I. Introduction

More than 50 years ago, Jerome Blum published an excellent survey on ‘The rise of serfdom in Eastern Europe’. (Blum 1957) Although in some respects outdated - e. g. his postulation of a strict ‘dualism’ in European agrarian structure since the later Middle Ages - it discusses in a concise manner the main possible explanations for the establishment of demesne lordship (Gutsherrschaft) and a commercial demesne economy (Gutswirtschaft) in regions of East-central and Eastern Europe after 1500. His survey can thus still serve as a good starting point.

The rise of the early-modern demesne economy producing for the market, which forms the focus of this paper, is part of the process which strengthened the feudal powers of noble landowners in many areas of East-central and Eastern Europe. Timing and extent of this development as well as the consequences for the rural subject population has been subject of new extensive research over the last two decades, when studies also focused on the considerable regional variation. This paper will avoid general reflections on this debate.¹ It will present a brief survey of the main explanations put forward for the changes in agrarian structure and will then discuss and critically evaluate three theories in greater detail.

II. Approaches to explain the rise of the early modern ‘demesne economy’

One group of explanations argues that the establishment of a commercial demesne economy by noble landlords in East-central and Eastern Europe in the early modern period was possible only because of conditions created by the economic expansion of the thirteenth and early fourteenth century. The older literature following this hypothesis gave more weight to what they regarded as special institutional and constitutional characteristics and their long-term continuity in East-central and Eastern European territories, whereas more recent variants such as the ones by Jerzy Topolski or by Robert Brenner stress the impact of the crisis of the later Middle Ages as the decisive turning point. (see also Blum 1957: 819-822; Czaja et al. 2005: 117-194, 438, 442, 444; Wallerstein 1976: 95) When lords in the east of Europe were confronted with the decline of feudal rents (just like lords in the west) they managed to shift the burden of the crisis to the peasantry, because they lacked the institutional means and the support to defend themselves against this refeudalization. „By the end of the fifteenth century then, from the Elbe to the Volga, most of the peasantry were well on their way to becoming serfs. “ (Blum 1957: 821)

This approach partly draws arguments from other, separate explanations. To begin with, the power of the nobility and the Estates and the weakness of the state are usually regarded as important elements in explaining why landlords were able to weaken the rights of their peasant tenants and could successfully establish a commercial demesne economy, which also built on extensive economic and trade privileges. Two further factors can be added to the argument concerning the social balance of power within the territories in this area. First, the power of the nobility undermined the political and economic influence of towns and cities in an environment in which the share of the urban population was generally relatively low. Secondly, noble landlords were granted legal jurisdiction over their subject peasant tenants by the state - not only in minor matters, such as in local concerns and neighbourhood conflicts, but also and particularly those of high jurisdiction. This combination of tenurial powers as landlords and of legal ones (usually called ‘judicial lordship’) put the rural population in a weak position. In some territories, subjects of noble and ecclesiastical lords lost access to princely courts altogether. This meant that they had no legal means left to fight against measures of their landlords which they regarded as violations of their customary rights. Some studies argue that the right to order and receive labour rents or forced labour services (corvée) was linked to judicial lordship. Thus, noble landlords acquired a powerful instrument to build
a demesne economy based on the extraction of forced labour services. (Blum 1957: 822-26, 833-35; Schmidt 1997: 127-130)

Yet, the combination of land lordship and powers of legal jurisdiction was not limited to territories of demesne lordship of the early-modern demesne economy, but also occurred in the west, where extensive direct management farming based on heavy forced labour services was exceptional and landlord income was mainly based on peasant tenants’ cash rents. Moreover, in some territories of East-central and Eastern Europe, the rural population did maintain access to territorial legal institutions and even successfully fought legal battles against landlords. Yet, demesne lordship and the demesne economy developed nevertheless. Finally, there were areas and territories in East-central Europe in which there was a dense urban network and rates of urbanization were high, sometimes approaching western European levels. Examples would be Lower Silesia, Upper Lusatia, Bohemia, Moravia, Royal Prussia (Western Prussia) and areas of Little Poland. Again, these characteristics could not prevent the establishment of demesne lordship and of a demesne economy.

Blum was aware that some of the influences did not play a role in all parts of Eastern Europe and he carefully differentiated. He was left with only one factor common to all territories, which “was the acquisition by the nobles of political power in the state (...) It seems to me that the most important reason for this divergence in the evolution of the lord-peasant relation in the two regions [i. e. Western and Eastern Europe - MC] lay in their differences in political development. “ (Blum 1957: 836)

This argument cannot account for the considerable variation of patterns of demesne lordship and the demesne economy within individual territories and regions. This approach suffers from the prevailing fundamental assumption of a strict ‘dualism’ of agrarian structure between Western and Eastern Europe and disregards deviations from what is understood as the dominant pattern in either region as minor exceptions without importance. This does not mean that the question of noble power was without influence in current work (see e. g. Schmidt 1997: 127-130), but research into social practice of demesne lordship (and indeed of rent-based landlordship in the west), emphasizing a ‘view from the village’ (a phrase coined by Hagen 1998), found considerable regional and even local variation in the concrete legal, economic and social manifestation of the system, which are now regarded as the rule. As variation receives much more attention than in the past, ‘strong’ theories of the rise of
demesne lordship and the demesne economy have increasingly become subject to criticism. (see e. g. Cerman 2004; Cerman/Zeitloher 2002; Heitz 1985; Kaak/Schattkowsky 2003; Klußmann 2003; Melton 1988; Peters 1995ab; Peters 1997; Peters 2000; Vári 1997)

Blum introduces a further factor to explain the rise of ‘serfdom’ (demesne lordship) in East-central and Eastern Europe: the establishment of a commercial noble demesne economy for the market during the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. (Blum 1957: 822, 826-33) For him, the labour demand of demesne farming was the reason for restricting the freedom of mobility among the Eastern European subject population and for the rise in forced labour services. Blum links these market-related economic activities of noble lords to the decline of their income, the widespread desertions of tenant farms during the late medieval crisis, to rising grain prices and to the surge in demand caused by sixteenth-century population growth. The rest of this paper will investigates some of these explanations in greater detail.

