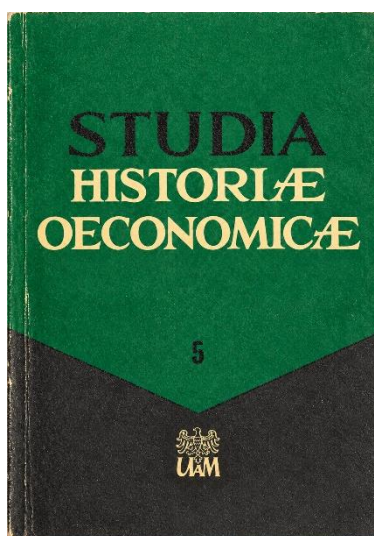




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USEFULNESS OF THE HISTORY OF PRICES IN ECONOMY RESEARCH OF THE LATE-FEUDAL POLAND

The first interest in the historical movement of prices in Poland may be traced back to the second half of the eighteenth century. Information of that sort was collected by F. Łojko and T. Czacki. The materials thus collected remained in large proportion in manuscript¹ with the exception of a part of Czacki's research work published much later².

Only after a longer period of time, in the last decade of the nineteenth century, the problems of prices became again the subject of interest of Polish historiography in the form of several treatises concerning the price and wage-lists issued by the administrative authorities³. The first decade of the twentieth century brought A. Szelagowski's study on *Money and Price Revolution in the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries in Poland* (1902) and some years later J. Rutkowski's work on *The Brzozow Estates of the Przemyśl Bishopric* (1910) supplied rich statistical material concerning the agricultural prices in the second half of the eighteenth century. It was not until the period between the two world wars, however, that a more extensive research activity in the field of the history of prices developed. Professor F. Bujak in an article published in the I volume of *Nauka Polska* (The Science in Poland) (1918), entitled *Some Notes on the Needs of Economic History*, pointed out the necessity of launching research in the history of prices in Poland and then tried to put his idea in practice at the Institute of Social and Economic History in Lwów. His plan aimed first of all at publishing the original data of local prices in the principal Polish towns within the period of time from the fifteenth till the beginning of the twentieth centuries (1914). Within the 15 years' period 11 volumes were compiled dealing with the prices in Lwów, Cracow and

¹ Biblioteka Czartoryskich (The Czartoryski Library in Cracow) mss 1076 - 1128, 1163 - 1177.

² O litewskich i polskich prawach (*On the Laws of Lithuania and Poland*). Warszawa 1800 - 1801, II ed. 1843.

³ The treatises of B. Ulanowski, F. Bostel, A. Chmiel, W. Rolny.

Warsaw from the sixteenth till the beginning of the twentieth centuries (1914) as well as with the prices of Lublin and Gdańsk (Danzig) from the sixteenth till the close of the eighteenth centuries or to the year 1815. The World War II interrupted the researches in progress for Poznań, Toruń and Wilno.

The so called Bujak series of monographic research on prices has not been resumed and carried out after the last war. On the other hand Western European economic historians showed keen interest in the Polish historical price investigations conducted within the interwar period. The Centre de Recherches Historiques de l'Ecole Pratique des Hautes Etudes in Paris edited in the year 1954, in the French language, the work of S. Hoszowski *The Prices in Lwów in the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries*, published in Polish as early as 1928. In Poland itself only two studies on the subject of price history can be mentioned in the post-war time: S. Hoszowski, *The Corn Prices in Toruń, 1755 - 1860* (1949) and H. Madurowicz-Urbańska, *The Prices of Corn in Little Poland in the Second Half of the Eighteenth Century* (1963). Both of them differed substantially from the researches carried out between the two wars in their approach to the subject. As a result the 11 volumes of the Bujak price series remain until today the main achievement of research in the Polish history of prices.

The publication of the first volumes of the Bujak price series was quickly followed by reviews in Polish historical journals (J. Rutkowski, J. Wiśniewski, J. Zagórski) and papers presented at the 6th General Congress of Polish Historians held in 1935 in Vilno (S. Arnold, J. Wiśniewski)⁴. On the one hand the reviewers stressed an urgent need for that kind of work and highly appreciated the value of the collected source materials, on the other hand they made several critical comments concerning mainly methodological-statistical problems. In foreign journals, too, there appeared a number of reviews mostly in form of brief notes and reports.

