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OLD AGE GIVES NO JOY?
OLD PEOPLE IN THE KUJAWY COUNTRYSIDE
AT THE END OF THE 18TH CENTURY

Here is the fair mall
To give a knock on the skull
To the man who keep no gear for himself
But gives all to his bairns¹.

It is only recently that historians began to conduct research on old age, their interest having been aroused by external circumstances, by the irreversible ageing of the population, evident in this century². The fact that the percentage of old people is steadily rising makes it necessary to assure them of means of livelihood and medical care and overcome their feeling of alienation from society. One of the results of this situation is that in the last twenty years historians have started to examine a new subject, namely, the historical aspects of old age, which can be researched in the same way as childhood

¹ A 16th century poem from the Scottish Highlands; similar versions circulated in Germany and Scandinavia at that time. Quoted after D. G a u n t, *The Property and Kin Relationships of Retired Farmers in Northern and Central Europe*, in: *Family Forms in Historic Europe*, ed. R. W a l l, J. R o b i n, P. L a s l e t t, Cambridge 1983, p. 260. I would like to thank the researchers of the Chair of Ethnology and Cultural Anthropology of Warsaw University as well as the Department of the History of Early Modern Times, Institute of History, Polish Academy of Sciences for their critical remarks which enabled me to make the text more precise.

² See the classic work by E. R o s s e t, *Proces starzenia się ludności (The Process of Population Ageing)*, Warszawa 1959; as regards more recent works, see Z. Z a r z y c k a, K. N o w a k – S a p o t a, B. N o w a k o w s k a, W. O b r a n i a k, *Terytorialne zróżnicowanie procesu starzenia się ludności Polski (Territorial Differences in the Ageing of Poland's Population)*, Warszawa 1991, and E. F r ą t c z a k, *Demograficzne determinanty procesu starzenia się ludności — metody pomiaru (Demographic Determinants of the Ageing of Population — Measurement Methods)*, in: E. F r ą t c z a k et al., *Wybrane uwarunkowania i konsekwencje procesu starzenia się ludności Polski*, Warszawa 1987, an important text for understanding the mechanism of population ageing.

and youth³. The first studies called into question the deep-rooted opinion that the problem of old age did not exist in the past, there being few old people then owing to a short life expectancy. It turned out that in many societies the proportion of old people was considerable, amounting to several or even 10 per cent (England at the end of the 17th century)⁴. The prospect of approaching old age aroused people's anxiety about their livelihood in the last years of their lives, and shaped family strategy⁵. This would be a sufficient reason for making old age a question of interest to historians.

The adage in the title of the article is usually unequivocal. By putting a question mark after it I have no intention of negating the inconveniences usually associated with old age. I only want to signal that people's attitude to the aged may vary. Oskar Kolberg wrote in the 19th century that the inhabitants of Kujawy showed respect to the old (e.g. by taking off their caps on seeing aged people), but they also did not hesitate to throw them out of the house and force them to go begging when it turned out that they were

³ There is a rich literature on this subject; see the pioneering works by P. Laslett, *The History of Ageing and the Aged*, in: *Family Life and Illicit Love in Earlier Generations*, Cambridge 1977; idem, *A Fresh Map of Life. The Emergence of the Third Age*, London 1989; idem, *Family, Kinship and Collectivity as Systems of Support in the Pre-Industrial Europe*, "Continuity and Change", vol. 3, 1988; surveys by D. Gaunt, *The Property and Kin Relationships* (the book contains a list of earlier works); H. Rebel, *Peasant Classes. The Bureaucratization of Property and Family Relations under Early Habsburg Absolutism 1511–1636*, Princeton 1983, in particular pp. 170 ff.; R. Wall, *Elderly Persons and Members of Their Households in England and Wales from Pre-industrial Times to Present Days* (a typescript kindly put at my disposal by the author); *Life, Death and the Elderly*, ed. M. Pelling, R. M. Smith, London 1989; G. A. Gunnlaugsson, L. Guttormsson, *Transitions into Old Age. Poverty and Retirement Possibilities in Eighteenth and Nineteenth Century Iceland*, in: *Poor Woman and Children in the European Past*, ed. J. Henderson, R. Wall, London 1993; G. A. Gunnlaugsson, *Living Arrangements of the Elderly in a Changing Society: the Case of Iceland 1880–1930*, "Continuity and Change", vol. 8, 1993; a literary picture of old age has been presented by G. Minois, *History of Old Age: from Antiquity to the Renaissance*, Cambridge 1989; P. Bois, *Od Montaigne'a do pierwszych emerytur (From Montaigne to the First Old Age Pensions)*, Warszawa 1996.

⁴ P. Laslett, *The History of Ageing*, pp. 181 ff.; see also the reconstructions of the structures of England's population by age and gender in: E. A. Wrigley, R. S. Schofield, *The Population History of England 1541–1871*, London 1981; R. M. Smith, *Fertility, Economy and Household Formation in England over Three Centuries*, "Population and Development Review", vol. 7, 1981, and T. Ładogórski, *Ludność (Population)*, in: *Historia Śląska*, ed. W. Długoborski and S. Michałekiewicz, vol. II, part. I, Wrocław 1966, pp. 35 ff.

⁵ Family strategy has been discussed by D. Gauntin, *The Property and Kin Relationships*, the situation in towns by R. J. Morris, *The Middle-Class and the Property Cycle during the Industrial Revolution*, in: *The Search for Wealth and Stability*, ed. T. C. Smout, London 1979.

no longer capable of earning their upkeep. Far from shocking anyone, this was regarded as something quite natural⁶.

Old age has been frequently mentioned in Polish historical, ethnographic, sociological and demographic writings, but no attempt has yet been made to present an historical synthesis of this period of human life. J. Rutkowski, B. Baranowski, A. Izydorczyk, A. Wyczański and A. Woźniak⁷ have written about aged peasants in Old Poland, and information on the situation of old peasants after the reform which granted them land (enfranchisement) has been supplied by D. Markowska, K. Dobrowolski and in the classic work by W. Thomas and F. Znaniecki⁸.

Some authors underline the contrast between villages before and after enfranchisement⁹. After the "impropriation", old people were offered notary-guaranteed annuities. Earlier, the duty of corvée and the landowners' absolute power resulted in such drastic changes that e.g. they were removed from their holdings to small plots, had to live with strangers, were forced to go begging or sent to a hospital. Life contracts, called "laments" in Kujawy, did exist, but it is difficult to say whether the practice was widespread and

⁶ O. Kolberg, *Kujawy*, Warszawa 1978, p. 51. This is how F. Znaniecki explains this apparent paradox: "A person who does not get married at the established time, like an old man who does not die at the established time, arouses unfriendly surprise in the family group; such individuals seem to be stopping in the middle of an incessant march forward", W. Thomas, F. Znaniecki, *Chłop polski w Europie i Ameryce (The Polish Peasant in Europe and America)*, vol. I, Warszawa 1976, p. 110.

