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Reform and Revival: The Physiocratic Plans for Poland in the Eighteenth-Century Crisis

1. Introduction

"The French of all times took part in the fate of the Poles, especially since Henry III (duke of Anjou) became their [the Poles'] king, and these two nations, made to love each other, gave each other queens,"[1] observes the writer Louis-Antoine Caraccioli in 1775. Worrying to all the courts of Europe, the seriousness of the Polish situation aroused a particular excitement among French intellectuals and especially Physiocrats. "Physiocracy," an expression forged by the association of Greek words "physis" (φυσισ) which means "nature" and "kratos" (κρατοσ) which refers to power, must be understood as the government of nature. In the Age of Enlightenment, this doctrine, founded in 1757 by Dr François Quesnay (1694–1774), personal physician of Madame de Pompadour, and Victor Riquetti, marquis de Mirabeau (1715–1789), famous author of *L'Ami des hommes*, constitutes a paradigm that won extensive admiration.[2] In the 1760s, this movement included new talents, such as the economist Charles Richard de

[1] L.-A. Caraccioli, *La Pologne, telle qu'elle a été, telle qu'elle est, telle qu'elle sera*, Poitiers 1775, p. 2: "Les Français de tout temps prirent part au sort des Polonais, surtout depuis qu'Henri III (duc d'Anjou) devint leur roi, et que ces deux nations, faîtes pour s'aimer, se donnèrent des reines réciproquement."

[2] On the "physiocratic current," see: L. Vardi, *The Physiocrats and the World of the Enlightenment*, Cambridge 2012; E. Fox-Genovese, *The Origins of Physiocracy: Economic Revolution and Social Order in Eighteenth Century in France*, Ithaca 1976; S. Kaplan, *Raisonner sur les blés: Essais sur les lumières économiques*, Paris 2017; R. Meek, *The Economics of Physiocracy: Essays and Translations*, London 1962; G. Vaggi, *The Economics of François Quesnay*, London 1987; H. Higgs, *The Physiocrats: Six Lectures on the French Economists of the 18th Century*, London 1897; L. Charles, Ch. Théré, "François Quesnay: A 'Rural Socrates' in Versailles," *History of Political Economy* 2007, vol. 39, pp. 195–214; *iidem*, "The Writing Workshop of François Quesnay and the Making of Physiocracy," *History of Political Economy* 2008, vol. 40, pp. 1–42; *iidem*, "From Versailles to Paris: The Creative Communities of the Physiocratic Movement," *History of Political Economy* 2011, vol. 43, pp. 25–58; *iidem*, "The Economist as Surveyor: Physiocracy in the Fields," *History of Political Economy* 2012, vol. 44, pp. 71–89; and M. Sonenscher, "Physiocracy as a Theodicy," *History of Political Thought* 2002, vol. 23, pp. 326–339.

Butré (1725–1805),[3] the administrator, jurist, and member of the Parliament of Paris, Paul Pierre Lemercier de la Rivière (1719–1801), the publicist Pierre-Samuel Du Pont de Nemours (1739–1817),[4] the magistrate Guillaume-François Le Trosne (1728–1780), and the abbot and journalist Nicolas Baudeau (1730–1792).

In many publications, Physiocrats develop a bold reform model that aims to improve and rationalize the functioning of the state and the economy by placing agriculture, the only wealth-producing activity, at the heart of government concerns.[5] To this end, broad liberalization of trade, both within and across borders, is a priority.[6] In order for labour to be released from any hindrance and for it to flourish freely, corporations and guilds must be abolished. From a more political and constitutional point of view, the doctrine aspires to regenerate monarchical absolutism within the framework of their theory of "legal despotism." The king's legislative activity must be devoid of any form of voluntarism. It must consist in translating the principles of natural law into positive norms. Principles of property, liberty, and security are real fundamental rights that every prince must comply with in order not to become arbitrary.[7] To this powerful central power, Physiocrats try to join a vast administrative decentralization where representatives elected by the citizen-owners would manage the interests of local communities.[8] Finally, in the field of taxation, they propose, in order to achieve more justice in taxation, a radical abolition of all existing levies to be replaced by a single and proportional tax on the "net revenue" of land.[9]

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[3] See: P. and C. Le Masne, "Charles Richard de Butré, Physiocrate originaire du Poitou," *Revue historique du Centre Ouest* 2014, vol. 1, pp. 7–37; L. Charles, Ch. Théré, "Charles Richard de Butré: An Economist in the Shadow of François Quesnay," *Journal of the History of Economic Thought* 2016, vol. 38, pp. 131–152; *iidem*, "Charles Richard de Butré: Pioneer of Mathematical Economics," *Journal of the History of Economic Thought* 2016, vol. 38, pp. 311–327.

[4] See: *The Age of Du Pont de Nemours: Politics, Law and Physiocracy in the Ancien Régime to the American Republic*, eds. A. Mergey, A. Skornicki, Oxford 2025; A. Saricks, *Pierre Samuel Du Pont de Nemours*, Lawrence 1965; P. Jolly, *Du Pont de Nemours, soldat de la liberté*, Paris 1956; and G. Schelle, *Dupont de Nemours et l'école physiocratique*, Paris 1888.

[5] On the French context that allowed the birth and development of Physiocracy, see: S. Kaplan, *Bread, Politics and Political Economy in the Reign of Louis XV*, London 2016; M. Sonenscher, *Before the Deluge: Public Debt, Inequality, and the Intellectual Origins of the French Revolution*, Princeton 2007.

[6] See: T. Hochtrasser, "Physiocracy and the Politics of Laissez-faire" [in:] *The Cambridge History of Eighteenth-Century Political Thought*, eds. M. Goldie, R. Wokler, Cambridge 2006, pp. 419–442; A. Bloomfield, "The Foreign Trade Doctrines of the Physiocrats," *The American Economic Review* 1938, vol. 4, pp. 716–735; L. Charles, *La Liberté du commerce des grains et l'économie politique française (1750–1770)*, PhD Thesis, University of Paris 1, 1999; P. Steiner, "La liberté du commerce: le marché des grains," *Dix-huitième siècle* 1994, vol. 26, pp. 201–219; *idem*, "Quesnay et le commerce," *Revue d'économie politique* 1997, vol. 5, pp. 695–713.

[7] As P.-S. Du Pont de Nemours points out, these precepts are intrinsically linked to each other: "No property without freedom; no freedom without security" (*De l'origine et des progrès d'une science nouvelle*, Paris 1768, p. 28). On these three eminent principles, see: A. Skornicki, "Liberté, propriété, sûreté. Retour sur une devise physiocratique," *Corpus. Revue de philosophie* 2014, no. 66, pp. 17–36.

[8] On the political and legal conceptions of the Physiocrats, see: A. Mergey, *L'État des physiocrates: autorité et décentralisation*, Aix-en-Provence 2010.

[9] T. Carvalho, "La justice fiscale des physiocrates" [in:] *La justice fiscale (X^e–XXI^e siècle)*, eds. E. De Crouy-Chanel, C. Glineur, C. Husson-Rochcongar, Paris 2020, pp. 101–117.

In the second half of the eighteenth century, this universal and original model of reform of society circulated in a remarkable way over the European continent and was received with more or less attention by its rulers and its enlightened elites.[10] This "new science of political economy," as its followers called it, carried the support of a number of crowned heads and aroused the enthusiasm of many intellectuals, diplomats, and foreign administrators. Thus, the Grand-Duke of Baden, Charles Frederick, King Gustav III of Sweden, and Leopold, the Grand Duke of Tuscany, were enthusiastic about the proposals of the Physiocrats and even decided to undertake reforms inspired by their solutions. Other princes and prominent personalities, however, received the principles of the school with scepticism or distrust, when they did not reject them outright, the pretext being the pernicious effects such precepts would have had on traditional social order. In this sense, the Empress of Russia, Catherine the Great, after a phase of curiosity illustrated by the trip of Lemercier de la Rivière to Saint Petersburg in 1767 and 1768, had a deep contempt for the Physiocrats and rejected their recommendations. In Vienna, the Emperor Joseph II showed intellectual independence and refused to follow a preconceived doctrinal framework. As a reformer in a hurry, he often opted for solutions far away from the Quesnay school.[11] Lastly, several European countries long shied away from Physiocracy, such as Spain, Portugal, and Great Britain, where the rulers and intellectuals received only late and parsimoniously its innovative ideas.