In the first decade after World War II, in the early fifties, there appeared two valuable critical reviews. In Poland E. Szwankowski discussed S. Siegel's *Prices in Warsaw in the years 1701 - 1815* (1951)⁵ and abroad P. Lebrun wrote with a great dose of criticism on the French version of Hoszowski's book, *Prices in Lwów in the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries* (1954)⁶. But the most critical attitude towards the Bujak price series was presented by W. Kula in his discussion on the 8th General Congress of Polish Historians, held in Cracow in 1958 and in two books, *The Economic Theory of the Feudal System* (1962) and *The Problems and Methods of Economic History*

⁴ Pamiętnik VI Powszechnego Zjazdu Historyków Polskich w Wilnie 17 - 20 września 1935 r. II Protokoły (*The Memoir of the VI General Congress of the Polish Historians in Vilno 17 - 20 September 1935, The Minutes II*). Lwów 1936, pp. 129 - 132 and 293 - 296.

⁵ Przegląd Historyczny (The Historical Review) vol. 42: 1951, pp. 468 - 473.

⁶ Revue Belge de Philologie, vol. 34: 1956, pp. 521 - 526.

(1963)⁷. W. Kula's considerations and conclusions take into account all the critical remarks made earlier by Polish and foreign reviewers and therefore they constitute at this moment the most comprehensive estimation of the Bujak series of monographs dealing with prices and wages in Polish towns. His statements on the methods, applied in those studies and on the quality of the documentary statistical material presented, published there, are a valuable contribution to the price history in its theoretical and practical aspect, and they will afford very instructive help for further research-work.

Yet this author's characterization of the Bujak price series is in some aspects deficient. He failed to give a clear-cut and relevant presentation of the conceptions and objectives underlying these price series, he did not regard the peculiar circumstances of the organization and advancement in the research work on economic history in the early twenties when those researches in Poland were started, he did not show the difference in methods adopted on the successive stages of research. Neither does W. Kula specify what elements of the aims and methods of research he regards as essential for the "Bujak school" respecting price history. He does not differentiate the characteristic elements of the "Bujak school" as a whole from the traits of individual authors. Therefore there is in W. Kula's commentaries a tendency to generalize the shortcomings in method and errors in interpretation, to be found in particular volumes of the Polish price history series, as characteristic of the "school" in entirety. As a result we receive a somewhat exaggerated picture of the deficiencies of the Bujak price series. This circumstance may act discouraging by as far as the perspectives of utilizing the documentary materials contained in monographs on prices are concerned, quite apart from the intention of the author who summing up his considerations on the Bujak price-history series, explicitly stated that they were "extremely useful and they open vast possibilities of interpretation which scholarship did not even start to make use of"⁸. That is why it seems worth while to supplement W. Kula's remarks by some information to facilitate the better orientation of future research-workers in the usefulness of the Bujak price series.

At the very beginning it must be pointed out that the objectives, scope and method of price history researches in Poland initiated by F. Bujak were not fully presented by him in any publication, a thing that one might normally expect, but they were defined and formulated partially and occasionally in the articles concerning the postulates of research in economic history and in the introductions to the particular volumes of the price series.

⁷ *Historia gospodareza Polski (The Economic History of Poland)*, Warszawa 1960, pp. 120 - 131; W. Kula: *Teoria ekonomiczna ustroju feudalnego (The Theory of Feudal Economy)*, Warszawa 1962; and the same: *Problemy i metody historii gospodarczej (Problems and Methods of the Economic History)*, Warszawa 1963.

⁸ W. Kula: *Problemy...*, p. 562.

More detailed problems, particularly those of method, were commented upon in the monographs by the authors themselves, emphasizing those that were generally accepted⁹.

Professor Bujak in the already mentioned article, *Some Notes on the Needs of Economic History*, juxtaposed as parallel such problems as research on the growth of population, on the history of prices, metrology, a chronicle of natural calamities. These things were expected to create the fundamental basis for further research-works in the field of economic history of Poland. Thus, as we see, these were not autonomous problems or an aim in itself. F. Bujak wrote elsewhere that the investigations in the history of prices are prepared "for historians and economists as an indispensable ancillary tool in trade history, in the history of industry, agriculture, state and civic finance, in the history of the working class, in the history of wars and military affairs and in the history of culture in general; that tool therefore may prove useful in the research in the history of law, of art and even in political history"¹⁰.

Thus there was no doubt at all that the publications of the research results in the prices of the Polish cities were supposed to be "an ancillary tool", in other words the publications of quantitative price data were prepared and arranged in such a way as to satisfy research needs of a variety of economic historical subjects and other historical branches of knowledge, so that "every researcher would be able to use and even check them".

