the original model – the dominance of demesne farming – the analysis shows that the case does not fit.

Despite finding different causes for the development, the results correspond very well to those of Erich Landsteiner’s paper on Lower Austria discussed below, where a demesne economy did not emerge to its fullest extent, either. Panjek also refers to the tenant sector, which relied on additional extra-agricultural economic activities, in this case trade rather than viticulture. Slovenian lords supported these forms of by-employment vis-à-vis town or territorial intervention because the diversification of livelihoods secured the continuous flow of

⁶⁶ Cf. Peters (ed.), *Gutsherrschaft*; and recently L. Enders, ‘Grundherrschaft und Gutswirtschaft’.

⁶⁷ Hagen, ‘Village life’.

⁶⁸ Cf. H. Wunder, ‘Das Selbstverständliche denken.

Ein Vorschlag zur vergleichenden Analyse ländlicher Gesellschaften in der Frühen Neuzeit, ausgehend vom “Modell ostelbische Gutsherrschaft”, in Peters (ed.), *Gutsherrschaft als soziales Modell*, pp. 23–49.

rents and dues in a poor agricultural environment. This finding relates to the discussion about the relationship between demesne lordship and proto-industrial development in early modern Eastern Europe. As mentioned before, and contrary to views expressed in the original theories of proto-industrialization, recent findings have established that a demesne-based seigneurial economy and proto-industrial activities could co-exist and form an integrated economic system.

As Panjek indicates in the introduction to his article, debates about the classification of individual territories one way or another may ultimately prove to be futile. Even though some authors give greater weight to factors concerning seigneurial powers (typical of approaches of ‘agrarian constitution’), and others to economic conditions, such as the role of a commercial demesne economy, attempts to classify whole areas or territories invariably result in ignoring local or regional conditions to a certain degree. Traditional readings of demesne lordship thus appear less flexible than they ought to be.

The same general question as discussed for western Slovenia – which way to classify the experiences within a particular territory in a general east-west divide of agrarian structure – forms the starting point for Erich Landsteiner’s essay on Lower Austria, the north-eastern province of the Austrian Lands proper. Acknowledging that the development towards demesne lordship and a commercial demesne economy was never fully completed, Austrian agrarian historians coined the concept of an intermediary form (which they called ‘economic lordship’, *Wirtschaftsherrschaft*) drawing on the characteristics of seigneurialism in the provinces of Upper and Lower Austria. Landsteiner sets his case study in the comparative context of recent empirical research critical of the notion of a ‘dualism’ of European agrarian structures. He refers to the background of sixteenth-century population growth and economic development in Lower Austria. To question the existing interpretations on the causes of change in Lower Austria – the structure of lordship rights, princely intervention to preserve the legal status of the villagers or the lack of commercialization – his analysis proposes an alternative by linking the push of the Estates for higher rents and income from their rural properties to the financial constraints faced by the territorial prince who was engaged in continuous warfare with the Ottoman Empire in Hungary and consequently desperate to increase tax revenue. The approach sheds new light on the standardization of labour rent levels in Lower Austria during the sixteenth century, which was accompanied by intensive conflicts and outright peasant uprisings. The author interprets the move as an opportunity to increase income from princely estates: as demesne farming remained very limited in most parts of the country, the newly introduced labour rents were not needed and were thus automatically commuted into cash payments in lieu. Additional labour rents thus increased direct (money) income, but also the value of estates when they were mortgaged.

Rather than the factors outlined by the previous literature, Landsteiner suggests that it was the specific agro-system of Lower Austria, in particular the relatively prominent presence of a highly commercialized viticulture meeting the demand of Vienna, the army garrisons in Hungary and export markets in Germany, which limited the landlords’ option of introducing a commercial demesne economy based on labour rents. On the one hand, seigneurial viticulture was based on a different organization of work from that of demesne arable agriculture. The use of low-quality forced labour could damage the plants and thus the viability of this particular type of agriculture. If services were used, they were confined to transport duties, such as hauling

wine to markets. Specialized tenant viticulture, on the other hand, provided villagers with a strategy to undermine services, because it made draught animals unnecessary and allowed the sub-partition of holdings (and thus a reduction of labour rent levels per holding, which were geared to full farm holdings). Despite seigneurial interference and attempts at regulation, there was a pronounced growth in the number of smallholdings over the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, which were unable to provide the draught services that would have been required to extend demesne arable farming in Lower Austria.

In his analysis of demesne grain production on royal estates in Poland, Piotr Guzowski revisits the role the international market played in the development of the Polish demesne economy and demesne lordship during the sixteenth and early seventeenth century. While the influence of cereal exports has always been acknowledged by Polish research, the early modern 'east-west division of labour' postulated by world system theories, which relied on the influential studies of the Polish economic historian Marian Małowist,⁶⁹ identified them as major cause of the emergence of a commercial demesne economy in East Central and Eastern Europe. General criticisms of this theory were discussed earlier. There has been some debate in Poland about the real effect of exports on the Polish economy, but there is now agreement that during the period of peak exports, they formed only about five per cent of the total grain production during the sixteenth century, rising to a possible maximum of 10 to 17 per cent before 1650. Exports may have reached as much as 25 per cent of *commercial* grain production during the sixteenth century, but even the higher bound estimates suggest that domestic consumption played a much greater role than the 'export hypothesis' would acknowledge.

