

THE SUPPLICATIONS OF LIVONIAN STATE PEASANTS, 1820–1841*

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Supplicating was an instrument for communicating the will of ordinary people to the rulers. This article explores how the Livonian state peasants could forward their wishes to governing authorities. In the Baltic provinces, where there was no institutionalized political representation or participation of peasants in the legislative process, supplications, complaints, and petitions were almost the only legally-accepted means at the disposal of the peasants to inform the authorities of conditions that in their opinion needed to be addressed. Following the newer trends in the agrarian history that focus on social practices rather than legal norms, this article concentrates on the actual practice of how peasants used their legal right to appeal and attempts to assess their effectiveness. The better (economic) position of state peasants in comparison to their peers living on private manors can be associated with state control over the situation of state peasants, which presupposed a possibility to forward supplications and requests to government authorities in order to limit the powers of manor lords.

Recent decades have seen an increasing interest in the written expressions of common people.¹ Different kinds of petition-like documents enable historians to hear the voices of the “silent masses”.² Secondly, petitions have enjoyed special attention from many historians as a means of influencing the making of policy and the enactment of legislation. It has been concluded that ordinary people were eminently capable of shaping their own history.³

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¹ Winfried Schulze, “Ego-Dokumente: Annäherung an den Menschen in der Geschichte? Vorüberlegungen für die Tagung ‘Ego-Dokumente’”, *Ego-Dokumente: Annäherung an den Menschen in der Geschichte*, ed. by Winfried Schulze (Berlin: Akad. Verl., 1996), 30.

² Lex Heerma van Voss, “Introduction”, *International Review of Social History*, 46 (2001), Supplement 9, 1–10. For a discussion over the definition of terms “petition”, “supplication”, etc. see *ibidem*.

³ Wayne Te Brake, *Shaping History. Ordinary People in European Politics 1500–1700* (Berkeley et al., 1998); *Resistance, Representation and Community*, ed. by Peter Blickle (Oxford et al., 1997).

Even the most autocratic governments used petitions as a source of information about popular feelings.⁴

This article draws upon the state peasants' supplications triggered by conflicts with manor lords⁵ in the period from the abolition of serfdom in 1819 until the 1841 Law on the Management of State Estates (1841) that launched the Kiselev reforms⁶ in the Baltics. Estonian authors, as a rule, suggest that due to the emancipation decree of 1819, peasants lost legal protection from the arbitrariness of the manor lords and their economic status even deteriorated in the aftermath of the liberation. The state peasants, as I have shown elsewhere already, were by law as well as in practice still protected.⁷ In addition to starting a court case, conflicts could be solved by means of negotiation, conciliation, and arbitration through the institutions in charge of state domains. Such extrajudicial procedures complementing legal proceedings were limited to state peasants only. Could they take advantage of these formal channels of interaction with the authorities? The office of peasant affairs by the chancery of Baltic Governor-General accepted the supplications and complaints against court decisions from all peasants irrespective of their status. The "Tumultuous 1840s"⁸ ended two decades of "Livonian still life". Amid a period of social contest, new forms of peasant resistance emerged.⁹ The 1841 Law on the Management of State Estates marked the beginning of a new era in Baltic agrarian legislation.

⁴ Voss, "Introduction", 4.

⁵ Complaints against manor lords were apparently overwhelming. Marten Seppel has argued on the basis of 17th-century archival materials that although peasant supplications cover a whole range of topics, most of them were concerned with abuses and excesses of the manor lord (Marten Seppel, "Talupoegade kaebekirjad ja kaebeõigus 17. sajandi Liivimaal", *Eesti Ajalooarhiivi toimetised*, 12 (19) (Tartu, 2006), 409, 412). The fragmentary nature of available sources from the first half of the 19th century does not enable quantitative analyses. The hostility of Livonian peasants towards landlords in the 19th-century can be illustrated by a case from Võlla (*Wõlla*) estate in 1831 where a verdict of the communal court to sell the only cow of Jaan Reymann to cover his debts was attributed by him to manor leaseholder Frey instead. Investigation revealed that the cow was taken from him and sold on auction by the communal court in order to cover his four-year debt of poll tax (Ajalooarhiiv [EAA], f. 2054, n. 1, s. 150, Pärnu district court to Baltic Governor-General, 23 May 1831).

⁶ For Kiselev reforms see more in Kersti Lust, *Pärisorjast pärisokohaomanikuks. Talurahva emantsipatsioon eestikeelse Liivimaa kroonukülas 1819–1915* (Tartu: Eesti Ajalooarhiiv, 2005).

⁷ *Ibidem*, 48–64.

⁸ For more see Juhan Kahk, *Murrangulised neljakümnendad* (Tallinn: Eesti Raamat, 1978).

⁹ Daniel C. Ryan, "Rumor, Belief, and Contestation amid the Conversion Movement to Orthodoxy in Northern Livonia, 1845–1848", available at: <<http://www.folklore.ee/Folklore/vol28/livonia.pdf>> (1.12.2009).

The law limited the arbitrariness of estate leaseholder–peasant relations on state estates and diminished the seigniorial authority of estate administration (*Gutsverwaltung*), as well as increased state intrusion in peasant affairs.

