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THE PEN AND THE SCYTHE: THE PEASANT QUESTION IN THE 18TH-CENTURY POLISH-LITHUANIAN COMMONWEALTH IN THE WRITINGS OF CONTEMPORARY FRENCH LITTÉRATEURS

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> 'A Lithuanian peasant, thrown by a storm on the island of Robinson Crusoe, would not have worried much for his fate. Give him an axe, he knows with this sole tool how to build a dwelling for him and his cattle.'[1]
>
> Jean-Emmanuel Gilibert (1741–1814)

ABSTRACT In the 18th century, people in Western Europe knew very little about the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth, which was perceived as an odd and anarchic regime, where not only did serfdom make agriculture inefficient, it was also a pretext for neighbouring powers to interfere in its domestic affairs. Nevertheless, Enlightenment ideas, spreading little by little, raised the question of the status of the peasants in the Commonwealth.

Displaying observations made by French travellers or residents (Chappe d'Auteroche, Bernardin de Saint-Pierre, Linguet, Jaucourt, Dubois de Jancigny, Caraccioli, Vautrin, Gilibert) on the Commonwealth's peasantry, and reflections by thinkers (Mably, Rousseau, Baudeau, Le Mercier de la Rivière), the article intends to show how these authors contributed to raising the issue of serfdom in the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth in the public sphere, and evaluates their influence on readers both in the Commonwealth and abroad. Although the social and political conditions were not yet there for the complete liberation of the serfs, the littérateurs' reflections were food for thought for the Polish-Lithuanian elite. Had the Commonwealth not been partitioned, progressive ideas would have taken root, little by little, and the peasants would have gained personal and civic rights, becoming full citizens of their country. Our survey aims to set forth little-known authors, expanding the knowledge of French literature devoted to the 18th-century

[1] J.-E. Gilibert, 'Tableau de l'économie rurale en Lithuanie', in: *Histoire des plantes d'Europe et étrangères, les plus communes les plus utiles et les plus curieuses* (Lyon, 1806), p. XXI.

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Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth, and broadening the historiography on the peasant question in the Commonwealth.

The article encompasses: I. French travellers and residents' accounts of the peasantry of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth; II. French educators' intervention in the debate on serfdom in the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth; III. The reflections of Philosophes and Physiocrats on serfdom in the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth; IV. The reception of French littérateurs' writings on serfdom in the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth.

KEYWORDS: Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth, 18th century, serfdom, French literature.

Introduction

In the 18th century, people in Western Europe knew very little about the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth (or the 'Commonwealth of the Two Nations'), and what they knew was not flattering. The Commonwealth, a republic with a king, was perceived as an odd and anarchic regime,[2] a backward country definitely outside enlightened Europe. In Britain, Adam Smith used it as an example of the Medieval economy.[3] In France, most Philosophes even considered the partitions (which occurred in 1772, 1793 and 1795) as an opportunity for the country to embrace modernity.[4]

On the eve of the first partition, the Commonwealth was home to 12 million inhabitants, the serfs making up three quarters.[5] The vast majority of peasants were actually serfs. Deprived of any civil rights, and bound to the land they received from the landowner, their obligations varied a lot depending on the estate on which they were settled. Moreover, their status also differed according

[2] V. Rakutis, *Prieš panyrant į sutemas, Lietuva XVIII amžiuje: kai ir Lenkija, ir Varšuva buvo mūsų* (Vilnius, 2022), p. 12.

[3] 'Poland, where the feudal system still continues to take place, is at this day as beggarly a country as it was before the discovery of America.' See: A. Smith, *An Inquiry into the Nature and Causes of the Wealth of Nations* (London, 1776), p. 300.

[4] A. Zamoyski, *The Last King of Poland* (London, 2020), p. 197.

[5] F. Rosset, D. Triaire, *Jean Potocki* (Paris, 2004), p. 16. After the first partition, 78% of the serfs lived on a noble property, 13% on a Crown property, and 9% on a Church property. See : M. Marty, *Voyageurs français en Pologne durant la seconde moitié du XVIII^e siècle. Ecriture, Lumières et alterité* (Paris, 2004), p. 183.

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to whether they were on land belonging to the Crown estates, a starosty,[6] a private landowner, or the Church.[7]

Serfdom affected the whole economy. With the peasants being overburdened by labour services, agriculture was inefficient. Besides, as described by the political writer César-Félicité Pyrrhys de Varille[8] in his 'Political Reflections on Poland' (*Réflexions politiques sur la Pologne*),[9] serfdom was a pretext for neighbouring powers to interfere in its domestic affairs, to promote discord, and to show that the Commonwealth was not an enlightened country.

Nevertheless, Enlightenment ideas, spreading little by little, raised the question of the status of the peasants in the Commonwealth. In 1743, in his 'Free Voice Ensuring Freedom' (*La voix libre du citoyen*), Stanisław I Leszczyński[10] felt the necessity to remind readers that the serf deserved freedom, for he too was a child of God: 'In creating the human being, God granted him freedom [...] In them [the peasants] we must worship the hand of God. For this reason, in fact, we are all equal."[11]

[6] Crown estates: 'large estates belonging to the Crown, from which a part of Crown revenues were drawn'. Starosty: 'an estate belonging to the Crown, granted in life tenure to a deserving citizen, with the understanding that he paid one-quarter of the estates revenues to the Treasury'. See: A. Zamoyski, *The Last King of Poland* (London, 2020), pp. 464, 467–468.

[7] *Lietuvos istorija*, t. VII, d. 2: Z. Kiaupa, *Trumpasis XVIII amžius* (*1733–1795 m.*) (toliau – Z. Kiaupa, *Trumpasis XVIII amžius*)(Vilnius, 2018), pp. 160, 162, 185; J. Rutkowski, *Histoire économique de la Pologne avant les partages* (Paris, 1927), p. 123.

[8] César-Félicité Pyrrhys de Varille was born in 1708 in Normandy. In 1755, he went together with the French ambassador de Broglie to Warsaw, and settled in Poland for the rest of his life. Becoming interested in the history and politics of the Commonwealth, he wrote several essays, such as *Lettres historiques et politiques à son Altesse le Prince Jean Sanguszko sur les interrègnes de Pologne* (Lubartow-Varsovie, 1764) and *Lettres sur la constitution actuelle de la Pologne et la tenue de ses Diètes* (Varsovie-Paris, 1769). He died in 1800. See: A. Parent, *Prancūzai Abiejų Tautų Respublikos pertvarkyme Stanislovo Augusto valdymo laikotarpiu* (*1764–1795 m.*). *PhD dissertation* (Vilnius, 2018), pp. 225–227.

[9] C.-F. Pyrrhys de Varille, *Réflexions politiques sur la Pologne* (Londres, 1770).