III. Medieval roots? The theory of medieval continuities

Several schools of thought of the debate on demesne lordship relate to the general hypothesis that early modern developments in rural East-central and Eastern Europe could only be explained by a long-term perspective and that they were rooted in settlement and power structures formed in the Middle Ages. They can, perhaps, be grouped in two separate strings: one belongs to traditions in historiography that put more emphasis on legal and constitutional aspects. In this approach, the special feudal structure formed the basis for the specific changes in agrarian structure during the early modern period. This possible relationship is frequently mentioned in surveys on agrarian development and in articles on demesne lordship in scholarly dictionaries (Gutsherrschafft 1978; Gutsherrschafft 1989; Henning 1994: 269-76), yet the description often remains vague and lacks references to concrete empirical case studies. Another group of studies stresses the consequences of the late medieval crisis, which - though affecting landlords in a similar manner all over Europe - caused different outcomes in East and West. (Brenner 1988; Brenner 1996; Kriedte 1983; Topolski 1965; Topolski 1968; Topolski 1981; Topolski 1998)

Robert Brenner argued, e. g., that feudal lords in East-central and Eastern Europe succeeded in shifting the burden of the late medieval crisis’ economic consequences on the peasantry,
because their power to resist was limited. Social cohesion between individual peasant farmers in villages east of the river Elbe was smaller, because the partly extensive village common resources of their western counterparts were absent. In particular, they lacked the institution of village communities which would have been important to defend their liberties and property rights. In addition landlords acquired the extensive properties and the rights of lower jurisdiction from village bailiffs, either because their holdings became deserted during the crisis or they systematically expelled them by force and downgraded their position and function. (Brenner 1988)

In the east and west of Europe, landlords were confronted with a secular decline of income (Harnisch 1969: 132f, 136, 143; Knittler 1989; Scott 2002: 183), caused particularly by the decrease in real value of their rents and by widespread desertions and flight of tenants in the later Middle Ages. Landlords in East-central Europe could not raise rents in order to prevent further flight of tenants. In consequence, they turned to direct management, extending their demesnes on deserted fields of peasant farms. Weakness of territorial rulers and the acquisition of judicial lordship gave landlords access to forced labour services - demanded occasionally first, but increasingly over time - and the power to pass legislation on mobility restrictions which were intended to prevent further desertions of peasant tenant farms. (Adamczyk 2001: 163-64; Kaak 2007; Schmidt 1997; Sundhaussen 1983) Desertions, demographic decline and the lack of a sufficient labour force thus were the decisive factors for landlords to systematically establish a commercial demesne economy in East-central and Eastern Europe from the fifteenth century onwards (Kriedte 1983) and their legal and political powers led to a considerable restriction of peasant rights and liberties. (Schmidt 1997)

This sketch of a general development, however, breaks down in the light of more recent research. Apart from the fact that the older literature generally exaggerated the degree of peasant liberties in high and late medieval East-central and Eastern Europe (e. g. Blum 1957: 815, 819; Schmidt 1997: 39, 44; see now Cerman (in print); Hagen 1998: 148; Münch 1997), empirical studies on Bohemia, Brandenburg and Lower Silesia have shown major discontinuities in the development of demesne lordship and the demesne economy between the late fourteenth and the sixteenth centuries which do not correspond to the existing theories. These also contradict more traditional suggestions that the agrarian structure was already embedded in the organization of the late medieval rural society and economy.
Despite the fact that landlord farms were widespread in East-central Europe in the later Middle Ages, there was no direct continuity of medieval direct management and the demesne economy after 1500. For the Lower Silesian Duchy of Wrocław, Richard Hoffmann has demonstrated fragmentation of estate ownership, and strong shifts in demesne landholding and landlord property between the thirteenth and early sixteenth-century. (Hofmann 1989: esp. 94-147, 203-20, 274-351) Equally, property turnover, fragmentation of noble landownership and estate discontinuity was high in areas of Brandenburg between the later Middle Ages and the consolidation of the demesne economy during the sixteenth century. (Enders 1988: 129, 144, 165; Enders 1992: 133; Enders 2000: 297; Engel/Zientara 1967: 87-8, 298, 302-7, 313-6, 367-74, 383-4) The observable increase in demesne land vs. land worked by peasant tenants in some parts of Brandenburg or in the Duchy of Wrocław in the late fourteenth and in the fifteenth century are not seen as a result of an early systematic attempt to install a commercialized demesne economy but rather a simple halt to further conversion of demesnes into rental land or as a reaction to widespread desertions due to population decline and agricultural recession. (Enders 1992: 132-3, 149; Enders 2000: 180-1, 308-13; Engel/Zientara 1967: 373-4; Hoffmann 1989: 314; Scott 2002: 186) Medieval demesne farms were small and not really oriented towards market production in Brandenburg. (Assing 1965; Engel/Zientara 1967; Müller-Mertens 1951) While some of these may have been extended on deserted tenant land to take up market production during the fifteenth century, the decisive break towards the establishment of newly built, commercial demesne farms occurred after 1500. (Harnisch 1969: 120)