⁷ J. Rutkowski, *Poddaństwo włościan w XVIII wieku w Polsce i niektórych innych krajach Europy (The Serfdom of Peasants in the 18th Century in Poland and Some Other European Countries)*, in: idem, *Wieś europejska późnego feudalizmu*, Warszawa 1986, p. 96; B. Baranowski, *Kultura ludowa XVII i XVIII wieku na ziemiach Polski środkowej (Peasant Culture in Central Poland in the 17th and 18th Centuries)*, Łódź 1971, pp. 336 ff.; A. Woźniak, *Kultura mazowiecka wsi pańszczyźnianej XVIII i początku XIX wieku (Culture of Mazovian Serf Villages in the 18th and Early 19th Centuries)*, Wrocław 1987, pp. 110 ff.; A. Izydorczyk, *Rodzina chłopska w Małopolsce w XV–XVI wieku (The Peasant Family in Little Poland in the 15th and 16th Centuries)*, in: *Spółczesność staropolskie*, vol. 3, Warszawa 1983; A. Wyczański, *Opieka nad ludźmi starymi na wsi polskiej w XVI w. (Care of Old People in Polish Villages in the 16th Century)*, in: *Biedni i bogaci*, Warszawa 1992. The situation in the Polish Lowlands has been described by P. Szafrań, *Żuławy Gdańskie w XVII wieku. Studium z dziejów społecznych i gospodarczych (Gdańsk Lowlands in the 17th Century. A Study in Social and Economic History)*, Gdańsk 1981, pp. 82 ff.

⁸ D. Markowska, *Z problematyki zmian struktury rodziny; rodzina wielopokoleniowa a ludzie starzy (Changes in Family Structure, the Multigenerational Family and Old People)*, in: *Zmiany kultury chłopskiej. Problematyka i metody prac etnograficznych*, Wrocław 1973 (bibliography); eadem, *Rodzina wiejska na Podlasiu 1864–1964 (The Peasant Family in Podlasie 1864–1964)*, Wrocław 1970; K. Dobrowolski, *Chłopska kultura tradycyjna (Traditional Peasant Culture)*, "Etnografia Polski", vol. 1, 1958; W. Thomas, F. Znaniecki, *Chłop polski*.

⁹ E.g. A. Woźniak, *Kultura*, p. 111.

whether all contracts were entered in court records¹⁰. What was propitious for the aged was the demand for their work (care of small children), the respect shown them as conveyors of cultural tradition by word of mouth and, in drastic cases, the influence of the Church and social pressure. There were regional and social differences which depended on wealth and the kind of title to the land, The radical change which took place in property relations after enfranchisement naturally changed the situation of this category of people¹¹.

In this essay I will present the chronology of old age in the south-eastern part of the Kujawy region at the end of the 18th century and try to examine what percentage of old people continued to live with their children when the latter took over the holding. Let me point out that I have no intention of analysing life contracts but will confine myself to a statistical evaluation of the fate of old people without delving into individual cases. In order to present old age in the proper context let us pay some attention to the institution of marriage and the structure of peasant families (age differences between spouses, the presence of relatives).

Sixty years has now been accepted in demography as the beginning of old age¹². This criterion is only seemingly unequivocal. It has been pointed out that many persons who have reached what is regarded as old age quite fit and cannot be regarded as old¹³. In order to overcome this difficulty the term “psycho-social old age” has been introduced in sociology. This is “the stage of life when psychological processes, manifest in resignation and in the feeling that one has no prospects, as well as social processes, consisting in the individual’s feeling of being rejected, act together with biological processes in accordance with the existing cultural ritual; this undermines the individual’s equilibrium and consequently, restricts his ability to counteract these processes and find a substitution; it also deprives him of the chance of

¹⁰ A. Wyczański, *Opieka*, p. 66.

¹¹ For general remarks on this question see, for instance, V. G. Kiernan, *Private Property in History*, in: *Family and Inheritance. Rural Society in Western Europe, 1200–1800*, ed. J. Goody, J. Thirsk, E. P. Thompson, Cambridge 1976, as well as the opinions of the classics of ethnology (e.g. Morgan) and, as regards Polish territories, the views of A. Woźniak. Let us add that the question of better and worse titles to land in Old Poland has not been adequately explained in Polish historiography. In addition to purely economic questions, family strategy depends on many cultural factors, see M. Mitterauer, *Komplexe Familienformen in sozialhistorischer Sicht*, “Ethnologia Europea”, vol. 12, 1981.

¹² E. Frątczak, *Proces starzenia się ludności Polski (The Ageing of Poland’s Population)*, in: E. Frątczak et al., *Wybrane uwarunkowania*.

¹³ J. Piotrowski, *Warunki życiowe i podstawowe potrzeby ludzi starych (Life Conditions and the Basic Needs of Old People)*, “Biuletyn Instytutu Gospodarstwa Społecznego” 1973, p. 33, and idem, *Starość w Polsce. Przyczynek do pojęcia starości (Old Age in Poland. A Contribution to the Concept of Old Age)*, “Przegląd Socjologiczny”, vol. 24, 1971, p. 126.

returning to the old state”¹⁴. To determine the psycho-social age the researcher would have to poll the population, but polls are not used by historians. Nevertheless, the term is useful¹⁵. In old rural societies the status of an individual did not depend on his age but on his position in the community and in the household¹⁶. A seventy-year old householder held an incomparably higher place in social hierarchy than an annuitant 10–15 years younger or a lodger living with his family or with a neighbour. In this sense it was the household position that was the decisive criterion in determining the psycho-social or, to be more correct, the social age of an individual.

The reflections that follow are based on censuses carried out in 23 parishes of the Radziejów and Podgórze districts in 1791 at the request of the civilian and military commission of the Radziejów district¹⁷. They concern a total of 14,851 persons living in the villages of that area, or 14,381 if we exclude noblemen, Jews, priests and persons whose age was not specified.

Before we define social old age more exactly let us use the birth date criterion and accept 60 years as the commencement of old age. When establishing the proportion of people over 60, we must remember that the main defect of the source at our disposal is that age was not declared precisely, for attention was focused on numbers ending in 0 or 1. The older the age, the greater were the deformations. In order to eliminate them, we have divided the population into ten-year groups, placing the age figures ending in 0 and 1 in the middle of each group. In order to find the proportion of people aged 60 and over, we must therefore divide the number of persons in the 55–64 age bracket by two. This is not a precise calculation for the group aged 55–59 must have been much more numerous than the group aged 60–64, but in view of the imprecision of the source, this will do. What we want is a general idea, not a precise calculation.

¹⁴ J. Staręga-Piasek, A. Lisowski, *Starość psychospołeczna (Psycho-social Old Age)*, in: *Starość psychospołeczna i potrzeby opieki medycznej ludzi starszych*, Warszawa 1985, p. 43.

¹⁵ As regards ancient Rome see the remarks by W. Suder, *Kloto, Lachesis, Atropos. Studia społeczno-demograficzne i medyczne z historii starożytnego Rzymu (Clotho, Lachesis, Atropos. Socio-demographic and Medical Studies in the History of Ancient Rome)*, Wrocław 1994, in particular pp. 54 ff.