The monographs dealing with urban centres and covering a period from the fifteenth till the beginning of the twentieth century were supposed to be the first stage of research in the form of compiling the statistics of prices from archival records, or otherwise a kind of publication of historical sources having a mass character, presented not in raw form but in the form of statistical tables.

The task of the first stage of research was the elaboration of tables of annual and quarterly prices and of indices of the movement of prices of particular goods or wages, as well as the presentation in the monographs of all the information illustrating the local market situation which could be found in archival records and in other sources. A resignation of that task would imply the loss of opportunities of supplying the original descriptive material for further research-work.

A full and fundamental analysis of prices had to be postponed till the second stage of researches, when a synthetical study of the price history of the whole country would be made. Then a comparative analysis of the price series

⁹ Equally S. Hoszowski gives only general outlines of these methods in his article on the studies in price history, published in *Roczniki dziejów społecznych i gospodarczych* (*The Yearbooks of Economic and Social History*) vol. I: 1931, pp. 53 - 71.

¹⁰ The introduction to the book by S. Hoszowski: *Ceny we Lwowie w latach 1701 - 1914* (*Prices in Lwów in the Years 1701 - 1914*), Lwów 1934, p. VI.

of various towns would make it possible to eliminate the accidental deviations of the local price movements and further the interpretation of the fluctuations of prices in the whole country would be facilitated by a much later sum of information about the economic, social and political conditions derived from studies of all local civic centres. In the first stage of research the calculations of five- or ten-year average prices for each commodity were also included. They were assumed to be useful for the investigation of secular trends in price development.

Nevertheless, the authors of the particular volumes of prices went further than the obligatory first stage necessitated. They attempted to construct the indices of group prices, of costs of *maintenance* and sometimes even purchasing power of wages indices, which constituted already a part of the second stage of investigation. Those scholars wanted to provide conclusions on the price-movements, at least some limited statistical basis for some general conclusions on the development of prices and socio-economic changes. The devising of group indices on the basis of such flimsy source materials, which are at the disposal of Polish researchers in prices, necessitated a great effort towards developing special statistical methods, adapted to the precisely defined scientific problems. Such detailed and varied tasks were very hard to implement in publications, the aim of which was to supply source-statistical material of a very wide chronological and subject-matter range. These attempts proved to be unsuccessful and that fact found its expression in the opinion of the reviewers of the first volumes of the Bujak series. As a result, in subsequent volumes the scope of group indices was radically cut down and the index of the "general" price fluctuations as well as the index of the purchasing power of wages were given up altogether.

The critics of the Bujak series do not take into consideration one general point which is very important in the realization, in the character, value and mistakes and thus in the utility for research purposes inherent in that series, viz. the organization and conditions of the research which were faced by the authors of the particular monographs of prices. The means assigned by the state in the pre-war Poland for research purposes were too small to form groups of scholars continually and exclusively conducting investigations in the history of prices in Poland. There was nothing like the groups consisting of, at least, several persons which were organized in the Western countries and subsidized by the International History of Prices Committee by means of funds granted by the Carnegie and Rockefeller Foundations. Polish researches were financed only by modest sporadic grants of the Polish National Culture Fund and by grants of the International History of Prices Committee, providing only scholarships for persons undertaking the preparation and writing monographs on prices in most cases for a duration of two years. The best incentive for young historians was the perspective of being conferred

a doctoral degree in case of having done a good work. Particular monographs had been started successively as soon as collaborators and grants for scholarships were gained. Similarly, when the monographs were finished, they were published if and when funds for publication were found. Since 1929 on the average 1 - 3 persons were engaged in price history researchwork, but they were not working together in the Institute of Social and Economic History of Lwów. The authors, working on subjects other than those concerned with Lwów, collected source materials in the archives of other cities during one or one and a half year periods, after which they returned to Lwów to compile the statistical tables and to write the text of their dissertations. Some authors were in continuous residence in the cities which were the subject of their research (Lublin, Poznań). Thus we may see that the cooperation of the authors of the monographs on history of prices was not systematic but rather an irregular one. It was based mainly on consultations of a sporadic character, but the strongest factor was the pattern of the first monograph, dealing with the prices of Lwów. These facts were essential, because thus the particular volumes were the results of individual work which, apart from some general principles of method, could differ in the particular approach to the source collection, in the details of the statistical calculations and in particular in the approach to the operation and grouping of data. Thus each volume has many individual traits resulting in differences in details of method. Therefore one cannot generalize the observations based upon the study of particular volumes and cannot treat the traits of a single volume as common to all the Bujak "school". The difference may sometimes be really serious, especially as far as thoroughness of collecting original price data, computing the averages and constructing the indices is concerned.