[10] Stanisław Leszczyński (1677–1766) became King of Poland and Grand Duke of Lithuania in 1704 with the help of King Charles XII of Sweden. In 1709, when Sweden was defeated by Russia at the Battle of Poltava, Stanislaw fled to France. In 1725, his daughter married the King of France Louis XV. In 1733, Stanislaw sought to regain the Polish throne with the support of France, but under Russian pressure he fled again, and was granted the provinces of Lorraine and Bar for life.

[11] S. Leszczynski, *La voix libre du citoyen, ou observations sur le gouvernement de Pologne*, seconde partie (1749), pp. 8, 22.

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French nationals who came to the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth left some descriptions of the peasantry they observed.[12] In this regard, in 2004, the literary historian Michel Marty, in his 'French Travellers in the Second Half of the 18th Century', provided a few pages of overview of portrayals made by the Jesuit priest Hubert Vautrin and the astronomer Chappe de Hauteroche.[13] The purpose of our article is to focus on observations of the Commonwealth's peasantry made by French travellers and residents,[14] and reflections by thinkers who joined the debate on the serfdom issue, to appraise their influence on their readers both

[12] For more on the connections between France and the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth in the 18th century, see: Z. Markiewicz, *Polsko-francuskie związki literackie* (Warszawa, 1986); M. Blaszke, *Obraz i naprawa Rzeczypospolitej w myśli społeczno-politycznej fizjokratyzmu Baudeau i Le Mercier de la Rivière* (Warszawa, 2000); M. Forycki, *Anarchia polska w myśli Oświecenia. Francuski obraz Rzeczypospolitej szlacheckiej u progu czasów stanisławowskich* (Poznań, 2004); D. Beauvois, 'Polacy w oczach Francuzów w latach 1764–1849', *Echa Przeszłośc*i, No 7 (2006). pp. 41–52; A. Parent, *Prancūzai Abiejų Tautų Respublikos pertvarkyme Stanislovo Augusto valdymo laikotarpiu* (*1764–1795 m.*).

[13] M. Marty, *Voyageurs français en Pologne durant la seconde moitié du XVIII^e^ siècle. Ecriture, Lumières et altérité* (Paris, 2004), pp. 182–190. Vautrin's work has been presented in: J. Gintel, *Cudzoziemcy o Polsce, relacje i opinie*, tom drugi: *Wiek XVIII–XIX* (Kraków, 1971), pp. 75–76. P. Kimla, 'Przywary niewolników pańszczyźnianych w XVIII-wiecznej Rzeczypospolitej w relacji Huberta Vautrina', *Annales Universitatis Mariae Curie-Skłodowska*. Sectio G, Ius, vol. 58(1) (2011), pp. 88–97. 17th-century French travellers's testimonies are shown in: W. Girys-Czagowiec, 'Obraz siedemnastowiecznej Polski i jej mieszkańców w oczach cudzoziemców', *Napis*, seria 11 (2005), pp. 9–20.

[14] Among the French travellers who came to the Commonwealth of the Two Nations in the second half of the 18th century, we present here only those who left an account of their voyage and gave testimonies about the peasants they observed. The Abbé Duperron de Castera, who performed diplomatic duties in Poland in the years 1746 to 1752, published in 1764 his valuable *Essai politique sur la Pologne*, but without mentioning the peasants. César-Félicité Pyrrhys de Varille left no description of the Commonwealth's peasants either. Madame Geoffrin, who travelled to Warsaw in 1766 to meet King Stanislaw August, did not leave a report of her voyage. As for Count de Ségur, who went to Poland in 1784, although he recounted his trip in his *Memoires*, he gave no description or reflection on the peasants' condition, only mentioning that they lived in a state of 'slavery'. See: L.-P. de Ségur, *Mémoires ou souvenirs et anecdotes* (Bruxelles, 1825), p. 155. As for Fortia de Piles and Boisgelin de Kerdu, who were in the Commonwealth during a journey made across Europe in the years 1790 to 1792, they too only mentioned that the peasants were 'slaves'. See: A. Fortia de Piles, *Voyage de deux Français en Allemagne, Danemarck, Suède, Russie et Pologne, fait en 1790–1792*, tome cinquième (Paris, 1796), p. 92.

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in the Commonwealth and abroad. This survey aims to set forth little-known authors, expanding the knowledge of French literature devoted to the 18th-century Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth, and broadening the historiography on the peasant question in the Commonwealth.[15]

We will thereafter consider: I. French travellers and residents' accounts of the peasantry of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth; II. French educators' intervention in the debate on serfdom in the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth; III. The reflections of Philosophes and Physiocrats on serfdom in the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth; IV. The reception given to French littérateurs' writings on serfdom in the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth.

I. French travellers and residents' accounts of the peasantry of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth

French citizens used to travel across the Commonwealth of the Two Nations to reach the Russian Empire, such as the astronomer Jean-Baptiste Chappe d'Auteroche (1722–1769), who went to Siberia to observe Venus in 1761. Among other descriptions, in his 'Journey in Siberia' (*Voyage en Sibérie*), he relates how Polish peasants were overseen and sanctioned. Auteroche states that the nobleman distributes a certain quantity of land and cattle to the peasants, who are like his 'slaves'. Although the peasant may reap all the benefits from the land granted, he is still obliged to work four days a week for the lord, to plough his land, and carry out any other task. To control the serfs, the lord is supported by a kind of farmer, the *podstaroste*, who has under him a *wout* or sub-farmer. This *wout* 'leads his slaves to work, whip in hand, as well as horses, and [...] treats them in the same way'. Equally, the *wout* reports every evening on the way the serfs have fulfilled their

[15] About peasant conditions in the Commonwealth of the Two Nations, see: J. Rutkowski, *Poddaństwo włościan w XVIII wieku w Polsce i niektórych innych krajach Europy* (Poznań, 1921); S. Inglot (ed.), *Historia chłopów polskich:* t. 1: *Do upadku Rzeczypospolitej szlacheckiej* (Wrocław, 1970); M. Jučas, *Baudžiavos irimas Lietuvoje* (Vilnius, 1972); W. Kula, *An Economic theory of the Feudal System*, 2nd ed. (London, 1986); J. Lukowski, 'The Peasantry of Poland-Lithuania on the Eve of the French Revolution', *History of European Ideas*, 12/3 (1990), pp. 377–393; Z. Kiaupa, *Trumpasis XVIII amžius.*

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obligations during the day. If one of the serfs has not carried out the tasks satisfactorily, he is punished on the spot. In that case, Auteroche reports that the serf 'is laid on the ground, bare back, one holds him by the head, and another by the feet, while a third covers his back with blood using a whip called a *kantzouck*. Women, who carry out other jobs, such as working the hemp of the lord or doing the laundry, are also liable to be given the *kantzouck*. If some serfs try to escape, the neighbouring lords send them back; but according to Auteroche, the serfs are so severely punished that it rarely happens.[16]

There were also French nationals who came to the Commonwealth to find employment. Many were officers looking for a command in the army. One of them was Bernardin de Saint-Pierre,[17] a newly graduated military engineer who spent two years in Poland and left in 1764. In his 'Journey in Poland' (*Voyage en Pologne*), he gives a description of the peasants he saw, deprived of the most elementary comforts, with 'no linen, chairs, tables, or any of the most necessary furniture', and who are constrained to 'sleep on the straw together with their cattle'. Additionally, these peasants 'work year round for barbarian masters who have the power of life and death over them', and they are so dirty that 'their filthiness has become a proverb.' On the whole, the serfs' poverty exceeds 'anything that can be said about it'. Actually, the serfs are so despairing that they have to find solace in the consumption of drugs: 'They cultivate the poppy as a vegetable, of which they eat the seed, to sleep off, I believe, the feeling of their misery,'[18] observes Bernardin.

