

PIOTR DASZKIEWICZ

**A comment on the forestry policy of Stanisław Leszczyński
in Lorraine**

Uwagi o Stanisława Leszczyńskiego polityce leśnej
w Lotaryngii

Muséum national d'Histoire naturelle
Département Ecologie et Gestion de la Biodiversité
61, Rue Buffon, 75005 Paris, France
e-mail: piotrdas@mnhn.fr

Received: 14 July 2006, Accepted: 13 September 2006

ABSTRACT. The eighteenth century is quite particular in terms of the history of forestry in Europe and especially in France. It was a period of great over-exploitation of the forests to meet the needs of the navy and emerging industry. It was also a period when forestry policy became increasingly centralised in France, reduced rights for local communities and authorities and more and more marked interventionism in forests that came under French influence. In 1737, Stanisław Leszczyński, the Polish king in exile, took possession of the duchy of Lorraine. The article presents forest policy of Stanisław Leszczyński and the consequences of imposition of “forestry French model” in Lorraine.

Key words: history of forestry, Lorraine, French woodland management model, Stanisław Leszczyński

In 1737, Stanisław Leszczyński, the Polish king in exile, took possession of the duchy of Lorraine. The circumstances surrounding this event and his subsequent reign lasting three decades have been relatively well documented by historians (Boyé 1898; Boyé 1926; Muratori-Philip 2005). Stanisław Leszczyński's years in Lorraine were marked on the one hand by the fact that the duchy of Lorraine lost its independence from France but gained in economic development and, most of all, the patronage of education, the arts and sciences. His regency saw the creation of a learned society, which was very important for the history of the sciences in Europe, and a system for educating underprivileged children (Rossinot 2004). The court at Lunéville was a meeting place for the philosophers and scientists of the day (Boyé 1891). Leszczyński himself possessed a menagerie¹ and collected mineral samples². He also encouraged agronomic research. His behaviour in this regard was considered to be exemplary for the time. When presenting his research on ray-grass to the king and advocating the creation of artificial prairies, Miroud du Bourg (1761) wrote:

„A prince who seeks glory in the hearts of his subject & happiness in their felicity, King Stanislas has not neglected this new means of serving them. He commanded the cultivation mainly of ray-grass, & he upheld the idea that plants capable of feeding livestock were a greater ornament in a king's garden than the most splendid of flowers”.

The eighteenth century is quite particular in terms of the history of forestry in Europe and especially in France. It was a period of great over-exploitation of the forests to meet the needs of the navy and emerging industry. It was also a period when forestry policy became increasingly centralised in France, reduced rights for local communities and authorities and more and more marked interventionism in forests that came under French influence. From this point of view, the forestry policy in Lorraine is a „textbook example”.

Authors dealing with „the question of wood for the navy” often considered Stanisław Leszczyński's forestry laws to be exemplary and particularly important. D'Acosta, the author of one of the most important works on the subject in the eighteenth century, ranked these laws on a par with Colbert's famous ordinance, which guaranteed France long self-sufficiency in the oak that was required to build a powerful navy. Summing up the principles of Leszczyński's laws, D'Acosta (1782) wrote:

„On September 18, 1738, the King of Poland, Duke of Lorraine, rendered a ruling comprising 7 articles. He thereby authorised officers of the Navy to choose and mark in his woods, and woods held in mortmain, oak trees suitable for construction, & ordered that the Proprietors of woods up to 6 leagues from navigable rivers be bound to declare 6 months in advance the quantities they intend to fell, & that in all cases the prices should be fixed by mutual agreement”.

It is interesting to note how quickly the new law was established, the speed indicating the importance of the Lorraine forests for French policy and particularly for the development of the navy. It is also interesting to note that the navy inspectors could intervene in forests regardless of their status and of their owners.

We have to bear in mind that the Lorraine region was very rich in forests. There is no doubt that the Thirty Years War (1618-1648), a period when authority was absent, combined with „uncontrolled exploitation” by various military administrations, caused a significant degradation of the forests of Lorraine. But the re-establishment of the power of Duke Leopold of Lorraine changed that situation. The short period of Lorraine independence was very important for forestry policy. In 1724 the ordinance concerning the defence of wooded property was promulgated and the old administrative structure³ was re-established, „no doubt as a reaction against French institutions” (Boyé 1909). Leopold's forestry policy was thus characterised by a rejection of measures imposed by the French,

considered to be an occupying force, and by an attempt to emerge from the crisis situation i.e. the dramatic degradation of the forests. In this context the return of French power and the period of Leszczyński rule was also the end of an independent model of forestry policy: „Not until the reign of Stanisław, and the December edict of 1747, were the fifteen *maîtrises*⁴ re-established with the same personnel as in 1686” (Boyé 1909).

The French king’s administration was fully aware of the importance of the forestry resources of Lorraine for the navy. For the navy inspectors, the situation whereby France paid very high prices in Amsterdam to buy oak for the hulls of its ships was unacceptable, particularly since a large share of the wood came from Lorraine, a duchy that was under their control. We have to bear in mind that around 1737 there was a very serious crisis in the supply of wood in France and forests were observed to be declining throughout the realm (Réaumur 1721). It is therefore not surprising that a reform of forestry administration became one of the priorities of the French policy with the establishment of Leszczyński as leader of Lorraine.

