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Johann Heinrich Gottlob von Justi and the Cameralist Criticism of Serfdom

1 Introduction

Johann Heinrich Gottlob von Justi's views on agriculture have been widely recognised.¹ Arguably, he had addressed the issue of serfdom already in his earliest teaching of cameral sciences when he set out his main principles and lecture plan in Vienna in 1750–1752. At the very least, his criticism of serfdom had been presented in *Kurzer systematischer Grundriß aller Oeconomischen und Cameralwissenschaften* (first published in 1754), and when this was republished in 1761 he pointed out that these principles originated from his Vienna lectures.² Identical in both publications, his paragraph about serfdom maintains that the oppression of lower classes was in no way compatible with the internal security of the state, and hence »serfdom (*Leibeigenschaft*) can hardly exist with the welfare of the state« (*mit dem Wohlseyn des Staats*).³ Subsequently, Justi referred to the problem of serfdom in various contexts in most of his major works.

1 Ernst Klein: Johann Heinrich Justi und die preußische Staatswirtschaft. In: Vierteljahrschrift für Sozial- und Wirtschaftsgeschichte 48 (1961), pp. 145–202; Wolfgang Prange: Die Anfänge der großen Agrarreformen in Schleswig-Holstein bis um 1771. Neumünster 1971, pp. 650–662; Ursula A. J. Becker: Politische Gesellschaft. Studien zur Genese bürgerlicher Öffentlichkeit in Deutschland. Göttingen 1978, pp. 78–83; Ingrid Mittenzwei: Die Agrarfrage und der Kameralismus. In: Deutsche Agrargeschichte des Spätfudalismus. Ed. by Hartmut Harnisch, Gerhard Heitz. Berlin 1986, pp. 146–185; Ulrich Adam: The Political Economy of J. H. G. Justi. Bern 2006, pp. 214–222; John G. Gagliardo: From Pariah to Patriot. The Changing Image of the German Peasant 1770–1840. Lexington 1969, pp. 34–36; Marion W. Gray: Productive Men, Reproductive Women. The Agrarian Household and the Emergence of Separate Spheres during the German Enlightenment. New York, Oxford 2000, pp. 98–103.

2 Johann Heinrich Gottlob von Justi: Kurzer systematischer Grundriß aller Oeconomischen und Cameralwissenschaften. In: Johann Heinrich Gottlobs von Justi Gesammelte politische und Finanzschriften über wichtige Gegenstände der Staatskunst, der Kriegswissenschaften und des Cameral- und Finanzwesens. Kopenhagen, Leipzig 1761, pp. 504–573, here p. 505. See also Adam: The Political Economy (see note 1), p. 34. I thank Roger Bartlett who drew my attention to this comment by Justi and raised the possibility of this early date for his statements against serfdom.

3 Johann Heinrich Gottlob von Justi: Kurzer systematischer Grundriß aller öconomischen und Cameral-wissenschaften. In: Neue Wahrheiten zum Vorthelle der Naturkunde und des gesellschaftlichen Lebens der Menschen. Leipzig, Breitkopf 1754, 2.–3. St., pp. 147–177, 241–276, here p. 160; Justi: Kurzer systematischer Grundriß (see note 2), pp. 518–519.

Yet it is striking that Justi never devised a more detailed plan to abolish serfdom. His demand for its abolition was certainly not obvious in the way that historiography sometimes claims (without any evidence).⁴ Another historiographical remark to make is that in the more general literature, where Justi's criticism of serfdom is mentioned, a reference has been made to Justi's treatise *Über die Haupthindernisse für den landwirtschaftlichen Betrieb* (1767).⁵ However, such a work of Justi is not listed in any of his bibliographies.⁶ All existing references lead only to one source, *Quellen zur Geschichte der deutschen Bauernbefreiung* (1957), edited by Werner Conze.⁷ Conze himself quoted his own textbook and not the original source when he introduced Justi's thoughts on serfdom in his chapter on peasantry in the *Geschichtliche Grundbegriffe*.⁸ If one tries to identify the text published in Conze's textbook, then the closest match is Justi's *Abhandlung von denen Hindernissen einer blühenden Landwirtschaft* (1760), but this is far from an identical text.

It is important to underline that Justi was not alone in his views on the conditions of the peasantry and was not the first cameralist to address the problem of serfdom in mid-eighteenth century Germany. The economic arguments against serfdom arose for the first time in the 17th century and developed during the 18th century. Thus, an understanding of Justi is not possible without assessing the extent to which the criticism of serfdom on economic grounds had reached German-speaking economic literature prior to his works and during his writings. In eighteenth-century Germany, cameralism or Cameralistic sciences became a doctrine that dealt with good state administration and called upon governments and society to pay attention to their resources and population, and to maximise their economic capabilities. Cameralism focused on the importance of domestic resources in connection with

4 E.g. Mittenzwei: Die Agrarfrage (see note 1), p. 171; Hans-Heinrich Müller: Akademie und Wirtschaft im 18. Jahrhundert. Agrarökonomische Preisaufgaben und Preisschriften der Preußischen Akademie der Wissenschaften (Versuch, Tendenzen und Überblick). Berlin 1975, p. 88; Susan Richter: Pflug und Steuerruder. Zur Verflechtung von Herrschaft und Landwirtschaft in der Aufklärung. Köln, Weimar, Wien 2015, p. 250.

5 E.g. Theodor Schieder: Friedrich der Große. Ein Königtum der Widersprüche. Frankfurt a. M., Berlin, Wien 1983, p. 80; Gray: Productive Men (see note 1), p. 312; Hartmut Zückert: Allmende und Allmendaufhebung. Vergleichende Studien zum Spätmittelalter bis zu den Agrarreformen des 18./19. Jahrhunderts. Stuttgart 2003, p. 299.

6 Erik S. Reinert, Hugo Reinert: A Bibliography of J.H.G. von Justi. In: The Beginnings of Political Economy. Johann Heinrich Gottlob von Justi. Ed by Jürgen Georg Backhaus. New York 2009, pp. 19–31; Adam: The Political Economy (see note 1), pp. 241–246. I thank Ere Nokkala for his expert opinion on this odd matter.

7 Werner Conze (ed.): Quellen zur Geschichte der deutschen Bauernbefreiung. Göttingen 1957, pp. 43–46.

8 Werner Conze: Bauer, Bauernstand, Bauerntum. In: Geschichtliche Grundbegriffe. Historisches Lexikon zur politisch-sozialen Sprache in Deutschland. Ed. by Otto Brunner, Werner Conze, Reinhart Koselleck. Stuttgart 1972, Bd. 1, pp. 407–439, here p. 416.

agriculture, mining, and forestry. Furthermore, cameralists considered the needs of the state in a broader context, with such needs directed towards the happiness and welfare of the country and its people.⁹ Consequently, the cameralists were also the first to voice economic arguments against multiple irrational practices, including serfdom. Arguments about unproductive serf labour and the importance of private property were already widely known to cameralist thinkers before the 1770s, well before the physiocratic or Smithian traditions.

2 What Is Serfdom and Why Does It Matter?

Justi does not discuss in any substantive detail the background, essence, and meaning of serfdom in Germany or, more broadly, in Europe. Only once in his *Vergleichungen* (1762) does he outline the condition of the serfs in Europe. According to Justi, »real serfs« (*wirkliche Leibeigene*) were those who could be defined through five landlord's rights: ownership as part of their estate, to sell serfs like a livestock inventory, to demand corvée, to require services of the children (i.e. so-called *Gesindezwangsdienst*), and finally the adscription of serfs. The latter meant that the peasant and his family belonged legally to a fixed landed estate where the landowner had the right to claim them back »like runaway slaves« when they changed their dwelling-place without his permission.¹⁰ Justi also explained that in most cases, serfdom originated through a conquest based on the law of war and nations.¹¹

In his earlier works during the 1750s, Justi addressed the issue of serfdom primarily as part of internal security¹² or a peopling policy (serfdom as a reason for

⁹ See Albion W. Small: *The Cameralists: The Pioneers of German Social Polity*. Chicago, London 1909; Keith Tribe: *Governing Economy. The Reformation of German Economic Discourse 1750–1840*. Cambridge 1988; Marten Seppel, Keith Tribe (Ed.): *Cameralism in Practice: State Administration and Economy in Early Modern Europe*. Woodbridge 2017.

¹⁰ Johann Heinrich Gottlob von Justi: *Vergleichungen der Europäischen mit den Asiatischen und andern vermeintlich Barbarischen Regierungen*, in drey Büchern verfasst. Berlin, Stettin, Leipzig 1762, p. 305; Richter: *Pflug und Steuerruder* (see note 4), p. 250.

¹¹ Johann Heinrich Gottlob von Justi: *Die Natur und das Wesen der Staaten, als die Grundwissenschaft der Staatskunst, der Policey, und aller Regierungswissenschaften*, desgleichen als die Quelle aller Gesetze, abgehandelt. Berlin, Stettin, Leipzig 1760, pp. 130–131; Johann Heinrich Gottlob von Justi: *System des Finanzwesens, nach vernünftigen aus dem Endzweck der bürgerlichen Gesellschaften, und aus der Natur aller Quellen der Einkünfte des Staats hergeleiteten Grundsätzen und Regeln*. Halle 1766, pp. 371, 375.