[16] J.-B. Chappe d'Auteroche, *Voyage en Sibérie fait par ordre du roi en 1761*, tome premier (Paris, 1768), pp. 11–12

[17] Jacques-Henri Bernardin de Saint-Pierre (1734–1814) became famous for his novel *Paul et Virginie* (1788).

[18] J.-H. Bernardin de Saint-Pierre, *Œuvres posthumes de Jacques-Henri Bernardin de Saint-Pierre* (Paris, 1836), p. 44. Professor Gilibert, about whom we will read later, when in Lithuania, was also astonished by the 'immense fields filled with big heads of poppies' he saw there. But the scientist specifies that these poppies were cultivated for their seeds, which were made into gruel, of which each Lithuanian ate 'a quantity capable of making tremble' French physicians. See: J.-E. Gilibert, 'Tableau de l'économie rurale en Lithuanie', in: *Histoire des plantes d'Europe et étrangères, les plus communes, les plus utiles et les plus curieuses* (Lyon, 1806), p. 19.

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The Parisian lawyer Nicolas Linguet,[19] who travelled once to Poland (before 1767), in his 'Theory of Civil Laws' (*Théorie des loix civiles*), describes how the oppressed serf becomes himself an oppressor, not to say a beast:

> The vilest of Polish peasants, while leading a donkey entrusted to him by his master, may think that without the relief of society he would not have received this unhappy animal. The rustic sceptre with which the serf rules the animal can compensate for the humiliation into which he falls at the approach of the imperious stick that dominates him. By exercising the right to strike without mercy, he must feel that the same reason that gives him this right also imposes on him the need to receive such harsh blows without a murmur.[20]

Woeful testimonies like these were used for the entry 'Poland' (*Pologne*) in the *Encyclopédie* of Diderot and d'Alembert. One could read the following chilling description under the pen of the chevalier Louis de Jaucourt:[21]

> The countryside would be populated and flourishing if it was cultivated by a free people. The serfs of Poland are attached to the soil, while in Asia itself there are no slaves other than those who are bought or captured during the wars: they are foreigners. Poland beats its own children. Each lord is obliged to house his serf. He lives in a very poor hut, where naked children in the rigour of an icy climate, living together with cattle, seem to blame nature for not having dressed them the same way. The slave who gave birth to them would quietly see his cottage burned, since nothing belongs to him. He could not say 'my field', 'my children' or 'my wife', for everything belongs to the lord, who can equally sell the ploughman or the ox. It is rare to sell women, because they multiply the herd.[22]

It has to be noted that these narratives are prior to the year 1768. That year, a cardinal law was passed providing for the peasant to be judged in a court. However, punishments such as imprisonment, putting in a pillory or shakling remained possible.[23]

[19] Simon Linguet (1736–1794), a journalist and advocate, also was a member of the Paris Parliament. It is known he stayed in the Commonwealth.

[20] S. Linguet, *Théorie des loix civiles*, tome second (Londres, 1767), p. 520.

[21] Chevalier Louis de Jaucourt (1704–1779) was the most prolific writer of the *Encyclopédie* after Diderot. See: J. de Viguerie (ed.), *Histoire et dictionnaire du temps des Lumières, 1715–1789* (Paris, 1995), p. 1055.

[22] *Encyclopédie, ou dictionnaire raisonné des sciences, des arts et des métiers*, tome douzième (Neufchastel, 1765), p. 930.

[23] Z. Kiaupa, *Trumpasis XVIII amžius*, p. 202.

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With Hubert Vautrin,[24] who worked as a private tutor in Poland during the years 1775 to 1782, we reach the burlesque. Insanity is a common mental condition in the country:

> The stupidity of the peasants is undoubtedly the effect of servitude. Perhaps it has some physical cause: what is certain is that the head of the Poles is more often affected and more prone to illness than other parts of the body. Epilepsy, which is quite rare in the rest of Europe, is very common in Poland; it is not uncommon to see people subject to a kind of vertigo which suddenly disturbs the organs of the brain; they lose all sensation, they can no longer see or hear, they run, give high-pitched squeals and dreadful shrieks.[25]

Some inhabitants of the country are small because of the cold:

> The intensity of the cold in Poland is, according to all appearances, the cause of these stunted sizes that one notices in some individuals [...] The mind, in dwarves, is not always as small as the body: I have seen some of them who perfectly honoured a house, and distinguished themselves at chess.[26]

A more serious account is given by Professor Jean-Emmanuel Gilibert.[27] At the invitation of Count Antoni Tyzenhaus (1733–1785), treasurer of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania and administrator of the Crown Estates, he came from Lyons in 1775 to Grodno to establish the first medical academy in the Grand Duchy (L'académie royale de médecine) and a hospital. Curious about everything and eager to socialise with everyone, the professor wrote a detailed description of the Lithuanian peasantry's way of life in 'View of the Rural Economy in Lithuania' (*Tableau de l'économie rurale en Lithuanie*). After returning to France to his home town of Lyons, he read it at the Lyons Royal Society of Agriculture (Société royale d'agriculture de Lyon)[28] in 1784.

[24] The Jesuit priest Hubert Vautrin (1742–1822) was in Poland in the years 1777–1781 to work as the tutor of Kazimierz Nestor Sapieha.

[25] H. Vautrin, *L'observateur en Pologne* (Paris, 1807), p. 295.

[26] Ibid., p. 298.

[27] Jean-Emmanuel Gilibert (1741–1814), a physician and naturalist from Lyons, wrote various works devoted to medicine and botany. See: A. Parent, 'The Medical Science Heritage of French Physicians in Lithuania in the Last Quarter of the Eighteenth Century', in: A. Chwalba, K. Zamorsky (eds.), *The Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth* (New York-London, 2021), pp. 234–255.