In the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth, Physiocracy aroused remarkable intellectual interest.[12] Kasimir Opalek asserts that in the Polish and Lithuanian cultured circles "it was fashionable to be a Physiocrat."[13] Starting from the heart of the 1760s, some magnates of the high nobility travelled to France where they immersed themselves in the ideas of the school. Such is the case of Prince Ignacy Jakub Massalski, Bishop of Vilnius, Count Joachim Litawor Chreptowicz, the last Grand Chancellor of Lithuania, and Prince Adam Kazimierz Czartoryski, cousin of the king and former candidate for the throne. Back in Poland and Lithuania, these powerful aristocrats wished to follow the prescriptions of this intellectual movement to undertake ambitious reforms. Similarly, many scholars and academics adhered to Physiocracy, such as Antoni

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10 See: T. Carvalho, *La Physiocratie dans l'Europe des Lumières. Circulation et réception d'un modèle de réforme de l'ordre juridique et social*, Paris 2020.

11 See: T. Carvalho, "Joseph II et la physiocratie. Enquête sur un malentendu historique," *Jahrbuch der Österreichischen Gesellschaft zur Erforschung des 18. Jahrhunderts* 2018, Bd. 33, pp. 89–107.

12 See: J. Rosicka, "Physiocracy in Poland" [in:] *La Diffusion internationale de la physiocratie (XVIII^{e}–XIX^{e})*, eds. B. Delmas, T. Demals, P. Steiner, Grenoble 1995, pp. 401–417.

13 K. Opalek, "Les physiocrates et leur rôle dans le renouveau culturel au siècle des Lumières en Pologne" [in:] *Utopie et institutions au XVIII^{e} siècle: le pragmatisme des Lumières*, ed. P. Francastel, Paris 1963, p. 184. In the same vein, A. Jobert observes that "Physiocratic theories enjoyed brilliant and lasting success in Poland" (*Magnats polonais et physiocrates français (1767–1774)*, Paris 1941, p. 13). On the success of their philosophical principles, see: H. Hinz, "La physiocratie comme source philosophique des Lumières en Pologne" [in:] *La littérature des Lumières en France et en Pologne. Esthétique. Terminologie. Échanges*, ed. J. Heistein, Warszawa–Wrocław 1976, pp. 75–84; J. Marchlewski, *Der Physiokratismus in Polen*, Zürich 1897.

Popławski and Hieronim Stroynowski, both professors at the Collegium Nobilium of Warsaw, and Hugo Kołłątaj, the great reformer of the University of Kraków and one of the most important figures of the Polish Enlightenment. This doctrine was the subject of extensive studies and is at the heart of important publications. Assimilated with theories of naturalism, the precepts of Physiocracy were taught in the most prestigious classes and universities of Eastern Europe. Like others of the school's greatest texts, Quesnay's *Tableau économique* was an extraordinary success in Poland.

"No one today wants to be King of Poland; their lands are taken, the internal order is distorted, and the nation is allowed to perish in its enclosure; foreign ministers reign in Warsaw, but not one of their masters would reign there."[14] This is the emotional observation made by the Marquis de Mirabeau in his correspondence. For the Physiocrats, the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth was a state with an archaic economic and legal organization, which moreover suffered from disastrous political anarchy.[15] However, they believed that the country had real assets thanks to its high agricultural potential due to its generous and abundant nature. Its agriculture had benefited from a steady increase in prices since the 1730s and was partly export-oriented towards Western Europe via the port of Danzig. A jeopardized Republic, the object of the lusts of its powerful Russian, Prussian, and Austrian neighbours, Poland-Lithuania constituted a formidable experimental laboratory for the Physiocrats.

When he acceded to the throne in 1764, Stanisław August Poniatowski hoped that his country would emancipate itself from the guardianship of foreign powers and make up for its economic and social backwardness compared to Western Europe. Among the new ideas useful for reform, Physiocracy held a significant place. Du Pont was, thus, appointed Secretary of the National Education Commission in 1774. Within this modern and unique institution in Europe, he was mainly concerned with rebuilding the system of public education and did not find time to take an interest in the question of Poland's sovereignty. On the other hand, this subject attracted the attention of two other Physiocrats: Baudeau and Lemercier de la Rivière. After his meeting with Massalski, Baudeau was appointed in 1768 "mitred provost" at Vidiškiai and made two trips in the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth interrupted by a few months in Saint Petersburg.[16] These stays generated a number of recommendations scattered in various writings. Consulted at the same time as Gabriel Bonnot de Mably and Jean-Jacques Rousseau, Lemercier de la Rivière drafted an ambitious reform project from 1769 to 1771 to clean up the Commonwealth. While the projects of Mably or Rousseau for Poland have been the subject of many recent and extensive studies, it is clear that

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[14] Marquis de Mirabeau to the Count of Batthyány, 11 October 1775 (Fonds Mirabeau, Paul Arbaud Museum and Library, Aix-en-Provence Academy, register 19), f° 29.

[15] See: M. Blaszke, *Obraz i naprawa Rzeczypospolitej w myśli społeczno-politycznej fizjokratyzmu Baudeau i Le Mercier de La Rivière*, Warszawa 2000.

[16] Baudeau stayed in Poland from November 1768 to February 1769 and from July to August 1769. See: A. Jobert, *Magnats polonais*…, pp. 24–34; M. Marty, "Les missions de l'abbé Baudeau en Pologne" [in:] *Nicolas Baudeau. Un "philosophe économiste" au temps des Lumières*, ed. A. Clément, Paris 2008, pp. 333–344.

the proposals of the Physiocrats remain very poorly known. Through a careful analysis of these different texts placed in the context of their creation, this article reveals their rich and original ideas to save the sovereignty of Poland from imminent death.

2. Reforming the Economy and Taxation: Abbé Baudeau's Recommendations

In the mid-1760s, Baudeau, who was being seduced by Physiocracy following a controversy with Le Trosne, produced several texts referring to the political and economic problems of Poland and Lithuania.[17] In 1767, when he composed his *First Introduction to Economic Philosophy, or the Analysis of Well-Ordered States* (*Première introduction à la philosophie économique, ou analyse des États policés*), published for the first time in 1771, Baudeau painted a stark portrait of this state "where complete anarchy reigns, and which provides a memorable example of the evils that necessarily result from the destruction of almost all authority."[18] The weakness of the Commonwealth *vis-à-vis* Russia, Prussia, and Austria is rooted in the serfdom imposed on the majority of the population and in arbitrary despotism. According to him, the country suffers from complete anarchy. It was therefore after showing a keen interest in the Polish question that Baudeau won the sympathy of Prince-Bishop Massalski during his stay in Paris in the winter of 1767–1768. The latter, enthusiastic about the publications of the Physiocrat, managed to bring him to his diocese by naming him "prévôt mitré" of Widziniski, a chapter of Canons Regular of the Lateran, some sixty kilometers north of Vilnius.

Baudeau left France by sea in October 1768 and landed in Danzig the next month. Without passing through Warsaw, he went to Lithuania where he celebrated Christmas in Białystok. At the beginning of 1769, he acted as Massalski's agent and was sent to stay for a time in Warsaw, where he led a busy social and political life. In the capital, the Physiocrat was received for more than an hour by King Stanisław August and frequently spent time with his brother, Prince Michał Jerzy Poniatowski.[19] "Without a doubt, he was extremely popular throughout Warsaw, with some for his kindness, with others for his intelligence,"[20] writes the Jesuit Wacław Wiażewicz, who was in charge of welcoming

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[17] N. Baudeau, "De l'éducation nationale," *Éphémérides du citoyen* 1765, vol. 1, pp. 97–112; 1766, vol. 2, pp. 65–80; 1766, vol. 3, pp. 17–32; 1766, vol. 4, pp. 49–64; 1766, vol. 5, pp. 145–160, 161–176, 177–192, 193–208; *idem*, "Du monde politique," *Éphémérides du citoyen*, 1766, vol. 2, pp. 17–32; 1766, vol. 3, pp. 33–48; 1766, vol. 6, pp. 65–80, 81–96, 97–112, 113–128; *idem*, "Des colonies françaises aux Indes orientales," *Éphémérides du citoyen* 1765, vol. 1, pp. 113–128; 1765, vol. 2, pp. 33–48, 49–64; 1765, vol. 3, pp. 49–64; 1765, vol. 5, pp. 17–32, 33–48, 49–65, 66–80.