In Estonian historiography, petitions and supplications have long been acknowledged as valuable and important sources of social, legal, and mentality history.¹⁰ A couple of remarkable studies have been published recently on the seventeenth century petitions.¹¹ Peasants' complaints and petitions against manor lords to judicial institutions and governing authorities are seen as one form of peasant (antifeudal) resistance. With respect to the first decades of the nineteenth century, state peasants' supplications and complaints have almost been neglected in our national historiography.¹² This article is based on largely unused archival sources preserved in the Latvian State Historical Archives and the Estonian Historical Archives.¹³

Suppliants and addressees of the supplications

Early nineteenth century agrarian laws established a three-stage peasant court system in the governorate of Livonia and set out the procedures for how, by way of lawsuits, the peasants could seek to defend their rights and interests against the overwhelming demands of the landlords.¹⁴ A situation where large numbers of petitions of a socio-economic nature were brought before the courts can be described with the words of Winfried Schulze as a “juridification of social conflict”.¹⁵

¹⁰ See for example Juhan Kahk, *Rahutused ja reformid: talupoegade klassivõitlus ja mõisnike agraarpoliitika Eestis XVIII ja XIX sajandi vahetusel (1790–1810)* (Tallinn: ERK, 1961); Artur Vassar, “Eesti talurahva vaated maavaldusele XIX sajandi teisel poolel”, *Eesti talurahva sotsiaalseid vaateid XIX sajandil* (Tallinn: Eesti NSV TA, 1977); Juhan Kahk, *Talude päriksostmise aegu* (Tallinn: Eesti Teaduste Akadeemia, 1993).

¹¹ Aivar Põldvee, *Pakri rootslaste kaebused Karl XI-le 1684. aastal. Muutuste aeg Harju-Madise ja Risti kihelkonnas*, Harjumaa uurimusi, 4 (Keila, 2001); Seppel, “Talupoegade kaebekirjad”, 396–422.

¹² I have used their supplications relating to land survey and assessment in my above-mentioned work. Content of the supplications of state peasants living in Courland has been analyzed by Heinrihs Strods, *Kurzemes kroņa zemes un zemnieki 1795–1861* (Rīga: Zinātne, 1987).

¹³ Most of the files pertaining to leasing and management of the estates and supplications of peasants are preserved in the archives of the Livonian Fiscal Office in Riga (Latvijas Vālsts vēstures arhīvs [LVVA], fond no 77) and in the archives of the Baltic Governor-General chancery's office of peasant affairs (fond no 2054) in Tartu (EAA).

¹⁴ Polnoe Sobranie Zakonov [PSZ] I, T XXXVI, no 27 735.

¹⁵ Cited in Peter Blickle, “Conclusions”, *Resistance, Representation and Community*, ed. by Peter Blickle (Oxford et al., 1997), 334

Since manor lords held all the cards both at the parish court and district court,¹⁶ the peasants placed their hopes on some established authorities.¹⁷ One should not forget, however, that government officials in charge of state domains were often manor lords themselves and/or bore the noble title 'von'.¹⁸

Popular petitioning was institutionalized and bureaucratized in Livonia due to the Great Reduction in the last decades of Swedish rule. The central authorities developed fixed routines for treating crown peasants' complaints. Complaints made directly to the ruler, the apex of the power structure, were prohibited both in the seventeenth century as well as in the period treated in this article.¹⁹ After the Reduction, the economic governor's instructions from 1691 and economic regulations of 1696 that regulated state peasants' right to appeal against manor lords²⁰ remained in force with regard to the state peasants of Livonia even after the emancipation decree had been introduced in 1819,²¹ but manor administrators were purportedly not aware of their content²². Nevertheless, the lease contract²³ with the manor holder incorporated some conditions borrowed from the economic regulations, and during *exmission* and *immission* (transfer of estates from one leaseholder or administrator to the other) the estate administrators were reminded of their obligation to follow the lease contract, agrarian law of 1819, economic regulations, and other relevant regulations.

Without going into detail about the institutional organization of the procedure of peasants' supplications at the end of the Swedish period, it is sufficient to say that the Governor-General and two economy governors

¹⁶ Livonian parish courts were to settle the complaints of manor lords against peasants conciliation procedure was used in case of peasants' complaints against manor lords. The presiding judge at court was manor lord, his three fellow judges were peasants. The presiding judge at the district court and half of the fellow judges were manor lords, but two fellow judges were peasants. The district court addressed those complaints against manor lords that parish court could not solve.

¹⁷ This was the case also at the end of the 18th-century, when the police courts often declared peasants' complaints wrong and unfounded. Subsequently the peasants started to address Governor-General directly, who often overruled the decisions of police courts (Mati Laur, *Eesti ala valitsemine 18. sajandil (1710–1783)* (Tartu: Eesti Ajalooarhiiv, 2000), 158). For Courland see Strods, *Kurzemes*, 147.

¹⁸ See officials' service records from 1830 (LVVA, 77. f., 16. apr., 56. l.).

¹⁹ Nevertheless, Couronian state peasants managed to petition the Tsar (Strods, *Kurzemes*, 149).

²⁰ For more see Seppel, "Talupoegade kaebekirjad", 396–422.

²¹ For more see Lust, *Pärisorjast päriskohtaomanikuks*, 50–51; EAA, f. 310, n. 1, s. 271.