[28] *Tableau de l'économie rurale en Lithuanie* was first published in: *Séance publique de la société royale d'agriculture de Lyon, tenue le 5 janvier 1787* (Genève, 1788),

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The favourable picture Gilibert gives of the peasantry differs radically from other testimonies. In this respect, he observes that in Lithuania the peasants 'are usually of good stature, with a pleasant face with regular features'.[29] Using the famous personage created by Daniel Defoe, Gilibert lauds their hability:

> A Lithuanian peasant, thrown by a storm on the island of Robinson Crusoe, would not have worried much for his fate. Give him an axe, he knows with this sole tool how to build a dwelling for him and his cattle.[30]

Besides, this peasant is a talented farmer: even though the soil is sandy, he obtains abundant crops.[31]

As we see, French citizens who came to the Commonwealth convey quite a pessimistic view of the peasants' way of life that they witnessed. Professor Gilibert appears to be an exception, but possibly the peasants he observed, mainly those of the Grodno Crown Estates, benefited from a better status. Gilibert was also one of the few French teachers living in Poland or Lithuania who took up the pen to enter the debate on serfdom.

II. French educators' intervention in the debate on serfdom in the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth

Among the French nationals who lived in the Commonwealth, some supported the endeavours of its sovereign King Stanisław August Poniatowski[32] to reform the country, namely to improve the situation of the peasants. One of them was the young Jean-Baptiste Dubois de Jancigny,[33] a history teacher at the Warsaw Cadet Corps.

pp. 65–80, and then in: J.-E. Gilibert, *Histoire des plantes d'Europe et étrangères, les plus communes les plus utiles et les plus curieuses* (Lyon, 1806), pp. XVIII–XXXI.

[29] Ibid., p. 20. A Lithuanian translation of this description may be found in: A. Parent, 'Botaniko Žano Emanuelio Žilibero pastebėjimai apie XVIII amžiaus pabaigos lietuvių valstietijos gyvenimą', *Liaudies kultūra*, No 3 (2014), p. 44–52.

[30] J.-E. Gilibert, *Histoire des plantes d'Europe et étrangère*, p. XXI.

[31] Ibid., p. XXIII.

[32] Stanisław August Poniatowski (1732–1798) was King of Poland and Grand Duke of Lithuania from 1764 to 1798. Despite the hostility of neighbouring powers and domestic opposition, significant reforms were achieved during his reign.

[33] Jean-Baptiste Dubois de Jancigny (1753–1808) was born and raised in Burgundy, and then moved to Paris, where he graduated in natural history. In 1775, Dubois came to the Commonwealth of the Two Nations to work as a history teacher and

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In 1775, Dubois de Jancigny wrote a philosophical drama in French for cadets, 'Casimir the Great' (*Casimir le grand*), dealing with the issue of serfdom, which he dedicated to the king.[34] In it, the author underlines the importance of the peasants to the existence of the country, as the king asserts in the play:

> Yes, I'm the king of the peasants [...] That is, the people who nourish us. We sometimes hardly dare to grant them the privileges of humanity, we are deaf to the voice of nature, we see only their apparent rudeness.[35]

Later in the play, when the Tatars invade the country, the peasants ask the king for weapons. Seeing this, Casimir observes: 'A beloved and respected nation of peasants quickly becomes a nation of soldiers.'[36] Concerning the right of the lord to claim the belongings of the serf who dies childless, Casimir says they should be handed over to his relatives. The sovereign also agrees to reduce his court expenses to alleviate the situation of the peasants.[37]

However, since he is writing for a noble readership, Dubois argues that the peasants should obey their master. This becomes apparent when King Casimir reminds them:

> You must be submissive to him [the landlord] Such is the order determined by God. For this reason, you have to obey him blindly, as long as it doesn't contradict either nature or religion, since, if the poor have the right to seek justice when they are oppressed, they must be severely punished when they disobey their masters.[38]

librarian for the Warsaw Cadet Corps (*Akademia Szlachecka Korpusu Kadetów Jego Królewskiej Mości i Rzeczypospolitej*). In 1777, he contributed to the development of a science book for the Society for Elementary Books (*Towarzystwo do Ksiąg Elementarnych*) under the Commission for Education (*Komisja Edukacji Narodowej*), whose purpose was to reassess the organisation of education in the country. Dubois was also one of the founders of the Society of Physical Sciences of the Republic of the Two Nations.

[34] J.-B. Dubois de Jancigny, *Casimir le grand* (Varsovie, 1775). It was reissued in 1816.

[35] J.-B. Dubois de Jancigny, *Casimir le grand* (Varsovie, 1816), pp. 23–24.

[36] Ibid., p. 29.

[37] Ibid., pp. 77–79.

[38] Ibid., p. 27.

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The Marquis Louis-Antoine de Caraccioli,[39] who had come to Poland to work as a private tutor, believed that the first partition of the Commonwealth would not have occurred so easily if the peasants had been free. In his 1775 'Poland as It Was, as It Is, and as It will Be' (*La Pologne telle qu'elle a été, telle qu'elle est, telle qu'elle sera*), he remarks bitterly:

> Had the Polish Republic abolished serfdom, it would have had many more resources in all the crises it went through. The lords would have suffered, but the state would have benefitted from it.' Indeed, the marquis considers that the peasants, if they had felt they were part of the country, would have wholeheartedly taken up arms to defend it, for there is 'much more zeal in a free people than in an enslaved people', whereas 'vassalage extinguishes value and stultifies souls.[40]

Professor Gilibert, whom we met earlier, also entered the debate on serfdom in the Polish-Lithuanian Republic. A freethinker and friend of King Stanisław August, he was a convinced proponent of the reforms the sovereign was carrying out to modernise the country. After his return to France in 1783, Gilibert kept up his loyalty to and friendship with the king. The same year, greatly dissatisfied with an article about serfdom in the Commonwealth written and published by his friend, the lawyer Prost de Royer,[41] he wrote a reply that was published in the following volume of Prost's 'Dictionary of Case Law and Judgements' (*Dictionnaire de jurisprudence et des arrêts*). The article is one of the very few published during this period in France that supported Stanislaw August's reforms, and especially his efforts to improve the situation

[39] The Marquis Louis-Antoine de Caraccioli (1719–1803) was born to Neapolitan parents. In 1739 he joined the Congregation of St Philip Neri. He then travelled to Poland, where he became acquainted with General Waclaw Rzewuski, who hired him to educate his children. Caraccioli wrote works endeavouring to defeat the prejudices of the French Philosophes about the Republic: L.-A. de Caraccioli, *La Pologne, telle qu'elle a été, telle qu'elle est, telle qu'elle sera* (Varsovie-Poitiers, 1775); L.-A. de Caraccioli, *La vie du comte Wenceslas Rzewuski* (Liège, 1782).

[40] L.-A. Caraccioli, *La Pologne telle qu'elle a été, telle qu'elle est, telle qu'elle sera*, p. 65.

[41] Antoine-François Prost de Royer (1729–1784) was administrator of hospitals, a member of the city council of Lyons in the years 1773 and 1774, and president of the local chamber of commerce. In 1772, he became the head of the city police. See: A. Parent, 'From Vitalism to Animal Magnetism: The Mesmerist Experiments of Dr Jean-Emmanuel Gilibert (1741–1814)', *Acta Baltica Historiae et Philosophiae Scientiarum*, No 8(1) (2020), p. 76.