¹² Justi: *Kurzer systematischer Grundriß* (see note 3), p. 160; Johann Heinrich Gottlob von Justi: *Staatswirtschaft oder Systematische Abhandlung aller Oeconomischen und Cameral-Wissenschaften, die zur Regierung eines Landes erfordert werden*. Leipzig 1755, I. Th., p. 99.

people leaving the country)¹³. In two of his writings (1759 and 1760), Justi mentions serfdom several times in striving to demonstrate that an aristocratic monarchy, like in Poland, must be considered the most unjust form of government as the nobility was too keen on subjugating the peasantry as serfs.¹⁴ However, from 1758 onwards, his argumentation around serfdom widened and his criticism principally became part of his teaching on the advancement of agriculture.¹⁵ In his works of the 1760s in particular, Justi stressed that agriculture was the most important source of livelihood and wealth. He maintained that among the issues pertaining to the oeconomy, there was nothing more important than a perfect and flourishing agriculture, because the prosperity of a country, and the power and happiness of a state, were based on this as well as the growth of the population, manufacture, and commerce.¹⁶ For this reason, Justi emphasised that, given the importance of the agricultural class to the state and the well-being of all others, the peasantry had in no way deserved either oppression or contempt.¹⁷ One of the main arguments Justi employed was that the promotion of agriculture slows or is even impoverished when the peasant suffers under heavy dues and burdens (unfixed corvée in particular). Therefore, all the obligations of peasants had to be arranged so that they did not become an obstacle to agricultural advancement.¹⁸

Justi's goal was nothing less than a perfection of agriculture (*die Vollkommenheit der Landwirthschaft*) and England was his example to aspire to.¹⁹ However, in

13 Johann Heinrich Gottlob von Justi: Allerunterthänigstes Gutachten, wegen Anbauung der jüt-ländischen Heiden. In: *Neue Wahrheiten zum Vortheile der Naturkunde und des gesellschaftlichen Lebens der Menschen*. Leipzig 1758, 12. St., pp. 609–672, here p. 626.

14 Johann Heinrich Gottlob von Justi: *Der Grundriß einer Guten Regierung in Fünf Büchern*. Frankfurt, Leipzig 1759, pp. 143, 150; Justi: *Die Natur und das Wesen* (see note 11), pp. 130, 166. For this see also Ulrich Adam: Justi and the Post-Montesquieu French Debate on Commercial Nobility in 1756. In: *The Beginnings of Political Economy* (see note 6), pp. 75–98, here p. 89.

15 As the current historiography believes, Justi started to pay more attention to the consequences of serfdom during his trip to Denmark from 1757 to 1758. See in particular Prange: *Die Anfänge* (see note 1), pp. 652–656.

16 Justi: *Allerunterthänigstes Gutachten* (see note 13), p. 629; Johann Heinrich Gottlob von Justi: *Abhandlung von denen Hinternissen einer blühenden Landwirthschaft*. In: Johann Heinrich Gottlob von Justi: *Oeconomische Schriften über die wichtigsten Gegenstände der Stadt- und Landwirthschaft*. Berlin, Leipzig 1760, Bd. 2, pp. 205–235, here pp. 205–206.

17 Justi: *Abhandlung von denen Hinternissen* (see note 16), p. 227.

18 Johann Heinrich Gottlob von Justi: *Grundsätze der Policey-Wissenschaft in einen vernünftigen, auf den Endzweck der Policey gegründeten, Zusammenhange und zum Gebrauch Academischer Vorlesungen*. Göttingen 1756, pp. 84–85; Justi: *Vergleichungen* (see note 10), pp. 307–308.

19 Justi: *Abhandlung von denen Hinternissen* (see note 16), p. 217; Johann Heinrich Gottlob von Justi: *Abhandlungen von der Vollkommenheit der Landwirthschaft und der höchsten Cultur der Länder*. Ulm, Leipzig 1761, pp. 3–5; Johann Heinrich Gottlob von Justi: *Abhandlung über die öconomische Preisfrage: Was tragen die Pflanzen selbst zu Zubereitung ihres Nahrungshaftes bey, und was ist bey ihrem ungleichen Wachsthum der Verschiedenheit des Erdreichs zuzuschreiben?* In:

1764 Justi admitted that he did not »see the slightest hope or probability that agriculture in Germany will ever attain such a bloom as in England«. He then listed the reasons for this: serfdom, corvée, the obligation to provide transport for the army and the manor, communal pastures, and incorrect division of arable fields, all of which hamper proper agriculture in Germany.²⁰

Justi's goal was both the improvement of agriculture as well as the promotion of manufacturing and factories,²¹ and both manufacturing and commerce also suffered from serfdom.²² Nevertheless, according to Justi, priority had to be given to agriculture as this was the basis of everything else.²³ He believed that from a flourishing agriculture derived a country's prosperity, a strong and numerous population secured with its own food and subsistence, and materials for manufacturing, industry, and commerce.²⁴ However, the sustenance and prosperity of a nation are not only determined by the natural fertility of the land, because even in fertile lands a nation may live in poverty unless they are cultivated with care, vigour, and knowledge. Therefore, the state government cannot leave agriculture to its own devices but must ensure that the diligence and skill of the peasantry are revived.²⁵ Thus, Justi called on both governments and society to take up agriculture. The government therefore had an obvious role to play in encouraging the diligence and industriousness of the peasantry and awakening their desire to improve agriculture and bring it to a flourishing state.²⁶ Therefore, it was deemed imperative that agriculture should receive the attention of the government (referring to the example of China), and that

Abhandlungen der Churfürstlich-Baierischen Akademie der Wissenschaften 4 (1767), 2. Th., pp. 55–96, here p. 59. – In addition to England Justi praised the advancement of agriculture and the freedom of the people in Switzerland in Europe: Justi: *Vergleichungen* (see note 10), p. 308.

20 Johann Heinrich Gottlob von Justi: *Abhandlung von der Eintheilung und Direction des Privatvermögens, wie solches hauptsächlich zur Vorsorge der Finanzcammern gehöret*. In: ders.: *Gesammelte Politische und Finanzschriften über wichtige Gegenstände der Staatskunst, der Kriegswissenschaften und des Cameral- und Finanzwesens*. Kopenhagen, Leipzig 1764, Bd. 3, pp. 338–378, here p. 373.

21 For Justi's views on manufacturing, see Xuan Zhao: *The Eighteenth-Century Entrepreneurial State in the Political Economy of Johann Heinrich Gottlob von Justi (1717–1771)*. Diss. The University of Manchester 2020, here esp. p. 28.

22 Johann Heinrich Gottlob von Justi: *Vollständige Abhandlung von denen Manufacturen und Fabriken*. Erster Theil. Kopenhagen 1758, p. 134; Johann Heinrich Gottlob von Justi: *Staatswirthschaft oder Systematische Abhandlung aller Oekonomischen und Cameral-Wissenschaften, die zur Regierung eines Landes erfordert werden*. Erster Theil. Leipzig ²1758, p. 118.

23 Anaxagoras von Occident: *Physicalische und Politische Betrachtungen über die Erzeugung des Menschen und Bevölkerung der Länder*. Smirna 1769, pp. 116–117.

24 Justi: *Abhandlungen von der Vollkommenheit der Landwirtschaft* (see note 19), p. 1; Justi: *Vergleichungen* (see note 10), p. 290; Justi: *Abhandlung über die öconomische Preisfrage* (see note 19), pp. 57–58.

25 Justi: *Vergleichungen* (see note 10), pp. 291–293.

26 *Ibid.*, p. 293.

those engaged in it should not be subject to misery (*Elende*) and oppression (*Unterdrückung*).²⁷

3 Emergence of the Criticism of Serfdom in Cameralist Discourse

Before the early 1750s, the detraction of serfdom on economic grounds had been discussed for some time in the German politico-economic literature. Some of Justi's cameralist arguments go back as early as the seventeenth century. From the mid-seventeenth century onwards, serfdom had become a problem in relation to population policy and the improvement of the country.²⁸ German cameralists were the first in Europe to directly and systematically oppose serfdom in economic terms.

Among the early cameralists, Veit Ludwig von Seckendorff described the condition of serfdom (*eine Art der Leibeigenschaft*) in his masterpiece *Teutscher Fürsten-Stat* (1656). However, he did not argue directly against serfdom that still existed in »other places of Germany« (i.e. not in Saxe-Gotha), but admitted that it was a traditional source of income for princes and warned of emerging conflicts and damage when serfdom, labour services, tithes, or other dues were excessive.²⁹ In his additions to his major work in 1665, he was even more critical and bemoaned the existence of »poor, oppressed, slavish, and destitute subjects«. Seckendorff argued that the prince could not achieve anything with such wretched peasants, as the latter had no interest in their ruler or officials, whose happiness or unhappiness did not really bother them. They knew they would always remain poor because the overly strict or greedy character of the government meant it would be impossible to improve their level of subsistence (*zur Besserung ihrer Nahrung nicht kommen können*). Seckendorff ended with a quote from Lucan: *Non sibi, sed Domino, gravis est, quae*

²⁷ Ibid. See also Richter: Pflug und Steuerruder (see note 4).