²² Saaremaa (Ösel) district commissioner to Livonian Fiscal Office, 20 March 1830 (LVVA, 77. f., 15. apr., 568. l., 1–2v. lpp.).

²³ See, for example, the lease contract of Holstre estate from 1836 (LVVA, 77. f., 15. apr., 47. l.).

(*Ökonomiestatthalter*) of Livonia were responsible for solving the crown peasants' complaints.²⁴ The duties of the economic governor included a due protection of crown peasants and admitting their complaints.²⁵ During the Russian rule, the office of the economic governor did not exist; monitoring the management of state estates and solving the supplications of state peasants was distributed among different offices of economic affairs (*Ökonomiebehörden*): district commissioner (*Kreiskomissar*), economic administration (*Ökonomieverwaltung*), and fiscal office (*Kameralhof*) operating on the governorate level.

Although the more solid foundations for the protection of the state interests were laid in the course of drawing up the new law on the management of state estates,²⁶ in the period under discussion the *Ökonomiebehörden* studied the cases of *leaseholders'* infringements of the norms of the *wackenbücher*, misconduct or excessive use of corporal punishment,²⁷ if they harmed state peasants or the economy of state estates. Other disputes between peasants and lords were to be settled by peasant courts.

If the peasants did not receive justice from the courts, they turned to the Governor-General.²⁸ For example, four cottagers from Holstre (*Holstfer-shof*) who were turned down by the court appealed to the Governor-General in May 1824 for help against the estate administration that demanded from them, under threat of penalty, two corvée days a week and from their wives spinning flax and tow in winter.²⁹ Governor-General forwarded the case to the district court, but since the investigation was stalled the cottagers made another appeal to the Governor-General in Riga. The amount of hope and courage that these visits gave can be seen from the appearance at the parish court of the cottagers' leader and instigator Olte Jaani in September of the same year. He threatened to supplicate in Riga again if the parish court made them work for the manor since the Governor-General personally told him that the corvée days were not obligatory. Despite this, the court decided in favour of the estate administrator, thereby relying

²⁴ *Sammlung der Gesetze, welche das heutige livländische Landrecht enthalten*, Bd. 2, 1221–1223.

²⁵ *Ibidem*, 1233 (p. 17).

²⁶ Baltic Governor-General to Livonian Fiscal Office, 13 February 1841 (LVVA, 77. f., 11. apr., 543. l., 1–2. lpp.); Decision of the Livonian Fiscal Office, 13 May 1841 (*ibidem*, 11. lp.).

²⁷ The manorial lord had a right to punish peasants for their lesser misdeeds against the manor lord or manor economy.

²⁸ Peasants could be punished for supplicating to the Governor-General only with the consent of the latter.

²⁹ EAA, f. 291, n. 10, s. 440.

on the Livonian agrarian law of 1804,³⁰ and called for initiation of criminal proceedings about Olte Jaan's disobedience and incitement. Manor supervisor Kirristo Zanders' widow Lieso from Rannu (*Schloß Randen*) also sought justice from Governor-General, since she wanted nothing to do with the district court where she had previously received no justice.³¹ She was taken to the court by force.

This article deals with complaints against manors, but one should note that they were directed not solely against the overwhelming demands or abuses of manor lords (leaseholders or administrators). Peasants' supplications often related to quarrels among themselves over heritage, the use of land and fishing waters, boundaries, as well as to such issues as schools, church, trading, etc. Moreover, the estate administrator very often mediated between the community and outsiders. Although the law of 1819 had declared the peasants to be in principle state entities, the manor lords (*resp.* administrators) continued conducting their relations with the state on behalf of the state peasants, and estate administration as a connecting link did not disappear in the bureaucratic communication between the peasant and the authorities throughout the whole period in question. Estate administration forwarded the community diverse information and, being responsible for the peasants' welfare, it was compelled to report about the peasants' situation to a number of institutions. But in the given context it is more important that manor lords petitioned on behalf of the peasants for assistance in paying³² or deferment of the poll tax, granting the use of state forests, 'fairer' distribution of tax and service obligations (foremost road maintenance obligation³³), and grain support.³⁴ According to the lease contract, estate administration was responsible both for road

³⁰ According to the law of 1804 cottagers who were physically fit to work had to perform: a) men: one corvée day a week throughout a year, b) women: one corvée day per week in summer; in winter she had to spin two pounds of flax or the same amount of wool or tow on her own account (PSZ I, T XXVIII, no 21 162).

³¹ Tartu district court to Baltic Governor-General 13 December 1833 (EAA, f. 2054, n. 1, s. 234, l. 3–6).

³² Journal of the Saaremaa economic administration, 19 June 1831 (EAA, f. 310, n. 1, s. 47, l. 53v).

³³ See the petitions for re-partition of road maintenance service on the behalf of local communities by manor lords of Vana-Kasaritsa (*Alt-Kasseritz*) and Haanja (*Hahnhof*) (LVVA, 77. f., 15. apr., 549. l., 1–2. lp), Vana-Kariste (*Alt-Karrishof*) (77. f., 15. apr., 74. l., 114–114v. lpp.), and Sindi (*Zintenhof*) (77. f., 15. apr., 473. l., 1–2. lpp.).