[18] N. Baudeau, *Première introduction à la philosophie économique, ou analyse des États polices*, Paris 1771, pp. 82–83: "où règne l'anarchie la plus complète, et qui fournit un exemple mémorable des maux qu'entraîne nécessairement l'anéantissement de presque toute autorité."

[19] A. Jobert, *Magnats polonais*…, p. 29.

[20] Wiażewicz to Massalski, Warsaw, 23 January 1769, in *ibid.*: "À coup sûr, il a extrêmement plu à tout Varsovie, aux uns par son amabilité, aux autres par son intelligence."

him.[21] From March to July 1769, Baudeau visited Saint Petersburg, where Massalski wanted to make him the unofficial intermediary in his political intrigues. On the spot, the abbot tries to attract the goodwill of the Russian government but only incurs the contempt of the all-powerful minister Nikita Ivanovich Panin. Mocked by Catherine the Great, Baudeau showed some hostility towards the King of Prussia, Frederick the Great, and ended up being forcibly expelled from Russia. Back in Lithuania, he was a spectator at the battle of Białystok on 16 July 1769, between the Russians and the Poles, the latter of whom he strongly supported. He then left for Danzig and went to Prussia, to where Massalski had cautiously withdrawn. This second stay is marked, for the two men, by two main disagreements. On the one hand, Baudeau did not share Massalski's hatred of Stanisław August. With the support of Russia, the Bishop of Vilnius aimed to lead a new Confederation in order to pacify Poland. On the contrary, Baudeau, faithful to monarchical institutions, considered that the Poles must rally around their King. On the other hand, the Frenchman lost all his illusions about Russia as a result of his humiliating stay in Saint Petersburg. He now believed that Poland's salvation no longer depended on diplomatic negotiations but on armed intervention by France and Austria. Although they did not have a great political impact, his travels did trigger a renewal of his analysis of the country's problems and its geopolitical situation.

After his return to France, Baudeau continued to worry about the difficulties of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth. He then wrote his *Historical Letters on the current state of Poland, and on the origin of his misfortunes* (*Lettres historiques sur l'état actuel de la Pologne, et sur l'origine de ses malheurs*), published in the *Éphémérides du citoyen* in 1770 and 1771.[22] He draws a very gloomy report of the country and holds Russian politics responsible. "What is the current state of the Republic? You ask me first; my answer is simple, it is sad, but it is only too true. Alas, sir, there is no longer a Republic of Poland. No, there is no longer one! No King, no Senate, no Ministers, no Diets, no Laws, no treasury, no army, no justice, no police, no diplomatic relations. There is nothing left but the will of the Muscovites, the decrees of their minister, and the daily orders of their ambassador."[23] More than the other Enlightenment thinkers who wrote about Poland, the abbot sees a direct link between the question of political sovereignty and that of the renovation of economic and social structures. He notes then the complete disintegration of the Polish state with regard to political economy: "How can you

[21] Wiażewicz was then tutor to Xavier Massalski, the four-year-old nephew of the Bishop. In 1771, the French economist Paul Boësnier de L'Orme replaced him.

[22] N. Baudeau, "Lettres historiques sur l'état actuel de la Pologne et sur l'origine de ses malheurs," *Éphémérides du citoyen* 1770, vol. 2, pp. 16–89; 1770, vol. 3, pp. 47–88; 1770, vol. 4, pp. 74–136; 1771, vol. 3, pp. 43–98; 1771, vol. 4, pp. 54–71; 1771, vol. 5, pp. 46–120. These articles were also published in one book: *idem*, *Lettres historiques sur l'état actuel de la Pologne, et sur l'origine de ses malheurs*, Amsterdam–Paris 1771.

[23] N. Baudeau, "Lettres historiques…," 1770, vol. 2, p. 18: "Quel est l'état actuel de la République? Me demandez-vous d'abord; ma réponse est simple, elle est triste, mais elle n'est que trop véritable. Hélas Monsieur, il n'y a plus de République de Pologne. Non il n'y en a plus! Ni Roi, ni Sénat, ni Ministres, ni Diètes, ni Lois, ni trésor, ni armée, ni justice, ni police, ni relations diplomatiques. Il n'y a plus rien que la volonté des Moscovites, les décrets de leur Ministre; les ordres journaliers de leur Ambassadeur."

expect a country […] without agriculture worthy of the name, possessing in fact only fallow land, […] in an immense expanse of the best soil in Europe, a tenth of which is scraped by a few million slaves who are perhaps the most unfortunate portion of humanity, supports two or three hundred thousand petty despots in idle and proud misery; a few thousand in mediocrity, a few hundred in ill-conceived pomp; that a State, finally, without arts, without commerce, without industry, and reduced to the physical impossibility of obtaining them, by an absolute lack of order […] did not fall prey to its enemy."[24]

In spite of this dramatic state of affairs, Baudeau uses his travel observations and some little-known books in France to explain chronologically the political history of Poland. He distinguishes five great "revolutions." If the first revolution allowed the nobility to overthrow the arbitrary power of kings, the last, characterized by the *liberum veto* and anarchy, threatens the very existence of the country. Baudeau openly denounces "arbitrary despotism," a political regime at the opposite of "legal despotism," which has been rooted in it for centuries. Disrespectful of natural human rights, this unlimited personal power led for a time to the monarch's complete control over provincial and municipal governments. The Physiocrat notes Poland's complete dependence on the empire of Catherine the Great and declares "the absolute nullity of the Republic, […] which showed that one could become King of Poland against the will of the Nation, by the power of foreign weapons."[25] He thus completely abandons the vision of a civilizing Russia led by a beneficent and enlightened empress, a view that he had held before his trip.

At the same time, in his *Economic opinions to enlightened Citizens of the Republic of Poland on how to collect public revenue* (*Avis économiques aux citoyens éclairés de la République de Pologne sur la manière de percevoir le revenu public*),[26] Baudeau develops a set of tax proposals in line with physiocratic principles but adapted to the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth. Observing the inadequate income of the Polish State, the abbot supports the establishment of a single, direct, proportional tax on the "net

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[24] *Ibid.*, 1770, vol. 3, pp. 48–49: "Comment voulez-vous qu'un État […] sans agriculture, digne de ce nom, ne possédant à vrai dire que des terres en friche, […] dans une étendue immense du meilleur sol qui soit en Europe, dont la dixième partie grattée par quelques millions d'esclaves qui font peut-être la plus malheureuse portion de l'humanité, entretient deux ou trois cent mille petits despotes arbitraires dans une misère oisive et orgueilleuse; quelques milliers dans la médiocrité, quelques centaines dans un faste mal entendu; qu'un État enfin, sans arts, sans commerce, sans industrie, et réduit à l'impossibilité physique de s'en procurer, par un défaut absolu de l'ordre […] ne devînt pas la proie de son ennemi."

[25] *Ibid*., 1771, vol. 5, p. 71. Nevertheless, Baudeau writes of the resistance of some Poles: "There was, however, a truly patriotic party of enlightened citizens, who understood all the harm resulting from the nullity and absolute impotence of the State, and from foreign domination" (*ibid.*, p. 73: "Il existait pourtant un parti vraiment patriotique de citoyens éclairés, qui sentaient tout le mal résultant de la nullité, de l'impuissance absolue de l'État, et de la domination étrangère").

[26] N. Baudeau, "Avis économiques aux citoyens éclairés de la République de Pologne sur la manière de percevoir le revenu public," *Éphémérides du citoyen* 1770, vol. 11, pp. 52–120; 1771, vol. 1, pp. 56–67. These articles are also published in 1771 at the beginning of *Lettres historiques sur l'état actuel de la Pologne, et sur l'origine de ses malheurs*.

revenue" of land. This levy is justified by the "progress of economic science" and "is much better suited to Poland than to any other European State."[27] In fact, every village in the country produces a "net revenue" every year that most often goes to a single lord who is the sole owner of the village. Thus, in Poland-Lithuania, "the real net revenue of landowners is very easy to know" and "it is very easy to collect a certain portion of it without much expense."[28] The creation of this new territorial tax would bring considerable revenues to the public treasury, which would continue to increase year by year, as the state complies with the rules of the natural order.