²⁸ See e.g. Heinrich Coelestin von Sternbach's, Chancellor of Swedish Pomerania (served 1658–1670), proposal for the improvement of Pomerania (undated but most likely from 1661): Augustin von Balthasar: *Tractatus iuridicus de hominibus propriis eorumque origine, natura ac indole et iure in Pomerania atque Rugia nec non Megapoli. Gryphiswaldiae* 1779, p. 339 (appendix no. 3); Jörg-Peter Findeisen: *Fürstendienerei oder Zukunftsweisendes unter feudalem Vorzeichen. Wirtschaftspolitische Reformpublizistik in Schwedisch-Pommern zwischen 1750 und 1806*. Sundsvall 1994, p. 94.

²⁹ Veit Ludwig von Seckendorff: *Teutscher Fürsten-Stat*, [...]. Franckfurth a. M. 1656, pp. 93, 172. See also Lars Magnusson: *On Happiness: Welfare in Cameralist Discourse in the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries*. In: *Cameralism and the Enlightenment. Happiness, Governance and Reform in a Transnational Perspective*. Ed. by Ere Nokkala, Nicholas B. Miller. Abingdon 2020, pp. 23–46, here p. 28.

servit egestas (»The want of the slave is painful to his master, not himself«).³⁰ Thus, in practical terms, Seckendorff had outlined the principle of self-interest that the servile peasants lacked.³¹

Johann Joachim Becher, another major early cameralist author, addressed the serf condition of peasants when he discussed the form and order of a good government. He viewed the original function of government as »to keep subjects in humanity, happiness, and in the laws of nature«; hence, the fundamental aim of the authorities was »to govern people well and make them happy«.³² According to Becher, this also applied to the treatment of serfs. If peasants and serfs were excessively burdened and their well-being and happiness were not respected by their lord, then they might simply run away.³³ He discerned two kinds of serfdom: pagan and Christian (*Heidnisch- und Christlich*), explaining that »the pagan one is nothing but an unperturbed tyrannical captivity struggling utterly against the laws of nature.« The result of such unchristian serfdom was the despair and misery of peasants and empty houses.³⁴ However, although Becher advocated the Christian treatment of serfs, he did not demand its abolition.

One of the first cameralist authors to suggest the abolition of serfdom was Theodor Ludwig Lau in his work on cameral and police matters (1717).³⁵ He contended that it would be »common sense to consider« whether it would be more useful to replace peasants' labour services with monetary payments and to abolish serfdom (*Ferner ob die Leibeigenschaft, wo sie im Gebrauch, auff und welcher gestalt zu heben?*).³⁶ Lau discussed the means to increase and preserve the population, includ-

30 Veit Ludwig von Seckendorff: *Additiones Oder Zugaben und Erleuterungen Zu dem Tractat des Teutschen Fürsten-Stats*. Frankfurt a. M. 1665, pp. 27–28. For the English translation and the source of the end quote see Thomas May: *Lucan's Pharsalia* (1627). Ed. by Emma Buckley, Edward Paleit. Cambridge 2020, p. 123.

31 The same Seckendorff's paragraph was later repeated by Wilhelm von Schröder: *Disquisitio politica vom absoluten Fürsten-Recht mit nöthigen Anmerckungen versehen, welche derselben gefährliche Irrthümer deutlich entdecken und solches praetendirte Recht gründlich untersuchen*. Leipzig, Wolffenbüttel 1719, p. 34.

32 Johann Joachim Becher: *Politische Discurs von den eigentlichen Ursachen deß Auff- und Abnehmens der Städt, Länder und Republicken [...]*. Franckfurt 1688, pp. 46–47.

33 *Ibid.*, pp. 43, 45.

34 *Ibid.*, pp. 45–46. See also Robert von Erdberg-Krczenciewski: Johann Joachim Becher. Ein Beitrag zur Geschichte der Nationalökonomik. Jena 1896, pp. 97–98; Kurt Zielenziger: Die alten deutschen Kameralisten. Ein Beitrag zur Geschichte der Nationalökonomie und zum Problem des Merkantilismus. Jena 1914, pp. 217, 264–265.

35 For Theodor Ludwig Lau see also Jonathan I. Israel: *Radical Enlightenment. Philosophy and the Making of Modernity 1650–1750*. Oxford 2001, pp. 652–655; Martin Pott: Einleitung. In: Theodor Ludwig Lau (1670–1740). Stuttgart-Bad Cannstatt 1992, pp. 9–54, here pp. 16–30.

36 Theodor Ludwig Lau: *Aufrichtiger Vorschlag: Von Glücklicher, vortheilhafter, beständiger, Einrichtung der Intraden und Einkünfften der Souverainen und ihrer Unterthanen; In welchem Von*

ing in matters of healthcare. At the same time, like Seckendorff, he followed the principle that had already become the motto of the early cameralists of the seventeenth century: »If the peasantry is rich, then the landlord is rich.«³⁷

In 1746, Georg Heinrich Zincke, a close colleague of Justi,³⁸ added a long footnote-comment to Friedrich Ulrich Stisser's cameral sciences textbook of Jena (which he edited and reissued), where he concluded that »old serfdom« (*die alte Leibeigenschaft*) hindered population growth, the prosperity of manufacturers, the growth of riches, wealth, and the income of princes. Although he viewed this as detrimental to the culture, industry, and agriculture of a country as a whole, he did not yet call for the complete abolition of serfdom.³⁹

Thus, by the 1750s, the time of Justi's thoughts on serfdom, there were already a number of classic cameralist works touching upon the problem of serfdom that were based on the understanding that the welfare of the state and general happiness stem from the well-being of the people, which required an increase in both population and prosperity. Equally important, the notion that »agriculture should always be improved« (*Der Acker-Bau soll immer verbessert werden*)⁴⁰ had been increasingly acknowledged in the German cameralist literature in the first half of the eighteenth century before Justi took up its advocacy. The slogan »Verbesserung des Feld-Baus« had already been employed by Wilhelm von Schröder in 1686.⁴¹ In his cameralist textbook (1731), Justus Christoph Dithmar considered how to improve (*zu verbessern*) estates (*Land-Güter*), livestock, fields, horticulture, and wool quality.⁴² A rather general view emerged that improvements would increase agricultural pro-

Policy- und Cammer-Negocien und Steuer-Sachen gehandelt wird. Franckfurth a. M. 1719, pp. 73–74.

37 »Es ist ein altes Sprichwort: daß, wenn die Unterthanen reich seyn; so seye auch der Landes-Herr reich«. – Lau: Aufrichtiger Vorschlag (see note 36), p. 317. For this motto in seventeenth-century German economic literature see Hans Hausherr: *Verwaltungseinheit und Ressorttrennung vom Ende des 17. bis zum Beginn des 19. Jahrhunderts*. Berlin 1953, p. 23; Tribe: *Governing Economy* (see note 9), p. 20.

38 See Erik S. Reinert: Johann Heinrich Gottlob von Justi (1717–1771): The Life and Times of an Economist Adventurer. In: *The Beginnings of Political Economy* (see note 6), pp. 33–74, here p. 36.

39 Friederich Ulrich Stisser: *Einleitung zur Land-Wirthschaft und Policy der Teutschen. Zum Unterricht in Oeconomie-Policy- und Cammer-Wesen eingerichtet, [...]*. Jena, Leipzig 1746, pp. 326–327; see also Wilhelm Roscher: *Geschichte der National-Oekonomie in Deutschland*. München 1874, p. 376; Erich Donnert: Johann Georg Eisen (1717–1779). Ein Vorkämpfer der Bauernbefreiung in Rußland. Leipzig 1978, p. 25.

40 [Anon.]: *Besondere und vermischte Versuche, Erfahrungen und Vortheilgen bey dem Acker-Bau*. In: *Leipziger Sammlungen* 3 (1746), pp. 920–941, here p. 932.