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of the peasants. In it, Gilibert recalls that the nobleman no longer has the right of life and death over his serfs, and if manhandled by him, they are entitled to take the case to court. In addition, if a serf loses his cattle, the lord supplies him with others; if his family suffers starvation because of a barren year, he is supplied with grain. For these reasons, Gilibert considers that serfs in the Commonwealth are less to be pitied than many French peasants.

Professor Gilibert also raises awareness of the impact of serfdom on the economy of the Commonwealth. In effect, the serf, well aware that he will not benefit from his own work, works as little as he can. Gilibert even asserts that 'the working day of four Polish peasants hardly equals that of a good French day labourer.' He nevertheless rejoices that there are magnates who understood that their soil would be more productive if worked by free peasants. The king himself released 'all the serfs he could', an example that spurred magnates such as Count Chreptowicz,[42] the grand chancellor of Lithuania, whose revenues doubled after he had liberated the serfs on his estates. Hence, according to Gilibert, a hundred thousand serfs have already been freed in Poland. It is likely that here Gilibert has in mind the agreements made in 1783 with the peasants on the Crown estates. The professor nonetheless regrets that the king, an elected ruler,[43] 'hampered by the make-up [constitution] of the state and the sejms',[44] cannot go further to improve the condition of the serfs. Be that as it may, Gilibert maintains his confidence in the sovereign for continuing the process of emancipation, concluding: 'Ah, Sir, I wish I could describe to you all the good that Stanisław August has already done, and that he will do again, if Poland is fortunate enough to keep him.'[45]

[42] Joachim Litawor Chreptowicz (1729–1812).

[43] Remember that the Commonwealth of the Two Nations was an elective monarchy.

[44] Sejm: the national parliament, meeting once a year for four weeks, with possible extensions.

[45] A.-F. Prost de Royer, *Dictionnaire de jurisprudence et des arrêts*, tome troisième (Lyon, 1783), pp. 426–427.

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III. The reflections of Philosophes and Physiocrats on serfdom in the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth

Some French littérateurs gave advice on how to reform serfdom in the Commonwealth. They were either famous Philosophes or Physiocrats, economists who considered that all wealth came from the soil. In 1768, a confederation[46] was formed in Bar (present day Ukraine) against King Stanisław August and Russian meddling in the Commonwealth's domestic affairs. In 1770, Count Wielhorski,[47] an emissary of the Confederation, was sent to France to seek support from the French court. The count took advantage of being there to meet the Philosophes Jean-Jacques Rousseau and the Abbé de Mably,[48] to request their advice on reshaping Commonwealth institutions. Answering his query, Mably wrote 'Of the Polish Government and Laws' (*Du gouvernement et des loix de Pologne*), and Rousseau wrote 'Considerations on the Government of Poland and on its Proposed Reformation' (*Considérations sur le gouvernement de la Pologne et sur sa réformation projettée*).[49]

In his work, Mably endeavours to heighten awareness among the nobility of the peasants' sad condition, stressing the importance of the serfs to the economy: 'May Poland look with compassion on men who want to serve and defend it, and the landowners will see their wealth increase.'[50] Although Mably wished for the emergence of a class of free peasants, the only advice he gives to improve their situation is to grant them freedom after they have completed 20-year service in the militia.[51]

As for Rousseau, he asserts that the economic and political feebleness of the Republic resides in its social organisation. Indeed, although the peasants constitute by far the biggest part of

[46] Confederation: a league of nobles, formed in an emergency, either 'around the King' or in opposition to him.

[47] Michal Wielhorski (1730–1814), the Lithuanian master of the kitchen.

[48] Abbé Gabriel Bonnot de Mably (1709–1785), a Philosophe and historian.

[49] The authors use the term 'Poland' in the titles of their works, but knowing how contemporaries used the terms 'Poland' and 'Commonwealth of the Two Nations' interchangeably, these works also apply to the Grand Duchy of Lithuania.

[50] G. Bonnot de Mably, *Œuvres complètes de l'abbé de Mably* (Lyon, 1792), p. 201.

[51] Ibid., p. 178.

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the inhabitants of the country, they play no political role in it. For this reason, the Philosophe imagines a progressive process to free the serfs, including the creation in each palatinate[52] of a Sanction or Charity Committee (*Comité censorial ou de bienfaisance*) composed of elected representatives summoned every two years between the Sejms.

At each meeting of the Committee, a list would be drawn up of peasants who have shown 'good behaviour, good culture and good customs, care for their families, and good performance of their duties'. This list would then be transmitted to the local sejmik,[53] which (in compliance with a legal quota) would choose the peasants who merit their freedom.[54] Rousseau also wanted compensation to be paid to the owner of the serfs, to avoid any financial damage to him.[55] Subsequently, it would be possible to liberate whole villages to create peasant communities, and to grant them communal lands. The Philosophe also wished the peasants ultimately became part of the nation and had representatives in the Sejm.[56] With such a process, he hoped the peasants 'would be beloved' and could be enlisted in a militia.[57]

With its poorly developed industry and commerce, the Commonwealth also drew the attention of the Physiocrats, who considered that all wealth came from agriculture. During a stay in Paris in 1767 and 1768, the Bishop of Vilnius Ignacy Massalski (1726–1794) became acquainted with the Abbé Nicolas Baudeau,[58] the editor of the Physiocrat newspaper 'Citizen's Calendar' (*Ephémerides du citoyen*). After Bishop Massalski aroused the abbé's interest in the Commonwealth, the latter published in *Ephémerides* various 'Letters on the Current Situation in Poland and the Origins of its

[52] A local administrative provincial unit (*województwo*).

[53] Sejmik: a local electoral assembly.

[54] J.-J. Rousseau, *Œuvres complètes*, vol. III (Paris, 1964), p. 1026.

[55] Ibid., p. 1026.

[56] Ibid., p. 1027.

[57] Ibid., pp. 1025–1027.

[58] The Abbé Nicolas Baudeau (1730–1792), at the bishop's invitation, travelled in the Republic in the years 1768 and 1769. Massalski granted him the revenues of the abbey of Videniškiai, not far from Moletai in Lithuania.

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Misfortunes' between 1770 and 1772, as well as the series of articles 'Economic Advice on the Republic of Poland about Methods on Tax Collection'.[59] Another Physiocrat, Pierre-Paul Le Mercier de la Rivière,[60] after meeting the already-mentioned Count Wielhorski, wrote 'The Common Interest of the Poles' (*L'intérêt commun des Polonais*), in which he discussed guidelines for the transformation of the Republic.[61]

The Abbé Baudeau considers the situation of peasants in the Republic worse than anywhere else.[62] In his opinion, the lord confuses human property with landed property, and ignores the fact that land cultivated by a free people gives much higher yields.[63] Moreover, the landowner, since he possesses serfs, alienates himself:

> How is it possible to ignore the fact that slavery could ever exist in a territory, without the landowners, tyrants of the workers, being themselves the necessary victims either of the most absolute arbitrary despotism, or of the most complete anarchy?[64]

Le Mercier de la Rivière, in his 'The Common Interest of the Poles', shares Baudeau's opinion:

[59] These letters and articles were gathered into two books: *Lettres historiques sur l'état actuel de la Pologne* (Amsterdam-Paris, 1772); *Avis économiques aux citoyens éclairés de la République de Pologne sur la manière de percevoir le revenu public* (Paris, 1772).