All the authors were undoubtedly of an opinion that their monographs had a source-statistical character and that they were obliged to carry into effect the first stage of the price-history researches. This may be noticed in the structure of those monographs and in the proportions of space devoted to the particular parts of it. Everywhere we see a division into the descriptive (I) and the statistical parts and tables (II). In the first part there is a division into the source-methodical section (IA) and the historical one — i.e. a commentary on the price movement (IB). In the second part the sections being: tables of prices for each quarter of a year and each year (IIA₁), average five-year or ten-year prices (IIA₂), general and group indices (IIB) and diagrams (IIC). Parts IA, IIA, and IIA₂, as a whole, belong to the first stage of investigation (a statistical calculation and estimate of sources), whereas parts IB and IIB belong to the second stage. Diagrams (IIC) pertain in an equal degree to both stages of the investigation. When we compare the space devoted to the material corresponding to the first and second stages of investigation respectively, we shall find the following proportions: in the first volume,

dealing with the prices of Lwów, we have 70 and 30 per cent respectively. In the subsequent volumes that proportion was changing continually at the expense of the second stage, which steadily decreased so much that it fell down, in the last volume (Cracow III), to a proportion of 96 and 4 per cent respectively. Thus we can see that the Bujak publications were, not only in their basic assumptions, but also in the implementation of those assumptions, of a specific and definite character: they were supposed to supply original source-material in form of statistical tables for further research. They were not final synthetical studies.

It was a characteristic fact that nearly all the reviewers of the Bujak price publications, including W. Kula, concentrated their interests first of all on the second stage of research work i.e. on group and general indices and upon the synthetical description of price movements (IB, IIB). The most important function of those monographs i.e. the publication of statistical source material (IA, IIA, IIA₂) was in their critical consideration neglected¹¹. This is understandable to a point: the users of that sort of publications would like to be furnished with material in as much a generalized form as possible, the material which would be directly useful for a larger synthesis of price fluctuations. Of course, the preparation of such material in the conditions of meagre source basis is particularly difficult both from the point of view of methods and of interpretations, hence the results are usually highly disputable. The concentration of the reviewers not on the main parts of the monographs but on the supplementary ones, having really a number of deficiencies and mistakes on account of the above mentioned reasons, resulted in rather one sided assessment of the whole of the monographs of the "Bujak school". It cannot be denied that for those who want to use the rich source material as well as statistics concerning the history of prices an equal orientation in the pros and cons of all the respective parts of that material is necessary. That is why it will be the subject of the subsequent part of this article to survey the critical remarks and adverse criticism of the Bujak price series.

THE BASIC PART OF THE BUJAK SERIES — PRESENTATION OF THE SOURCE MATERIAL

1. Nominal price or its metallic equivalent?

W. Kula and some of the other reviewers are definite advocates of the analysis of the development of prices on the basis of nominal values. There are, however, also reviewers and price historians who find many advantages

¹¹ Only the reviews by E. Szwanowski on the S. Siegel monograph on the Warsaw prices in the nineteenth century is an exception. He exactly concentrates a great deal of attention on the documentary statistical part of the publication, especially on the making full use of archival records.

in the presentation of prices in metallic equivalents: in silver or gold. This is a controversial problem. As far as the source and statistical material of the Bujak series is concerned the problem becomes less acute, simply because in that series both nominal prices and those in silver and gold were furnished. Thus it is up to the researcher in question which he will choose according to his needs. Only the index of the development of the price of a commodity is based solely on the metallic price, but it is practically possible to substitute it with the nominal index and it is not particularly labour absorbing. There may be, however, some grounds to doubt whether the nominal value in question was properly converted to its metallic equivalent. Mistakes are really possible there. The metallic equivalent of the grosz being the money of account was based upon the price (rate) of the more valuable coins, the talar and the dukat or upon mint regulations. For some years there was no source material about the rate of the talar or the dukat and in result it was necessary to use interpolations which involved the danger of accepting values somewhat removed from reality. On the other hand the mint regulations fail to provide the basis for establishing the metallic contents of the coin when an illegal deterioration of mint standard takes place. That is why metallic equivalents cannot be very precise and consequently one cannot regard small differences in their value as important. It is very important that whoever uses the tables may correct his conversion by means of the money table, if he has at his disposal some better information as to the rate of the coins. He is in a better position than the authors of the monographs being now able to compare the rates of money in various towns owing to the information furnished by the Bujak series. The problem of nominal prices or metallic prices will become more significant only when synthetical problems such as the computing of the group indices and the analysis of the general development of prices are arrived at.