41 Wilhelm von Schröder: *Fürstliche Schatz- und Rent-Cammer [...]*. Leipzig 1686, p. 301.

42 Justus Christoph Dithmar: *Einleitung in die Oeconomische Policei- und Cameral-Wissenschaften*. Franckfurth a. d. O. 1745, pp. 6, 14, 33, 37, 43, 161, 162.

duction, and consequently income, and should therefore receive all possible encouragement.⁴³

4 Serfdom as an Obstacle to Peopling the Country

One of the central threads of the cameralist criticism of serfdom was the need to support a growing population. Claims that population growth and prosperity cannot be expected in a country unless serfdom was eradicated appeared earlier in administrative documents of the period than they did in theoretical literature.⁴⁴ For instance, in 1685, the *Amtskammer* of Kurmark discussed the question of whether serfdom (*Leibeigenschaft*) in Uckermark was more harmful than beneficial (*mehr schädlich, alß vortürlich sey*).⁴⁵ It concluded that »Thus, if serfdom were abolished (*die Leibeigenschaft abgeschaffet*) in Uckermark and Stolp county, a large number of people from other neighbouring places would come to settle here.«⁴⁶ It also highlighted the experiences of some noble estates which had previously been empty, but »through the abolition of serfdom« (*durch Cassirung der Leibeigenschaft*) immediately found people who took up empty farms and cultivated them diligently at their own expense.⁴⁷

Similarly, the importance of freedom and good order was strongly emphasised by Justi in 1755:

First of all, in a country that is to become ever more populous, there must be a benevolent and mild government. [...] A monarch who wants to further populate his lands must therefore, in all his intentions, measures, and actions, show nothing but benevolent sentiments and an uncommon love for his people in the most convincing way. [...] that everything is done out of love and provision for their welfare. In doing so, the subjects must be given reasonable freedom.

⁴³ See also Peter M. Jones: *Agricultural Enlightenment. Knowledge, Technology, and Nature, 1750–1840*. Oxford 2016; Verena Lehmbruck: *Der denkende Landwirt. Agrarwissen und Aufklärung in Deutschland 1750–1820*. Wien, Köln, Weimar 2020.

⁴⁴ For more in detail see Marten Seppel: *Cameralist population policy and the problem of serfdom, 1680–1720*. In: *Cameralism in Practice* (see note 9), pp. 91–110.

⁴⁵ *Acta Wegen der Unterthanen LeibEigenschaft de anno 1685*, Brandenburgisches Landeshauptarchiv (BLHA, Potsdam), Rep. 2 Kurmärkische Kriegs- und Domänenkammer Nr. D 2141, f. 1. See also Lieselott Enders: *Die Uckermark. Geschichte einer kurmärkischen Landschaft vom 12. bis zum 18. Jahrhundert*. Weimar 1992, pp. 387–388; Lieselott Enders: *Bauern und Feudalherrschaft der Uckermark im absolutistischen Staat*. In: *Jahrbuch für Geschichte des Feudalismus* 13 (1989), pp. 247–283, here pp. 250–251.

⁴⁶ BLHA, Rep. 2 Nr. D 2141, f. 2v.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, f. 3.

Freedom is so much to the liking of all men that nothing is so repugnant to them as the restraint of their indifferent or innocent actions.⁴⁸

Hence, Justi was convinced that if the overarching goal was to increase the population, there could be no slavish oppression and restrictions.⁴⁹ Furthermore, serfdom was one of the main reasons for people leaving the country.⁵⁰ Justi also maintained that if new settlers were openly called to Jutland, they must be guaranteed everlasting freedom from »all serfdom, corvée« and other constraints.⁵¹

5 The Idea of Self-Interest as a Driving Force

According to the understanding of cameralists, the constraints of serfdom, corvée, and a lack of secure property rights did not motivate enough peasants to work more diligently. The fact that serfdom inhibited their self-interest (i.e. it submitted to the peasant's natural desire to better their own and their family's condition) became one of the central arguments of Justi and other cameralists. Seckendorff, who was still admired among the eighteenth-century cameralists,⁵² explained the poor condition of the peasantry as being attributable to the lack of motivations they were offered.⁵³ Similarly, the Amtskammer of Kurmark (1685) outlined the assumption that free peasants with property rights would take much more care of their households as they would work for themselves rather than be serfs in Uckermark.⁵⁴

In 1758, Justi wrote that any person who knew something of the human mind (*die menschlichen Gesinnungen*) would recognise the importance of a peasant's ownership. The latter was »the only motive (*Bewegungsgrund*) of industriousness, activity and inventiveness« to improve one's fortune.⁵⁵ As Justi asserted, a peasant only works if this benefits themselves, their family, and their descendants. If peasants were not insured, they would have no motivation (*rechte Bewegungsgrund*) to

48 Justi: Staatswirthschaft (see note 22), pp. 164–165.

49 Justi: Kurzer systematischer Grundriß, 1761 (see note 2), p. 525.

50 Justi: Allerunterthänigstes Gutachten (see note 13), p. 626; Justi: Vollständige Abhandlung von denen Manufacturen (see note 22), pp. 134–135.

51 Justi: Allerunterthänigstes Gutachten (see note 13), p. 652.

52 See Volker Bauer: Hofökonomie. Der Diskurs über den Fürstenhof in Zeremonialwissenschaft, Hausväterliteratur und Kameralismus. Wien, Köln, Weimar 1997, p. 175.

53 See above note 30.

54 BLHA, Rep. 2 Nr. D 2141, f. 2. Similarly Christoph Rantzau stated in 1688 when he abolished serfdom in his manors of Holstein: Wolfgang Prange: Christoph Rantzau auf Schmoel und die Schmoeler Leibeigenschaftsprozesse. Neumünster 1965, pp. 81, 102; Peter Wick: Versuche zur Erbverpachtung und Aufhebung der Leibeigenschaft in Mecklenburg zu Beginn des 18. Jahrhunderts. In: Jahrbuch für Wirtschaftsgeschichte 1961, T. 1, pp. 45–60, here p. 53.

55 Justi: Allerunterthänigstes Gutachten (see note 13), p. 627.

take full care of their household and make the necessary improvements.⁵⁶ Ere Nokkala viewed self-interest as lying »at the centre of Justi's political and economic thought«.⁵⁷

According to Justi, (self-)interest is the only mainspring of all diligence (*Das Interesse ist die einzige Triebfeder alles Fleißes*). If peasants were not fully insured, they would fear that they or their children might be deprived of their farm holding on any pretext, and thus had no proper motivation to put all their industriousness (*Fleiß*) into improving their farm. It never occurred to peasants to make large and important improvements (*Verbesserungen*) to their lands.⁵⁸ Justi grounded his arguments in self-interest when he also discussed better use of communal pastures, asserting that »no one takes the trouble to improve and cultivate a thing if so many others have a share in the enjoyment of it.«⁵⁹

6 The Goal of Improvement (*Verbesserung*)

Criticism of serfdom throughout most of the eighteenth century was linked to the proliferation of endeavours to improve the country. It was agriculture that became one of the main focal points regarding the aim of improvement (*Verbesserung*) in German eighteenth-century economic literature.⁶⁰ As noted previously, for Justi, agricultural improvement occupied a central place in his vision of economic

⁵⁶ Ibid., pp. 634–635; Justi: *Abhandlungen von der Vollkommenheit der Landwirtschaft* (see note 19), p. 22; Johann Heinrich Gottlob von Justi: *Die Grundfeste zu der Macht und Glückseligkeit der Staaten; oder ausführliche Vorstellung der gesamten Policy-Wissenschaft*. Königsberg, Leipzig 1760, Bd. 1, p. 150; Adam: *The Political Economy* (see note 1), p. 217.

⁵⁷ Ere Nokkala: *From Natural Law to Political Economy: J.H.G. von Justi on State, Commerce and International Order*. Zürich 2019, p. 119. See also Ere Nokkala: *From Fatherly Government to an Economic State: Late Cameralists on Natural Rights, Freedom, and Pursuit of Happiness*. In: *History of Political Economy* 53/3 (2021), pp. 479–495, here pp. 488, 491; Hans-Erich Bödeker: *Reconciling Private Interests and the Common Good. An Essay on Cameralist Discourse*. In: *Cameralism and the Enlightenment* (see note 29), pp. 47–79, here p. 54.

⁵⁸ Justi: *Abhandlung von denen Hinternissen* (see note 16), p. 22.

⁵⁹ Johann Heinrich Gottlob von Justi: *Vorschläge zu besserer Nutzung der gemeinen Triften und Weiden* [1756]. In: Johann Heinrich Gottlob von Justi: *Oeconomische Schriften über die wichtigsten Gegenstände der Stadt- und Landwirtschaft*. Berlin, Leipzig 1760, Bd. 1, pp. 465–476, here p. 467; see also Prange: *Anfänge* (see note 1), pp. 651–652.