In addition to his apology for physiocratic taxation, Baudeau develops the role of the Polish local administration in the collection of the direct tax: "You have a very ancient and well-established political organization. Each of your large provinces is divided into districts, and each district has its own kind of Judiciary and Court […]. You therefore have no need for new institutions that are cumbersome, costly, and, what is more, always dangerous in a State such as yours."[29] As the Commonwealth already knows a form of administrative decentralization, the existing territorial institutions can very well take care of the new tax. In accordance with the Physiocrat school's proposals, the proportion of this tax would be fixed at three-tenths of the "net revenue."[30] Thus, every landowner would know that seven-tenths of the clear, net income of his village belonged to him alone, while three-tenths belonged to the state of which he was a member, for purposes from which he too benefited. If disagreements arose over how to assess the net product of each village, the issue would be settled by two arbitrators – one chosen by the owner, the other by the public treasury – who could appoint a third in the event of a tie; under the supervision of the district officers and assembly, such a dispute could be resolved without difficulty. Ultimately, Baudeau argues that the ideal revenue enabling the Polish state to perform its functions and secure its survival is precisely the physiocratic tax: a single land tax replacing existing levies and those proposed by other advisers, and likely to provide the public treasury with a large income proportionate to the country's real needs. This, he concludes, is the only genuine source of public revenue suited to the state.

In his work, Baudeau refuses to take a clear stand on the political conflicts that beset Poland and offers mainly economic and fiscal solutions. He speaks as much to the royalist party as to the members of the Bar Confederation, defenders of an aristocratic/noble republicanism. His recommendations were probably known to Rousseau, who at the same time was writing his *Considerations on the Government of Poland*.[31] The

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27 N. Baudeau, "Avis économiques…," 1770, vol. 11, pp. 55–56.

28 *Ibid.*, 1771, vol. 1, p. 56.

29 *Ibid.*, pp. 59–60: "Vous avez une organisation politique très ancienne et très bien entendue. Chacune de vos grandes provinces est divisée en districts, et chaque district a son espèce de Magistrature et de Tribunal […]. Il ne vous faudrait donc point de nouvelles institutions embarrassantes, dispendieuses, et qui plus est toujours dangereuses dans un État comme le vôtre."

30 *Ibid.*, pp. 60–61. The Physiocrats estimate the single tax at about one third of the "net revenue," but two-sevenths or six-twentieths are also mentioned.

31 According to J. Favre, Rousseau consulted economic 'papers' to compose his project. See: J.-J. Rousseau, "Considérations sur le gouvernement de Pologne et sur sa réformation projettée" [in:]

country's serious political problems also attracted the attention of another important Physiocrat: Lemercier de la Rivière, who proposes a vast plan of reorganization of the Commonwealth.

3. Regenerating Institutions: The Ambitious Project of Lemercier de la Rivière

After a short time as special adviser to Empress Catherine the Great who wanted to achieve a fundamental reform of Russian legislation, Lemercier de la Rivière tried to solve the serious political crisis that Poland was going through.[32] At that time, the country attracted prestigious observers such as Mably, a notorious adversary of the Physiocrats,[33] and Rousseau, who were invited to develop institutional reform projects.[34] On the strength of the European impact of his famous treatise, *The Natural and Essential Order of Political Societies* (*L'ordre naturel et essentiel des sociétés politiques*), published in 1767, Lemercier de la Rivière was also invited to draft a new political and legal organization for the Commonwealth. He offers the results of his reflections in a text entitled *The Common Interest of the Poles, or Memorandum on the Means of Pacifying forever the Troubles of Poland, by Perfecting its Government and Reconciling its True Interests with the True Interests of Other Peoples*.[35] Composed probably between June 1771 and April 1772 and until recently only in manuscript,[36] this document was

Œuvres complètes, vol. 3: *Du Contrat social. Écrits politiques*, eds. B. Gagnebin, M. Raymond, Paris 1964, p. 1004.

[32] On Lemercier de la Rivière, see: B. Herencia, *Physiocratie et gouvernementalité: l'œuvre de Lemercier de la Rivière*, PhD Thesis, University of Paris Ouest Nanterre La Défense, 2011; L.-P. May, *Lemercier de La Rivière (1719–1801): aux origines de la science économique*, Paris 1975. On his stay in Russia, see: T. Carvalho, *La Physiocratie…*, pp. 356–379; S. Zanin, *Utopisme et idées politiques. Visite de Pierre-Paul Joachim Henri Lemercier de La Rivière à Saint-Pétersbourg*, Paris 2018; B. Herencia, "Le séjour du physiocrate Lemercier de la Rivière en Russie. 1767–1768," *Dix-huitième siècle* 2012, vol. 44, pp. 621–658.

[33] On criticisms and oppositions to Physiocracy, see: *The Economic Turn: Recasting Political Economy in Enlightenment Europe*, eds. S. Kaplan, S. Reinert, New York 2019; *Les Voies de la richesse? La physiocratie en question (1760–1850)*, eds. G. Klotz, P. Minard, A. Orain, Rennes 2017; J. Rogers, *The Opposition to the Physiocrats: A Study of Economic Thought and Policy in the Ancien Regime, 1750–1780*, Baltimore 1971.

[34] See: J. Michalski, *Rousseau and Polish Republicanism*, Warsaw 2015, http://rcin.org.pl/Content/58076/WA303_78371_JM_Michalski-eng.pdf [accessed: 2.12.2025]; M. Belissa, "Introduction" [in:] G. Bonnot de Mably, *Du Gouvernement et des lois de la Pologne*, Paris 2008, pp. 7–118; J. Lecuru, "Deux consultants au chevet de la Pologne: Mably et Jean-Jacques Rousseau" [in:] *Colloque Mably. La Politique comme science morale*, vol. 1, eds. P. Friedemann, F. Gauthier, J.-L. Malvache, F. Mazzanti Pepe, Bari 1995, pp. 124–129.

[35] P.P. Lemercier de la Rivière, *L'Intérêt commun des Polonais, ou mémoire sur les moyens de pacifier pour toujours les troubles actuels de la Pologne, en perfectionnant son gouvernement et conciliant ses véritables intérêts avec les véritables intérêts des autres peoples*, Archives nationales, K 1317, n° 15, ff° 44–49 and 62–67 are missing.

[36] I have recently published this text with B. Herencia. See: P.P. Lemercier de la Rivière, *Les Lumières au chevet de la Pologne. Les projets de Rousseau, Mably et Lemercier de la Rivière à la veille du premier partage (1772), avec les observations de Wielhorski et d'autres contributeurs de la Confédération de Bar*, Geneva 2024, pp. 465–523.

found at the beginning of the twentieth century by Władysław Konopczyński at the National Archives in Paris.[37]

The question immediately arises: Who was the sponsor of this report? Two hypotheses can be suggested. First, it may have been Count Michał Wielhorski, who had already hired Mably and then Rousseau.[38] This representative of the Bar Confederation might have been attracted by the reputation of Lemercier de la Rivière. Indeed, Lemercier de la Rivière had crossed all of Europe to reach Saint Petersburg only to finally be disappointed and dismissed by Catherine II, the great threat to the sovereignty of Poland. Du Pont de Nemours gave the first proof of the existence of the text in a speech at the Institut de France in 1810. Evoking the constitutional projects of the "philosophers of France," precisely those of Rousseau and Lemercier de la Rivière, he declared in an ambiguous way that these projects were "asked for by Count Wielhorski and other Poles."[39] Du Pont was probably the Physiocrat who was the closest to Wielhorski and was, therefore, likely to be the best informed.[40] However, although important, this obscure testimony does not help to solve the mystery. Second, the sponsor may have been Bishop Massalski, one of the "other Poles," according to Du Pont's formula. Konopczyński and Ambroise Jobert proposed this in the first half of the twentieth century. It is true that at the time when this text was written, Massalski was staying in Paris and assiduously associating with the Physiocrats. Likewise, such a sponsor, independent of any approaches by Wielhorski, may explain the widespread lack of knowledge of this text, as well Lemercier de la Rivière's inclination to write it with the utmost discretion.[41] Unlike Baudeau, Lemercier de la Rivière only mentions diplomatic affairs in a very general way and focuses on the development of an internal regeneration programme based on the establishment of a physiocratic and republican regime. By following the principles of the Physiocrat school, Poland would become "a safe haven for virtues, a delightful place where peace and happiness would reign forever,"[42] the author promises in an optimistic and utopian way.