In Bohemia, a study on several large monastic estates found widespread abandonment of direct management during the later Middle Ages. Farms were leased to town citizens or peasant tenants or they were subdivided in smaller units and sold in hereditary tenure to peasant farmers and smallholders. (Čechura 1994: esp. 49-52, 63, 69-74, 96-97) The upheaval and secularization of church properties during and after the Hussite Wars may have resulted in further discontinuities, but may have also triggered an antagonism between the Estates and royal towns and the establishment of mobility restrictions. (Cerman 2001)

Detailed empirical research on early-modern demesne lordship also undermined Robert Brenner’s proposition about the ineffectiveness or absence of village communities and institutions. The rural population in Brandenburg, Bohemia, Silesia and Upper Lusatia succeeded in maintaining some spheres for autonomous political and legal actions within the
village community. Village communities retained rights of the lower jurisdiction, such as neighbourhood conflicts and subject property transfers, and took an important role in conflicts between villagers and demesne lords. (Enders 1993; Rudert 1995; Štefanová 2009; Zückert 1998) Similar results have now been presented for areas of Little Poland. (Guzowski 2008) Villages thus maintained important functions and also disposed over partly considerable economic resources which they even managed to extend in certain cases, as has been shown for late medieval and sixteenth-century Brandenburg. (Enders 1993)

Recent research on direct management in Little Poland indicates that under certain conditions the establishment of a demesne economy could indeed have a medieval basis, which was connected to systematic changes during the fourteenth century. As part of this development, demesne farms located in central places of feudal estates were systematically extended, while smaller ones situated elsewhere were frequently abandoned and their land redistributed to peasant tenants. The extended demesne farms were worked with peasant labour services. The change was most visible in large estates of the church, which traditionally kept close market links because of the significant quantities of grain they received as tithe from peasant farms. It also occurred - less widespread - on noble estates, e. g. in the vicinity of the Krakow market at the beginning of the fifteenth century. Market connections seemed to have been crucial, because in other, more remote regions, the feudal economy continued on a pure rent basis, in which demesne farms were kept only for reasons of supply for local noble households. (Czaja et al. 2005: 431-433; Mikulski/Wroniszewski 2003: 118-21, 126) Thus, medieval continuities may have been a regional phenomenon and limited to a certain group of estates. As a more general trend, affecting also the smaller estates of the lower noble ranks, the rise in direct management was a reaction to the crisis of the peasant economy and the increasing number of desertions and did not occur before the late fifteenth-century and early sixteenth-century. The crisis specifically affected regions, in which the peasant economy was not well connected to markets. (Mikulski/Wroniszewski 2003: 122, 126)

Possible medieval roots are suggested by a careful analysis for Mecklenburg. A study showed that the majority of the large landed estates of the nobility in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries were held by the oldest aristocratic families of the country. Also, their later centres of demesne economy can be traced to the original medieval centres of estate administration. In certain regions and territories, therefore, the continuity of noble families and their estate
property may have made possible a long-term process of change towards a commercial
demesne economy. (Münch 1997).

This highly differentiated approach exemplified by the studies on Little Poland and
Mecklenburg seems to be promising for future research into the hypothesis of medieval
continuities of the early-modern demesne economy. A more differentiated perspective could
also help to interpret the early roots of a demesne economy in fifteenth-century Bohemia and
Moravia, when commercial pisciculture and fish-farming took hold and was systematically
established. (cf. e. g. Mika 1953)

A further possible resolution with regard to this explanation lies in a new approach to
understand the growth of demesne lordship as a gradual process affecting the status of the
peasantry and the concentration of lordship powers. The necessity to differentiate between
this process and the rise of a commercial demesne economy has recently been summarized by
T. Scott: "(t)he rise of Gutsherrschaften [demesne lordship - M.C.] preceded – by as much as
three centuries in some cases – the emergence of Gutswirtschaften [demesne economy - M.
C.]." (Scott 1996: 10; Scott 2002: 183) This would mean that late medieval agrarian
structures by no means automatically predetermined the rise of early modern demesne
lordship and it would be possible to account for the enormous regional diversity of the
manifestations of this system.

IV. The theory of market and export demand

Among the countries and territories, which are usually associated with an agrarian structure
resembling demesne lordship in one form or another, there were only two which can be
considered as net importers of grain: Upper Lusatia and Silesia. All others were net exporters
of grain or agricultural products to a varying extent and would only fail to produce a grain
surplus in exceptional situations such as extreme harvest failures or to disruptions by wars. It
thus seems straightforward to assume that there must have been a connection between the
rising grain demand of North-western Europe beginning in the fifteenth century and the
development of a demesne economy in which feudal landlords operated large commercial
estates producing grain that was exported via the Baltic ports or via Hamburg.
A summary of the first generation research on demesne lordship, published in 1910, already emphasized that commercial market production was a major cause for the growth of the demesne economy. (Wittich 1905; cf. Harnisch 1969: 119) Also Jerome Blum regarded the establishment of a demesne economy producing for markets as one of the causes for the rise of early modern ‘serfdom’. (Blum 1957: 822, 826-833) The role of export for the intensification of demesne farming was taken up by Marxist historical research after 1945 particularly in Poland and in Eastern Germany with specific reference to demesne lordship in the Baltic area. (see e. g. Topolski 1985: 128)