¹⁶ See J. Oledzki's remarks on time in peasant consciousness, *Murzynowo. Znaki istnienia i tożsamości mieszkańców wioski nadwiślańskiej w XVIII–XX wieku (Murzynowo. Signs of the Existence and Identity of the Inhabitants of a Village on the Vistula in the 18th–20th Centuries)*, Warszawa 1992, pp. 168 ff.; and W. Thomas, F. Znaniecki, *Chłop polski*, vol. I, p. 114.

¹⁷ Central Archives of Historical Records in Warsaw (henceforward referred to as CAHR), Great Poland's Court Records, documents of the civil and military commission of the Radziejów district, vols. 1 and 4. A list of the censuses can be found in A. Siłuch-Błaszczyk, *Parafialne spisy ludności powiatu radziejowskiego (Parish Population Registers of the Radziejów District)*, "Przeźsłość Demograficzna Polski", vol. 16, 1985.

According to this definition of old age, old people accounted for 4.7 per cent of the population of villages in the Kujawy region (4.8 per cent of men and 4.6 per cent of women being old). This estimate is however too high, for the proportion of small children is clearly too low in the census, and the gender proportions in the individual age groups are deformed (the number of men in the 15–30 age bracket in all 1791 censuses is too low). It is impossible to establish the exact percentage of old people without supplementing our source by an estimate of persons left out. The number of small children should be increased by 1004 and that of men in the 15–30 age group by 123; this will lower the proportion of old men to 4.3 per cent of the total population¹⁸. This is not a high percentage; it is lower than the proportions in Silesia, in the four parishes of the Wieluń region researched by W. Obraniak and the proportions known from the life tables of that time¹⁹.

What may raise doubt is that the gender proportions in the oldest age group indicate the preponderance of men. It seems that the number of women is too small. Although in the censuses cited by P. Laslett and in many old Polish censuses the number of men did sometimes equal that of women or even exceeded it, the difference is never so great as in Kujawy (see the last columns of *Table 1 A and B*)²⁰.

¹⁸ The proposed increase in the number of children is based on the death order in a French table from 1740–1749, Y. Blayo, *La mortalité en France 1740 à 1829*, "Population", vol. 30, 1975, and on the assumption that the natural increase amounted to 0.6 per cent annually. The method has been presented by J. Z. Holzer, *Model ludności ustabilizowanej (A Model of Stable Population)*, Warszawa 1969. The low number of men aged 15–30, common in civil–military registers, does not reflect the actual state but men's fear of being called up. For the principles of conscription see L. Ratajczyk, *Wojsko i obronność Rzeczypospolitej 1788–1792 (The Commonwealth's Army and Means of Defence 1788–1792)*, Warszawa 1975, Chapter 2.

¹⁹ W. Obraniak, *Oblicze demograficzne wsi wieluńskiej w epoce Sejmu Wielkiego (The Demographic Aspect of Villages in the Wieluń Region during the Great Sejm)*, "Studia Demograficzne", vol. 16, 1968, p. 111: 6.7 per cent were persons aged 60 and over; the author has levelled down the percentage on the basis of a hypothetical age structure drawn up by E. Viérose in 1957.

²⁰ The hypothesis that men outnumbered women in the past and lived longer than females because child-bearing increased women's death rate (see J. O. Benediktow, *The Medieval Demographic System of the Nordic Countries*, Oslo 1993) has not been confirmed by research. See R. S. Schofield, *Did the Mothers Really Die? Three Centuries of Maternal Mortality in the World We Have Lost, in: The World We Have Gained. Histories of Population and Social Structure*, ed. L. Bonfield, R. M. Smith, K. Wrightson, Cambridge 1986, and I. Loudon, *Maternal Mortality: Definition and Secular Trends in England and Wales, 1850–1970*, in: *The Cambridge World History of Human Disease*, Cambridge 1993. A different opinion is held by A. Faue-Chamoux, *Starość w rodach pirenejskich w XVIII i XIX w.*, "Przeszość Demograficzna Polski", vol. 18, 1990.

Table 1. Population according to age and household position. Radziejów and Podgórze districts (in percentages)

A. Men — Household position

Age	Children	Farm-hands	House-holders	Male relatives	Male lodgers	Percentage	Persons
0-4	73	7	—	3	17	100	927
5-9	74	7	—	2	17	100	972
10-14	61	27	—	2	10	100	792
15-24	25	62	3	3	7	100	1309
25-34	3	42	37	5	13	100	1284
35-44	0	22	61	1	16	100	1065
45-54	—	17	63	2	18	100	621
55-64	—	14	59	6	21	100	257
65-74	—	9	56	12	23	100	132
75-	—	7	32	28	32	100	96
Percentage Persons	30 2254	28 2096	24 1814	3 245	15 1046	100 —	— 7455

B. Women — Household position

Age	Children	Farm-hands	House-wives	Female relatives	Female lodgers	Percentage	Persons
0-4	73	7	—	3	17	100	878
5-9	74	7	—	3	16	100	897
10-14	61	26	—	1	12	100	698
15-24	19	47	17	5	12	100	1410
25-34	1	20	56	3	20	100	1320
35-44	—	10	63	2	25	100	835
45-54	—	10	52	10	28	100	457
55-64	—	12	30	23	35	100	227
65-74	—	4	14	42	40	100	125
75-	—	5	14	49	32	100	79
Percentage Total	29 2010	20 1406	27 1830	5 370	19 1310	100 —	— 6926

Source: My own calculations based on: Central Archives of Historical Records. Great Poland's Court Records, documents of the civilian and military commission of the Radziejów district, vols. 1, 4.

A predominance of men is characteristic of all age groups in Kujawy beginning with the 35-44 group. While in this age group it can be explained by the influx of immigrants, in the following groups it must have been due to the omission of women, but the scale of this omission can be only indirectly assessed. A comparison of the proportion of the genders in the Kujawy region with that of the stable population of Great Poland compiled on the basis of Great Poland's life tables in 1856-1858, allows us to assume that as many as 280 women aged 50-80 (32 per cent) must have been omitted

in the source²¹. We cannot correct the data but we can reasonably assume that the omissions concerned mainly single women, the householders' relatives and lodgers.

The percentage presentation of the population according to age and household position reveals the chronology of social old age in Kujawy villages. We have divided the inhabitants into five categories: children, farm-hands, householders and housewives, their relatives and lodgers. Let us add that the children of farm-hands, lodgers and relatives have been included in the respective groups; they do not figure in the category of children (*Table 1*).

The first conclusion which can be drawn from an analysis of the tables is that changes in household position and consequently also in social position were connected with age. A close look at the tables will show that the concept of men's old age differed from that for women. In the case of men, social age, that is, the transfer of the holding to a successor, began after the age of 65, although already in the 55–64 age group the percentage of landholders falls and that of relatives and lodgers increases.