³⁴ According to the rules, manor administrators had to request grain support via district commissioner. See for example the letter of the district commissioner Rathleff to the Livonian Fiscal Office in the name of Kalli (*Kallie*) community from 3 April 1841, where he requested advance loan of summer seeds (LVVA, 77. f., 15. apr., 67. l, 78–78v. lp.).

maintenance and grain support (advance loans).³⁵ In Jõõpre (*Jaepern*), state peasants even petitioned for the staying of the former manor lord: “[...] we have been living under fair administration. [...] Our manor lord has always been just to us and during difficult times he has been helpful like a father to his children.”³⁶ On the other hand, peasants’ distrust of lords is widely known throughout the historiography.³⁷

Form and content of the supplications

Most of the supplications under consideration here were oral. Suppliants appeared either before the Baltic Governor-General’s office of peasant affairs in Riga or local offices of economic affairs and raised complaints against their manor lords on behalf of themselves or other community members or the whole community.³⁸ Most of these supplications were individual. Both in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, authorities had fought against, albeit not always with much success, any collective voicing of grievances by subjects.³⁹ Individual strategy does not mean a lack of the collective dimension of the raised issue. Singular supplications can indicate heavy social conflicts if they form part of a larger body of similar petitions.⁴⁰ For example, the cottagers’ individual supplications against the manor lord were usually protests against corvée as such or too much corvée. Forcing cottagers to perform corvée was a larger issue arising from socio-economic circumstances.

Another chance to petition orally against manor lords was given to the state peasants during the exmission and immission of estates, when the representatives of farm heads were asked about possible abuses and

³⁵ See for example the lease contract of Enge manor from 1833 (LVVA, 77. f., 15. apr., 17. l.); see also the letter from the Livonian Fiscal Office to Pärnu district commissioner, 16 April 1841 (LVVA, 77. f., 15. apr., 67. l., 80. lp.); see also the instruction of Baltic Governor-General to the Livonian Fiscal Office from 11 May 1826, § 1 (Lust, *Pärisorjast pärisokohaomanikuks*, 179).

³⁶ Peasants’ petition to the Livonian Fiscal Office, 7 October 1839 (LVVA, 77. f., 15. apr., 61. l., 47–47v. lpp.).

³⁷ See Juhan Kahk, “Eesti talurahva maailmavaatest XVIII sajandi lõpul ja XIX sajandi esimesel poolel”, *Eesti talurahva sotsiaalseid vaateid XIX sajandil*, ed. by Ea Jansen, Juhan Kahk, Artur Vassar (Tallinn: Eesti NSV Teaduste Akadeemia Ajaloo Instituut, 1977), 6.

³⁸ In Courland written and collective petitions were forbidden to the peasants (Strods, *Kurzemes*, 148–149). It applies also to the governorate of Livonia.

³⁹ Seppel, “Talupoegade kaebekirjad”, 414; Laur, *Eesti ala valitsemine*, 155.

⁴⁰ Andreas Würigler, “Voices From Among the ‘Silent Masses’: Humble Petitions and Social Conflicts in Early Modern Central Europe”, *International Review of Social History*, 46 (2001), Supplement 9, 28.

excesses of the manor administrator. The inquiries reveal that the issue of following economic regulations from 1696 was of particular interest.⁴¹ The protocols indicate that complaints could gather several years, in extreme cases the peasants waited for several years before making complaints.⁴² The frequency of revisions accompanying ex- and immission process depended on how often the estate was passed from one leaseholder or sub-leaseholder to another. In case of complaints, the district commissioner tried to solve them on spot, but if unsuccessful, he generally forwarded them to a parish court. The protocols of ex- and immission were referred for consideration to the fiscal office, which after considering the opinion of the district commissioner and economic administration decided upon the further action. During the revisions, only farm heads were questioned and therefore the results reflect foremost the interests of farmers. Other village social groups like cottagers, labourers, handicraftsmen, etc. voiced their grievances at court or to the Governor-General.

Supplications require a critical attitude from researchers since suppliants usually highlight only one side of the story.⁴³ The Livonian peasants, no doubt, often exaggerated and distorted the real facts, often renouncing them later.⁴⁴ In order to check the facts, if the situation demanded it, an investigation was initiated through the district commissioner, parish court, or an explanation was sought from the opposing party and/or court, who had already conducted an investigation in the given matter. If the suppliants presented false facts, they were punished unless the complaints were attributed to their ignorance. If complaints with regard to land survey and taxation turned out to be ill-founded, the costs for checking were charged to the complainants.

⁴¹ Cf. the chapter 3 (paragraphs 1, 3, 6, 9–10) of economic regulations (*Eesti NSV ajaloo lugemik*, 1 (Tallinn: Eesti Riiklik Kirjastus, 1960), 198–201) and the questions during the inquisition (e.g. LVVA, 77. f., 15. apr., 79. l.).

⁴² See for example exmission and immission protocol of Vastse-Kasaritsa, 26 May 1834 (LVVA, 77. f., 15. apr., 79. l.).

⁴³ Voss, "Introduction", 9; Otto Ulbricht, "Supplikationen als Ego-Dokumente. Bittschriften von Leibeigenen aus der ersten Hälfte des 17. Jahrhunderts als Beispiel", *Ego-Dokumente: Annäherung an den Menschen in der Geschichte*, ed. by Winfried Schulze (Berlin: Akad. Verl., 1996), 154.