More than any other it was the famous Polish historian Marian Małowist who argued that the early capitalistic commercialization of North-western Europe in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries was directly related to the rise of the demesne economy in the Baltic area. A rising western European demand for grain due to the increase of population since the later fifteenth century and resulted in grain prices surges during the sixteenth century. Trade was fuelled by a significant grain price difference between Amsterdam and the Baltic. According to some estimates, Gdańsk prices amounted to 53 per cent of Amsterdam ones on average for the period 1551-1600 and prices in both locations were closely correlated. Prices for oxen in Gdańsk were a mere 27 per cent of those in Antwerp. (Adamczyk 2001: 49, 168; Kriedte 1983: 27; Sundhaussen 1983: 558) The volume of grain exports rose tenfold between the end of the fifteenth and the peaks in the sixteenth, seventeenth and the beginning of the eighteenth centuries. (cf. Table 1)

Export demand did not play the same role for the development of the demesne economy in the Baltic territories. In general, grain had a much lower share of total exports in the Baltic ports than in Gdańsk. In Tallinn, only 50 per cent of exports were grain, in Riga about a third. (In Poland, 70 to 80 per cent of exports were grain.) Other goods such as flax and hemp, wood, furs etc. played a much greater role in export there. (Scott 2002: 189) Still, export grain theoretically may have been provided by demesne farms, but other agricultural products were of equal or even greater importance in this area.

Grain was also exported from Brandenburg between the fourteenth and the sixteenth century, but export production may have collapsed in the first half of the seventeenth century under the impact of the Thirty Years’ War. (Kaak 2007: 79-81) Data collected by H. Harnisch demonstrate an active export trade from Brandenburg and a strong market-related production
of the demesne economy. By approximation from the 1563/64 customs data at the port of Lenzen situated at the river Elbe, about 9,000 tons of grain was exported from the western Brandenburg Kurmark (the larger part of the country situated west of the river Oder). More than half of this quantity may have been supplied by demesne lords. In addition to that, grain from the eastern parts of the Kurmark, the districts of Uckermark and Barnim, was usually hauled along a different route. An estimate of the 1580s mentions an average volume of about 3,000 tons per year, which were sent to the Baltic export harbour of Szczecin. In sum, it is safe to assume that between 10,000 and 15,000 tons of grain were exported annually in the period between 1560 and 1620, which would be quite a considerable quantity given the size of the country. (Harnisch 1969: 121-26, 142-43) In the same period, a major extension of demesne farming occurred and the demesne economy and grain sales represented an increasing share of demesne lords’ income, while money and product rents remained roughly constant. (Harnisch 1969: 126-33) Given that the network of small towns was denser in Brandenburg than further east and that major market centres such as Magdeburg or Braunschweig were situated close to the western borders, domestic grain markets as well as land exports to neighbouring territories played a role in grain demand and thus as a stimulus for direct management. (Scott 2002: 188)

The Kingdom of Hungary (including present-day Slovakia) forms a special case which is not usually covered by the ‘export demand’ hypothesis, because the main export goods in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries were cattle, copper and wine. Hungarian, grain production was stimulated mainly by the domestic market, in particular by the necessary supplies during the wars between the Habsburg and the Ottoman Empires in the sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries. It was estimated that until about 1600 grain production was sufficient to supply the domestic needs of a large group of farmers specializing in livestock and viticulture and the continuously present armies and garrisons, possibly also because general meat consumption was considerably higher than the western European average. The population losses of the Ottoman Wars made it difficult to establish intensive demesne grain farming and thus raise outputs, which would have been necessary for export. For Hungary, grain exports consequently played a negligible role in the building of the demesne economy in the sixteenth and early seventeenth century. (Żytkowicz 1985) The country became a significant exporter of grain only after 1750.
In total about 10 to 15 per cent of the Hungarian wine production was exported abroad in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. In areas closer to the main export regions, such as in western Hungarian Sopron, export shares were higher and reached 43 per cent of the production in the second half of the sixteenth century. The main export markets were Bohemia, Silesia, western Poland and southern Poland. The export volume is well documented by customs sources and was 100-110,000 hl per annum, with 50,000 hl directed to the northern and 60,000 hl to the western export markets. (Kiss 1985: 92-93)

Livestock was the main export good in this period. While about 50,000 oxen were exported from Hungary in 1562 via different routes to Venice, Austria and particularly Southern Germany, the number reached c. 130,000 in 1587. The annual average was about 100,000 heads in 1550-1600 and 60,000 in 1600-1650 and 1700-1750. The 1570 level was only reached again around 1770. Thus, Hungary deviates from the ‘classic’ export model in that its main export goods were cattle and wine, rather than grain. Trade was fuelled by considerable price differences. Between 1581 and 1590, the silver value of an ox in Western Hungary was slightly more than half of its value in Southern and a third of its value in Northern Germany. (Kiss 1985: 87-91, 95)

This conclusion can also be drawn for Denmark, Holstein and the Ukraine, which were further centres for exports of livestock, but not necessarily grain, to the west. In the peak year of 1612, more than 50,000 head of livestock were exported from Denmark and Holstein. At about this time, slightly less, c. 30-50,000 per year, came from Eastern Poland and the Ukraine. Around 1600, the Duchy of Schleswig was dependent on imports of rye but specialized in exports of barley, cheese and oxen. (Kriedte 1983: 30; Schmidt 1997: 79; Sundhaussen 1983: 551, 553-54; Wyrobisz 1985: 41)