[60] Pierre-Paul Le Mercier de la Rivière (1719–1793), in 1747–1757, was a magistrate at the Paris Parliament. In 1759–1764 he was intendant of the Windward Islands (Iles du Vent). He gained fame for his *Ordre naturel et essentiel des sociétés politiques* (Londres, 1767).

[61] 'The Common Interest of Poles or Memoir on the means to pacify for ever the current troubles in Poland, perfecting its government and reconciling its true interest with the true interest of other peoples' (*L'intérêt commun des Polonais ou Mémoire sur les moyens de pacifier pour toujours les troubles actuels de la Pologne, en perfectionnant son gouvernement et conciliant ses véritables intérêts avec les véritables intérêts des autres peuples*), written during the years 1771 and 1772, was never published.

[62] N. Baudeau, 'Avis économiques aux citoyens éclairés de la République de Pologne, sur la manière de percevoir le revenu public', in : *Ephémérides du citoyen*, tome onzième, 1770, p. 70.

[63] N. Baudeau, *Lettres historiques sur l'état actuel de la Pologne* (Amsterdam-Paris, 1772), p. 97.

[64] N. Baudeau, *Première introduction à la philosophie économique* (Paris, 1771), p. 157.

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In the midst of his slaves, a Polish lord knows no laws except his will. He has no idea of what is right and what is wrong. His quality as absolute master establishes in him from an early age a spirit of independence he cannot get rid of.[65]

Interestingly, Le Mercier further questions the social pressure that compels a lord to behave in an authoritarian way: 'A Polish lord, however rich he is, feels he has to be, in his district, an arbitrary despot and fully independent of the law.'[66] That said, Le Mercier pessimistically thought that if they were granted freedom too quickly, the serfs would be unable to benefit from it, and he himself does not furnish any concrete advice for their emancipation.[67]

IV. The reception given to French littérateurs' writings on serfdom in the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth

In endeavouring to make an assessment of the reception of writings by French littérateurs on serfdom in the Commonwealth, we can observe that the description of serfdom in the Commonwealth by Chappe d'Auteroche was overshadowed by the description he gave of serfdom in the Russian Empire. In fact, the Empress Catherine II, outraged by the portrayal he made of Russia, released her *Antidote*[68] to refute his book. It is very likely that as a result of the literary quarrel, readers will have remembered above all serfdom in Russia, and forgotten the Commonwealth.

As for Vautrin's work, the reviews in the press at the time may give some clues about its reception. In 1807, the French 'Typographic and Bibliographic Journal' (*Journal typographique et bibliographique*)[69] briefly presented the book, although emphasising that Vautrin 'treated the Poles with some severity'. In 1822, when Vautrin died, his colleague de Heldat at the Royal Society of Sciences, Letters and Arts of Nancy (*Société royale des sciences, lettres et arts de Nancy*) expressed his praise. About Vautrin's work

[65] P.-P. Le Mercier de la Rivière, *L'intérêt commun des Polonais*, pp. 28–29.

[66] Ibid., pp. 28–29.

[67] Ibid., pp. 28–31.

[68] Catherine II, *Antidote ou Réfutation du mauvais livre superbement imprimé intitulé : Voyage en Sibérie* (Petersburg, 1770).

[69] *Journal typographique et bibliographique*, dixième année (Paris, 1807), p. 108.

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on Poland, de Heldat admitted that he depicted the country and its inhabitants with some exaggeration (*il a rembruni ses couleurs*) conveying a sad image (*d'un œil chagrin*) of them. Nevertheless, for de Heldat, Vautrin was right to do so, since that was what the country was like.[70] Abroad, the widespread British *Critical Review* presented and reproduced long excerpts from Vautrin's work in 1808.[71] Since the Jesuit priest had lived for several years in the country he describes, the reviewer considers that there is 'no reason to call in question either the diligence of his research, the accuracy of his remarks, or the veracity of his narrative'.[72] It should be noted that Vautrin's work was released in 1807, and therefore, unlike the other authors, could not influence the debate on serfdom before the partitions. Nevertheless, because of the rather negative picture he portrayed of the defunct Republic, it may have served as an *a posteriori* justification for its dismemberment.

As for Professor Gilibert's work, in 1788, Pierre Luneau de Boisjermain, in his 'Lessons on Bibliography' (*Cours de bibliographie*),[73] emphasised the significance of the professor's 'View of the Rural Economy in Lithuania'. It was subsequently inserted in 1806 into the second publication of Gilibert's 'History of the Plants of Europe' (*Histoire des plantes d'Europe*), which was also reviewed in the *Critical Review.*[74] Unexpectedly for the reviewer, one of the most enthralling parts of this book devoted to botany is the description of the 'agriculture, life and labours of the peasantry' of the former Grand Duchy of Lithuania. He notes:

> Our ignorance of the "rural economy" of Poland,[75] and indeed of almost every thing which concerns that country, contributes to render this sketch from the pen of so able a naturalist and accurate observer, still more interesting.

[70] 'Eloge historique de feu M. l'abbé Vautrin', in: *Précis des travaux de la société royale des sciences, lettres et arts de Nancy*, de 1819 à 1823, p. 221.

[71] *The Critical Review*, series the third, vol. XII (London, 1808), pp. 504–520.

[72] Ibid, p. 520.

[73] P. Luneau de Boisjermain, *Cours de bibliographie, ou nouvelles productions des sciences, de la littérature et des arts* (Paris, 1788), pp. 196–197.

[74] 'The Appendice to the Critical Review', Vol. XII, No V, *The Critical Review or, Annals of Literature*, series the third, vol. XII, 1808, p. 478.

[75] The commentator has in mind the whole Commonwealth.