2. The elimination of the "non-typical" data in the estimate of the quarterly or annual price averages

This is a very essential and at the same time very controversial problem. It is important because the original price data, given in statistical tables, cannot be verified by the user of the tables. The possible mistake will influence all the further statistical values and it may be removed only by a new scrutiny of the original sources, which in practice can take place only in rare cases. It must be recalled that some researchers, particularly statisticians, object to any elimination of data to be found in sources (J. Zagórski)¹², others demand the rejection of extremes (W. Kula)¹³. From the point of view of the method

¹² J. Zagórski: *Baltic and Scandinavian Countries*, vol. 1: 1935, p. 270.

¹³ W. Kula: *Problemy...*, p. 544 ff.

applied in the Bujak price series both groups of reviewers are wrong. A historian utilizing data on prices must have a critical attitude to his source records and find out the supposed mistakes of the scribe in his presentation of the quantity of commodity, of the sum paid, in the description of the kind and quality of the article in question, of the form of transaction, etc. As a result a researcher disqualifies such source records which do not correspond to the really existing price of a given commodity. That activity is possible only for someone who can use direct sources, read them thoroughly and perform in each particular case an internal and external criticism of the original record. The introduction of data of that sort to price average would obscure reality. On the other hand can one reject extreme cases, corresponding to prices that really did exist as a result of, maybe exceptional, but real factors of various nature which had formed the market situation in a given period of time? As a rule we do not know how long such a situation lasted and the sources rarely inform us about the causes of a high or low price level. This is historical reality and its significance for later researches of various kinds cannot be foretold, and therefore it should be taken into consideration in source publications. It is up to further users of the statistical tables to decide whether they have any significance for their more detailed research objectives or not, and whether they should be omitted or left. Presentation of the minimal nominal price and maximal nominal price allows for a proper estimate of all whe recorded values when their number is small (the majority of cases) and when the number is considerable, their influence upon the average value is slight. In cases when we have only one data for one year we cannot, on the basis of comparison with other years, especially the more remote ones, decide whether this is, in that particular case, an extremely low or an extremely high price. In an example used by W. Kula the price of sugar in Cracow in 1588 seems "suspect", because it was twice as high as that of 1585 and 1596. Actually that price was quite a real one and it can be easily explained by the events taking place at that time in Cracow, such as the civil war (1587 - 88), the concentration of the armies of the belligerents, the siege of the city, the coronation of the new elected king, the burial ceremony of his predecessor. It would be unjustified to omit registering it in the tables of prices. W. Kula questions whether such a price may be utilized in estimating the average price of the five-year period, if for that period as a whole the only extant notation is that for 1588. We shall return to that problem when dealing with the average prices for several years. The fact that in the Bujak series tables such extremely low and extremely high prices are quoted will not decide the question of how, if at all, a researcher will use them for his particular subject of research. The decision and the selection depend on him, whereas the business of a publication presenting the original price statistics is to provide for the free choice of data, methods and interpretations.

3. Calculation of averages from original data or as averages of averages

W. Kula presents very instructive examples of how an unequal chronological distribution of records of prices and a complete lack of records in some time units may cause a deformation to arise in the development line of prices. He recommends "calculating of each average directly on the basis of original data"¹⁴. An opinion so categorically formulated is disputable. The choice between one of the two possible methods depends, in my opinion, on the character of the case under investigation as defined by the number of records of prices and by their distribution in particular periods of time. It is possible to present examples in favour of either one or the other method. If we have at our disposal average prices for all quarters or years and they are reliable, i.e. they are based upon a considerable quantity of raw data, it will be more reliable and speedy to calculate our annual average on the basis of quarterly averages and our five-year or ten-year average on the basis of annual averages. If we calculate our average on the basis of all the original data there arises a danger of an undue preponderance of a period for which there are disproportionately many records as compared with other periods which differ distinctly in their levels of prices. E. g. when the first quarter is characterized by 2 single records (quotations), the second by 3 single records, the third by 25 single records and the fourth by 2 single ones and the prices of corn for the third preharvest period were high as compared with the other quarters, the annual average will not be really representative for a given year, because it will be too high. Thus it may be seen that the choice of one of the two methods is relative. But let us return to the volumes of the Bujak series. The situation in the number and the time distribution of price records was highly differentiated and at the same time very changeable. The principle of using both methods in accordance with the condition of the raw data was difficult to apply, because the heterogeneity of method could cause changes in the averages which in that case would be a result of formal rather than actual factors and, what is more important, the reader would be deprived of information concerning the way in which the averages had been arrived at. Thus it was necessary to adopt, as the only possible method, a mechanical calculation of the averages of the higher periods on the basis of shorter periods of time, irrespective of the occurring gaps in records. Such an approach has its drawbacks, pointed out above by W. Kula, but its advantage is that it enables the user of the tables of statistics to check the calculations he finds there and to calculate for himself and thus arrive at different period averages, if this is the requirement of his particular type of research. Such a situation is very adequate in the case of statistical source publications.