⁴⁴ The peasants had to petition orally and therefore it could happen that their words in vernacular were misinterpreted by officials whose mother tongue was different. Secondly, state officials' preconceptions of peasants as well as peasants' behaviour while being in contact with them affected how their words were recorded. For preconceptions of Baltic German landlords see Heide W. Whelan, *Adapting to Modernity: Family, caste and capitalism among the Baltic German nobility* (Köln, Weimar, Wien: Böhlau Verlag, 1999), 47–49.

Given the illiteracy of most peasants, written supplications were usually compiled with help from literate outsiders who were held liable. In 1833, when solving a supplication of Holstre peasants Saa Jahn and Pampo Jaak, the question of its author became relevant. Viljandi police court found that the author of the petition – locksmith journeyman Alexander Johann Karm – had once before served time in prison for a similar offence by the decision of Viljandi City Council and could be “cured” by corporal punishment only.⁴⁵

In their supplications, Livonian state peasants were protesting particular grievances (e.g. overloading peasants’ horses while carrying manorial products, inadequate support from manors, obligations not in conformance with the *wackenbücher*, cartage service instead of manorial labour service, eviction) and sought redress (compensation, etc.). As has been pointed out by some Russian and German historians, peasants very often fought against specific forms of feudal oppression and did not question the established system.⁴⁶ The Livonian state peasants, like their counterparts elsewhere in Europe in the pre-industrial era, requested a return to the rules of conduct of the past and a restoration. There is a widely held view that “novelties create unrest”.⁴⁷ In the aftermath of the liberation, by means of supplications, Livonian peasants sought to enforce their understanding of a “just” assessment of their labour dues, and “just” treatment; only in the 1860s they went on the offensive and started to demand what was genuinely new. In the 1820s and 1830s, their supplications were usually motivated by breaches of established norms and wrong punishments. The leaseholder of Lümamda (*Lümmada*) estate Ströhm claimed in his letter to the director of the office of economic affairs in 1836 that his plans to change the existing arrangements, as well as the appeals of the neighbouring Atla (*Attel*) peasants, had motivated local peasants not willing to forget the “magnificent idling and swinging days” (*herrlichen Faulenzer- und Schlenkertage*) under his predecessor Gerlach to raise “baseless” complaints against him.⁴⁸

As the emancipation of 1819 had not significantly changed basic rural relationships, the peasant struggle retained its old forms. They disputed

⁴⁵ Viljandi police court to Baltic Governor-General, 7 June 1833 (EAA, f. 2054, n. 1, s. 240, l. 1–1v). Karm dealt with composing supplications for peasants and allegedly also made false passports. Sumbaki Hans and his wife Liiso had to pay for writing their supplication 5 banco rubles (EAA, f. 2054, n. 1, s. 286, Viljandi police court to Baltic Governor-General, 16 October 1834).

⁴⁶ For example Soviet specialists B. F. Porshnev and B. T. Litvak (Kahk, “Eesti talurahva maailmavaatest”, 10; Ulbricht, “Supplikationen”, 149–174).

⁴⁷ Würgler, “Voices From Among the ‘Silent Masses’”, 21.

⁴⁸ LVVA, 77. f., 15. apr., 505. l.

manorial corvée duties that they found unfair. One has to bear in mind, however, that the views of peasantry can only to some extent be gauged from their “humble” supplications. The peasants’ mentality was a multilayered phenomenon; progressive requests such as abolition of corvée, life without landlords, introduction of money rent, becoming owners of the land they tilled, and other demands could be voiced, for example, during peasant protests.⁴⁹ Charles Tilly has argued that rebellions provide especially valuable clues to popular (political) aspirations.⁵⁰ One should also point to the synergies between supplications and revolts; repeated and frequent supplications in combination with disobedience, revolts, and other forms of social contest could bring positive results for the Livonian peasants.

The effectiveness of supplicating

Were state peasants more protected from the arbitrariness of the manor lord? This seems to be supported by the reply of the Livonian Fiscal Office to the inquiry of the Second Department of the Ministry of State Domains from 17 June 1838.⁵¹ It says that the provisions of economic regulations and lease contracts of estates applicable in Livonia, as well as the orders relating to the management of state estates, claim that if the state’s interests have been jeopardized or the peasants unlawfully oppressed and harmed, the leaseholder *resp.* administrator must be evicted from the estate. The latter had never occurred. But the same letter also reveals that there are no specific precepts if the given situation were to occur. The letter also mentions that due to revisions by state officials and various inspections, no disorder or abuse can remain uncovered or unsolved.

The ex- and immission protocols of state estates from 1820–40 indicate, quite unexpectedly, that Livonian state peasants seldom used their right to complain over economic or physical mistreatment by leaseholder or administrator,⁵² and sometimes, on the contrary, expressed their gratitude for “tender”, “caring”, or “fair” treatment, relaxing obligations, support in

⁴⁹ For state peasants’ requests during the protest movement after the abolition of serfdom in 1822–23 see: Lust, *Pärisorjast päriskoahomanikuks*, 43–48; Kahk, *Talude päriksostmise aegu*, 6–15.

⁵⁰ Cited in Te Brake, *Shaping History*, 5.

⁵¹ LVVA, 77. f., 11. apr., 3. l., 16. lp.