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The journalist adds that the description is all the more appealing in that since its redaction, the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth, partitioned and wiped off the map of Europe, has been 'the theatre of one of the most bloody and desperate wars that have ever disgraced the annals of man'.[76] Inspired, the reviewer even furnishes an abridged version of Gilibert's description.[77]

In the summer of 1779, Dubois de Jancigny resigned from his duties at the Warsaw Cadet Corps and left the Commonwealth, possibly because of his convictions regarding serfdom. Nevertheless, he may have contributed usefully to raising awareness of the issue. We can believe this when we see that Julian Ursyn Niemcewicz,[78] who completed his studies at the Warsaw Cadet Corps in 1777, wrote a historical play for the first anniversary of the 3 May Constitution entitled 'Casimir the Great' (*Kazimierz Wielki*), just like the Cadet Corps history teacher Dubois did before him.[79] It is equally interesting to note that Niemcewicz was an acquaintance of Professor Gilibert, and was delighted to meet him when he travelled to Lyons in 1784.[80]

Concerning Mably and Rousseau, they only proposed a lengthy process to free the serfs, and made no specific recommendations for preparing them for freedom, or for preparing the nobleman to run his agricultural holdings without them. Actually, flattered by the request for advice from the lords of the Confederation of Bar, they chose not to displease them by demanding the prompt emancipation of the serfs. For these reasons, it was difficult to expect landowners to make changes towards the serfs, let alone those who perceived the improvement of their situation as interference in their privileges. Besides, as the historian Richard Butterwick noted, Rousseau's *Considerations*, although envisaging personal

[76] Ibid., pp. 482–483.

[77] Ibid., p. 485.

[78] Julian Ursyn Niemcewicz (1757–1841), the Polish politician and political writer, represented Livonia at the Four-Year Sejm. He was the secretary of Tadeusz Kosciuszko during the 1794 uprising.

[79] J. Niemcewicz, *Kazimierz Wielki w trzech aktach* (Warszawa, 1792).

[80] A. Nieuwazny, C. Laforest, *De tout temps amis, cinq siècles de relations franco-polonaises* (Paris, 2004), p. 136.

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and political liberty for peasants, was 'a misty prospect', and was used as an excuse for the proponents of serfdom well into the 19th century.[81] In addition to this, one might wonder if Rousseau himself, with his shifty way of life, would have met the requirements he set to liberate the serfs. As for the Physiocrats, although they sympathised with the Polish and Lithuanian serfs, they made no proposal for freeing them, and, like Mably and Rousseau, did not want to meddle too much in the noblemen's business.

That said, Enlightenment ideas and Physiocrat doctrines had an influence on the clergymen of the Commonwealth. Such was the case with the Michał Karpowicz,[82] who called for a complete rethink of the legal status of the peasants in the Republic. Referring to a concept of Physiocratic and natural law,[83] the priest demanded that the peasants be granted full citizenship.[84] In the 1770s, he delivered numerous sermons[85] recalling that serfdom is incompatible with Christian values and natural law,[86] often raising discontent among the local nobility. The clergyman also emphasised the need to offer a suitable education to the children of peasant families, a prerequisite for the prosperity of the country.[87] In order to implement his educational ideas, he established a parish school in Prienai in Lithuania.[88] Karpowicz was not the only clergyman

[81] R. Butterwick, *The Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth. Light and Flame* (New Haven-London, 2021), p. 114.

[82] Michał Franciszek Karpowicz (1744–1803), priest, and professor of theology at Vilnius University.

[83] A. Parent, *Prancūzai Abiejų Tautų Respublikos pertvarkyme Stanislovo Augusto valdymo laikotarpiu* (*1764–1795 m.*), p. 92.

[84] M. Karpowicz, *Kazanie jubileuzowe*. Quoted by: M. P. Karpavičius, *Rinktiniai pamokslai*, ed. K. Mačiulytė (Vilnius, 2003), pp. 31–32.

[85] M. Karpowicz, *Kazania w roznych okolicznosciach miane*, vol. II (Kraków, 1806), p. 205; vol. III (Wilno, 1777), p. 28.

[86] M. Karpowicz, 'Kazanie jubileuszowe, w porządku 80, z rozkazu J. O. Ks[ię]cia Jmci Pasterza dnia 24 wresnia 1776 w kosciele Sw. Ducha miane, o powinnej poddanym od panow milosci wgzledem ich duszy, a zatem o powinności wyprowadzenia ich z tej grubości rozumu, w której zostają, i o szkołach parafialnych', in: *Kazania w rożnych okolicznościach miane*, vol. II (Wilno, 1777); vol. III (Kraków, 1806), p. 56.

[87] L. Pukianiec, 'Kazania jubileuszowe ks. Michała Franciszka Karpowicza', in: *Alma Mater Vilnensis* (z. 11, 1933), pp. 8–10.

[88] A. Parent, *Prancūzai Abiejų Tautų Respublikos pertvarkyme Stanislovo Augusto valdymo laikotarpiu* (*1764–1795 m.*), p. 93.

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who sought to reconcile natural law and Physiocratic doctrine with the teachings of the Catholic Church. On 10 May 1776, the Bishop of Vilnius Massalski called on the priests of his diocese to draw attention to the issue of serfdom in their sermons. Also quite interesting is the experiment implemented by the prelate Paweł Brzostowski.[89] In 1769, this convinced follower of Rousseau and the Physiocrats acquired an estate near Merkinė in Lithuania, where he created a peasants' republic named 'the Republic of Paulava'. The peasants were free and the corvée was replaced by rent. A parish school was set up for children and adults.[90] The community operated until 1795.

The issue of serfdom finally found a beginning to its resolution in the Constitution of 3 May 1791.[91] Article IV (Peasants and Villagers) states that: 'The agricultural populace, from whose hands flows the most plentiful source of the country's riches' is received 'under the protection of the country's law and government'[92] (actually, only the peasants established on a starosty or a Crown estate were covered by this provision). In France, in Lyons, the city where Professor Gilibert lived, the local branch of the Society of Friends of the Constitution[93] congratulated King Stanisław August on 27 May 1791 for the implementation of the 3 May Constitution, for the improvement it brought to the situation of the peasants in the country: 'It is more beautiful to reign over citizens than to command slaves, and you hastened to restore the rights of men to the inhabitants of the towns of your Empire and the assurance of

[89] The priest Paweł Ksawery Brzostowski (1739–1827). About the Republic of Paulava, see: J. Bartyś, *Rzeczpospolita Pawlowska na tle reform włościańskich w Polsce w XVIII wieku* (Warszawa, 1982); P. K. Bžostovskis, *Paulavos Respublika*, eds. A. Arlauskienė, L. Jurgelevič, R. Šmigelskytė-Stukienė, (Vilnius, 2014).

[90] A. Parent, *Prancūzai Abiejų Tautų Respublikos pertvarkyme Stanislovo Augusto valdymo laikotarpiu* (*1764–1795 m.*), p. 99.

[91] The Andrzej Zamoyski Code, completed in 1778, which contained provisions beneficial to peasants, was rejected by the Sejm in 1780.

[92] Freedom was granted only to peasants migrating into the 'territories of the Commonwealth' and to those returning to the country after an absence. See: R. Butterwick, *The Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth. Light and Flame*, pp. 231, 263–264.

[93] *La société des Amis de la Constitution*, designed to support the adoption of a French constitution.

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liberty to the inhabitants of the countryside.'[94] It is highly probable that Professor Gilibert, who promoted the reforms carried out by King Stanislaw, played a role in this accolade.