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[37] The professor then devoted two articles to this project, one very brief one in German and another longer one in Polish. See: W. Konopczyński, "Mercier de la Rivière. Ratschläge für Polen," *Bulletin international de l'Académie des Sciences de Cracovie* 1917, pp. 60–66; *idem*, "Rady Mercier de la Rivièrea dla Polski," *Themis Polska* 1924–1925, vol. 2, pp. 139–158.

[38] See: M. Blaszke, "Projets de réformes pour la Pologne par deux adversaires: Mably et Mercier de la Rivière" [in:] *Colloque Mably…*, pp. 132–133.

[39] P.-S. Du Pont de Nemours, *Mémoires soumis à la troisième classe de l'Institut, sur plusieurs ouvrages historiques, et particulièrement celui de M. de Rulhière, intitulé: "De l'anarchie de Pologne", concourant pour les prix décennaux*, Paris 1810, p. 24.

[40] In Paris, Wielhorski met the Physiocrats and tried to establish strong links with them, particularly with Du Pont. In 1810, Du Pont declares that he had "the greatest relationship with Count Wielhorski, Minister of Confederates in France" (*ibid.*, p. 7).

[41] B. Herencia, "Présentation" [in:] P.P. Lemercier de la Rivière, *Pour la Pologne, la Suède, l'Espagne et autres textes. Œuvres d'expertise (1772–1790)*, Geneva 2016, p. 16.

[42] P.P. Lemercier de la Rivière, *L'intérêt commun des Polonais…*, f° 11: "un asile assuré pour les vertus, un séjour de délices où se fixeraient pour toujours la paix et le bonheur."

"This entire memorandum focuses on two principles, one fundamental and common to all civilized societies, the other hypothetical and specific to Poland,"[43] Lemercier de la Rivière writes. "The fundamental principle common to all civilized societies is that a multitude of men cannot become a single moral individual, a single political body, unless they are united by a common interest, an interest that can only be found in the right to property. […] The hypothetical principle specific to Poland is the form of government it has chosen. It wanted the political body, the body of the nation, to govern itself, to exercise its sovereignty itself."[44] Two main axes emerge from the memorandum. First, the right to property, natural and inalienable, must be considered as a fundamental law of the Commonwealth so that it can finally reform itself and believe in the future. "As long as Poland does not make the law of property the foundation of its legislation and public order, it is impossible for it to have a uniform and stable system of government, or a clear and unchanging notion of its common interest."[45] Second, the theorist of "legal despotism" asserts from the beginning of his text the compatibility of the physiocratic laws of natural order with a republican regime. "The government Poland has chosen is founded on the very order of nature; and it would be an excellent model for all republics, if it were as consistent in its consequences as it is sound in its principles."[46]

This statement may come as a surprise to Lemercier de la Rivière himself, who, about four years earlier, had categorically rejected any form of republicanism and insisted on his opposition to the elective monarchy.[47] In comparison, the "republican" projects of Mably and Rousseau remained much more faithful to the usual convictions of their authors, declared supporters of republicanism.[48] However, this choice must absolutely not be interpreted as a complete reversal of the Lemercier de la Rivière's former thinking. In fact, Physiocrats fully recognize that each country has specific

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[43] *Ibid.*, f° 105: "Tout ce mémoire porte sur deux principes, l'un fondamental et commun à toutes les sociétés policées, l'autre hypothétique et particulier à la Pologne."

[44] *Ibid.*, ff° 105–106: "Le principe fondamental et commun à toutes les sociétés policées, est qu'une multitude d'hommes ne peut parvenir à ne plus être qu'un seul individu moral, qu'un seul corps politique, s'ils ne sont unis entre eux par un intérêt commun, intérêt qui ne peut être placé que dans le droit de propriété. […] Le principe hypothétique et particulier à la Pologne est la forme de gouvernement dont elle a fait le choix. Elle a voulu que le corps politique, le corps de la nation, se gouvernât lui-même, qu'il exerçât lui-même sa souveraineté."

[45] *Ibid.*, f° 28: "Tant que la Pologne n'aura pas pour base de sa législation et de son ordre public, la loi de propriété, il est impossible qu'elle ait un système de gouvernement uniforme et constant, une notion claire et invariable de son intérêt commun."

[46] *Ibid.*, f° 2: "Le gouvernement dont elle [la Pologne] a fait choix, a pour base l'ordre même de la nature; et il serait un excellent modèle pour toutes les républiques, s'il était aussi régulier dans ses conséquences qu'il l'est dans ses principes." See: M. Belissa, "La République et le républicanisme polonais, modèles ou contre-modèles des Lumières?," *Révolution Française.net*, 2007, https://revolution-francaise.net [accessed: 2.12.2025].

[47] P.P. Lemercier de la Rivière, *L'Ordre naturel et essentiel des sociétés politiques*, Paris 1767, p. 145: "The time of the election can […] only be a stormy time in all respects, where all the passions of which men are susceptible come together to be deployed and moved according to opinion."

[48] However, it should be noted that Rousseau calls on the Poles to gather around their monarch and accepts, in contrast to *The Social Contract*, the idea of political representation.

characteristics that require special considerations. Far from being a ridiculous change of opinion, this pragmatic and realistic reform project demonstrated the remarkable adaptability of its author. Thus, in the event that its sponsors were Wielhorski and the Bar Confederation, Le Mercier de la Rivière, a convinced monarchist and fierce supporter of "legal despotism," fully adapted his text to the republican convictions of his recipients, just as he did a few years later in a project on public education that he sent to Gustav III of Sweden. In this plan for Poland, the question of the political regime appears in the end to be rather secondary; the right to property is raised to the rank of a supreme legal norm. Lemercier de la Rivière writes finally: "Once you have paid homage to the law of property, […] your Republic will no longer be governed by men but by immutable laws, by laws that will leave nothing to arbitrariness, neither in rights nor in duties."[49]

From the mid-sixteenth century, a monarch elected by the general *Sejm*, established by the Union of Lublin in 1569, governed the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth. A bicameral parliament, the *Sejm* consisted of a Senate of high ecclesiastical and secular officials and a lower house, the *Sejm* proper, composed of lower ranking officials and general nobility. Over time, the *szlachta*, a legally privileged noble class, increased its privileges and participation in state affairs until it effectively contributed to the exercise of legislative power through the *liberum veto*. This hybrid political system, a mixture of monarchism and republicanism, degenerated in fact into an oligarchy of some great aristocratic families.[50] As it stood, this elective monarchy moderated by a *Sejm* constituted a "mixed government." This type of government, which combined elements of monarchy, aristocracy, and democracy, was strongly condemned by the Physiocrats.[51] Moderating his usual position, Lemercier de la Rivière retained the royal institution but limited the prerogatives of the king to a bare minimum, that is to say to executive, administrative, and representative tasks. He maintained, however, his attachment to the hereditary monarchy and openly criticized the principle of elective monarchy.[52] Indeed, he argues, every election period generates divisions and internal struggles that considerably weaken the state and can push it into anarchy. In addition, how can we prevent an ambitious man who wants to the throne from preparing a plot to overthrow existing institutions to increase his power? His mistrust of this form of government was reiterated in 1775 in his plan for the King of Sweden.[53] In his project,

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[49] P.P. Lemercier de la Rivière, *L'intérêt commun des Polonais…*, ff° 56–57: "Dès que vous aurez rendu hommage à la loi de propriété, […] votre République ne sera plus gouvernée par des hommes mais par des lois immuables, par des lois qui ne laisseront rien d'arbitraire, ni dans les droits ni dans les devoirs."

[50] See: J. Lukowski, *Disorderly Liberty: The Political Culture of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth in the Eighteenth Century*, London 2010; *idem*, "Political Ideas among the Polish Nobility in the Eighteenth Century (to 1788)," *The Slavonic and East European Review* 2004, vol. 1, pp. 1–26; M. Michalski, "L'État constitutionnel polonais et ses réformes" [in:] *Histoire des idées politiques de l'Europe centrale*, eds. Ch. Delsol, M. Maslowski, Paris 1998, pp. 266–281.