While the evidence shows that considerable amounts of grain were exported from the Baltic to North-western Europe from the late fifteenth century onwards (cf. Table 1) and that the newly established demesne economy profited and grew due to this export demand, it is thus not without problems to conclude that this had a general impact upon all regions and territories in Eastern Europe.
Table 1: Rye exports from Gdańsk, 1465-1646 (in 1,000 Last/tons, from 1562/5 annual averages)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Last</th>
<th>Tons</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1465</td>
<td>2.3</td>
<td>5.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1490</td>
<td>2.5</td>
<td>20.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1492</td>
<td>10.2</td>
<td>22.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1530</td>
<td>14.0</td>
<td>30.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1557</td>
<td>21.0</td>
<td>46.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1562/65</td>
<td>42.7</td>
<td>94.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1566/69</td>
<td>35.4</td>
<td>77.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1574/79</td>
<td>19.8</td>
<td>43.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1580/84</td>
<td>18.9</td>
<td>41.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1585/89</td>
<td>27.4</td>
<td>60.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1590/94</td>
<td>2.8</td>
<td>6.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1595/99</td>
<td>38.7</td>
<td>85.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1605</td>
<td>35.1</td>
<td>77.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1615</td>
<td>32.6</td>
<td>71.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1618</td>
<td>84.8</td>
<td>186.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1625</td>
<td>19.2</td>
<td>42.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1631/35</td>
<td>31.4</td>
<td>69.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1636/40</td>
<td>31.8</td>
<td>70.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1641/44</td>
<td>50.9</td>
<td>112.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1646/49</td>
<td>40.8</td>
<td>89.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1649</td>
<td>70.9</td>
<td>156.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


Even for Poland, which presented the classic case for this theory (Schmidt 1997: 79), it is highly unlikely that land-locked estates not situated close to navigable rivers such as in Little Poland, Red Russia, the Ukraine or Byelorussia would produce for the Baltic export. At a greater distance from the coast, demesne lords would face considerable transport costs even on navigable rivers, partly covering distances of up to eight hundred kilometres. Urbanization rates e. g. in Little Poland were more than double the rates of Mazovia, which meant that domestic consumption in Little Poland must have been higher. For medium-sized estates, transport of grain was only profitable within a range of 70 km to the nearest navigable river port. Thus, only the largest estates would be able to sell grain with a profit to the export cities and take advantage from the price differences to the inland, often with the use of forced transport labour services from their subjects, as in the case of the estate of Korczyn in Little Poland. For instance, in the east of Little Poland, only two magnate families, the Firlejs and the Tarnowskis, seemed to dominate trade from the region. (Adamczyk 2001: 49, 53, 201; Mikulski/Wroniszewski 2003: 123; Samonowicz/Mączak 1985: 14; Żytkowicz 1985: 61, 66-67)
In the fourteenth and fifteenth century, most of the export grain exported from Gdańsk came from the surrounding regions of Prussia, Cuiavia and later Mazovia. Only when prices picked up towards the end of the century, also rye and wheat from the central Vistula area and from Little Poland appeared on the Gdańsk market. (Czaja et al 2005: 445; Mikulski/Wroniszewski 2003: 123) Even in the sixteenth century, at least 60 per cent of the Polish grain export came from the provinces closest to the Baltic Sea (Mazovia and Cuiavia) and only about 20 per cent from Little Poland (Table 2).

Table 2: Origin of export grain during the sixteenth century (customs at Włocławek) (in Last)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Region</th>
<th>1537</th>
<th>1546</th>
<th>1556</th>
<th>1575</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Cuiavia</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>1,697</td>
<td>828</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mazovia</td>
<td>90.6</td>
<td>2,935</td>
<td>6,327</td>
<td>6,677</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Great Poland</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>506</td>
<td>562</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Little Poland</td>
<td>120</td>
<td>52</td>
<td>1,752</td>
<td>424</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Podlasie</td>
<td>70</td>
<td>97</td>
<td>327</td>
<td>80</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lithuania</td>
<td>58</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>--</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


Contrary to the reasoning of the ‘export hypothesis’, these were also the regions, in which the demesne economy was less developed than elsewhere in Poland. The inland regions of Little Poland and Eastern Great Poland had the highest proportion of demesne land (as a percentage of total land) close to parity with peasant land. Mazovia, directly adjacent to the province of the export harbours had a share of demesne land that was by 20 per cent smaller than in Little Poland by 1600. Also, estimates of the regional variation of labour service obligations in the third quarter of the sixteenth century do not show unanimous support for the ‘export hypothesis’.

Also some Polish historians developed criticism against the general explanatory power of the ‘export demand’ hypothesis. While they do not deny some influence, they claim that the rise of demesne lordship can only be fully explained by factors internal to the Polish feudal system. As to the impact exports, Witold Kula differentiates between consequences for the Polish commercial sector and those for the overall economy. He calculated that about 10 to 15 per cent of the total Polish grain production was exported before the partition of Poland in 1772. This was a relatively small proportion of overall production but significant with respect to the grain that entered the market. Other estimates confirm this pattern. According to Jerzy Topolski, exports amounted to a maximum of 2.5 per cent of the total Polish grain production during the second half of the sixteenth century. Alternative figures for the 1560s set exports at
five to six per cent of total grain production or ten to twelve per cent of the rye and wheat production and at about 10 to 17 per cent during the first half of the seventeenth century. (Table 3) This represented c. 15 to 20 per cent of the total grain produced for markets and up to 40 per cent of the commercial rye production. According to this criticism, the decisive factor for the rise of demesne farming was the growth of markets for agricultural products in general. Exports may have been important for some demesne lords, but seen in general perspective they were marginal compared to domestic markets. (Topolski 1985: 128-29; Kriedte 1983: 28, 30; Żytkowicz 1985: 65, 81) Export quantities represented only 25 per cent of the total production of demesne farms, thus domestic sales were of considerable more importance even for demesne production. (Topolski 1985: 129)

Table 3: Production and consumption of rye and wheat in Great Poland, Little Poland, Pomerania and Mazovia c. 1630 (in mio. tons)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>in mio. tons</th>
<th>% of total production</th>
<th>% of market production</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Total production</td>
<td>1.1</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>393</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total market production</td>
<td>0.28</td>
<td>25.5</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Consumption by Polish towns</td>
<td>0.1</td>
<td>9.0</td>
<td>35.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Exports</td>
<td>0.12</td>
<td>10.9</td>
<td>42.9</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Adamczyk 2001: 171.