⁵² It happened in Aidu in 1814 and 1827 (LVVA, 77. f., 15. apr., 2. l., 137–162. lpp.; 77. f., 15. apr., 1. l., 12–12v. lpp.); in Vastse-Kasaritsa in 1834 (77. f., 15. apr., 79. l.); in Vana-Koiola in 1830 (77. f., 15. apr., 104. l., 59–74. lpp.); in Timo in 1829 (77. f., 15. apr., 478. l., 3–4. lpp.).

times of special difficulty, etc.⁵³ Although the complaints were not filed, it did not always mean there were none. For example, the representatives of Aidu (*Aidenhof*) peasants complained during the time of the change of the manor holder in 1827 about the claim from 1819 and earlier, although they could have done it already at the time of the revision in May 1821.⁵⁴

The peasants' ability to influence their relationships with manor holders may be assessed by comparing complaints with legal resolutions. How high was the success rate of state peasants' supplications? Since data on legal decisions concerning supplications is often missing, statistical analysis is not possible and supplications must be investigated by means of examples. Heinrihs Strods has not studied this aspect in regard to Courland, but it seems that the odds were against state peasants.⁵⁵ Rather controversial claims have been made about Livonia in the seventeenth century. Estonian author Marten Seppel does not share the point of view of Latvian historian Arveds Švābe who believes that though the peasants had the right to complain to governmental and judicial authorities, the government officials often followed the interests of manor lords. Seppel considers that the way peasants energetically voiced their opinions through complaints and supplications had a positive impact on their situation.⁵⁶

The following examples will illustrate what happened to peasants' supplications. There was even one instance in which intervention by the Governor-General was sufficient to make the manor lord withdraw his (unjust) claim, as was the case in 1833 in Tuhalaane (*Tuhalane*). Hans Dannberg complained to the Governor-General that the parish court threatened to take away his Jõksi farmstead two years prior to the end of the contract and due to his intervention the manor lord had to withdraw his claim.⁵⁷

During the change of the Aidu estate administrator in 1827, the peasants made a complaint about the claims from the times of administrator Jacob

⁵³ Most of all it was common in very poor regions. See, for example, exmission and immission protocols of Hellamaa (*Hellama*) from 1825 (LVVA, 77. f., 15. apr., 43. l.), Sindi from 1833 (77. f., 15. apr., 15. l., 51–77. lp.), Laiuse (*Lais*) from 1832 (77. f., 15. apr., 130. l., 41v. lp.); Jõõpre from 1820 and 1828 (77. f., 15. apr., 58, 59. l.); Kalli from 1837 (77. f., 15. apr., 66. l., 167–186. lpp.), and Vana-Kasaritsa from 1835 (77. f., 15. apr., 76. l.). Also cases where leaving estate administrators sometimes partly or completely cancelled advance loans to the peasants tell about unhostile relations between manor lords and peasants.

⁵⁴ Pärnu district commissioner Baranoff to Tartu-Pärnu economic administration, 20 July 1827 (LVVA, 77. f., 15. apr., 1. l., 12–12v. lpp.); exmission and immission protocol of Aidu estate (77. f., 15. apr., 2. l.).

⁵⁵ Strods, *Kurzemes*, 148–149, 157–158.

⁵⁶ Seppel, "Talupoegade kaebekirjad", 403, 417.

⁵⁷ Baltic Governor-General to leaseholder Brasche, 12 September 1833, and Brasche's response to his letter, 8 October 1833 (EAA, f. 2054, n. 1, s. 239).

von Mensenkampff, who had died a year before: beginning with the establishment of communal granaries up until 1819 the manor lord had not compensated for delivered granary crop (summer crop); the manor lord had not returned the 133 bushels of rye that he had borrowed from the granary; he had kept the half-year poll tax (155 kopecks per person) paid by the peasants to the manor lord six or more years ago; he had also taken 11 logs from Kilingi forest that were meant for the church in Paistu (*Paistel*), making the peasants therefore purchase new logs from Voltveti (*Tignitz*) manor for 77 rubles.⁵⁸

The supplications of the Aidu peasants were efficient. The former administrator's widow returned 133 bushels of rye and refunded immediately 189.8 banco rubles for the logs to the community.⁵⁹ To cover the remaining claims (granary crop and poll tax) she gave a mortgage worth 550 rubles. Those supplications were further investigated by Pärnu VI parish court,⁶⁰ which decided on 18 June 1828 to dismiss the peasants' claim against the former administrator's beneficiary (widow) due to lack of evidence. Since the peasants did not appeal the decision to the Pärnu district court, the fiscal office decided to return the deposited mortgage to its owner.⁶¹

The peasants of Kähri (*Heimadra*) estate filed several complaints during the ex- and immission in 1828 that were mostly forwarded to the parish court which ruled against the peasants.⁶² But the supplication concerning corvée at the private manors of Kiuma (*Kioma*) and Söreste (*Serrist*) for the purpose of logs (there was no forest in Kähri) were fruitful. No one forced them to perform any corvée at another manor⁶³ and logs were obtained from Kiuma manor free of charge.