[51] See: A. Mergey, *L'État des physiocrates…*, pp. 96–100.

[52] P.P. Lemercier de la Rivière, *L'intérêt commun des Polonais…*, f° 25.

[53] P.P. Lemercier de la Rivière, *De L'Instruction publique, ou considérations morales et politiques sur la nécessité, la nature et la source de cette instruction*, Paris 1775, p. 102.

Lemercier de la Rivière decided to rationalize the mode of election of the sovereign to give him "a consistency, a reality he does not have in the current state of things."[54] It was, therefore, appropriate that the king be appointed according to the law of the majority and no longer according to that of a unanimity of votes.

To adapt to Polish conditions, Lemercier de la Rivière took note of national sovereignty and suggests that "all institutions […] have to contribute to facilitate, to preserve in the political body the exercise of its sovereignty."[55] Representing the body of the sovereign nation, the *Sejm* is in charge of initiating laws and voting on them. The *Sejmiks*, which are district assemblies of aristocrats whose mission is to appoint their deputies to the *Sejm*, have to play a central role in the legislative process.[56] They designate the representatives sitting in the *Sejm* by giving them an imperative mandate in order to oblige them to follow the wishes expressed by the nation.[57] In the event that a representative deviates from the instructions given, the *Sejmik* that elected him has the power to sanction him.[58] Like Mably, Lemercier de la Rivière condemned the *liberum veto* which allowed a deputy, by only his own personal opposition, to paralyze all the legislative activity of the *Sejm*.[59] In his view, this instrument was the expression of the "most arbitrary despotism" likely to lead to "the most complete anarchy."[60] "The *liberum veto*, far from maintaining public liberty, is only an established means of oppressing and nullifying this liberty, because it is an established means of nullifying public authority and consequently society without which liberty cannot exist."[61] However, Lemercier de la Rivière was respectful of local political traditions and refused to completely abolish this *liberum veto*, but proposed a reform so that it no longer had the effect of unconditional abolition of laws passed. To enter into force, the *Sejmiks* at their intermediate meetings would have to henceforth ratify a text adopted by the *Sejm*. Yet, the author did not specify whether the rejection of a law was to be decided by a majority or by the unanimity of *Sejmiks*.

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54 P.P. Lemercier de la Rivière, *L'intérêt commun des Polonais…*, f° 53.

55 *Ibid.*, f° 13.

56 On the *Sejmiks*, see: M. Serwański, M. Zwierzykowski, "Entre le centralisme et la décentralisation: l'évolution de l'importance des diétines dans le système institutionnel de la Pologne (XVI^e–XVIII^e siècles)" [in:] *L'Invention de la décentralisation. Noblesse et pouvoirs intermédiaires en France et en Europe. XVII^e–XIX^e siècle*, eds. R. Baury, M.-L. Legay, Villeneuve d'Ascq 2009, pp. 229–239.

57 P.P. Lemercier de la Rivière, *L'intérêt commun des Polonais…*, ff° 33 and 42.

58 These representatives could then prove to be "guilty of high treason" (*ibid.*, f° 34).

59 On the *liberum veto*, see: J.-P. Feldman, "Le *liberum veto*. Essai sur le 'purgatoire de la liberté' en Pologne (XVI^e–XVIII^e siècle)," *Droits* 2009, vol. 49, pp. 243–253; A. Wyczański, "Le liberum veto en Pologne" [in:] *L'Europe des Diètes au XVII^e siècle*, ed. D. Tollet, Paris 1996, pp. 223–228; M. Michalski, "Le *liberum veto* et la théorie de la volonté Générale," *Kwartalnik Historii Nauki i Techniki* 1979, vol. 3, pp. 553–562; W. Konopczyński, *Le liberum veto. Étude sur le développement du principe majoritaire*, Paris 1930.

60 P.P. Lemercier de la Rivière, *L'intérêt commun des Polonais…*, ff° 20–22: "[Poland] is in a state of complete anarchy, since every citizen has the power and freedom to nullify the unanimous will of all other citizens" ("[La Pologne] se trouve dans une véritable anarchie puisque chaque citoyen a le pouvoir et la liberté de rendre nul le vœu unanime de tous les autres citoyens").

61 *Ibid.*, f° 23: "Le *liberum veto*, bien loin de maintenir la liberté publique, n'est qu'un moyen établi pour opprimer et rendre nulle cette liberté, parce qu'il est un moyen établi pour rendre nulle l'autorité publique et par conséquent la société sans laquelle la liberté ne peut exister."

The Common Interest of the Poles (*L'intérêt commun des Polonais*) also plans important social reforms, resulting from the usual programme of Physiocracy, such as the gradual abolition of serfdom: "I shall not propose to you […] that you grant all at once freedom to your slaves; they would not know its value; they would not know how to make use of it; they would not even have the means to do so. […] You will begin, of your own accord, by improving the condition of your slaves, by granting them rights which are not exactly all those of the free man, but which, by inspiring in them the desire to become free, also enable them to acquire the means of doing so."[62] Thus, the author proposes a gradual emancipation of the peasantry and the granting of new rights to former serfs over time. However, he refuses to go into detail because it is not the main object of his project. Lemercier de la Rivière supports legal equality among men, but not the absolute equality of material conditions. Inequality, in fact, is a natural datum. He insists that the common interest overrides special interests. Moreover, he proposes granting the bourgeoisie full freedom to acquire landed property of every kind, and establishing that, in future, all owners – whether noble or commoner – who hold a certain amount of cultivated land should be entitled to sit in the *Sejmiks*. The essential criterion for the exercise of political power would then become property, to the detriment of personal, social, and hereditary distinctions, thus enshrining the State's new fundamental law. According to the principles of Physiocracy, the nobility and the bourgeoisie would form a single class of citizen owners charged with the administration of local interests and with the election of the representatives in the *Sejm*.

"Note well that, in your *Sejmiks*, the bourgeois will not enter as bourgeois, but as landowners, that is, as truly national men; for in every nation, only those who possess landed property can be regarded as members of the nation."[63]

With regard to taxation, Lemercier de la Rivière did not try to be original and defends the unique territorial tax. He refers to the "Economic opinions" of Baudeau, "an author you must count today among your citizens" and someone who has perfectly demonstrated to you that indirect taxation "would be more ruinous for Poland than for any other nation, and that the first form of taxation [the single tax] is much easier to establish in your country than in any other nation."[64] The Commonwealth must establish its public income in such a way that it "has nothing arbitrary in its quota, neither in the form of its perception, nor in its use."[65] In the same way, he advocates a major reform

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62 *Ibid.*, ff° 78–79: "Je ne vous proposerai point […] de donner tout d'un coup la liberté à vos esclaves; ils n'en connaîtraient pas le prix; ils ne sauraient pas en faire usage; ils n'en auraient pas même les moyens. […] Vous commencerez de vous-même par améliorer la condition de vos esclaves, par leur donner des droits qui ne soient pas précisément tous ceux de l'homme libre, mais en leur inspirant le désir de le devenir, leur permettent aussi de s'en procurer les moyens."

63 *Ibid.*, f° 81: "Remarquez bien que dans vos diétines, les bourgeois n'entreront point comme bourgeois, mais comme propriétaires fonciers, c'est-à-dire comme hommes vraiment nationaux, car dans chaque nation, il n'y a que les possesseurs des biens-fonds qui puissent être réputés membres de la nation."

64 *Ibid.*, f° 86.

65 *Ibid.*, ff° 106–107.

of commercial law: "Poland must establish within its borders the greatest freedom of trade, both external and internal; for this freedom is, in essence, nothing other than the freedom granted to each citizen to exercise his rights to property, and one cannot restrict this freedom without infringing upon the right of property."[66]

In a section entitled "On public order," Lemercier de la Rivière then examines the stability and durability of new institutions. "It is […] evident that, in order to establish firmly in a Republic the rule of law, two conditions are essential. First, the laws must be perfectly just and perfectly aligned with the common interest; second, public knowledge of this justice and of this common interest must be established and must no longer be able to disappear within that society."[67] This second requirement inevitably leads to the implementation of a national education system based on physiocratic principles. Like Mably and Rousseau, Lemercier de la Rivière thus links institutional and educational questions in an inextricable way. In his view, it is essential to establish a public, free system of education and to ensure, through whatever measures are necessary, that no one is counted among the citizens unless they have publicly demonstrated their knowledge of the Commonwealth's political system, its common interest, the foundations of its constitution, in short, the citizen's essential rights and duties.