If exports and European market integration were decisive factors, this would rule out the existence of a demesne economy in regions unaffected by grain exports. This cannot be coincided with the known regional distribution of demesne lordship and the demesne economy. An export orientation of the demesne economy is explicitly refuted for Croatia, Hungary, Upper Lusatia and Lower Silesia. (Sundhaussen 1983: 554) The latter territories were centres of proto-industrialization from the sixteenth century onwards and may have been dependent on food imports. Although demesne lords and subject farmers exported grain in considerable quantities from Bohemia, particularly along the river Elbe or by land haulage towards Saxony, the export trade was never regarded as a decisive reason for the growth of the demesne economy in Bohemia and Moravia either. Estimates show that the exported quantities between 1597 and 1643 were on average only around 1,300 to 1,800 tons of grain per year, which seems almost negligible. (Żytkowicz 1985: 71) Only a very small part of this volume was produced by demesne farms. For the Czech Lands, research always emphasized the domestic market, particularly beer brewing of towns and demesne lords, as central for the growth of demesne farming. (Sundhaussen 1983: 554; Żytkowicz 1985: 68-71, 81)
These differences and the question what impact grain exports actually had in Poland cast doubts on the general explanatory power of the ‘export demand’ hypothesis. Its strengths, however, lie in the attempt to link the rise of demesne lordship and the demesne economy with secular trends in agrarian development and with the emerging regional specialization within Europe. Therefore, a refinement needs to put the growth of the demesne economy in the context of rising demand on domestic as well as export markets. (Kriedte 1983: 30, 113-14; Sundhaussen 1983: 551)

Finally, the ‘export demand’ hypothesis set the growth of the commercial demesne economy in East-central and Eastern Europe in the chronological context of the secular increase of grain demand and grain prices stimulated by the European population growth in the late fifteenth and particularly in the sixteenth century. However, a further approach of research - more pronounced for some territories than for others - proposed an entirely different chronology and explanation and thus fundamentally questions the ‘export demand’ hypothesis. According to this approach, a demesne economy based on forced labour services provided by the peasantry was the result of the consequences of the Thirty Years’ War and the demographic crisis of the seventeenth century. With shrinking markets, falling grain prices and rising wages for agricultural labour, demesne lords put in practice those significant privileges they had acquired with the backing of territorial rulers in the course of the sixteenth century. Only now, they really imposed mobility restrictions and weekly forced labour services - all with the backing of the post-war absolutist territorial state. It is this theory, which will be investigated next.

V. The theory of the consequences of the Thirty Years’ War

According to the classical view, the second half of the seventeenth century witnessed a major intensification of demesne lordship and of the demesne economy based on forced labour services in all areas of East-central and Eastern Europe (with the exception of Russia). Also in territories, in which the situation of the subject population is sometimes regarded as weak already in the period before 1600, such as in Mecklenburg or Poland, the literature at least identifies a further deterioration of tenant rights and a considerable increase of forced labour services which had to be rendered by subject farmers, smallholders and cottagers. This course of events rests on a demographic explanation: lack of available labour which followed the
widespread disruption, migration and epidemics caused by the Thirty Years’ War and by wars in the second half of the seventeenth century (in the case of Poland). The noble demesne economy also faced the problem of shrinking demand and of lower grain prices and found itself in the middle of a secular crisis of profit. (surveys in Adamczyk 2001: 213-14; Hroch/Petráň 1981; Wallerstein 1980: 226; for a summary of the traditional view regarding German territories see Hagen 1989; Hagen 1998: 149, 174-75)

This approach is partly supported by the chronological coincidence of major territorial law codes passed roughly in the period 1620 to 1660, which repeat and reinforce measures about mobility restrictions, property rights of subject tenants, forced agricultural service of subject children, landlord market privileges and, in a minority of territories, laws established personal serfdom of the subject population (such as in Mecklenburg or Pomerania). (see for Brandenburg Kaak 2007: 84-85; for Bohemia and Moravia Hroch/Petráň 1981: 126-35, 138-41)

Due to the dependency on grain exports prior to 1620/1650, the Polish economy became particularly vulnerable to the agricultural downturn after 1650, which hit the country in the middle of a serious political crisis culminating in the wars of the second half of the seventeenth century. Stagnating grain demand in the west from about 1600/1620 meant declining grain prices and shrinking income from the trade for demesne lords. In the period 1700-1749 average annual grain volumes shipped through the Sound fell to less of a third of the level from 1600-1649. The turning of the terms of trade thus affected the noble demesne economy, commercial peasant farmers and the urban sector in Poland. The feudal economic structure created by the export demand was unable to cope with these new circumstances and went through a long-lasting crisis in which demesne lordship was further strengthened. In particular, there was a growing concentration of landed property among the highest nobility, the magnates.