A question of interest is also how quickly these supplications were solved. In general, the addressees of supplications forwarded them, without delay, to a body appointed to carry out the investigation – to a parish court or district commissioner *resp.* fiscal office. But the investigation itself could sometimes linger or take place only after several reminders. For example, in 1830 the district commissioner did not follow the order from the head of the fiscal office, vice-governor Cube, to urgently investigate the suppli-

⁵⁸ LVVA, 77. f., 15. apr., 2. l.

⁵⁹ Estate's exmission-immission protocol, 14 July 1827 (LVVA, 77. f., 15. apr., 2. l., 222v–223. lpp.).

⁶⁰ Pärnu district commissioner Baranoff to Tartu-Pärnu economic administration, 20 July 1827 (LVVA, 77. f., 15. apr., 1. l., 12–12v. lpp.).

⁶¹ LVVA, 77. f., 15. apr., 2. l., 279–281. lpp.

⁶² LVVA, 77. f., 15. apr., 41. l.

⁶³ At first it was permitted under mutual agreement and only for farmworks and not for hauling stones or any other type of work that was hard for peasants' draught animals. Under the orders from district commissioner even that was soon stopped.

cation from the Vana-Kariste peasants about the road-building encumbrance, so that the manor holder had to repeat his complaint three years later. Hence, no decision was reached during three years.⁶⁴ A rather curious case occurred in Vana-Löve (*Alt-Löwel*). During the ex- and immission of the estate in 1814, the bail that was paid by the leaseholder upon the leasing was placed under injunction due to the peasants' supplications and poor management of the estate. In 1827, the district commissioner turned to the case again since no solution had been reached.⁶⁵ By that time, the leaseholder's debt to the treasury had been cancelled already with the manifesto of 22 August 1826.⁶⁶ A part of the manor lord's debt to the peasants (the debt in total was of 901.19 rubles, 42 bushels and 1½ pecks of rye and the same amount of barley) had been paid, but the peasants had not yet been compensated for working bee at Jursi (*Jurs*) noble manor (which according to the calculations of the district commissioner reached 770 banco rubles). On 27 February 1828, the fiscal office told the economic administration to collect the debt from Carl Mathias von Nolcken's beneficiaries and pay it to the peasants within six weeks (!), failing which would result in legal proceedings.⁶⁷ Through county court (*Landgericht*), the debt was received from the beneficiaries in November 1828. It had taken fourteen years from filing the complaint to reach a positive judicial decision.

On 10 February 1830, on the basis of supplications from the Vastemõisa (*Wastemois*) peasants and upon the decision from the Pärnu district court, the beneficiaries of manor holder Knorring had to pay for almost twenty years of uncompensated cavalry service, conveyance-money, and logs-money. Strict orders were given to pay 2540.25 banco rubles to the communal treasury in six weeks.⁶⁸

What happened to the manor lords who had broken the rules? The caused damages had to be compensated. His offences would be pointed

⁶⁴ Leaseholder of Vana-Kariste estate to Livonian Fiscal Office, 20 September 1830 (LVVA, 77. f., 15. apr., 74. l., 114–114v. lpp.); leaseholder's renewed complaint to the same addressee, 9 December 1833 (*ibidem*, 128. lp.).

⁶⁵ District commissioner to Saaremaa economic administration, 7 September 1827 (LVVA, 77. f., 15. apr., 135. l., 77–78. lpp.)

⁶⁶ PSZ II, T. 1, no 540.

⁶⁷ LVVA, 77. f., 15. apr., 135. l., 135. lp.

⁶⁸ Peasants petitioned the Governor-General in 1826 (Tartu-Pärnu economic administration to Livonian Fiscal Office, 4 August 1826: LVVA, 77. f., 15. apr., 244. l., 32–35v. lpp.); upon the fiscal office's order the complaint was passed on to the parish court (Livonian Fiscal Office to Tartu-Pärnu economic administration, 23 October 1826: *ibidem*, 108. lp.); Tartu-Pärnu economic administration to Livonian Fiscal Office, 1 April 1830: 77. f., 15. apr., 245. l.).

out to him and precepts were made for further actions either during the revision on the spot or later to the manor in written form, which could also contain a warning about the termination of lease next time.⁶⁹ As was mentioned before, this never happened in Livonia. In the case of cruel and unjust treatment of peasants, the right of corporal punishment over the peasantry might have been precluded.⁷⁰

An illustrative case occurred in Avinurme (*Awwinorm*) estate, when the manor lord, without the knowledge of state officials, evicted two farm heads, accusing them of various offences and poor housekeeping. The district commissioner's investigation revealed that some of these accusations were justified. Since the new farm heads had already settled in, the Governor-General let them keep the farm but ordered the Avinurme estate administration to make sure that the two evicted farm heads were rented new farms or were compensated in some other manner. It appears that the manor holder could evict the farm head without the officials' knowledge and his arbitrary action was not vitiated.⁷¹ Nevertheless, on 4 September 1833, the Livonian Fiscal Office upon the orders of Governor-General sent out a precept to all the estate administrations, which forbade the eviction of farm heads without approval from the offices of economic affairs as long as the farm was managed according to the rules defined in the agrarian law of 1819.⁷²

The exmission protocol of Vana-Koiola (*Alt-Koiküll-Kirrupäh*) estate from 13 August 1830 states that contrary to the rules, the peasants had been sent to work to other manors. But since it was not done on a regular basis, the manor lord was given an admonition and told that peasants could be made to work on other manors only upon receiving permission from the Livonian Fiscal Office.⁷³ Only two years later, the district commissioner arrived for a more thorough investigation. Although on state estates it was

⁶⁹ See for example economy department of fiscal office to plenary meeting, 14 June 1839 concerning precept to Holstre estate administrator (LVVA, 77. f., 15. apr., 47. l., 144–147v. lpp.); journal of Saaremaa economic administration, 1832 (EAA, f. 310, n.1, s. 48, l. 20v, 36v–38v, 52–52v; (f. 310, n. 1, s. 49 (journal, 1833), l. 98–99v; for reminders to landlords see also Melita Svarāne, *Saimnieks un kalps Kurzemē un Vidzemē XIX gadsimta vidū* (Rīga: Zinātne, 1971), 72.