⁶⁰ E.g. Ambrosius Zeiger: *Vernünfftige Anleitung zur Oeconomie und Kunstmäßigen Verbesserung des Feld-Baues*. Eisleben 1733, pp. 4–5; [Anon.]: *Sendschreiben an den Verfasser der Sammlungen, von der Verbesserung der Landwirtschaft und einem Vorschlag solche zu befördern*. In: *Leipziger Sammlungen* 5 (1749), pp. 799–804; P. J. D.: *Bericht von der Beschaffenheit, und Einrichtung der Guthswirtschaft, mit verlangten Gutachten, zu deren Verbesserung*. In: *Oeconomische Nachrichten* 6 (1754), pp. 500–534.

advancement.⁶¹ In his treatise on the obstacles to a flourishing agriculture in Germany (1760), he aimed to offer guidance for improvements (*Verbesserungen*) in agriculture and peasant farming.⁶²

From the mid-eighteenth century onwards, the condition of the peasant (*Verbesserung des Zustandes der Bauern*) became part of the topic of agricultural improvement. Cameralist authors sought to explain serfdom as an obstacle to achieving such improvement. According to Justi, any excessive oppression of the peasants was a major obstacle to the flourishing of the culture and agriculture of the country. This is because it meant the peasant lacked the mood or desire to undertake any relevant improvement of their farm holding (*zu Verbesserung seiner Grundstücke zu unternehmen*).⁶³

One of the earliest cameralists to ardently argue the incompatibility of serfdom and the goal of improvement was Johann Georg Eisen, a most remarkable cameralist from Livonia who had studied at Jena in the 1730s and then obtained a job as the pastor of Torma in Livonia. He wrote his first cameralist work, *Proof that that constitution of the peasant whereby he is subject to his lord as the owner of his farmstead is the only basis on which all the happiness of a state can be built; serfdom by contrast can be considered the first cause of all imperfections in it* in 1751–1756, although it was never published.⁶⁴ In this work, he entitled Paragraph 27 »The serf order fights against an improvement in agriculture« and contended that agriculture required improvement, but as long as the peasants were serfs, they would not be interested in improving their farmstead, not even »by 10 kopecks in a thousand years«. The reason was simple: »Because it is not his property, and what he improves on it would not even benefit him during his lifetime, much less his children.«⁶⁵ Improvements would only mean more care and work for peasants.⁶⁶ Hence, Eisen summarised by saying: »It is with all aspects of agriculture in general, that under serfdom they are as necessarily imperfect as one can boast of every possible im-

⁶¹ Justi: *Allerunterthänigstes Gutachten* (see note 13), pp. 627–629; Justi: *Abhandlung über die öconomische Preisfrage* (see note 19), pp. 58–59; Adam: *The Political Economy* (see note 1), p. 214.

⁶² Justi: *Abhandlung von denen Hinternissen* (see note 16), p. 234; Justi: *Abhandlung von der Eintheilung* (see note 20), p. 359.

⁶³ Justi: *Abhandlung von denen Hinternissen* (see note 16), pp. 226–227.

⁶⁴ Johann Georg Eisen: *Beweis, daß diejenige Verfassung des Bauern, wenn selbiger seinem Herrn als ein Eigentümer von seinem Bauernhof untertan ist, der einzige Grund sei, worauf alle mögliche Glückseligkeit eines Staats gebauet werden kann; die Leibeigenschaft hingegen vor die erste Ursache von aller Unvollkommenheit in derselben gehalten werden könne*. In: Johann Georg Eisen (1717–1779). *Ausgewählte Schriften. Deutsche Volksaufklärung und Leibeigenschaft im Russischen Reich*. Ed. by Roger Bartlett, Erich Donnert. Marburg 1998, pp. 123–217. See also Roger Bartlett: *Russia's First Abolitionist: The Political Philosophy of J. G. Eisen*. In: *Jahrbücher für Geschichte Osteuropas* 39 (1991), pp. 161–176.

⁶⁵ Eisen: *Beweis* (see note 64), pp. 176–177.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 178.

provement with property, [...]». ⁶⁷ Additionally, Eisen argued that serfdom was harmful to the state as it increased the threat of famine, created an obstacle to population growth, and hindered useful projects and the growth of crown income. Serfdom also prevented trade from flourishing. ⁶⁸

7 The Problem of Laziness Among Peasants

The traditional claim was that serfs were lazy by nature, which was also the more general perception of the peasantry. The oft-repeated proverbs in eighteenth-century German literature regarding the nature of peasants' laziness were »Der Bauer thut nichts, wann er nicht muß«, ⁶⁹ and especially »Wo/wenn/wann der Bauer nicht muß, rührt er weder Hand noch Fuß«, which in English would be translated as: »Unless forced to hustle, peasants won't move a muscle.« ⁷⁰

In the second half of the eighteenth century, the economic argument increasingly accepted that laziness stemmed from an individual's servile status, and that people were by nature ambitious, diligent, and not indolent. They simply needed to be motivated. Hence, laziness was determined by existing socio-economic relations. In Eisen's opinion, all the negative characteristics of Livonian peasants, such as lacking the habit of thinking, deceptiveness, carelessness, astounding laziness, spendthrift, and proneness to theft were due to serf relations. ⁷¹

When reviewing the eighteenth-century cameralist literature, it could even be argued that it aimed to provoke an industrious turn in order to achieve a growth in wealth. ⁷² As Justi explains: »Since the essential reason for the republics depends on the fact that many people unite their forces as well as their will; thus, the entire power and wealth of the state arise solely from the individual powers of the subjects; and consequently it is certainly a duty of the subjects to the state that they

⁶⁷ Ibid., p. 186.

⁶⁸ Ibid., pp. 193–217.

⁶⁹ Johann Ulrich von Cramer: Ob man von ungemessenen Frohnden auf die Leibeigenschaft schließen könne? In: Wetzlarische Beyträge. Wetzlar 1763, 3. Th. pp. 107–119, 113.

⁷⁰ E.g. Balthasar: Tractatus (see note 28), p. 116; Joseph Friedrich Enderlin: Der Einfluß des Bauernstandes auf den Staat. Karlsruhe 1773, p. 31. See also Earl W. Jennison Jr.: Christian Garve and Garlieb Merkel: Two theorists of peasant emancipation during the ages of enlightenment and revolution. In: Journal of Baltic Studies 4 (1973), pp. 344–363, here p. 349.

⁷¹ Donnert: Johann Georg Eisen (see note 39), pp. 32–33.

⁷² This would be an industrious turn in the direct sense. For the indirect ›Industrious Revolution‹ (Jan De Vries) see Sheilagh Ogilvie: Revolution des Fleißes. Leben und Wirtschaften im ländlichen Württemberg von 1650 bis 1800. In: Revolution des Fleißes, Revolution des Konsums? Leben und Wirtschaften im ländlichen Württemberg von 1650 bis 1800. Ed. by Sigrid Hirbodian, Sheilagh Ogilvie, R. Johanna Regnath. Ostfildern 2015, pp. 173–193.

should seek to increase their fortunes by industriousness (*Fleiß*) and skill.«⁷³ He saw great potential in peasants who acquire firm rights over their household as this would encourage them to be »more diligent, to work hard, to cultivate and to improve their soil«. ⁷⁴

Cameralist literature revolved around peasants' industriousness (*Fleiß*) as a capacity that required motivation not suppression, especially when discussing the promotion of agriculture. This was also the heart of Joseph von Sonnenfels' teaching, which asserted that there existed a simple principle: »The more motives are offered for the diligence of the peasant in tilling his field, the more eager his industriousness (*Fleiß*) will be.«⁷⁵ Thus, there were no grounds for excessively high customary dues and an unfixed corvée that could completely destroy a peasant's mood. In addition, insecurity in their property rights and the prince's or landlord's powerful desire to hunt caused peasants to despair and fear that all their pains and trouble would be lost.⁷⁶

8 Justi's Solutions to the Problem of Serfdom

Justi talked of the harmful consequences of serfdom but never assumed that serfdom would actually be eradicated.⁷⁷ In 1756, he did, however, suggest the idea of offering liberation from serfdom (*die Befreyung von der Leibeigenschaft*) as a kind of reward (*Belohnung*), among others, to facilitate the implementation of necessary police orders by the government,⁷⁸ but this was more a list of options for good governance than a direct proposal for the abolition of serfdom. Justi also asserted that the continuation of serfdom was a disgrace (*Schande*) for any government as it was so obviously contrary to the nature and essence of a state and unsuitable for our »reasonable and enlightened times«. ⁷⁹ He repeatedly implied that the welfare of the state and the promotion of agriculture could not align with serfdom and was con-

⁷³ Johann Heinrich Gottlob von Justi: *Die Grundfeste zu der Macht und Glückseligkeit der Staaten; oder ausführliche Vorstellung der gesamten Policey-Wissenschaft*. Königsberg 1761, Bd. 2, p. 222. See also Gray: *Productive Men* (see note 1), p. 124.

⁷⁴ Justi: *Allerunterthänigstes Gutachten* (see note 13), p. 629.

⁷⁵ Joseph von Sonnenfels: *Sätze aus der Polizey- Handlungs- und Finanzwissenschaft*. Wien 1769, 2. Th., pp. 38, 73–74.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 55, 67, 70.

⁷⁷ So explicitly Justi: *System des Finanzwesens* (see note 11), pp. 375–376.

⁷⁸ Justi: *Grundsätze* (see note 18), p. 334.