Following a seminal study by Stanisław Mielczarski,⁷⁰ Guzowski's paper investigates the price effects of grain exports in the individual parts of the kingdom. In this period, rye for exports was mainly supplied from the regions of Royal Prussia and Masovia, which were favourably located for access to the main port, Gdańsk. According to this analysis, grain exports were therefore an incentive for demesne farming only in some regions. In others the sector was geared to different markets. It would thus be incorrect to assume that a uniform type of export-led demesne farming emerged. Outlining some of its basic characteristics, Guzowski concludes that the domestic market must receive greater attention as a factor in the establishment of demesne lordship in Poland.

William Hagen's paper is a call to step up efforts to analyse the development of the early modern rural society and economy within a unified, comparative framework that includes all parts of Europe. For him, the 'yeoman farm' might usefully form the research focus, because it was the unit of agricultural production dominating the sector to a varying degree all over early modern Europe. Based on his own research on the commercial grain production and the livelihood of tenant farms and smallholdings under Brandenburg and Polish demesne lordship⁷¹ as well as other recent empirical research questioning the 'decline' of the peasantry in early modern Western Europe, Hagen's 'yeomanry' model stresses the flexibility and

⁶⁹ M. Małowist, 'Die Getreidehandelspolitik des Adels in den Ostseeländern', *Hansische Geschichtsblätter* 75 (1957), pp. 29–47; id., 'The economic and social development of the Baltic countries from the fifteenth to the seventeenth centuries', *EcHR* 12 (1959), pp. 177–89.

⁷⁰ S. Mielczarski, *Rynek zbożowy na ziemiach polskich w drugiej połowie XVI i pierwszej połowie XVII wieku* (1962).

⁷¹ See Hagen, *Ordinary Prussians*.

dynamics of tenant farmers ('agrarian entrepreneurs', whether on hereditary or non-hereditary tenures), their market involvement and their reliance on the wage labour of servants and day labourers to run their farms along with the family labour. He argues for comparative studies of rural living standards across early modern Europe. The substantial area cultivated by full farm holdings in some parts of Europe (20 to 40 ha or up to 100 acres) also questions the artificial separation between 'peasant agriculture' and 'capitalist agriculture' based on the size of farm units.

The paper focuses on characteristics common to most or all parts of Europe, such as the obligation of tenants to pay rents and taxes, and, far from imposing a uniform structure, outlines differences, such as personal legal status, tenurial and property rights or the seigneurial regime and degree of commercialization individual societies experienced. The persistence of a large group of substantial tenant farm holdings, according to Hagen, is a sign of their flexibility, adaptability and economic success. He refers to available evidence of the agrarian innovations and productivity gains achieved by the yeomanry but also by smallholdings, questioning the long-standing belief in 'peasant stagnation' and its alternate, that progress was solely restricted to 'consolidated farms'. This question of the development of productivity will demand more attention in future research in a comparative perspective. As with many of the recent comparative research efforts – see, for instance, the CORN or the COST A 35 publication series – this paper strengthens the case for questioning and overturning conventional master narratives of all forms of agricultural 'exceptionalism' in early modern Europe.

IV

For the time being, the term 'demesne lordship' continues to be used as an analytical tool in European rural history, but it is no longer understood to describe a distinct 'agrarian constitution' or to justify the case for a European 'agrarian dualism'. Rather, it represents a form of umbrella term for regionally differentiated rural power relations and economic structures in early modern East Central and Eastern European rural societies. Along with current efforts to make available for international debate the results of recent empirical investigations into economic and social development in these regions, this research discusses long-term processes of change in European-wide comparison. Naturally, existing differences must not be ignored, but certainly they must not be interpreted in the context of a mere deterministic narrative of distinct 'agrarian constitutions' or 'agrarian exceptionalism'.

The studies published here represent a further step towards this aim. The pieces by Panjek and Landsteiner on western Slovenia and Lower Austria, as well as Hagen's call for a unified approach towards early modern European rural history, all question the fragile and inconclusive nature of the idea of an 'agrarian dualism'. Guzowski's analysis sheds light on the functioning and differentiation of forms of demesne lordship by means of a regional comparison of the demesne economy in sixteenth-century Poland. All the papers contribute further to the undermining of the received understanding of early modern rural societies in East Central and Eastern Europe.

Panjek's paper indicates that occupational diversification of villagers and the presence of non-agricultural income have been overlooked in previous research on the area. This probably

holds true, to at least some extent, for early modern East Central and Eastern Europe as a whole. How far the economic pursuits of villagers could, on the contrary, influence and frustrate seigneurial economic strategies becomes obvious from Erich Landsteiner's contribution. The highly commercialized environment of viticulture and its impact on social structure may have determined, among other factors, that the landlord push to extend the demesne economy more systematically remained futile in Lower Austria. That a uniform pattern of demesne farming did not exist in sixteenth-century Poland is the conclusion to be drawn from Guzowski's careful study of the influence of grain exports on demesne farming in royal estates. The view that the export stimulus was the sole or even primary factor in the rise of Polish demesnes is not supported by his analysis. Instead, the regional context seems more important. This is a common theme in all the papers presented here: all support the need to acknowledge regional variations in the character of lordship. Together, they support William Hagen's argument that the idea of structural divides should be put to one side and comparative investigations of rural living standards should be encouraged, as one of the most important ways in which our understanding of European rural history can be developed. And so these papers not only illuminate, but also offer an agenda for the future.