Old age looked different in the case of women. Already in the 45–54 age bracket the proportion of housewives drops markedly while that of relatives and, to a much smaller extent, of lodgers increases. This trend intensifies in the successive age groups. This means that in the Kujawy rural areas women's old age started at 50 and men's about 10 years later. Differences in the chronology of old age were not the only differences in the life cycles of the two genders. Women got married at an earlier age; after leaving home they were less likely to increase the category of farm-hands and acquired the position of housewife at an earlier age. Old age, in the sense of loss of the acquired position, began earlier for them.

Let us now have a look at the table showing persons over 54 years of age according to their marital status (*Table 2*).

It shows a marked non-fortuitous difference between the genders, in particular a high percentage of widows, which greatly exceeds the percentage of widowers. Not even the high proportion of persons of unknown civil status can change this picture. Besides, the proportion of women is higher than that of men also in this group. This is confirmed by our earlier assumption that widows must have predominated among the oldest women omitted in the censuses. In our calculations persons of unknown marital status, inclu-

²¹ The Great Poland life tables have been compiled by M. Kędelski, *Umieralność i trwanie życia w Wielkopolsce w latach 1816–1875 (Morality Rate and Life Expectancy in Great Poland in 1816–1875)*, "Przeszłość Demograficzna Polski", vol. XVI, 1986.

ding spinsters and bachelors, will be regarded as widows and widowers; in our opinion this is not at variance with the real situation, for marriage was universal and persons who did not get married usually did not reach the age of 55²².

Table 2. Oldest persons (over the age of 54) in the Radziejów and Podgórze districts in 1791 according to their marital status

MARITAL STATUS		MEN	WOMEN
Single persons	number	6	3
	percentage	1.2	0.7
Married persons	number	373	169
	percentage	76.9	39.2
Widows and widowers	number	45	196
	percentage	9.3	45.5
Unknown status	number	61	63
	percentage	12.6	14.6
TOTAL	number	485	431
	percentage	100.0	100.0

Source: My own calculations based on Central Archives of Historical Records, Great Poland's Court Records, documents of the civil and military commission of the Radziejów district, vols. 1, 4.

The differences in the marital status of men and women are connected with their different household position reflected in the proportion of householders, farm-hands, relatives and lodgers among the two genders (*Table 1*). Of the 228 men aged over 64 as many as 105 were still heads of the household. However, there were only 7 widowers among them. A preponderance of married men is seen even among lodgers (of 61 lodgers 40 were married). Widowers outnumbered married men only in the group of relatives (21 widowers, 20 married men).

The situation of women aged over 64 was completely different. Only 29 of 204 women (14.7 per cent) were housewives; one of them was a widow who ran the holding herself. Relatives and lodgers constituted the most numerous group, widows predominating in both categories (81 per cent and 75 per cent respectively)²³. The connection between civil status and household position was thus even stronger among women than among men. This

²² For the commonness of marriage see W. T h o m a s, F. Z n a n i e c k i, *Chłop polski*, vol. I, pp. 110 ff.; for the link between marriage and longevity see S. P e l l e r, *Births and Deaths among Europe's Ruling Families since 1500*, in: *Population in History: Essays in Historical Demography*, London 1965.

²³ We do not know the marital status of 23 of the 75 women from the latter group, but they were most probably widows.

means that just as marriage and the taking over of a holding marked the beginning of adult age, old age was connected with widowhood and the transfer of land and housekeeping duties to the successors.

The institution of marriage deserves more attention because of its connection with adult and old age. In Kujawy and other already researched ethnically Polish regions, men contracted marriage at an average age 25–29 and women at between 20–24²⁴. Owing to a high death rate, marriages did not last long. This is why remarriages accounted for 50 per cent of the total number in some periods²⁵. Until the middle of the 19th century widowhood did not last long either, and as long as a man was able to run his holding he could count on finding a wife.

Unfortunately, our source does not provide direct information on the proportions of remarriages. Indirect information can be gleaned from the average difference in the age of spouses, which was 8.6 years (median 7 years). This great difference is due to the confusion of first with successive marriages in the census, for let us point out that the older the man, the greater the age difference between the spouses. In the group of men under 30 it is 4.8 years (median 4), in the group up to 40 it is 7.0 (median 6), between 40 and 50 it is 9.0 (median 9) and over 50 it is 14.3 (median 11)²⁶.

Frequent remarriages were an economic necessity and a means of retaining one's social position. This is confirmed by descriptive sources²⁷. Old men stood a much better chance on the marriage market than old women; this is confirmed by *Table 2* and E. Piasecki's research on the population of the parish of Bejsce in the Kielce region. The data cited by him indicate that the percentage of women who remarried dropped from 63

²⁴ I. Gieysztorowa, *Rodzina staropolska w świetle źródeł demograficznych. Zarys problematyki (The Old Polish Family in the Light of Demographic Sources. An Outline of the Matter)*, in: *Spółczesność staropolskie*, vol. 2, Warszawa 1979, p. 166; E. Piasecki, *Ludność parafii bejskiej (woj. kieleckie) w świetle ksiąg metrykalnych z XVIII–XIX wieku (The Population of the Parish of Bejsce (Kielce voivodship) in the Light of Public Records from the 18th and 19th Centuries)*, Wrocław 1990, pp. 141 ff.; K. Wierzbicka-Michalska, *Małżeństwa chłopów w drugiej połowie XVIII wieku (The Marriages of Peasants in the Second Half of the 18th Century)*, "Kultura i Społeczeństwo", vol. 3, 1959.

²⁵ A. Błaszczyk in report on research into the natural movements in Ostrów Mazowiecka in the 18th century, "Przeszłość Demograficzna Polski", vol. 16, 1985.

²⁶ Similar figures referring to age differences between spouses have been obtained in two Austrian parishes by M. Mitterauer, *Zur Familienstruktur in ländlichen Gebieten Österreichs im 17. Jahrhundert*, in: *idem, Familie und Arbeitteilung. Historische vergleichende Studien*, Wien 1992, p. 172. They were: 3 years in the group of men under 30, 7.1 in the groups up to 40 and 50, 13.8 in the group aged 50–59, and 19.3 in the group aged 70–79.

²⁷ W. Kula, *Dwór a rodzina chłopska (The Manor and the Peasant Family)*, in: *Teoria ekonomiczna ustroju feudalnego*, Warszawa 1983.

per cent in the case of women widowed when they were under 30 to 4.7 per cent in the case of those whose husband died when they were over 51. Women who had sons aged over 18 also found it difficult to remarry. Remarriage was exceptional in such cases (3.7 per cent)²⁸ and the holding was usually transferred to children. The data in *Table 2* allow us to assume that the fate of women in Kujawy was similar to that in the parish of Bejsce.

Until the end of the *corvée* system old people could remain with their family and be granted, or denied, a legal confirmation of their status as annuitants; they could also be sent to a hospital or live as lodgers with other householders. Let us examine these three possibilities.