⁷⁹ Justi: *Die Grundfeste* (see note 56), p. 150. He repeats this statement word by word: Justi: *Abhandlung von der Eintheilung* (see note 20), p. 361.

vinced that the institution of serfdom was genuinely detrimental (*schädlich*).⁸⁰ Later, Justi describes serfdom as something commonly »detested« (*verhaßte Leibeigenschaft*).⁸¹ In his two treatises of 1759 and 1761, Justi praises those rulers who have used their authority to abolish serfdom on the grounds that it is detrimental to the cultivation of the soil.⁸² However, he did not consider it sufficient that serfdom in the Danish dominions had been eradicated only nominally (*dem Namen nach*), as the main components continued to exist.⁸³ Justi also disagreed with those apologists of serfdom who regarded serf peasants as extremely happy and carefree because their lords had to take care of them in cases of want and misfortune. As Justi noted, this would be akin to claiming that a prisoner would be happier than other people as water and bread were always given to them.⁸⁴

Nevertheless, Justi was strikingly cautious in suggesting a direct abolition of serfdom. Only in 1766 he opined that it would be »in accordance with wise governmental principles to abolish the serfdom of the peasants« but added that this could happen only »as far as it can be done without great disadvantage to the nobles«.⁸⁵ Therefore, Justi, like other cameralists, sought to present anti-serfdom proposals in a manner that would avoid overturning the rights and positions of the nobility. He strived to be rational, practical, and economical rather than radical or revolutionary.⁸⁶ The same can be said about the rest of the cameralist literature and before the 1770s only a very few and short suggestions that serfdom should be eradicated could be found.⁸⁷ For instance, in 1762, Johann Peter Süßmilch, in the second enlarged

80 Justi: *Allerunterthänigstes Gutachten* (see note 13), p. 626; Justi: *Staatswirthschaft* (see note 22), p. 118.

81 Justi: *System des Finanzwesens* (see note 11), p. 375.

82 Johann Heinrich Gottlob von Justi: *Grundsätze der Policey-Wissenschaft in einem vernünftigen, auf den Endzweck der Policey gegründeten, Zusammenhange und zum Gebrauch Academischer Vorlesungen abgefasst*. Göttingen 1759, p. 31; Justi: *Abhandlungen von der Vollkommenheit* (see note 19), p. 23.

83 Justi: *Allerunterthänigstes Gutachten* (see note 13), pp. 626, 633–634.

84 This comment was added only to the second edition: Justi, *Staatswirthschaft* (see note 22), p. 118.

85 Justi: *System des Finanzwesens* (see note 11), p. 375.

86 See also Marten Seppel: *The Evolution of the Concept *Verbesserung* and the Anonymous Idealists of German Improvement Discourse*. In: *Political Reason and the Language of Change: Reform and Improvement in Early Modern Europe*. Ed. by Adriana Luna-Fabritius, Ere Nokkala, Marten Seppel, Keith Tribe. London, New York 2022, pp. 44–64, here p. 50; Ere Nokkala: *Projects for the Improvement of Constitutional Order. Late Cameralists as Advocates of Political Change*. In: *Political Reason and the Language of Change: Reform and Improvement in Early Modern Europe*. Ed. by Adriana Luna-Fabritius, Ere Nokkala, Marten Seppel, Keith Tribe. London, New York 2022, pp. 139–157, here p. 141.

87 Cameralist views that had developed by the 1770s were well summarised by Johann Heinrich Ludwig Bergius in his police and cameral encyclopaedia, where a separate article on serfdom can be found that presents a concrete programme for the abolition of serfdom: »Leibeigenschaft«. In:

edition of his *The Divine Order*, considered the total abolition of serfdom to be necessary but mentioned it only in passing (however, the suggestion was entirely missing in his first edition of 1741).⁸⁸ In 1764, Daniel Gottfried Schreber noted that population growth and prosperity could not be expected in the country unless serfdom was eradicated.⁸⁹

Justi's caution on the issue of serfdom is incomparable to his principal and relentless demands for secure property for peasants and the abolition of *corvée*. Put simply, Justi suggested three main solutions to the problem of the wretched condition of the peasantry that were agreed upon by most of the cameralists. These were: 1) secure property; 2) abolition of *corvée*; and 3) breaking up great (domain) estates.

9 Secure Property Rights

When Justi discussed peasants' insecure property rights, he first of all referred to serfdom.⁹⁰ Justi claimed that while serfdom in a country exists, »one has not even taken the first step towards the flourishing of agriculture.«⁹¹ However, Justi did not demand the abolition of serfdom as the first step, as he believed the government had to begin by transferring the ownership of farmsteads into the hands of the peasants.⁹² These property rights of peasants over their households were central means of enabling agriculture to flourish.⁹³

According to Justi, private property was the basis of the entire economic order: »There is therefore no doubt that private property is the most useful and beneficial basis for the well-being of families as well as for the common good or for the whole state.«⁹⁴ And the other way around: »in any country where the peasant is not the owner (*Eigenthümer*), agriculture and the cultivation of the soil remain in a very

Johann Heinrich Ludwig Bergius (ed.): *Policey- und Cameral-Magazin in welchem nach alphabetischer Ordnung die vornehmsten und wichtigsten bey dem Policey- und Cameralwesen vorkommende Materien [...] erläutert werden*. Frankfurt a. M. 1771, Bd. 6, pp. 141–148.

88 »So nützlich dieses ist, so nöthig ist es auch, daß die Leibeigenschaft ganz abgeschaffet werde.« – Johann Peter Süßmilch: *Die göttliche Ordnung in den Veränderungen des menschlichen Geschlechts, aus der Geburt, dem Tode und der Fortpflanzung desselben*. Berlin ²1762, Bd. 2, p. 34.

89 Daniel Gottfried Schreber: *Zwo Schriften von der Geschichte und Nothwendigkeit der Cameralwissenschaften in so ferne sie als Universitätswissenschaften anzusehen sind*. Leipzig 1764, p. 98.

90 Justi: *Abhandlung von der Eintheilung* (see note 20), p. 360.

91 *Ibid.*, p. 372.

92 *Ibid.*

93 Justi: *Die Grundfeste* (see note 56), pp. 149–150; Justi: *Abhandlungen von der Vollkommenheit* (see note 19), p. 22; Justi: *Abhandlung von der Eintheilung* (see note 20), p. 360.

94 Justi: *Die Grundfeste* (see note 56), p. 14.

poor condition«. ⁹⁵ Similarly, other cameralists at that time believed that if the serfs were given their own holdings, the entire country would soon be well populated and everything would improve. ⁹⁶

In his *Treatises on the Perfection of Agriculture* (1761), Justi emphasises that landlords benefit little from the right of serfdom (*aus dem Rechte der Leibeigenschaft*). However, if peasants were given full ownership, landlords would be able to collect more dues from them. ⁹⁷ According to Justi, the fact that peasants in so many parts of Germany did not own their farmsteads but were serfs (*Leibeigene*), or were farming them as *Laßgüther* or *Meyerey-Recht* holdings, was the central obstacle to a perfect soil culture and flourishing agriculture in Germany. ⁹⁸ He stated: »In countries where peasant serfdom exists, a true culture of the soil is still at such distance as heaven and earth is.« ⁹⁹

10 The Abolition of Corvée

Alongside peasants' property rights, the discussion of labour services (*Frohnden*, *Hofedienste*, *Robot*, *Scharwerk*) became a topical and popular issue from the middle of the eighteenth century onwards. ¹⁰⁰ Justi linked corvée to the serfdom from where it originated; ¹⁰¹ and called it »a debilitating disease of our agriculture in Germany«. ¹⁰² However, several earlier cameralist works had already questioned the economic value of corvée. In his textbook of cameral sciences in 1729, Simon Peter Gasser from Halle argued that replacing hard daily labour services with a money payment would be more profitable for both noble and domain manors. The peasants

⁹⁵ Justi: *Allerunterthänigstes Gutachten* (see note 13), p. 627.

⁹⁶ E.g. Eisen: *Beweis* (see note 64), p. 134; Johann Heumann: *Der Geist der Gesetze der Teutschen*. Nürnberg 1761, p. 160; Johann Christoph Bernhard: *Vorschläge zu einer Wirthschaftlichen Policei der Dörfer oder wie die Landwirthschaft daselbest überhaupt, [...], als auch der Inwohner besondere Haushaltung zu verbessern*. Stuttgart 1768, p. 43.

⁹⁷ Justi: *Abhandlungen von der Vollkommenheit* (see note 19), p. 23. Similarly already Justi: *Allerunterthänigstes Gutachten* (see note 13), pp. 628–629; Justi: *Abhandlung von denen Hinternissen* (see note 16), pp. 222–223.

⁹⁸ Justi: *Abhandlung von denen Hinternissen* (see note 16), pp. 221–222; Justi: *Abhandlungen von der Vollkommenheit* (see note 19), p. 22.

⁹⁹ Justi: *Abhandlung von der Eintheilung* (see note 20), p. 372.

¹⁰⁰ E.g. Balthasar: *Tractatus* (see note 28), pp. 340–348 (appendix 5).

¹⁰¹ Justi: *Grundsätze* (see note 82), p. 31.