Nevertheless, no matter how benevolent and full of hope Article IV of the 3 May 1791 Constitution was, the situation of the peasants did not evolve, the reformers being reluctant to carry out too radical changes. Such was the case with King Stanisław August. However willing he was to improve the situation of the peasants, he had to deal with the social context of the country.[95] This was evident in a letter he wrote in 1790 during the Four-Year Sejm[96] to Filippo Philip Mazzei,[97] his correspondent in Paris:

> When talking about this country [the Commonwealth of the Two Nations] always remember that generally speaking we are two centuries younger than France, in terms of philosophical-political ideas. And many medicines that are very suitable for France, here would be too early.[98]

It is true that some unrest broke out when the peasants understood the Constitution as an act of liberation.[99]

Conclusion

As serfdom was a part of the country's agrarian system and social order, the reform of the economy and a change in public thought patterns were a prerequisite for its abolition. Moreover, it has to be recalled that in France itself the suppression of the last remnants of feudalism occurred with the Revolution's unexpected and violent events. Such events happened in the Polish-Lithuanian

[94] J. Favre, *Stanislas-Auguste et les hommes de lettres français* (offprint from *Archivum Neophilologicum*), 1936, p. 2.

[95] For instance, on 10 February 1790 the sejmik of Trakai in Lithuania, by invoking both internal and external security, instructed its representative at the Four-year Sejm definitely to not support initiatives favouring the emancipation of the serfs. See: M. Jučas, *Baudžiavos irimas Lietuvoje*, p. 215.

[96] The Four-Year Sejm was a parliament that was held in the years 1788–1792. Its most significant achievement was the adoption of the 3 May 1791 Constitution.

[97] Filippo Mazzei (1730–1816), an Italian physician, merchant and author, was a privy councillor of King Stanislaw August.

[98] Letter written by King Stanislaw August to Filippo Mazzei, 1 December 1790. Bibliothèque polonaise de Paris, MS 37, fol. 430.

[99] A. Šapoka, *Gegužės 3 d. Konstitucija ir Lietuva* (Kaunas, 1940), pp. 152, 157.

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Commonwealth in 1794 when Tadeusz Kosciuszko issued his 'Manifesto of Polanec' (*Uniwersał połanieck*), according to which serfs fighting for the motherland would be freed. Despite how bravely the 'Scythemen' fought, because of the Commonwealth's ultimate partition, this proclamation was not lasting. Still, the idea remained in the air, and in his pamphlet 'Can Poles Fight their Way to Independence?' (*Czy Polacy wybić się mogą na niepodległość*), published anonymously in Paris in 1800, the political writer Józef Pawlikowski (1767–1826) answered positively, provided that the peasantry was emancipated and mobilised to fight, thus echoing the wishes of the Marquis de Caraccioli.

Our survey shows that some authors (Chappe d'Auteroche, Bernardin de Saint-Pierre, Linguet, Jaucourt, Vautrin), while showing compassion for the peasants, enhanced the negative perception the readers had of the Commonwealth with their dreary reports on the Polish-Lithuanian peasantry. Others (Caraccioli, Dubois de Jancigny, Gilibert) helped to offer an alternative and more optimistic approach. This tends to temper the commonly held view that the writings of French writers about the Commonwealth of the Two Nations as a whole were negative. Nowadays, the Marquis de Caraccioli and Professor Gilibert are almost forgotten, but in his time Caraccioli was renowned for the abundance of his witty publications, and Gilibert was a respected scientist whose works were reviewed in the French and the foreign press. As for the famous Mably and Rousseau, given that they knew too little about the Commonwealth to provide relevant solutions regarding the peasantry, their advice could not be retained. Rousseau's ideas on liberty as expressed in *The Social Contract* were more influential. Concerning the Physiocrats, their economic doctrine attracted the attention of the landowners more easily.

All these *littérateurs* still contributed to raising the issue of serfdom in the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth in the public sphere. Although social and political conditions were not yet there for the complete liberation of the peasants, their reflections were food for thought for the Polish-Lithuanian elite. Had the Commonwealth not been partitioned, progressive ideas would have taken root, little by little, and the peasants would have gained personal

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and civic rights, becoming full citizens of their country. Eventually, in the countries that included the former Polish and Lithuanian lands, that is, Prussia, Austria and Russia, serfdom was abolished in the years 1807, 1848 and 1861 respectively.

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PLUNKSNA IR DALGIS – VALSTIEČIŲ KLAUSIMAS XVIII A. ABIEJŲ TAUTŲ RESPUBLIKOJE TUOMETINIŲ PRANCŪZŲ LITERATŲ KŪRYBOJE

Santrauka

ARNAUD PARENT

XVIII a. Vakarų Europos gyventojai labai mažai žinojo apie Abiejų Tautų Respubliką, kurios santvarka buvo suvokiama kaip keista ir anarchiška. Čia dėl baudžiavos ne tik žemės ūkis buvo neefektyvus, bet ir kaimyninės valstybės turėjo pretekstą kištis į Respublikos vidaus reikalus. Vis dėlto dėl po truputį plintančių Apšvietos idėjų kilo ir valstiečių statuso Abiejų Tautų Respublikoje klausimas.

Straipsnyje, pateikiant prancūzų keliautojų ar gyvenusių ATR (Chappe d'Auteroche, Bernardin de Saint-Pierre, Linguet, Jaucourt, Dubois de Jancigny, Caraccioli, Vautrin, Gilibert) įspūdžius ir mąstytojų (Mably, Rousseau, Baudeau, Le Mercier de la Rivière) svarstymus apie Abiejų Tautų Respublikos valstiečius, nagrinėjama, kaip šie autoriai prisidėjo prie to, kad baudžiavos klausimas Respublikoje būtų iškeltas į viešąją erdvę, ir stengiamasi įvertinti jų įtaką skaitytojams Respublikoje ir užsienyje. Nors socialinės ir politinės sąlygos visiškam baudžiauninkų išsilaisvinimui dar nebuvo susiklosčiusios, šių literatų refleksijos buvo penas Lenkijos ir Lietuvos elito pamąstymams. Respublika nebūtų buvusi padalyta, progresyvios idėjos po truputį būtų įsitvirtinusios, o valstiečiai būtų įgiję asmeninių ir pilietinių teisių ir tapę visateisiais savo šalies piliečiais.

Tokia apžvalga siekiama pristatyti mažai žinomus autorius, praplėsti žinias apie prancūzų literatūrą, skirtą XVIII a. Abiejų Tautų Respublikai, ir išplėsti istoriografiją, skirtą valstiečių klausimui Respublikoje. Straipsnyje pateikiama: 1) prancūzų, keliavusių ar gyvenusių Abiejų Tautų Respublikoje, pasakojimai apie valstietiją; 2) prancūzų dėstytojų įsitraukimas į debatus dėl baudžiavos Abiejų Tautų Respublikoje; 3) filosofų ir fiziokratų svarstymai apie baudžiavą Abiejų Tautų Respublikoje; 3) prancūzų literatų raštų apie baudžiavą Abiejų Tautų Respublikoje apžvalga.

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