We will take a look at the anatomy of the peasant family in Kujawy, remembering the phenomena mentioned above²⁹. The analysis takes into account 1407 holdings held by serf peasants and free peasants as well as semi-agricultural holdings and plots. We will call this group agricultural population³⁰.

A more detailed division is out of the question for the data concerning the social groups of the population we are dealing with are imprecise and fragmentary. Another group consisted of 299 households of cottagers, farm-hands of manorial farms living separately, and shepherds.

According to the censuses, two-generation families predominated among the households, accounting for 77.2 per cent of the 1,407 households of the agricultural population. One-generation families accounted for 10.1 per cent, and families consisting of three or more generations for 12.7 per cent. In the group of cottagers, families consisting of more than two generations accounted for only 6.4 per cent of all families and one-generation families for 17.4 per cent. These are, of course, minimum figures, for the percentage of families consisting of more than two generations is lower in our source than it really was because of the omission of youngest children

²⁸ E. Piasecki, *Ludność parafii bejskiej*, pp. 161 ff. See also the remarks by W. Kula, *Dwór a rodzina chłopska*, p. 237.

²⁹ The word "family" means here persons who are related and live in the same household. This is a stiff definition taken from present-day demography but one that has been successfully used in historical studies (see, for instance, *Household and Family in Past Times*, ed. P. Laslett, R. Wall, Cambridge 1972); it is also justified by the mentality current at that time, D. Herlihy, *Family*, "American Historical Review", vol. 96, 1991.

³⁰ Excluding innkeepers, millers, craftsmen and, of course, noblemen.

and inadequate information³¹. We must therefore also establish the proportion of households accommodating relatives, and families consisting of two or more related couples³².

There were 254 (18 per cent) such families among the agricultural population and 27 (9 per cent) among cottagers. The most frequent (164 and 24 respectively) were families composed of the householder and his wife and one or more widowed or unmarried relatives. Households with relatives of the ascending line predominated among them (130 among the agricultural population and 18 among cottagers). Women predominated among relatives aged over 45 (73 per cent of 252 persons). Widowed mothers were the most numerous category, constituting 57 per cent of all relatives and 77 per cent of female relations. Widowed fathers were a smaller group (28 cases); they accounted for only 42 per cent of all male relatives (67) aged over 45. Few families lived with collateral relations or relations of the descending line (31 and 6). There were 93 households (6.5 per cent) composed of two or more married couples among the agricultural population and 3 (1 per cent) among the cottagers. Households consisting of the householder, his wife and relatives of the descending line (married children and possibly grandchildren) predominated in this group (64 households among the agricultural population and 2 among cottagers). Less frequent were households where the two parents lived with their son or son-in-law who was the household head (24 families), while households composed of two married couples related colaterally were an exception (5 and 1 respectively). This means that the peasants of Kujawy shunned the typical post-land-reform situation where three-generation families predominated and where old people, at

³¹ The error cannot be great for the calculations for the parishes of Szubin (villages without the town) and Zabartowo (18.1 per cent of three-generation or larger families) as well as the data cited in literature show similar proportions: M. G ó r n y, *Wartość źródłowa status animarum parafii Szaradowo z 1766 (The Value of Status Animarum of the Szaradowo Parish in 1766 as a Source)*, "Przeszość Demograficzna Polski", vol. 17, 1987, p. 173; A. W o ź n i a k, *Kultura*, pp. 154 ff.; J. R u t k o w s k i, *Studia nad położeniem włościan w Polsce XVIII w. (Studies on the Situation of Peasants in 18th Century Poland)*, in: i d e m, *Studia z dziejów wsi polskiej*, Warszawa 1956, p. 210. The Szubin census has been published by J. M a t u s z e w s k i, *Spis ludności parafii Szubin z 1766 r. (The 1766 Census of the Population of Szubin)*, "Studia i Materiały do Dziejów Wielkopolski i Pomorza", vol. 6, 1960; the Zabartowo census has been published by H. J. v o n W i l k e n s, *Ein Bevölkerungsbild aus dem Netzegau im Jahre 1766*, "Wissenschaftliche Zeitschrift für Polen", vol. 23, 1931. For the way it was published see M. G ó r n y, *Niemieckie wydanie status animarum parafii Zabartowo z 1766 roku (The German Edition of the Parish of Zabartowo's Status Animarum in 1766)*, "Przeszość Demograficzna Polski", vol. 17, 1986.

³² We are using here the households systematics and terminology of E. A. H a m m e l, P. L a s l e t t, *Comparing Households Structure over Time and between Cultures*, "Comparative Studies in Society and History", vol. 16, 1974; as regards Polish literature see C. K u k l o, W. G r u s z e c k i, *Informatyczny system rekonstrukcji rodzin, gospodarstw domowych i społeczności lokalnych w Polsce przedrozbiorowej (The Informatics System of Reconstructing Families, Households and Local Communities in Pre-Partition Poland)*, Białystok 1994, pp. 44 ff.

least those from richer families, lived as annitants with their children or even as heads of households.

In conditions where peasants could bequeath their land without dividing it among their children, the problem of old people was probably solved by allowing older children to leave home and transferring the land to them as late as possible, a solution which prevents generational conflicts in the household. This conclusion is based on circumstantial evidence; its confirmation would require an analysis of at least a dozen lists of inhabitants from the same area compiled in successive years³³.

That this was indeed the case is confirmed by the average age difference between the householders and their oldest children (single as well as married) in the household, which in the case of householders aged over 60 was 45 for men and 49 for women. As regards householders aged 41–60 the respective indices were 34 and 36³⁴. In the oldest group the indices clearly exceed the average life span of a male generation which must have oscillated between 34–37 years³⁵.

In summing up these remarks on the structure of families in south-eastern Kujawy let us emphasize that a three-generation family was not a frequent phenomenon. Although there was a close connection between the socio-economic position of the household head and the structure of the family, the proportion of non-nuclear families was far lower, even among the agricultural population, than in Russia and in Polish villages after the land reform³⁶. D. Markowska who hypothesised that “a multi-generational family was only a transitional phenomenon, characteristic of the transition from feudalism to capitalism in agriculture”³⁷, was therefore right. The simplest explanation, namely, that the absence of multi-generational families before the land reform was due to the short life span, is not confirmed in literature. It has been refuted by a computer simulation of the family life cycle carried out by K. Wachter, P. Laslett and E. A. Hammel which has shown that a short life span exerts a smaller influence on family structure

³³ See R. Sieder, M. Mitterauer, *The Reconstruction of Family Life Course: Theoretical Problems and Empirical Results*, in: *Family Forms in Historic Europe*.

³⁴ These medians refer to 72 and 45 cases respectively for the group aged over 60, and to 428 and 417 cases for the group aged 41–60.

³⁵ E. Piasecki, *Ludność parafii bejskiej*, p. 245.

³⁶ Let us add that our source gives us no ground for formulating the thesis that nuclear families were a transitional phenomenon in the development of the family, a thesis formulated by Berkner with reference to Austria and Germany in the 18th century, see L. K. Berkner, *Inheritance, Land Tenure and Peasant Family Structure: a German Regional Comparison*, in: *Family and Inheritance*.