In the light of the above presented argumentation we arrive at the conclu-

¹⁴ *Ib.*, p. 547.

sion that as far as the basic corpus of the material furnished by the Bujak series is concerned, it presents great opportunities for further research in the series of prices of particular commodities as well as of wages of non-qualified workers and craftsmen. The salaries of civic officials and functionaries published in the monographs have a limited value, because of the lack of essential information concerning their functions, the factors and the mechanism of the establishment of their level and of the changes in it. In their present form those record publications can only be a point of departure for further investigations of a more detailed and problem orientated character, investigation of salaries that is, based upon a much wider utilization of archive sources of the cities in question, which would throw light upon the whole of the civic economy. The material presented by the quarterly price tables, by the annual price tables and even that of the five-year or ten-year price tables, in all its forms (nominal values, metallic values, individual indices) may prove useful if utilized in a critical and cautious way, taking into considerations such factors as the abundance and the character of the sources from which it was taken and the statistical methods used in the process of investigation. For this purpose it is necessary to study thoroughly the description of the sources and of the method used in each volume utilized by the researcher, because there are some differences between the volumes. It would be wrong to assume on the basis of our knowledge of one monograph that one knows the methods of all the other authors of the series, merely because they form one "school". As I have pointed out at the very beginning of this article, the uniformity of method comprised only the most fundamental assumptions and in the details of execution the volumes may differ and those differences may influence the value and the usefulness of the material. It is also indispensable to study the critical commentaries of the reviews and in particular those of the *Problems and Methods* by W. Kula. Only by means of that sort of procedure it will be possible to attain a proper estimate of the particular parts and elements of the source-statistical material of the Bujak series monographs. One should not expect to find there ready-made material which can be directly applied to our research objectives. In many cases the material will have to be verified or the statistical elements will have to be re-calculated in order to select the most useful sort of materials and methods. All the above discussed parts of the monographs of prices can be useful, to a more or less considerable degree, in that kind of approach.

SYNTHETICA—THE SUPPLEMENTARY PART IN THE BUJAK SERIES ON PRICE HISTORY

I have mentioned above that the synthetical description of the history of prices, using properly constructed group indices, was not one of the proper

objectives of the first stage of the investigation of price history to be arrived at by the "Bujak school".

An attempt at constructing group indices and a description of the general development of prices was rather a supplementary part of the monographs of the history of prices. That is why those matters occupied on the average near twenty per cent of the contents and in the final volumes even less: to five per cent (tables and the texts of the descriptions). It was also explained above why those parts provoked such an adverse criticism.

In a number of reviews and in the commentaries of W. Kula the following were questioned: the mechanical calculation of the five-year and the ten-year group indices, without the observation of the principle that there should always be data for all the commodities comprising the index; calculations performed on the basis of prices expressed in terms of silver or gold; the application of indices with a stable basis in long chronological periods; the construction of unweighted group indices¹⁵. That adverse criticism had been convincing, therefore in subsequent volumes some indices were dropped, as there were no objective opportunities (time and means) for the expanding and deepening of investigations in that direction. Nevertheless, in the last volumes there were some attempts at calculating chain indices and geometrical indices. Those attempts were not noticed by the reviewers¹⁶. W. Kula ended his commentary with a conclusion "general indices in the Lwów researches... should not be utilized at all". One can agree with that opinion in principle, at the same time suggesting some exceptions. It is true that the group indices of that series are not sufficiently precise, owing to weak source material in many cases and some defects of the methods of calculation. It is true that they do not fulfil the requirements of scientific analysis, but they may be useful in a limited way. In spite of all their deficiencies they present a true picture of the trend of the development of prices and they also allow us to realize which groups of commodities show in the long run greater or smaller tendencies of prices to rise. Of course, here too the user must apply his critical apparatus and find whether they are sufficient for his research objectives or not and he must find also whether some corrections are not desirable. Otherwise, as the case may be, the only thing to do is to construct new aggregate indices with the application of more adequate methods. It is also disputable whether the group indices based on silver or gold are worthless, particularly for the purposes of making comparisons with other countries having different monetary systems. Without such indices that kind of comparison would be impossible.