In the schools, "teachers maintained and appointed by the Commonwealth would be charged with teaching, to all who present themselves, the elements of the citizen's science. Drawn from the fundamental laws, these elements would impress upon the minds of the young that the very essence of society lies in a common interest, and that a society's true common interest is contained in the right to property."[68] Confident about the success of his project, Lemercier de la Rivière offers an ingenuous assurance: "Certainly the first words children will learn to stammer will be property, security, freedom."[69] Alongside these schools intended for all citizens, others should be reserved for those whom natural ability, birth, and wealth call to public office. These more advanced institutions would train them to discern, in the fixed order of nature and its immutable laws, the essential principles and fundamental laws of any political community. Above all, they would strive to make the theory of this "order" convincing by grounding it in evidence, chiefly through a thorough study of history.

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66 *Ibid.*, f° 106: "La Pologne doit faire régner chez elle la plus grande liberté de commerce tant extérieur qu'intérieur; car cette liberté n'est au fond, que la liberté donnée à chaque citoyen d'exercer ses droits de propriété, et l'on ne peut, sans blesser le droit de propriété, resserrer cette liberté."

67 *Ibid.*, f° 94: "Il est […] évident que pour fonder solidement dans une république le gouvernement des lois, deux conditions sont essentielles. Il faut premièrement, que les lois soient parfaitement justes, parfaitement conformes à l'intérêt commun; il faut en second lieu, que la connaissance publique de cette justice, de cet intérêt commun, soit établie et ne puisse plus se perdre dans cette société."

68 *Ibid.*: "Des maîtres entretenus et choisis par la République, seront chargés d'enseigner à tous ceux qui se présenteront, les éléments de la Science du citoyen. Ces éléments, puisés dans les lois fondamentales, graveront dans l'esprit de la jeunesse, que l'essence de la société consiste dans un intérêt commun; que le véritable intérêt commun d'une société est renfermé dans le droit de propriété."

69 *Ibid.*, f° 95: "Certainement les premiers mots que les enfants apprendront à bégayer seront propriété, sûreté, liberté."

Finally, Lemercier de la Rivière was interested in the organization of the military, an essential subject for the survival of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth, which was directly threatened by its neighbours. Similarly to Mably, he wants "every citizen to be a soldier, every citizen to be trained in the handling of weapons and all the exercises of this profession."[70] Instead of hiring mercenaries, the state must maintain a small number of troops oriented exclusively to defence and never towards attack. However, this regular army would know that it could benefit, if necessary, from reinforcements from the entire nation. In a decidedly modern way, Lemercier de la Rivière defends the model of the citizen-soldier that the French Revolution would establish a few years later. Physiocratic doctrine, condemning militarism, considers that the power of a state does not lie in the size of its army but in the material wealth of its population. "Here you see how greatly you will increase your strength and political cohesion when you have allowed the bourgeoisie to acquire noble lands; when your uncultivated lands have been brought under cultivation, and when your slaves have been turned into free men. Your population will quintuple; you will count as many citizens as men, and as many soldiers as citizen,[71] Lemercier de la Rivière energetically summarizes his position.

In May 1772, the announcement of the first partition of Poland arrived in Paris and Lemercier de la Rivière's project became obsolete.[72] Never printed, his expert report long remained almost unknown in France and Poland. In contrast, the projects of Mably and Rousseau circulated in manuscript or through public readings and were even the subject of responses or criticism. In 1810, Du Pont de Nemours made a brief comparison of these various works at the *Institut de France*: "A singularity of these projects of constitution requested by Count Wielhorski and other Poles of our philosophers of France, is that Jean-Jacques was very monarchical and Lemercier de la Rivière's was very republican. Both feared that they would be accused of echoing the sentiments of their other works."[73] By this reform project, Lemercier de la Rivière, whose international reputation was diminished after his failure with Catherine II in Russia, offers a shining example of the application of the physiocratic model outside France. Drawing on the fundamental values of Quesnay's doctrine, his proposals aim to respond as closely as possible to the serious institutional problems of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth. Faced with local circumstances and the demands of

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70 *Ibid.*, f° 90.

71 *Ibid.*, f° 92: "Ici vous voyez de combien vous augmenterez vos forces et votre consistance politique, lorsque vous aurez permis aux bourgeois d'acquérir des biens nobles; que vos terres incultes seront défrichées; que vos esclaves seront convertis en hommes libres. Votre population quintuplera; vous compterez autant de citoyens que d'hommes, et autant de soldats que de citoyens."

72 On the reception by the Enlightenment of this event, see: M. Belissa, "Les Lumières, le premier partage de la Pologne et le 'système politique' de l'Europe," *Annales historiques de la Révolution française* 2009, vol. 356, pp. 57–92.

73 P.-S. Du Pont de Nemours, *Mémoires*…, p. 24: "Une singularité de ces projets de constitution demandés par le comte Wielhorski et d'autres Polonais à nos philosophes de France, est que celui de Jean-Jacques fut très monarchique, et celui de Lemercier de La Rivière très républicain. Tous deux craignaient qu'on ne les accusât d'abonder dans le sens de leurs autres ouvrages."

practice, Lemercier de la Rivière demonstrates a surprising ability in adapting his ideas to a foreign historical and political reality.

4. Conclusions

Physiocrats tried to accurately diagnose the symptoms of the weakness of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth in order to save it. Their observations were very harsh since they perceived this state as profoundly ill and in danger of death. According to Le Trosne, its political constitution was "the most vicious that ever existed" and "is only a mixture of anarchy, tyranny and servitude."[74] It was a "barbaric government that destroys all civilization, all law enforcement, all legitimate authority."[75] The king no longer had any authority and was no more than a sad and powerless spectator to the misfortunes of his nation. In the absence of reform, according to the Physiocrats, the Commonwealth could only disappear. In 1775, the Marquis de Mirabeau admitted his lack of interest and weariness. He did not want to hear about the insoluble question of the sovereignty of Poland: "As for their constitution, they have bored me so much that I know nothing about it, nor do I want to know anything about it, and I have never in my life wanted to write a single line for any of these gentlemen."[76] In the case of the Physiocrats, the time for prescriptions was over and the patient appeared condemned. History would prove them right. Beyond this state of affairs, the Physiocrats propose unprecedented solutions and develop, in a very original way, a reasoning at the same time political, legal, and economic.

Due to the weakness of royal power and widespread conservative resistance, Poland failed to reform its social and legal structures inherited from medieval feudalism. Nevertheless, one should note that its new constitution of 3 May 1791, adopted by the Great or Four-Year *Sejm* (*Sejm Wielki* or *Czteroletni*) which had been in session since 1788, was shaped by principles completely corresponding to physiocratic theories. This is not surprising since some of his authors, such as Hugo Kołłątaj, were particularly influenced by the school's ideas. In accordance with the recommendations of the Physiocrats, the constitutional text established a hereditary monarchy, one that is no longer elective.[77] The three major principles of "property, liberty, security" were raised

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[74] G.-F. Le Trosne, *De l'ordre social* [in:] *idem*, *Les Lois naturelles de l'ordre social*, Geneva 2019, p. 123: sa constitution est "la plus vicieuse qui ait jamais existé" et "n'est qu'un composé de l'anarchie, de la tyrannie et de la servitude."

[75] *Ibid.*, p. 173: un "gouvernement barbare et destructif de toute civilisation, de toute police, de toute autorité légitime."

[76] Mirabeau to the Count of Batthyány, 11 October 1775 (Fonds Mirabeau, Paul Arbaud Museum and Library, Aix-en-Provence Academy, register 19, f° 27): "Quant à leur constitution, ils m'en ont tant ennuyé que je n'en sais, ni n'en veux rien savoir, et je n'ai de ma vie voulu écrire une seule ligne pour aucun de ces Messieurs."