Some of the measures imposed by the French were not bad. Leszczyński’s forestry policy was guided by two principles: the interests of the king of France and his own permanent financial problems. Some of the „good” new measures were thus not retained:

„The creation of financial managers was of great benefit for the forestry administration, which thus found itself relieved of a very heavy load in terms of responsibility. The French ordinance of 1669 made this separation official, which was thus applied in Lorraine, and fortunately on this point at least, Leopold had no thoughts of returning to the old system: the fifteen financial managers created by the edict of August 31, 1698, profited from the forestry products of the grueries in their sectors at the same time as the *tiers denier*⁵ from other domain products (...) in 1774 the financial managers for wood domains were re-established, one for *maîtrise*, receiving not only the sale prices but also the product of fines. These regrettable modifications were dictated solely by a narrow-minded tax policy in order to provide the treasury with resources for the sale of offices” (Guyot 1886).

In practice Leszczyński’s forestry reform was really prepared by his all-powerful administrator, La Galizière, and executed by Paul François Gallois, the ex-reformer of the forests of Normandy. His main goal was to homogenize the system with the French sylvicultural model and to pave the way for the definitive annexation of Lorraine. This was thus the end of the near-sovereign regional forestry powers, the imposition of the French sylvicultural model, initially disguised by the semblance of autonomy accorded to Leszczyński and then the open integration of the forests of Lorraine into the French forestry management system (Garnier 2004). In 1766, when Lorraine was integrated into France, the forestry administrative system had already been identical in both countries for some years.

Leszczyński's forestry policy reduced the situation of the owners in favour of the interests of the king of France. In 1739, following his decree, forest exploiters received 8 and 10 livres for what was sold only a few years earlier for 29 to 30 livres. Increased repression was another sign of the new forestry policy. In 1737 the fines charged for various forestry offences amounted to 18,891, and in 1740 they reached 45,126 (Boyé 1909). We must also bear in mind the considerable salaries paid to the new forestry civil servants. Thus, in spite of the affirmations of forestry writers of the time, Leszczyński's forestry policy remains ambiguous at best. On the one hand it is characterised by the predominance of the interests of central French power (low-price production and sale of wood to the navy and control over forest management) over real local interests, although we can also note the modernisation of forest management (particularly in terms of financial management, but also the separation of forest space from agricultural space⁶) and a considerable increase in knowledge, general surveying⁷ of forests and the first map of forests (one of the first in Europe).

References

- BOYE P., 1891. *La Cour de Lunéville en 1748 et 1749, ou Voltaire chez le roi Stanislas*. G. Crépin-Leblond, Nancy.
- BOYE P., 1898. *Un Roi de Pologne et la couronne ducal de Lorraine. Stanislas Leszczyński et le troisième traité de Vienne, d'après les archives d'État, les papiers du roi de Pologne et autres documents inédits*. Berger-Levrault, Paris.
- BOYE P., 1909. *Les Eaux et forêts en Lorraine au XVIIIe siècle*. Extrait du 'Bulletin des sciences économiques et sociales du Comité des travaux historiques et scientifiques', année 1907. Impr. Nationale, Paris.
- BOYE P., 1926. *La Cour polonaise de Lunéville (1737-1766)*. Berger-Levrault, Nancy-Paris-Strasbourg.
- D'ACOSTA T., 1782. *Instruction sur les bois de marine et autres : contenant des détails relatifs à la physique & à l'analyse du chêne : suivi d'un aperçu des bois & des consommations dans le royaume : avec un abrégé des loix sur les bois de marine*. La veuve Duchesne [et] Clousier, Paris.
- DASZKIEWICZ P., TARKOWSKI R. *Tajemnica kolekcji agatów polskiego króla*. In: *Zeszyty Historyczne* [in press].
- GARNIER E., 2004. *Terre de coquêtes. La forêt vosgienne sous l'ancienne régime*. Fayard, Paris.
- GUYOT C., 1886. *Les Forêts lorraines jusqu'en 1789*. G. Crépin-Leblond, Nancy.
- LOISEL G., 1912. *Histoire des ménageries de l'antiquité à nos jours*, 2. O. Doin et fils, Paris.
- MIROUD DU BOURG J.-B., 1761. *Mémoire sur le ray-grass ou faux-seigle, présenté au Roi de Pologne, duc de Lorraine et de Bar, le 29 juin 1760*. La veuve & C. Leseure, Nancy.

- MURATORI-PHILIP A. (ed.), 2005. Leszczyński, aventurier, philosophe et mécène des Lumières. R. Laffont, Paris.
- REAUMUR A., 1721. Réflexions sur l'état des bois du royaume et sur les précautions qu'on pourrait prendre pour en empêcher le dépérissement et les mettre en valeur. Histoire de l'Académie royale des sciences: 284-301.
- ROSSINOT A., 2004. Stanislas : le roi philosophe. R. Laffont, Paris.

Footnotes

¹ The animals from the menagerie were transferred to Versailles following the marriage of his daughter Maria Leszczyńska to King Louis XV of France (Loisel 1912).

² Prompted by Buffon, the French king bought a collection of agates that apparently belonged to Stanisław Leszczyński (Daszkiewicz, Tarkowski in press).

³ *grueries* – former forest administration units used in Lorraine and some other principalities.

⁴ French forest administration units.

⁵ A tax for the goods bought by the communities.

⁶ Under Leszczyński the „servitudes” linked to pig breeding and the exploitation of acorns were still very considerable, in 1766 this activity became very marginal.

⁷ From 1750 to 1758, under the responsibility of a specialist with a salary of 3,875 livres, assisted by four surveyors and a draughtsman. From 1753 the „geographer-engineer” was none other than the abbé Jean Chappe d'Auteroche (1722-1769) whose name was destined to become famous for his works in astronomy, Siberian travel and polemics with Catherine II.