W. Kula pointed out the narrowing down of the scientific interpretation

¹⁵ *Ib.*, p. 551 ff.

¹⁶ M. Górkiwicz: *Ceny w Krakowie w latach 1796 - 1914 (Prices in Cracow in the Years 1796 - 1914)*. Poznań 1950, p. 27 ff.

of the development of prices in the Bujak series publications and made suggestions towards their widening¹⁷. This is the right standpoint, but as we know those works did not have such objectives and the modest attempts in that direction could not be full and sufficient. The analysis of the factors effecting the move of prices was confined in that series to such things as good harvests or elementary calamities and to monetary conditions, that is to factors the information about which could be obtained easily from local sources.

In the whole of his commentaries upon the Bujak series publications W. Kula makes claims and demands based upon the present-day status of research, thus his requirements are maximalist ones. Monographs written nearly forty years ago in research and organization conditions definitely less favourable for casting the scope of research as wide as those of today, in conditions of a much lower level of development of economic history and ancillary sciences, of economics and statistics, in conditions of a much poorer set of tools of research of a historian, such researches could not avoid deficiencies and even mistakes, particularly because of the speed in the implementation of the general plan of research. In spite of their deficiencies, those publications transmitted to us a lot of valuable material for further research. It should be the subject of care of the present generation of economic historians to utilize the publications to their utmost possibilities. Former examples of successful utilization of those materials may offer a considerable stimulus.

THE UTILIZATION OF THE BUJAK PRICE SERIES IN SUBSEQUENT STUDIES ON ECONOMIC HISTORY

The researches in the history of prices organized by Professor F. Bujak was mainly a source publication enterprise, the aim of which was to provide the basis for further investigations by historians and economists. Thus there arises a question how the monographs were utilized within the forty years since the publication of the first volume of the series (1928). Between the wars or more strictly, in the years 1929 - 1939, there was little attention paid to the appearing monographs of the history of prices among the historians and it was limited to reviews in the historical journals. It was too early to introduce the material of the monographs into the sphere of research tools of historians. The monographs enjoyed more interest among the economists. That interest was symbolized by R. Rybarski's book on the finance of Poland in the times of the partitions (1937) and on the treasury and the money of the later half of the seventeenth century (1939)¹⁸. In both those publications the author

¹⁷ W. Kula: *Problemy...* p. 560 ff.

¹⁸ R. Rybarski: *Skarbowość Polski w dobie rozbiorów (The Finance of Poland in the Time of the Partitions)*. Kraków 1937; the same: *Skarb i pieniądz za Jana Kazimierza, Michała Korybuta i Jana III (The Treasury and Money in the Times of John Casimir, Michael Korybut and John III)*. Warszawa 1939.

investigated the value of the Polish zloty of those times and its purchasing power and in the latter he also treated the influence of inflation of the depreciated money upon prices and in this he used the nominal and gold and silver standard prices of the Bujak series, making his own calculations of group indices on their basis.

After the World War II W. Kula was the first of the Polish historians, who made use of the original price data embraced in the Bujak series. He computed the group indexes of prices in five Polish towns observing the secular and short term movement of prices in the 16th, 17th and 18th centuries. During the general conference of Polish Historians in Cracow in 1958 S. Hoszowski and W. Kula presented papers concerned with the history of prices based on source materials taken from the Bujak series. Later W. Kula in his two books — already mentioned in the introductory part of this article — on the theory of the feudal system and on problems and methods of the economic history made large use of these materials, in spite of the acute criticism directed towards the monographs of the Bujak "School". In these books the author utilized for the construction of his theories the materials of the Bujak price-history series. He investigated the correlation of the development of prices in various cities of Poland, the correlation of crops and prices, the long- and the short-term fluctuations of prices, the differences in the dynamics of prices of various commodities and calculated the terms of trade for the particular social groups.

The researcher who appreciated the richness of the material contained in the Bujak series and made extensive use of it is A. Wyczański¹⁹. In his publications concerning the economy of the manorial estates of the gentry, of the king, the economic crises of the seventeenth century, the consumption of foodstuffs in Poland in the sixteenth and the seventeenth centuries, he used the data on prices and wages presented by the Bujak series. Using the standard of nominal prices and their silver-equivalents, he investigated the formation of prices in the markets of the latifundia, compared them to prices in larger civic centres, he investigated the correlation between the vacillations of prices and the changes in the organization and directions of production in the manors, and finally he made attempts at calculating the costs of living.