[77] On the Constitution of 3 May 1791, see: J. Duzinkiewicz, *Fateful Transformations: The Four Years' Parliament and the Constitution of 3 May 1791*, New York 1993; S. Fiszman, *Constitution and Reform in Eighteenth-Century Poland: The Constitution of 3 May 1791*, Bloomington 1997.

to the rank of the fundamental laws of the Commonwealth. Indeed, article 2 states: "We preserve and guarantee to every individual thereof personal liberty and security and security of territorial and moveable property, as they were formerly enjoyed; nor shall we even suffer the least encroachment on either by the Supreme national power […], under any pretext whatsoever, contrary to private rights, either in part, or in the whole; consequently we regard the preservation of personal security and property, as by law ascertained, to be a tie of society, and the very essence of civil liberty, which ought to be considered and respected for ever."[78] The triumph of these three great physiocratic principles, already enshrined in Article 2 of the French Declaration of the Rights of Man and of the Citizen of 1789, was the culmination of the struggles of the Polish reformist party against the injustices of the traditional system. Similarly, article 4 recognizes a genuine legal existence for peasants who are placed under the direct protection of the monarch and no longer that of the lords. The text maintains, however, some moderate positions: it does not proclaim equality and does not abolish serfdom. The freedom of trade and industry is also proclaimed by the same article 4: "we declare most solemnly, that any person coming into Poland, from whatever part of the world, or returning from abroad, as soon as he sets his foot on the territory of the Republic, becomes free and at liberty to exercise his industry, wherever and in whatever manner he pleases, to settle either in towns or villages, to farm and rent lands and houses, on tenures and contracts, for as long a term as may be agreed on; with liberty to remain, or to remove, after having fulfilled the obligations he may have voluntarily entered into."[79]

Immediately after its enactment, the Constitution of 3 May met with the admiration of all liberal Europe. The friend of Du Pont de Nemours, Thomas Jefferson, then ambassador of the United States to Paris and future president of the USA, considered that the world had acquired three memorable constitutions, in the order of their promulgation: the American, the Polish, and the French. In spite of the enormous hope raised throughout Poland and Lithuania, the new constitution remained in force for only fifteen months. On 24 July 1792, the Polish King was forced to join, under pressure from Russia, the Targowica Confederation, established in Saint Petersburg by Polish and Lithuanian magnates, with the backing of Catherine II. This confederation demanded the abolition of the Constitution and a return to the old legal and social order. In 1793, the Second Partition of Poland took place. Finally, in 1795, the Third Partition marked the end of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth.[80] This dramatic moment in Polish history was accompanied by the abdication of the monarch, who spent the last years of his life in Saint Petersburg. In 1810, Du Pont de Nemours gave a favourable verdict on this constitution "which improved the lot of the peasants and prepared their future gradual liberation, which gave an honourable life to the

[78] Constitution Constitution of 3 May 1791, art. II Nobility, or the Equestrian Order, Sejm Library, https://biblioteka.sejm.gov.pl/tek01/txt/kpol/e1791-spis [accessed: 2.12.2025].
[79] *Ibid.*, art. IV Peasants and villagers.
[80] See: J. Lukowski, *The Partitions of Poland: 1772, 1793, 1795*, London 1999.

bourgeoisie, which did not displease the nobility and which was to enrich it."[81] He reports that at the time of its adoption, Stanisław August wrote to him: "I am happier than you: I started later and ended earlier a revolution and a constitution that did not cost a drop of blood, did not cause a tear to be shed."[82]

As a result, the Physiocrats did not succeed in reorganizing the functioning of Poland, but succeeded in promoting their conceptions of the world and natural rights.[83] This paradigm of French *économistes* was still taught in institutions of higher education until the first quarter of the nineteenth century. The contribution of Physiocrats to Polish political, legal, and economic culture deserves to be reevaluated and better known. Far from being an entirely fixed doctrine, Physiocracy emerges as an evolving movement that, while grounded in fundamental principles, demonstrated remarkable adaptability to local contexts. This Franco-Polish intellectual exchange significantly enriched European legal culture by creating a dialogue between French theories and Poland's republican traditions. The Physiocrats engaged deeply with Poland's unique challenges, particularly its sovereignty crisis in an era of threats of partition. Their innovative approaches – notably Lemercier de la Rivière's groundbreaking effort to reconcile principles of natural law with Poland's republican constitution – represented more than theoretical exercises. These adaptations, developed alongside but distinct from works by Rousseau and Mably, offered concrete institutional solutions while contributing to broader European Enlightenment debates about statehood and legal order. Through this cross-cultural engagement, the Physiocrats transformed Poland-Lithuania into a living laboratory where Western political economy interacted with Eastern European constitutionalism. Their reform proposals, far from being derivative, shed new light on a pivotal moment when Enlightenment thought was being actively reshaped through transnational exchanges across the European legal space. This episode deserves recognition as a vital chapter in the development of modern European political and legal thought.

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[81] P.-S. Du Pont de Nemours, *Mémoires*…, p. 35.

[82] *Ibid.*, pp. 35–36: "Je suis plus heureux que vous: j'ai commencé plus tard et fini plus tôt une révolution et une constitution qui n'ont pas coûté une goutte de sang, qui n'ont pas fait verser une larme."

[83] See: T. Carvalho, "The Role of Physiocracy in the Birth of Human Rights," *Opera Historica. Journal of Early Modern History* 2020, vol. 21, pp. 61–71, https://www.opera-historica.com/pdfs/oph/2020/01/04.pdf [accessed: 2.12.2025].

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Summary

Thérence Carvalho

Reform and Revival: The Physiocratic Plans for Poland in the Eighteenth-Century Crisis

This article examines how the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth became a crucial testing ground for physiocratic ideas in the 1760s and 1770s, revealing a dynamic exchange that enriched European legal culture. As French-trained reformers and local elites sought to address the Commonwealth's economic and political crises through Quesnay's doctrines, they created a unique dialogue between Western theory and Eastern European traditions. This article focuses on Nicolas Baudeau's fiscal proposals in the *Éphémérides du citoyen* (1768–1769) and Lemercier de La Rivière's constitutional blueprint in *The Common Interest of the Poles* (1771–1772), showing how these works adapted physiocratic principles to Poland-Lithuania's distinctive noble republicanism, while contributing to broader European debates about sovereignty and reform. Contemporary to Rousseau's *Considerations on Poland*, these efforts represented not just projects of economic reform but a creative synthesis of French Enlightenment thought with Poland-Lithuania's legal heritage, demonstrating how peripheral states actively shaped Enlightenment political discourse. This article ultimately reveals this exchange as a vital chapter in the development of modern European political economy and constitutional thought.

Keywords: physiocracy, Poland, eighteenth century, Europe, constitution, economy, enlightenment.

Streszczenie

Thérence Carvalho

Reformy i odrodzenie – fizjokratyczne plany dla Polski w dobie kryzysu XVIII wieku

W niniejszym artykule autor analizuje, w jaki sposób Rzeczpospolita Obojga Narodów stała się w latach 60. i 70. XVIII wieku ważnym poligonem doświadczalnym dla idei fizjokratycznych, pokazując tym samym dynamiczną wymianę, która wzbogaciła europejską kulturę prawną. Wykształceni we Francji reformatorzy i lokalne elity, poszukując rozwiązań dla kryzysu gospodarczego i politycznego Rzeczypospolitej, sięgali po doktryny Quesnaya, tworząc w ten sposób wyjątkowy dialog między zachodnią teorią a tradycjami Europy Wschodniej. Opracowanie koncentruje się na propozycjach fiskalnych Nicolasa Baudeau zawartych w *Éphémérides du citoyen* (1768–1769) oraz na projekcie konstytucji Lemercier de La Rivière opublikowanym w *The Common Interest of the Poles* (1771–1772), pokazując, w jaki sposób prace te dostosowały zasady fizjokratyczne do charakterystycznego polsko-litewskiego republikanizmu szlacheckiego, przyczyniając się jednocześnie do szerszej europejskiej debaty na temat suwerenności i reform. Wysiłki te, współczesne *Uwagom nad rządem Polski* autorstwa Rousseau, miały na celu nie tylko reformę gospodarczą, lecz także twórczą syntezę myśli francuskiego oświecenia z polsko-litewskim dziedzictwem prawnym, udowadniając, jak państwa peryferyjne aktywnie kształtowały oświeceniowy dyskurs polityczny. Artykuł ilustruje tę wymianę jako istotny rozdział w rozwoju nowożytnej europejskiej ekonomii politycznej i myśli konstytucyjnej.

Słowa kluczowe: fizjokracja, Polska, XVIII wiek, Europa, konstytucja, gospodarka, oświecenie.