

POLAND, 1764-1791

Szymon Kazusek, Jan Kochanowski¹

University Poland

1. Coverage

This questionnaire discusses Poland from 1764 to 1795. After 1795 the Polish state did not exist. The responsibility for preparing documentation about the flow of traded goods was taken up by administration of countries that had taken part in the partition of the Polish-Lithuanian state.

2. Documents

Annual registers on foreign trade were prepared separately for Poland and Lithuania on the basis of the detailed data gathered from customs registers during the second half on the eighteenth century. Many documents were destroyed during the Second World War. The custom registers for 1764 to 1767 have survived, along with summaries for 1786-1790. They are currently available both on paper and on microfilm.

3. Institutional setting

The Crown Treasury Committee and Lithuanian Treasury Committee controlled trade and customs. Both Committees were created in 1764. The institutions worked in strict cooperation with the Grand Treasurer of the Crown and Grand Treasurer of Lithuania respectively. In some specific cases concerning trade a Treasurer issued documents called proclamations.

4. Motivations

Data collection was linked to a general movement of reform of the customs system, and the trade and customs policy. The existing customs system was very complicated. For example, there were three

1. szymon.kazusek@ujk.edu.pl

kinds of customs duties: state, royal, and private. The collection of customs was leased out.

The most important motivation was to determine the amount of customs and state revenue from customs fees. The documents were also used to establish a trade balance. The information about goods flow was also supposed to encourage national production of some products currently imported from other countries.

5. Methods

Customs declarations by traders and the examination of their paperwork were the basis for the establishment of the customs registers. These were checked in the customs houses. The statistical data from customs houses was sent to a lease owner of the customs province, and then, after careful checking, to the Crown Treasury Committee.

The data gathered in customs registers as well as in their surviving summary records might not be fully adequate. Duty-free products, including goods owned by noblemen and the clergy and not intended for distribution, were not registered. However, the estimation of the trade of peasants and townsmen seems to be quite trustworthy.

The value of goods was determined by the Crown Treasury Committee which was in the habit of understating the value of goods. Hence, the global value of exported and imported goods is also understated. There is no perfect method to estimate by how much. The actual value of products might be estimated thanks to research in prices in the biggest towns in Poland, or by looking closely at trade along some important trade routes, e.g. through Gdańsk or Kraków.

6. Information

The detailed data include the type, value, amount, and quality of imported and exported products. The summary records provide the destination of exports and the origin of imports. In many cases there are precise notes about the origin of the products. The customs registers also include information about the place of origin of the ship or the merchant.

The summary records prepared for the Crown Treasury Committee provide the quantity of traded goods. The custom registers contain information about both quantities and value, expressed in the current accounting currency, the zloty.

The system of weights and measures was in accordance with the reform carried out in Poland in 1765. Values are probably approximate. The goods are listed according to a list in Polish and Latin compiled by the office of Grand Treasurer of the Crown and Grand Treasurer of Lithuania. The summary records from 1786-1790 list about 1286 different export products and about 2550 import ones.

The summary records from 1786-1790 contain notes about the destinations of exports and imports. The names of some products that these notes include give us clear tips as to their origin. They indicate trade with five different countries (Austria, Germany, Russia, Turkey, Wallachia) and “other countries”, including the United States, Great Britain, France, the Netherlands, Scandinavian countries, Spain, Portugal, Italy, and Far Eastern countries. These “other countries” are not associated to any direct import. Information about final recipients is very rare.

The customs registers from 1764-1767 give more detailed information about the places of origin of some products and their destination. Quite often they include information about the transport of goods to a well-known foreign fair. Furthermore, because they are broken down by place of dispatch/landing in the reporting territory, they provide additional information. The data from customs houses located on the borderland make it possible to determine directions of export and import. Even for customs houses from the center of the country we may infer with some confidence the country which participated in the trade. The registers tell us about direct trade with five countries (Germany, Austria, Russia, Turkey, and Wallachia).

7. Availability

I have published the data from the summary records of foreign trade of the Crown (S. Kazusek, *Handel zagraniczny Korony w końcu XVIII wieku. Tabele statystyczne*, vol. 1: *Ekspert w latach 1786-1790*, Kielce 2012; vol. 2: *Import w latach 1786-1790, part. 1: Zestawienia roczne*, Kielce 2012; vol. 2, part. 2: *Zestawienie sumaryczne*, Kielce 2013).

I am currently working on the customs registers from 1764-1767. My aim is to create a huge database that will provide us with the detailed information about national and foreign trade of Poland in the years 1764-1767.

8. Research questions

The materials from summary records from 1786-1790, will be used in preparing the trade balance of Poland at the end of the eighteenth century. The data informs us about the range of Polish trade connections, mainly with Austria, Germany, Russia, Turkey, and Wallachia, but also with countries from western and northern Europe and the Far East.

There are other potential research questions:

- What was the balance of Polish trade with Germany, Austria, Russia, Turkey, and Wallachia at the end of the eighteenth century?
- What was the range of imports from countries from western and northern Europe (indirectly from America and the Far East) in comparison with Polish imports from Russia, Germany, Turkey, and Wallachia at the end of the eighteenth century?
- What was the range of Polish re-exports at the end of the eighteenth century?
- What was the percentage of agricultural and industrial products in foreign trade?
- When the statistical sources are missing, can the profits from customs fees be the basis for determining the range of foreign trade in the second half of the eighteenth century?
- What was the participation of foreign merchants in the trade with Poland in the second half of the eighteenth century?
- The studies over the customs registers from 1764-1767 should put emphasis on establishing the structure and direction of foreign trade, merchants' activity, seasonal character of land and water transport, activity of merchants and participation of townsmen, noblemen, and clergy in trade, as well as on the influence of natural disasters and development of agriculture and industry in Poland on the foreign trade.
- Registers are a good basis for further studies on the route specific products took, the size of means of transport, the seasonal character of trade, and the influence of international fairs on foreign trade.

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