³⁷ D. Markowska, *Rodzina wiejska na Podlasiu*, p. 195. As we have stated above (fn. 11) we agree with Woźniak that changes in property relations exerted the greatest influence on the shape of the family.

than volitional factors, such as the age when marriage is contracted, the inheritance system (primo- or ultimogeniture) or the tendency to assemble family workforce in the household. An analysis of peasant families' structure in 18th and 19th century Russia leads to similar conclusions³⁸. Another explanation, popularised by W. Kula's research and based on descriptive sources, asserts that the small number of multi-generational families was a result of landowners' intervention. The noblemen were interested in breaking up large peasant families and setting young couples on empty holdings. This was the scheme applied in Mazovia³⁹. However, the argumentation that cumulation of family workforce was an immanent feature of peasant households is incompatible with our observations⁴⁰.

The situation in Kujawy was different; in any case the influence of noblemen's decisions was less evident. This is indicated above all by the fact that children took over their parents' holding when they were well past the prime of life, and by the very high proportion of farm-hands and lodgers⁴¹.

Another possibility for old people was to spend the last few years of their life in a hospital. Hospitals were, as a rule, municipal institutions, but there were some also in the countryside. Despite the fact that their network was becoming increasingly dense in the 17th and 18th centuries, the number of inmates was not large, even if we assume that the data are incomplete and the number should be multiplied severalfold⁴². The use of hospitals was

³⁸ K. Wachter, E. A. Hammel, P. Laslett, *Statistical Studies of Historical Social Structure*, New York 1975; P. Czap jr., *A Large Family: the Peasant's Greatest Wealth: Serf Households in Mishino, Russia, 1814–1858*, in: *Family Forms in Historic Europe*; M. Mitterauer, A. Kagan, *Russian and Central European Family Structures: a Comparative View*, "Journal of Family History", 1982.

³⁹ The role of landowners' intervention has been stressed by: W. Kula, *Dwór a rodzina chłopska*, and A. Woźniak, *Kultura*; J. Kochanowicz, *Pańszczyźniane gospodarstwo chłopskie w Królestwie Polskim w pierwszej połowie XIX wieku (Peasant Serf Holdings in the Polish Kingdom in the First Half of the 19th Century)*, Warszawa 1981, pp. 73 ff.; Kochanowicz cites evidence from an 18th century pamphlet *O poddanych polskich (On Polish Serfs)*.

⁴⁰ W. Kula has drawn this assumption from Chayanov and found confirmation in the pamphlet *O poddanych polskich*. Let us remember however that Chayanov described Russian conditions which were very specific as far family anatomy is concerned and the author of the pamphlet presented an ideal rather than reality.

⁴¹ See M. Kopczyński, *Młodość i młodzież na Kujawach. Rzecz o czeladzi i służbie w świetle parafialnych spisów mieszkańców z 1791 (Youth and Young People in Kujawy. Farm-Hands and Servants in the Light of Parish Registers of 1791)*, "Przegląd Historyczny", vol. 86, 1995.

⁴² This has recently been discussed by M. Surdacki, *Opieka społeczna w Wielkopolsce zachodniej w XVII i XVIII wieku (Social Care in Western Great Poland in the 17th and 18th Centuries)*, Lublin 1992, pp. 51 ff. and 125 ff. Surdacki estimates that after the Swedish invasion in the middle of the 17th century 569 persons lived in hospitals in Western Great Poland, the population numbering 101,000 at that time according to L. Polaszewski, *Szlachta Wielkopolski na podstawie rejestrów pogłównego z lat 1673–1676 (Great Poland's Nobility in the Light of Poll-Tax Registers from 1673–1676)*, in: *Spółczesność staropolskie*, vol. 3, Warszawa 1983.

sometimes inconsistent with the purpose for which they had been set up. Thirty-seven persons lived in the five hospitals situated in the region we are concerned with. The largest group (17 persons, i.e. nearly 46 per cent of the total number) were persons defined as beggar-men and beggar-women. But among the inmates were also three organists aged 40, 90 and 22, and a 35-year old wheelwright. The structure of the inmates's age is presented in *Table 3*.

The age structures of hospital inmates and of the inmates of old people's homes were not the same. The median age was 43 and was similar to the median age of householders and lodgers. In addition to accidental inhabitants, rural hospitals in Kujawy must have been used mainly by vagrants and disabled people. The male and female beggars who constituted the largest group were seldom over 60.

Table 3. Age structure of Hospital Inmates

Age	Men	Women
Under 40	10	8
41-50	2	7
50-60	1	3
over 60	3	3

Source: My own calculations based on the Central Archives of Historical Records, Great Poland's court records, documents of the civil and military commission of the Radziejów district, vols. 1, 4.

The third possibility for old people was to move out of their home and live with strangers or distant relatives. Our source does not indicate the kind of relationship between householders and their lodgers, mentioning only close relationship. The function performed in the household was the criterion applied in our source and this distinguishes it from Russian registers which adopted relationship in the male line as their criterion⁴³.

Lodgers accounted for 16.7 per cent of the examined population. They lived in 38 per cent of all houses inhabited by families defined as agricultural population and in 34 per cent of cottagers's households. Unlike the four parishes of the Wieluń region examined by W. Obraniak, where lodgers were mostly old people, in Kujawy their median age (excluding children) was 40 for each gender⁴⁴. This can be explained either by the influx of immigrants into Kujawy or the lack of other possibilities of settlement (e.g. because of the large area of manorial farms)⁴⁵.

⁴³ M. Mitterauer, A. Kagan, *Russian and Central European Family Structures*, p. 108.

⁴⁴ W. Obraniak, *Oblicze demograficzne wsi wieluńskiej*, pp. 110 ff.

This does not mean, of course, that old people in Kujawy could not spend the last years of their lives as lodgers. The problem is that our source does not permit to link the oldest lodgers with their respective families. There is not a shadow of a doubt however that in Kujawy, as in the whole of Poland, lodging was the plight of many old people. Its extent can be seen if we compare it with the situation in 18th century Denmark, for which comparable data are available (*Table 4*)⁴⁶.

Table 4. Household position of old people, Denmark in 1787, Kujawy in 1791* (percentages)

MEN					
	Householders	Male Relatives	Male Farm-hands	Male Lodgers	TOTAL
Denmark	72	19	4	5	100
Kujawy	53	12	11	24	100
WOMEN					
	Hausewives	Female Relatives	Female Farm-hands	Female Lodgers	TOTAL
Denmark	54	13	1	12	100
Kujawy	23	33	8	36	100

*Denmark — persons aged 60 and over, Kujawy — persons aged 55 and over.

Source: My own calculations based on Central Archives of Historical Records, Great Poland's court records, documents of the civil and military commission of the Radziejów district, vols. 1, 4; H. Ch. Johansen, *The Position of the Old*, p. 142.