J. Rychlikowa in her publications valuable both from the methodological and intrinsic point of view, dealing with the commodity production of big

¹⁹ A. Wyczański: *Studia nad folwarkiem szlacheckim w Polsce w latach 1500 - 1570* (*Studies on a Nobleman's Manor in Poland in the Years 1500 - 1570*). Warszawa 1960; the same author: *W sprawie kryzysu w XVII wieku* (*On the Seventeenth-Century Crisis*), In: *Kwartalnik Historyczny*, vol. 69: 1962; the same author: *Studia nad gospodarką starostwa korezyńskiego, 1500 - 1660* (*Studies in the Economy of the Korczyn Estates, 1500 - 1660*). Warszawa 1964; the same author: *Studia nad konsumpcją żywności w Polsce w XVI i w pierwszej połowie XVII wieku* (*Studies in the Consumption of Foodstuff in Poland in the Sixteenth and in the First Half of the Seventeenth Centuries*). Warszawa 1969.

land-ownership in Little Poland in the second half of the eighteenth century²⁰, utilized the source and statistical material from the volumes pertaining to Cracow, Lwów and Gdańsk. She investigated the influence of the market situation upon the manor of the latifundia and its commodity production, the correlation between the prices and the extent of grain cultivation, the connections between the Little Poland and Gdańsk corn markets, correlations between the prices of wheat in Gdańsk and manorial crops, she also calculated the co-efficients of the correlation of prices and a number of other elements in the market situation. She introduced to her research workmanship the precision tools of a scientific statistical analysis.

The prices presented by the Bujak series were utilized to a smaller degree by many other historians (M. Komarzyński, H. Małachuk-Urbańska, J. Małachuk, A. Małachuk, S. Mielczarski and others). This seems to indicate that the utilization of that sort of source material becomes general and that it is paralleled by the improvement of the methods of research. On the basis of experience one may say that price materials are most valuable in the investigations of all sorts of market conditions, pertaining both to home and international markets and enabling the researcher to unravel the secrets of the market mechanism.

The Bujak price series was the subject of foreign scholarship too. That interest was only of a formal character between the wars and it was connected with the International Committee of the History of Prices which subsidized the Polish researches. After World War II it became of a more intrinsic character as a result of the development of comparative studies. Owing to that fact, there are more and more frequent cases of foreign monographs and synthetic studies the authors of which utilize Polish materials concerning the history of prices. It will suffice here to mention just a few names. The well known Dutch historian B. H. Slicher van Bath utilized the prices of Cracow and Gdańsk in his synthetic study of the agrarian history of Western Europe in the years 500 - 1850. He did so in order to present the directions and differences in the increase of prices of various groups of commodities and wages in the fifteenth to the seventeenth centuries. He also points to Cracow and Gdańsk prices when discussing the influence of consumption upon agricultural production²¹. The British historian B.E. Supple was interested in his monograph on the commercial crisis in England in the years 1600 - 1642, in the prices in terms of silver of a variety of goods in Gdańsk, Warsaw, Lublin, Cracow and Lwów

²⁰ I. Rychlikowa: *Studia nad towarową produkcją wielkiej własności w Małopolsce w l. 1764 - 1805 (Studies in the Market Production of Big Land Estates in Little Poland in the Years 1764 - 1805)*. Part I. *Towarowa gospodarka zbożowa (The Market Corn Economy)*. Wrocław 1966.

²¹ B. H. Slicher van Bath: *The Agrarian History of Western Europe A.D. 500 - 1850*. London 1963.

and also in the value of money in Poland²². Extensive use of the Bujak series of researches in the history of prices was made by economic historians F.P. Braudel and F. Spooner in their recently published papers on the prices in Europe from 1450 till 1750²³. The development of prices in Polish cities is illustrated there by a number of diagrams and presented in a comparison with other European countries.

We may hope that comparative research in the history of prices has entered a period of successful development both in Poland and in other countries and that it will continue to serve the advancement of the development of economic history. At the end of our observations we think it worth while to quote the opinion expressed by F.P. Braudel: "the history of prices must find its proper place in the context of general history to which it is an ancillary branch of knowledge"²⁴.

Translated by:
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²² B. E. Supple: *Commercial Crisis and Change in England, 1600 - 1642*. Cambridge 1964.

²³ F. P. Braudel — F. S. Spooner: *Prices in Europe from 1450 to 1750*. In: *The Cambridge Economic History of Europe*, vol. IV, pp. 376 - 486.

²⁴ *Ib.*, p. 374.