

Summary:

The book explores the legal relationships in the compulsory mill system before 1810 in the Kingdom of Prussia, with a particular focus on the Kurmark province. The central theme revolves around the conflict between compulsory mill system and trade and personal freedom, reflecting economic, social, and legal disparities. The research delves into the interplay of technological, economic, and legal elements within the mill system, directly or indirectly influenced by the legal obligation for farmers to have their grain milled exclusively at a designated mill.

The compulsory mill system originated from medieval sovereign rights merged with fiefdom as independently grantable privileges. These rights formed the legal basis for compulsory mill system, requiring inclusion in mill-related legal transactions for their effect. The economic rationale for obtaining or inheriting compulsory mill rights was to secure revenues or taxes from the mill for the landlord.

In the 18th-century Kurmark, fragmented records, including a 1750 general table of all mills, provide partial insights. The study delves into the legal reality of the socially stratified Prussian society, refining medieval legal institutions such as compulsory and exclusive rights. The millers, positioned between social classes, operated as a distinct "miller class," their products—flour, meal, and malt—essential for all social classes, leading to constant conflicts of interest.

This resulted in special milling legislation, maintaining the millers' unique position until the reforms of 1810, which marked the end of the compulsory mill system and the special status of millers. The compulsory mill system aligned with the prevailing mercantilist-cameralist economic model in 18th-century Prussia, aiming for maximum self-sufficiency and consistent tax revenue growth through administrative intensification.

Comparative historical analyses of Mecklenburg Duchies and Electoral Saxony reveal similar mill legal conditions, with variations in the abolition of milling obligations. While Saxony lifted these restrictions through internal legal development between 1838 and 1861, external influences triggered their early cessation in Prussia in 1810 and only much later in Mecklenburg in 1869.

With regard to the ownership structures of the mill operators in the countryside, parallels can be drawn with those of the farmers, which in turn was an expression of the hybrid status of the millers described above, consisting of farmer and rural craftsman. The study identifies diverse ownership arrangements, ranging from free hereditary millers to precarious leaseholders, influenced by regional characteristics.

The emergence of windmills, responding to land expansion and population growth, influenced milling laws, separating the mill from its original water rights. Milling restrictions expanded to monopolize grain processing, focusing on millstone trade. The study relies on a quantitative and qualitative examination of the Kurmark compulsory mill system, primarily based on a 1750 general table of all mills.

Regional variations in compulsory mill obligations exist, with the overall Kurmark presenting a more heterogeneous legal landscape than anticipated. Notably, royal mills were disproportionately endowed with compulsory mill rights, emphasizing their role in enforcing state interests and increasing revenue. This contradicts the prevalent economic model's inability, by the late 18th century, to reconcile conflicting interests between rulers and subjects. Despite intensified state intervention, the self-inflicted scarcity economy became increasingly difficult to manage.

In conclusion, the study affirms that the compulsory mill system primarily served as an instrument of economic regulation, adapted to the mercantilist-cameralist system. The legal framework evolved from medieval privileges and reflected the complex interplay of societal interests. The study provides a nuanced understanding of the Kurmark milling system's character until the introduction of economic freedom in 1810, shedding light on its role within the broader context of state economic regulation.

(Translation with Chat-GPT)