Demesne lords tried to counter declining profits by increasing the burden of labour rents and by extending their demesne farms either by taking over smaller estates or by seizing areas from desertions that had partly been leased to the peasantry before. In addition, the economic position of peasant farmers was undermined by the declining prices and they were further weakened by the landlord measures described above. Declining productivity and labour shortage following a demographic crisis led to a strong decrease of agricultural output to a

This theory had an important, though never exclusive, position with regard to the establishment of the demesne economy based on forced labour service in Bohemia and Moravia and has re-emerged in recent scholarship. (Kostlán 1997; Čechura 2000; Čechura 2003: 56-57) During the growth of the demesne economy in the period between 1550 and 1620, landlords are believed to have managed their farms mainly without forced labour services. Although these studies acknowledge the establishment of restrictive laws by the Bohemian and Moravian Diets in the course of the sixteenth century, the actual legal status and situation of subjects did not change in a pronounced manner, which distinguished the Bohemian territories from other east-European countries such as Brandenburg, Poland or Hungary. Due to rising grain prices and eroding rents, the period was the ‘golden age’ of peasant farming in Bohemia.

As a result of the prevailing division of historical development in the Czech Lands in a period before and after 1620, the full establishment of the demesne economy, related mainly to the extension of labour rents and feudal monopoly, was shifted by Czech historiography into the second half of the seventeenth century. The manpower shortage and the collapse of prices for agricultural produce with which demesne lords were confronted during and after the Thirty Years’ War were the principal causes of the increase in labour service obligations and the intensification of demesne lordship resulting in a hereditary dependency (subjection) of the subject population, though not in serfdom. In Bohemia (so Czech accounts contend) pressure for refeudalization grew after the war until eventually a ”demesne economy based on forced labour services” emerged. (Hroch/Petráň 1981: esp. 126ff, 138-39, 185-86; see now Kostlán 1997; Čechura 2003: 56-57; for a balanced survey see Maur 2001)

Studies by Hartmut Harnisch and by William Hagen present evidence for a forceful rejection of the ‘Thirty Years’ War hypothesis’ for the case of Brandenburg. For Harnisch, the rise of demesne lordship and of the demesne economy was completed by 1600/1620. Already before 1600, direct management was the dominant factor in landlords’ income, the majority of demesne farms were run with peasant labour services and legislation to restrict peasant mobility and force teenage children into landlords’ service was already in place. (Harnisch 1969: 134)
William Hagen’s research largely confirms Harnisch’s account of the rise of demesne lordship and the demesne economy in Brandenburg. He offers a persuasive new analysis, arguing that lords had massively lost in authority due to the upheaval caused by the war. (Hagen 1989) Some were driven into ruin, others had to establish themselves in estates, which were heavily depopulated and lacked operating peasant farms and manpower. As wage levels were high, grain prices low and export markets were lost, direct management was nearly unprofitable. Although there were attempts to re-establish the pre-war order of demesne lordship with the help of the absolutist state in the 1650s (Kaak 2007: 84-85), landlord extraction had to compete with that of the state (a “postwar crisis in distribution”). Bargaining power was on the side of the peasant tenants who had to be attracted, e. g. by lower rents, to take over vacant holdings and render dues and forced labour services. Until the late seventeenth century, lords in Brandenburg were largely unsuccessful in tightening demesne lordship.

It was assumed that demesne lords monopolized markets and established forced sales of goods produced by the demesne economy and thus weakened the peasant economy and its market relations. Particularly in recent times fundamental doubts have been expressed as to whether it is even possible to speak of a suppression of subject agrarian market production in general. Case studies and a synthetic account of the Magdeburg Plain by Harnisch have pointed out that any pronounced obstruction of the marketing of subject surplus production would have been impossible, if only because of the cash rents demanded and the taxes that subjects had to pay on sales of agricultural produce. In fact, market relations of the Brandenburg peasant farmers were always strong. (Harnisch 1969; Harnisch 1980: 127ff, 190ff; Harnisch 1986b: 46-47; Enders 1992; Enders 1998b: 127; Enders 2000; Hagen 1998; Melton 1988: 341-349; Melton 1998: 309). It is also clear that, in the case of Bohemia and Moravia, demesne production could not saturate the market and that especially seigneurial breweries were dependent on buying grain from markets. (Cerman/Zeitlhofer 2002)

As regards the increase in labour service obligations, this development seems plausible in that, given the decline in cereal prices, the price of labour went up in real terms. On the other hand, the real value of cash rents received by demesne lords increased and they were usually used to pay wage labour used in the demesne economy. Moreover, a comparative view shows that labour markets did not necessarily conform to the causality observed by the supporters of
the ‘Thirty Years’ War’-theory. For instance, a study of the relationship between wage labour and labour services in Prussia has thrown some light on the connections between the labour market and amounts of labour rent required. (North 1988: 11-12, 14-15) It shows that the explanatory models invoked for increases in forced labour services in the seventeenth century do not chime with the reality of direct demesne farming in Prussia at the time. Availability of surplus forced labour services was always converted, with some of the resultant cash being used to pay servants and wageworkers, but labour services that were needed were always called in. The first result of any reduction in available manpower (as a result of demographic crises, for example) was that existing conversions of forced labour services were annulled in order that the number of days of forced labour services required could be maintained. Another factor was that wage costs were routinely entered in the books as expenditure, whereas labour services performed were not entered in terms of their value, and thus did not really have a price. So there was an additional tendency in demesne-economy operations to avoid wages as a cost incurred and to prefer forced labour services.