¹⁰² Johann Heinrich Gottlob von Justi: *Von Verwandlung der Domainen in Bauergüther*. In: Johann Heinrich Gottlob von Justi: *Gesammelte Politische und Finanzschriften über wichtige Gegenstände der Staatskunst, der Kriegswissenschaften und des Cameral- und Finanzwesens*. Kopenhagen, Leipzig 1761, Bd. 2, pp. 390–406, here p. 396; Justi: *System des Finanzwesens* (see note 11), p. 100.

would benefit from this simply because they could save the time taken to walk from one village to another in order to perform the *corvée*. Gasser also stated that in places where peasants were not burdened with hard work, such as in Saxony or Magdeburg, peasant fields looked much better than they did in serf villages in Pomerania or Mark where the fields were not owned by peasants.¹⁰³

The argument that unfree (serf) labour is unproductive became one of the key ideas for cameralists by the 1760 (well before Adam Smith's similar criticism of slavery in 1776). In fact, such a criticism of *corvée* had already appeared at the end of the seventeenth century.¹⁰⁴ In 1760, Justi argued that the peasant who performs servile work »with displeasure and annoyance« and the constant fear of flogging always works as little as possible, and only »lightly and superficially« (*leicht und oberhin*).¹⁰⁵ Debates over the abolition of labour services were largely economic rather than legal discussions, as *corvée* was viewed as economically wasteful.¹⁰⁶ The outcome of unpaid work was always bad work, and only half of what it could be as it was undertaken with aversion. This meant that a nation bound to labour services would always be poorer than a nation relieved from this unnatural obligation.¹⁰⁷

According to Justi, the unmeasured *corvée* is utterly unbearable as the peasant can never devote themselves to their farming, but must live in constant fear of being called out, doing everything in haste, and keeping extra draught animals for manor work.¹⁰⁸ Consequently, Justi rejects *corvée* and proposes instead an appropriate annual fee (*Frohngeld*).¹⁰⁹ As proof of this, he indicated that the yield was always much worse in manors based on labour services than in small farms with a caring owner who lacked *corvée*. Justi asserted that England would never have been able to

103 Simon Peter Gasser: Einleitung zu den Oeconomischen Politischen und Cameral-Wissenschaften. Halle 1729, pp. 328–329; see also Roscher: Geschichte der National-Oekonomik (see note 39), pp. 375–376.

104 E.g. in 1700, Christian Friedrich Luben argued that the peasant who tills their small plots better than a domain estate may hope for *corvée*, »since they come to the manor labour services late, thereby learning to be idle,... because it is not their own field, work more to the detriment than advantage,..., [they] get used to being idle, and thereby ruin themselves.« – [Friedrich Ludwig Joseph Fischbach]: Historische politisch-geographisch-statistisch- und militärische Beyträge, die Königlich-Preußische und benachbarte Staaten betreffend. Berlin 1782, II. Th., Bd. 1, p. 103.

105 Justi: Abhandlung von denen Hinternissen (see note 16), pp. 224–225. He repeats the same: Justi: Abhandlungen von der Vollkommenheit (see note 19), p. 24.

106 See also Horst Schlechte (ed.): Die Staatsreform in Kursachsen 1762–1763. Quellen zum kursächsischen Rétablissement nach dem Siebenjährigen Kriege. Berlin 1958, p. 93.

107 Bernhard: Vorschläge (see note 96), p. 159; Ivo Cerman, Michal Morawetz: Der Entwurf zur Emporbringung der österreichischen Staaten (1772). In: Opera historica 16 (2015), pp. 269–301, p. 285.

108 Justi: Abhandlung von denen Hinternissen (see note 16), p. 224.

109 Ibid., p. 225; Justi: Abhandlungen von der Vollkommenheit (see note 19), p. 27; Justi: Von Verwandlung (see note 102), p. 396; Justi: Grundsätze der Policy-Wissenschaft (see note 82), p. 32; Justi: System des Finanzwesens (see note 11); pp. 100–101.

bring agriculture to its current prosperous level if labour services had still existed in the countryside.¹¹⁰ Therefore, he was convinced that peasants' labour services (especially when unfixed) should be entirely eliminated.¹¹¹ He saw the *corvée* as detrimental and as the central obstacle to »the perfect cultivation of the soil and the flourishing of agriculture«. ¹¹² As long as *corvée* persists there would be no prospect for the advancement of *Landöconomie*.¹¹³ The peasant always performed services reluctantly (*mit Unwillen und Verdruss*), working as little as possible.¹¹⁴ At the same time, the value of *corvée* was extremely low for landlords, and exceptionally onerous for the peasant as it was an obstacle to »cultivating the land properly and to improve it«. ¹¹⁵ Thus, *corvée* also inhibited any improvements in the countryside.¹¹⁶ He emphasised repeatedly that *corvée* was only harmful and brought little in the way of benefits to domain and noble manors.¹¹⁷ The *corvée* days kept peasants away from their own farm work, which was a direct form of damage.¹¹⁸ Another oft-repeated argument regarding the disadvantages of *corvée* was the belief that labour services amounted to nothing but a loss of time (*der Verlust der Zeit*).¹¹⁹ Justi also advocated that a wise government would not exceed its powers if it first put unmeasured *corvée* on a firm and determined ground.¹²⁰

110 Justi: Abhandlung von denen Hinternissen (see note 16), pp. 224–225; Justi: Abhandlungen von der Vollkommenheit (see note 19), p. 24.

111 Justi: Grundsätze (see note 82), p. 31 (he develops these ideas in a footnote commentary, which was missing in the first edition of 1756). See also Klein: Johann Heinrich Gottlob Justi (see note 1), pp. 175–176.

112 Justi: Grundsätze (see note 82), pp. 31–32; Justi: Abhandlung von denen Hinternissen (see note 16), pp. 223–224; Justi: Abhandlung über die öconomische Preisfrage (see note 19), p. 58.

113 Justi: Von Verwandlung (see note 102), p. 396.

114 Justi: Grundsätze (see note 82), p. 31; Justi: Abhandlungen von der Vollkommenheit (see note 19), p. 24.

115 Justi: Abhandlungen von der Vollkommenheit (see note 19), p. 26.

116 Justi: Abhandlung über die öconomische Preisfrage (see note 19), p. 58.

117 Justi: Abhandlungen von der Vollkommenheit (see note 19), pp. 26–27; Justi: Von Verwandlung (see note 102), p. 396.

118 Justi: Grundsätze (see note 82), p. 31; Justi: Abhandlung von denen Hinternissen (see note 16), pp. 223–224; Christian Friedrich Gotthard Westfeld: Ueber die Abstellung des Herrndienstes. Lemgo 1773, pp. 12–13.

119 Justi: Von Verwandlung (see note 102), p. 396; Justi: Abhandlung über die öconomische Preisfrage (see note 19), p. 59; [Georg Christian Oeder]: Bedenken über die Frage: Wie dem Bauernstande Freyheit und Eigenthum in den Ländern, wo ihm beydes fehlet, verschaffet werden könne? Frankfurt, Leipzig 1769, pp. 31–33; Die Staatsreform (see note 106), p. 93; Westfeld: Ueber die Abstellung (see note 118), pp. 6–7.

120 Justi: Abhandlung von denen Hinternissen (see note 16), p. 226. Later similarly Georg Christian Oeder considered the regulation of labour services to be entirely in the hands of a prince: [Oeder]: Bedenken (see note 119), p. 95.

11 Breaking Up Great Domain Estates

The question of *corvée* was closely related to the matter of whether the existing demesne farming should be retained or whether great estates should be divided into tenant farms. A Prussian clerk, Christian Friedrich Luben, had already proposed a *Erbpacht* project in 1700, according to which the domain estates would have been transformed into smaller hereditary leasehold tenures.¹²¹ A few years later, Christian Julius Schierl von Schierendorf made a similar proposal in Vienna to improve Austria's dire financial situation.¹²² However, this topic arose more seriously on the agenda in the 1750s.¹²³ Wolfgang Prange correctly noted that Justi's writings on the matter in the late 1750 were in many ways his response to the ongoing debate.¹²⁴ In 1761, Justi wrote a separate article on the breaking up of domain estates where he supported the main assertion of a recent anonymous essay that new peasant farmsteads in place of great domain estates would lead to population growth.¹²⁵ Hence, Justi was convinced that the growth of the population would benefit from the division of large domain manors into small tenure holdings (either on *Erbpacht* or *Erbzins*). Where one family currently lived, there could now live 20 or more families. This would make an enormous difference to the population, and thus the consump-

121 [Friedrich Ludwig Joseph Fischbach]: Historische politisch-geographisch-statistisch- und militärische Beyträge, die Königlich-Preußische und benachbarte Staaten betreffend. Berlin 1782, II Th., 1. Bd. pp. 94–105 (Beylage P); Curt Flakowski: Beiträge zur Geschichte der Erbpacht unter König Friedrich I. Inaugural-Dissertation. Königsberg 1910, pp. 6–9.