The percentage of the oldest householders was much lower in Kujawy than in Denmark. What is surprising is the higher percentage of old relatives in Denmark despite the fact that Denmark was a classic example of the West European family model with the domination of households consisting of

⁴⁵ Z. Guldón, *Zaludnienie Kujaw w końcu XVIII w. (The Density of Population in Kujawy at the End of the 18th Century)*, "Przeszłość Demograficzna Polski", vol. 14, 1983, says that the increase in the number of homesteads was very high in 1674–1789, a slightly smaller increase took place in the number of settlements and in population. Very important for the verification of our source are another two of the same author's studies: *Osadnictwo powiatu radziejowskiego w XVII–XVIII w. (Settlement in the Radziejów District in the 17th and 18th Centuries)*, "Zapiski Kujawsko-Dobrzyńskie", vol. 1, 1978, and *Osadnictwo województwa inowrocławskiego w latach 1775–1789 (Settlement in the Inowrocław Voivodship in 1775–1789)*, "Ziemia Kujawska", vol. 6, 1981. J. Kochanowicz, *Spór o teorię gospodarki chłopskiej. Gospodarstwo chłopskie w teorii ekonomii i w historii gospodarczej (Dispute over the Theory of Peasant Farming. Peasant Farming in Economic Theory and in Economic History)*, Warszawa 1992, pp. 123 ff. points out that as population was increasing at that time, it was not shortage of labour but lack of arable land that was the main problem. The question of village stratification in the 18th century should be reconsidered in this context.

⁴⁶ H. Ch. Johansen, *The Position of the Old in the Rural Household in the Traditional Society*, "The Scandinavian Economic Review", vol. 24, 1976, p. 139. Data from 26 parishes inhabited by 1 per cent of the country's population.

nuclear families. Another difference is that the percentage of old people living as lodgers and, to a lesser extent, as farm-hands was higher in Kujawy⁴⁷. The Danish researcher H. Ch. Johansen says that only half of the persons over 60 who may have had married children lived together with them. The others lived separately or, more seldom, became lodgers⁴⁸. This question has been researched from another point of view by F. Skrubbeltrang. He says that in the 18th century 35–40 per cent of the peasants in Danish noblemen's estates kept their holdings until their death, another 30–35 per cent became annuitants, and 25–30 per cent were removed from the household, irrespective of their children's status, and were either sent to a hospital or, which was more common, lived alone in separate houses⁴⁹. The difference between the data of Johansen and Skrubbeltrang is only apparent. By householders the former means peasants who were household heads, irrespective of whether they had a holding or only a cottage set aside for old people. Skrubbeltrang, on the other hand, writes about land holdings and not households.

Among the old persons living as lodgers in Kujawy we find those who, having no children, were left at the mercy of strangers as well as persons who left their family of their own will or as a result of their family's decision. In order to establish the size of the last-named group we must acquaint ourselves with the situation of old people, ascertain what percentage lived without children, evaluate the probable proportion of childless people and of persons who may have outlived their children. We must assume that lodgers were not related to their householders⁵⁰. Another tentative hypothesis is that the basic demographic situation in Kujawy's rural areas at the end of the 18th century did not differ much from the parameters established for the parish of Bejsce by E. Piasecki. Let us follow E. Piasecki's criterion and take 60 years as the commencement of old age for men and 50 for women⁵¹.

⁴⁷ These were mainly servants from manor houses and farm-hands from manorial farms, M. Kopczyński, *Młodość i młodość*. As regards the Danish family model as a classic example of predominance of nuclear forms, see J. Hajnal, *Two Kinds of Pre-Industrial Household Formation System*, in: *Family Forms in Historic Europe*.

⁴⁸ H. Ch. Johansen, *The Position of the Old*, p. 142.

⁴⁹ F. Skrubbeltrang, *Faestergården som forsørger: aftægt og anden forsørg i det 18. århundrede*, "Jyske Samlinger", 1961.

⁵⁰ When the source allowed us to conclude that kinship was at stake, the person has been classified as a relation, not as a lodger.

⁵¹ The proportions for men would then be as follows: household heads 51 per cent, relatives 15 per cent, servants and farm-hands 9 per cent, lodgers 25 per cent. The respective proportions for women aged over 50 would be 32, 27, 8 and 33 per cent.

Let us first take a look at the family situation of the oldest people. We will start our analysis with men, 170 of whom headed a household⁵². These were mainly (89 cases) households of nuclear families with children. Thirty-three married couples (19 per cent) were childless and another six households consisted of single old persons⁵³. This means that 39 of the 170 households headed by men aged over 60 (22.9 per cent) can be defined as empty nests, a term well known to sociologists of the family. This does not mean that we are dealing with houses set aside for old people or with declining peasant holdings. Farm-hands or lodgers lived in 95 per cent of the agricultural population's 21 households which can be defined as empty nests. Farm-hands can be found in more than 60 per cent of these households and 30 per cent of them had more than two farm-hands.

Of the 82 male lodgers only three lived in a hospital and three in a presbytery (7 per cent). Childless couples (37, i.e. 45 per cent) and single persons (17, i.e. another 21 per cent) were the largest groups. The other lodgers lived with their wives and children. If we sum this up and add the oldest farm-hands, we can say that 114 (35.1 per cent) of 325 persons did not live with their children or other descendants. Sixty of them (52.6 per cent) were lodgers.

Of 586 women, 231 (39 per cent) did not live with their children. As in the case of men, lodgers were the largest group, numbering 124, that is, more than a half of all women who did not live with their children. This means that 37.9 per cent of the group of old people distinguished according to the definition adopted by us lived without their children (345 of 911 persons of both sexes).

Further information can be found in the above-mentioned book by E. Piasecki. The percentage of childless persons among those who set up a family varied. Childless women accounted for 1.6 per cent to 9.1 per cent of all married women aged 45–49. In the parish of Bejsce about 5 per cent of representatives of each gender who contracted at least two marriages were childless. To this we must add persons who outlived their children. According to the calculations concerning persons born in the parish of Bejsce between 1781 and 1820, 7.6 per cent of men had no living descendant when they reached the age of 60, the respective figure for women over 50 being 6.6 per cent⁵⁴. Applied to Kujawy, these proportions would mean that 13 per cent of the oldest men and 12 per cent of the oldest women were either childless or had no living children. Thus, at the end of the 18th century the percentage of old people in Kujawy's rural areas who lived outside their

⁵² Of which 111 were households of the agricultural population and 35 of cottagers.

⁵³ Of which 20 were households of the agricultural population and 8 of cottagers.

⁵⁴ E. Piasecki, *Ludność parafii bejskiej*, pp. 27 ff. and 263 ff.

family, even though they might have living children, amounted to about 22–27 per cent, and in the case of men was higher than the percentage of those who lived with their families as annuitants. In the case of women the proportion of annuitants equalled the proportion of women who lived alone despite having living children⁵⁵. Since the number of widows must have been lowered in our source, 27 per cent must be regarded as the minimum figure. This proportion will be higher if we add the 50–80 year-old women who must have been omitted in the census. Assuming that half of them were lodgers and the other half relatives, the percentage of women who did not live with their children will rise to 43 per cent, and the percentage of women who lived alone in old age despite having living children will amount to 31 per cent.