Hungarian researchers have also concerned themselves with the transition within the demesne economy from direct operating using wagework to a predominant reliance on forced labour services, which in Hungary began in the 1570s already. The switch was necessitated by the way in which the sixteenth-century price revolution had devalued the cash rents of subjects that were used to pay wageworkers. (Pach 1974; Pach 1982: 158ff, 165ff) A similar causality would be entirely conceivable in connection with the demesne economy in Bohemia, which always represented the key example for the supporters of the ‘Thirty Years’ War’-hypothesis. On a more general level, research on Hungary has also established that demesne lordship and the demesne economy was fully established before 1600. Population decline and economic destruction related to the seventeenth-century Ottoman wars, therefore, did not trigger the developments which were associated with the Thirty Years’ War. (Żytkowicz 1985: 79)

A further problem area that might be cited here with regard to the case of Bohemia is that any population losses should have enhanced rather than diminished the scope of subjects vis-à-vis demesne lords in general. A degree of accommodation by the demesne lord was needed to prevent subjects from leaving for other demesnes or even going abroad, as described for Brandenburg above. Moreover, the implementation of mobility restrictions for the subject population, usually assumed by Czech research for the period after 1650, must have been extraordinarily difficult if not impossible under such conditions. And not least a relatively
uniform countrywide picture in terms of the growth of demesne farming, the increase in labour services and other burdens has to be brought in accordance with population losses that differed widely from region to region. Therefore, no uniform effects can be expected for the structure of regional labour market (if we were to take mobility restrictions seriously). In addition, intensive Czech research on historical demography has led to population losses during the Thirty Years’ War being steadily revised downwards, thus neutralising this factor. (Cerman 1994; Cerman/Zeitlhofer 2002; Fialová et al. 1996; Dokoupil et al. 1999)

Recent empirical studies and research before 1945 have emphasized long-term developments. According to these results, demesne lordship and the demesne economy was fully established in Bohemia and Moravia by 1600/1620. There may have been regional differences in the use of forced labour services for the demesne economy (this was also the case after 1650), but there is enough empirical evidence to show that in some parts of the country, demesne farming heavily relied on corvée. (see for a summary Cerman 1997; Cerman 2001) In addition, the arguments presented by supporters of the ‘Thirty Years’ War’-hypothesis particularly for Bohemia and Moravia appear doubtful once they are tested against a comparative perspective to other territories in East-central and Eastern Europe.

A hypothesis that links the full establishment of a demesne economy based on forced labour services with the consequences of the Thirty Years’ War is at odds with accounts of the long-term development since the later Middle Ages. Between the period 1400/1450 and 1620 almost all the regulations which made possible the establishment of hereditary subjection or dependency of the rural population (in some territories even serfdom) and of the demesne economy were put in place throughout East-central and Eastern Europe: lords’ acquisition of legal powers, mobility restrictions, the means to increasing forced labour services, the extension of the demesne economy in the age of the European price revolution etc. Already in 1957, Jerome Blum concluded that ‘serfdom’ was fully established by 1600. (Blum 1957: 821-22) Finally, the chronology emphasizing the role of the Thirty Years’ War does not match approaches of explanation that have tried to link the establishment of the demesne economy to the secular trends of the European agrarian economy, i. e. to the sixteenth-century price revolution. As H. Harnisch summarized with reference to the consequences of the Thirty Years’ War: ”The stimulus of the markets on building the agrarian system in eastern central Europe were consequently weaker than in the century before the Thirty Years’ War.“ (Harnisch 1986a: 253, 260-61)
VI. Conclusion

It seems to be a general fault of most approaches to explain early-modern demesne lordship and the demesne economy that they were developed with specific relation to particular countries or to a group of territories in East-central and Eastern Europe. This distinguishes Blum’s more general view from much of the historiography before and after the publication of his article. By contrast, any analysis based on a comparative perspective and with specific reference to variations will not find the standard explanations satisfactory. A comparative approach was chosen in this paper to evaluate and criticize the arguments of the theories, which explain the establishment of demesne lordship by the sixteenth-century growth of export markets or by the seventeenth-century demographic crisis. The two approaches were also questioned, because case studies have demonstrated the importance of long-term factors and processes for the development of the early-modern demesne economy. Therefore, theories based on the idea of the Thirty Years’ War or the ‘crisis of the seventeenth century’ as a significant watershed and as a trigger for the establishment of demesne lordship based on forced labour services fail to consider these long-term changes.

The flaws of a theory of ‘medieval continuities’ based on a macro-level perspective, which became obvious in recent empirical studies, clearly show that also this explanation cannot form the basis for future work on the causes of demesne lordship and the demesne economy without major revisions.

Yet as already mentioned, case studies have repeatedly shown that the rise of early-modern demesne lordship was a long-term process. This seems to provide at least some justification for an attempt to analyze again the consequences of the crisis of the later Middle Ages in terms of their effects on the long-term development of agrarian structure. Without doubt, arguments about a special medieval ‘agrarian constitution’ pre-determining the agrarian development in East-central and Eastern Europe or any other form of general determinism will have to be given up. Instead, one promising approach seems to be to follow the suggestions of Tom Scott (1996, 2002) and to separate analytically the development of demesne lordship from that of a commercial demesne economy. It would also have to take as a starting point a new interpretation of ‘serfdom’ or of ‘subjection’: this was determined on a
regional and local scale and did not exist as a uniform status regulated by state legislation. This understanding of demesne lordship, based on a ‘view from the village’ already exists in many case studies and, contrary to traditional research, takes account of a greater independence of the subject economy, of the communal institutions, of peasant decision-making and so on. As for the necessity of a long-term perspective, this can best be illustrated by several recent studies on Brandenburg. These demonstrated that an analysis of late medieval structures not only helps to fully grasp the meaning of later developments (for instance with respect to the role of the village community or the difference between personal bondage and tenurial dependency) (cf. e. g. Enders 1992; Enders 2000; Hagen 1998: 162-65) but also the gradual nature of the change towards the establishment of a commercial demesne economy.
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