122 Alfred Fischel: Christian Julius von Schierendorff, ein Vorläufer des liberalen Zentralismus unter Josef I. und Karl VI., in: Alfred Fischel, Studien zur österreichischen Reichsgeschichte. Wien 1906, pp. 211–217 (137–305); Ivo Cerman: 1.11.1781 zrušení nevolnictví. Základ občanské svobody [The Abolition of Serfdom of November 1, 1781. The Foundation of Civic Liberties]. Praha 2022, pp. 57–58.

123 For more in detail see Seppel: Cameralist Population Policy (see note 44), pp. 101–102, 107–108.

124 Prange: Die Anfänge (see note 1), pp. 657–660.

125 Justi: Von Verwandlung (see note 102), pp. 390–391, 394. The essay mentioned was apparently the piece written by Siegmund Christian von Zech: A. S. v. Z: Die Verwandlung der Domainen in Bauergüther; als das beste Mittel zur Bevölkerung, zur Macht, und zum Reichthum eines Landes entworfen. Straßburg [1760] that was published also in Leipziger Sammlungen 15 (1760), 173. St., pp. 375–429. In 1760 Justi had written a short review of the same treatise: Johann Heinrich Gottlob von Justi: Die Verwandlung der Domainen in Bauergüther, als das beste Mittel zur Bevölkerung. In: Johann Heinrich Gottlob von Justi. Fortgesetzte Bemühungen zum Vortheil der Naturkunde und des Gesellschaftlichen Lebens der Menschen. Berlin, Stettin 1760, 3. St., pp. 427–428. And in 1764 he wrote a continuation to this discussion: Johann Heinrich Gottlob von Justi: Fortsetzung der Abhandlung, von Verwandlung der Domainen in Bauergüther. In: Johann Heinrich Gottlob von Justi: Gesammelte Politische und Finanzschriften über wichtige Gegenstände der Staatskunst, der Kriegswissenschaften und des Cameral- und Finanzwesens. Kopenhagen, Leipzig 1764 Bd. 3, pp. 438–448. See also Prange: Anfänge (see note 1), p. 658.

tion of agricultural products, goods, and livelihood would become more prosperous in all areas. There would also be an increase in the state's cameral revenues as the peasant was now the secure owner of a farm who »takes incomparably more care of farming his private plots.«¹²⁶

Justi also argued that the »most important« consequence of the reduction of great domain estates would be a solution for eradicating harmful *corvée*.¹²⁷ The peasants would start paying money dues through which landlords could increase their returns to a remarkable level.¹²⁸ Later, some authors viewed the issue the other way around and placed great emphasis on the hope that the elimination of *corvée* would form the basis for a division of the estates (*eine Zergliederung der großen Haupthöfe und Meyereyen*).¹²⁹

In any case, Justi was not alone in demanding such a measure. Other contemporary cameralists suggested breaking up great estates both in terms of domains and private possessions. However, Georg Christian Oeder admitted in Denmark that the prince could not order the fragmentation of private estates, but could set an example on his own domains. Published in 1769, Oeder's views on agriculture were remarkably close to those of Justi.¹³⁰ Even if the state could not directly demand a division of private estates into smaller tenure plots, the cameralists indicated that it would be clearly profitable for them, and there would be no risk of losing anything. The biggest winner would still be the state and common happiness, as the liquidation of manor lands would promote population growth, prevent accumulation of wealth (*Stockung des Vermögens*), and boost industrial development and diversification.¹³¹

Joseph von Sonnenfels also advocated the division of large estates, including domain estates, into smaller holdings as his main solution to the advancement of agriculture, commerce, and population.¹³² Sonnenfels also attacked the system of *corvée* and, like Justi, did not directly demand the abolition of serfdom (at least not

126 Justi: *Abhandlung von denen Hinternissen* (see note 16), p. 221; Justi: *Abhandlungen von der Vollkommenheit* (see note 19), pp. 19–21; Justi: *System des Finanzwesens* (see note 11), pp. 98–100.

127 Justi: *Von Verwandlung* (see note 102), p. 396; Justi: *System des Finanzwesens* (see note 11), p. 100.

128 Justi: *Abhandlung von denen Hinternissen* (see note 16), p. 226.

129 Westfeld: *Ueber die Abstellung* (see note 118), p. 38; [Oeder]: *Bedenken* (see note 119), p. 13.

130 [Oeder]: *Bedenken* (see note 119), pp. 8–9, 15, 92. See also Prange: *Die Anfänge* (see note 1), p. 662.

131 Westfeld: *Ueber die Abstellung* (see note 118), pp. 45–46; Johann Christoph Wöllner: *Preisschrift wegen der eigenthümlichen Besitzungen der Bauern; welche bey der Rußischkayserl. freyen ökonomischen Gesellschaft zu St. Petersburg den ersten May 1768 das Accessit erhalten*. Berlin 1768, pp. 31, 33–34.

132 See also Günther Chaloupek: *Emancipation of the Peasantry in Lower Austria: The Economists' Views, the Role of the Estates, and the Revolution of 1848*. In: Jürgen Georg Backhaus (Ed.): *The Liberation of the Serfs. The Economics of Unfree Labor*. New York 2012, pp. 19–31, here pp. 23–24.

in the first editions of *Grundsätze* 1765–1787). Sonnenfels did not doubt that reducing a large land estate into smaller tenure holdings would improve farming (*die Verbesserung des Feldbaus*), especially when those plots would be let on a long-term lease (25–30 years) or on hereditary tenure (*Erbpacht*).¹³³ Thus, in many ways Sonnenfels' views coincided with those of Justi (he even refers to Justi). He similarly believed that the conversion of the demesnes into small farm holdings would eliminate the problem of *corvée*.¹³⁴ He also advised the ruler to set an example in his domains and become the first to divide his lands and distribute them among the peasants. Private landlords always turned their eyes to the ruler, and if they doubted the benefits of dividing their land, domains may convince them of the success of the move.¹³⁵ Therefore, Sonnenfels displayed enormous confidence in the correctness of such a decisive and transformational reorganisation, although he did not offer any convincing calculations or evidence to support this. Such bluffing was rather characteristic of cameralists more generally.¹³⁶

12 Conclusion

Cameralist literature played a central role in raising the issue of serfdom in Germany. Cameralists viewed the problem of serfdom as a key obstacle to economic advancement, improvement, and increased agricultural productivity. Cameralist thinking began to stress that securing private property, abolishing unproductive *corvée*, and granting freedom to peasants could yield greater benefits than coercion and serfdom. In a multitude of ways, they were the first systematic critics of serfdom in Europe.

Justi clearly joined these critics of serfdom, although he never became a fanatic or devoted opponent of serfdom. In his first major works, he viewed serfdom as an institution that impeded the advancement of general internal security, population growth and happiness. In the later years of the 1750s and early 1760s, he addressed the problem of serfdom predominantly in relation to agriculture and the need for improvement. However, to understand Justi's thinking, it is important to study cameralist discourse over a much longer period. Justi elaborated on existing arguments rather than presenting anything that was entirely new. This indicates that in regard to the issue of serfdom, Justi continued the tradition of German politico-economic

¹³³ Sonnenfels: *Sätze aus der Polizey- Handlungs- und Finanzwissenschaft* 2 (see note 75), pp. 53–54.

¹³⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 58.

¹³⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 86–87. Similarly Cerman, Morawetz: *Der Entwurf* (see note 107), p. 286.

¹³⁶ This has been especially argued by Andre Wakefield: *The Disordered Police State: German Cameralism as Science and Practice*. Chicago, London 2009.

literature and was not following the Physiocrats who in fact only later became popular with many analogous arguments.

The main aim of Justi and cameralists was to increase the industriousness of peasants. Their arguments were based on the belief in self-interest and the importance of property rights. It is also important to note that although Justi paid a great deal of attention to the domain economy,¹³⁷ when it came to the demand to eradicate *corvée*, secure peasants' property rights, and the promotion of agriculture, he did not limit himself to narrow state interests in domain estates as he also kept private estates (*Rittergütern*) in mind. This accorded with the more general goal of the betterment of agriculture within a country that had appeared in the cameralist literature from the 1720s onwards. It is clear that Justi also believed in the general natural freedom of people.¹³⁸ However, Justi's central statements against serfdom, that peasants must be owners of their household and not oppressed for the sake of the prosperity of agriculture and their industriousness, were derived first and foremost from the rationale of economic purpose.

At the same time, it can also be concluded that the arguments deployed against serfdom by Justi and other cameralists in the eighteenth century were quite limited and revolved around the same three or four main ideas. It is remarkable how consistent Justi was in his views about serfdom throughout the 1750s and 1760s. Only in his later suggestion for the abolition of serfdom in the 1760s did he become bolder than he had in his earlier works. It is also important to highlight that in the 1770s, all of Justi's main standpoints against serfdom found increasingly wider acceptance in German politico-economic literature.

¹³⁷ See Klein: Johann Heinrich Justi (see note 1), pp. 171–174.

¹³⁸ Marcus Obert: Die naturrechtliche »politische Metaphysik« des Johann Heinrich Gottlob von Justi (1717–1771). Frankfurt a. M. 1992, pp. 94–95.