The most frequent and probably the ideal model of old age for the examined population was to retain the position of household head until death (it was definitely so in the case of men). The second possibility was to be a lodger or a related annuitant living together with one's children. These two possibilities dominated among women. Cases of old people living in a hospital were rare.

Since our data are incomplete, we cannot say to what extent these models depended on the family's prosperity. However, we can say with a large dose of certainty that a joyful old age was mainly the privilege of rich peasants; this is indicated indirectly by the fact the percentage of families living with their relatives grew in proportion to the social position of the household head⁵⁶.

The old age model existing in Kujawy's rural areas was half way between the Russian-Balkan model, in which old people stayed with their families and usually retained the position of head of the family until their death, and the West European (Danish-English) model, in which after giving up their holding old people moved to a separate house and remained under the care of next of kin (annuity contracts, *Auszug*) or had to rely on help from their parish community (England). The latter system relieved many persons of the burden of years-long services for old people⁵⁷.

⁵⁵ See the proportions in fn. 49. The calculation for men: $35.1 - 13 = 22.1$ per cent, for women: $39 - 12 = 27$ per cent.

⁵⁶ This regularity has been shown by J. Kochanowicz, *The Peasant Family as an Economic Unit in the Polish Feudal Economy of the Eighteenth Century*, in: *Family Forms in Historic Europe. The Stem Family and the Developmental Cycle of the Peasant Household; an 18th Century Austrian Example*, "American Historical Review", vol. 67, 1972, and a general view: P. Laslett, *Family, Kinship and Collectivity as Systems of Support*; D. Gaunt, *The Property and Kin Relationships*.

⁵⁷ For the Russian family see M. O. Koswen, *Wspólnota rodzinna (Family Community)*, in: *Etnologia. Wybór tekstów*, ed. Z. Sokolewicz, Warszawa 1969; for Austria: L. K. Berkner, *The Stem Family and the Developmental Cycle of the Peasant Household; an 18th Century Austrian Example*, "American Historical Review", vol. 67, 1972, and a general view: P. Laslett, *Family, Kinship and Collectivity as Systems of Support*; D. Gaunt, *The Property and Kin Relationships*.

The fact that Polish peasants strove to retain the position of household head as long as possible means that annuity signified a radical unfavourable change of social position. This contrasts with the realities in 17th and 18th century Austrian, Czech and Scandinavian villages. In Upper Austria *Auszug* (removal) did not mean isolation from active life. Hermann Rebel, who has researched this question, cites examples of successive marriages by men—annuitants and cases of old “retired” peasants acquiring wealth. David Gaunt says that at the beginning of the 19th century Swedish peasants left their holdings and became annuitants at an average age of 60, and Finnish peasants in eastern Bothnia between 50–65. Gaunt emphasises that their successors paid them considerable sums. Let us point out that in 17th century Bohemia the authorities found it proper to ban early retirement⁵⁸.

The fact that the situation of old people was relatively more favourable in Western Europe and Austria was partly due to the persistence of a strong link between marriage and the taking over of a holding by a young man. In Western Europe this link was a preventive Malthusian brake and its weakening could have led to an excessive increase of population and to the appearance or intensification of demographic pressure; this might even have exposed the population to the operation of the positive Malthusian brake⁵⁹. Marriages contracted before the acquirement of land were an exception in Denmark, England and Austria. At the end of the 18th century the connection between marriage and the acquirement of land was not so close in Kujawy. Men married at an age comparable to the Western pattern but several years before acquiring land (see column 3 in *Table I*). The fact that families composed of two couples were relatively rare in Kujawy means that the persons who married at an early age must have been lodgers, for farm—hands married seldom⁶⁰. Unfortunately, we have no data which would allow us to determine whether the connection between the age of marriage and the acquirement of land was stronger in the 17th and early 18th centuries

⁵⁸ H. Rebel, *Peasant Classes*, pp. 173 ff. cites as Austrian examples a certain Symondel from Brand (about 1630) who joined the army several times after retirement, and Hans Schrämberl from Frankenburg (d. 1624) whose personal property increased more than a hundredfold during 14 years in *Auszug*. D. Gaunt, *The Property and Kin Relationships*, pp. 262 ff. writes about Swedes and Finns. H. Rebel, *op. cit.*, p. 174 mentions Czechs.

⁵⁹ See R. S. Schofield, *Family Structure, Demographic Behaviour and Economic Growth, in: Famine, Disease and the Social Order in Early Modern Society*, ed. J. Walter, R. S. Schofield, London 1989; R. M. Smith, *Fertility, Economy and Household Formation in England*. A good example of the operation of the positive Malthusian brake is Ireland in the late 18th and early 19th centuries, see C. O'Grada, *For Irishmen to Forget. Recent Research on the Great Irish Famine*, in: *Just a Sack of Potatoes? Crisis Experiences in European Societies. Past and Present*, ed. A. Häkkinen, Helsinki 1992 and the classic text by K. H. Connell, *Land and Population in Ireland 1780–1845*, in: *Population in History*.

⁶⁰ M. Kopczyński, *Młodość i młódzież*, tables 3 and 4, pp. 345 ff.

than at the end of the 18th century. We can assume that at the end of the 18th century there must have been possibilities of earning one's living outside agriculture or by casual work. Otherwise young men, in particular lodgers, could not have married before taking over a holding⁶¹. It can therefore be said that there is a connection between the way in which a community solves the problem of old people and the mechanisms of demographic development.

In concluding our reflections on old age let us recall the dichotomous picture presented in literature. Neither the rather idyllic picture emphasising formal contracts and the duty of looking after old parents nor the picture of life in beggary is convincing. Reality was more complex and both models intertwined. The same can be said of the situation in the Polish Kingdom after enfranchisement. Law courts and even papers were flooded with complaints about old people clinging stubbornly to the position of household head and about children failing to meet the usually orally expressed obligation of looking after their old parents⁶².

(Translated by Janina Dorosz)

⁶¹ J. Kochanowicz, *Spór o teorię gospodarki chłopskiej*, pp. 130 ff. This question has been discussed by authors concerned with proto-industrialisation and its influence on population's demographic behaviour, see, for instance, M. Gutmann, R. Leboutte, *Rethinking Protoindustrialization and Family*, "Journal of Interdisciplinary History", vol. 14, 1984.

⁶² I owe my less contrastive view of the village before and after the land reform to the remarks of Dr Włodzimierz Mędrzecki, whom I would like to thank hereby. The question of peasant inheritance and the plight of old people have been discussed by J. Nakoneczny, *Pojęcia prawne ludu* (*The Peasants' Legal Notions*), "Wisła" 1903, No. 6; 1904, No. 1-4; J. Czeraszkievicz, *Spadkobranie i działy majątkowe włościan w Królestwie Polskim* (*Inheritance and Division of Property among Peasants in the Polish Kingdom*), "Ateneum", vol. 2, 1901.