⁷⁰ Such an issue was raised in relation to Püha (*Pastorat Pyha*) vicar Gahlenbaeck (journal of Saaremaa economic administration, 25 May 1834; EAA, f. 310, n. 1, s. 50, l. 59v, 61v). Monitoring and controlling the use of manor police and corporal punishment was a separate clause in Governor-General's instructions to the Livonian fiscal office from 11 May 1826 (Lust, *Pärisorjast päriskoahaomanikuks*, 182). The leaseholder was threatened to be deprived of these rights if he turned out to be untrustworthy.

⁷¹ Lust, *Pärisorjast päriskoahaomanikuks*, 54–55.

⁷² EAA, f. 310, n. 1, s. 49, l. 101.

⁷³ LVVA, 77. f., 15. apr., 104. l., 59–74. lpp.

strictly prohibited to use peasants on other manors for corvée without permission from the fiscal office, von Roth still made his peasants work in Pölgaste (*Pölkis*) and Tilsit (*Tilsit*). As a result, the vice district commissioner and economic administration suggested to permit deviation from the rules and not to impose any fines, since the interests of the state were not hurt and the peasants did not complain. The relevant permission was given by Livonian Fiscal Office on 25 November 1835.⁷⁴

If the violation of laws and norms occurred, as a general rule, no fines or punishments were imposed on manor lords, instead they were asked for compensations or given warnings to prevent further incidents. An exceptional example comes from Karala (*Karral*), where peasants were used (under voluntary agreement) at Pilguse (*Hocheneichen*) private manor. Saaremaa's economic director Buxhoevden ordered the Karala landlord, head of the police court Woldemar von Aderkas, to be fined,⁷⁵ although the district commissioner believed that it would have been sufficient to give an order that in the future agreements of such nature should be confirmed by the economic administration. The motives behind the economic director's harshness might be explained by the letter from the manor holder to the senior supervisor on 20 September 1817 where he complains that "I have been bullied by the *Ökonomiedirektor* in every possible way for many years already [...]."⁷⁶

A further issue is whether the manor lord complied with a default judgment against him. Kalli cottagers Leppiko Jaak, Kütti Jahn, and Kõrgema Jakob, who had been successful at parish court against the manor holder in dispute over corvée days, appeared in 1830 again in the Governor-General's office to complain that the manor holder did not fulfil the verdict of the court.⁷⁷ It proved successful since the manor lord did not demand any performance of corvée days from them and did not evict Kütti Jahn and Kõrgema Jakob from their houses.

Instead of a positive outcome to the supplication, however, the matters could have had a very different outcome. For example, in Lümända the manor holder was so irritated by the peasants' supplications that he filed a number of complaints on his own behalf. As a result, the peasants were found guilty in most instances.⁷⁸

⁷⁴ LVVA, 77. f., 15. apr., 104. l., 83–83v., 90–90v. lpp.

⁷⁵ Saaremaa economic administration to Livonian Fiscal Office, 13 September 1817 (LVVA, 77. f., 15. apr., 72. l., 6–7v. lpp.); in similar compensation was often demanded from manor lords also in Courland (Svarāne, *Saimnieks un kalps*, 172–173).

⁷⁶ LVVA, 77. f., 15. apr., 72. l., 14–15v. lpp.

⁷⁷ EAA, 2054, n. 1, s 96, l. 7–9.

⁷⁸ Investigation protocol, 31 October 1836 (LVVA, 77. f., 15. apr., 505. l.).

Complaints about the results of land assessment indirectly also include complaints against the manor lord, since peasants sought for remission of corvée based on the results of the land assessment. In Avinurme, a number of peasants complained during the period of ten years after the *wackenbuch* norms were announced about the wrongful assessment of lands and too many corvée days.⁷⁹ Although during those years, by order of the Governor-General and the fiscal office, land surveyors and district commissioner were sent to check the peasants' complaints and survey the lands again, and they all admitted the results of land survey to be generally correct (although the "supplication was not fully unjustified").⁸⁰ Peasants claimed that during the announcement of land survey results in Valga (*Walk*), they did not have any say in it.⁸¹ Among the supplications from people of Avinurme, only those concerning excessive threshing (crop loads larger than permitted) had a completely positive outcome for the peasants. They were settled immediately and the barny (*Riegenaufseher*) was punished under the orders from the manor lord.⁸²

A similar outcome occurred in the case of peasants' complaints about excessive corvée requirements after a land survey in Vana-Tänassilm (*Alt-Tennasilm*). The supplications were considered unjustified after the surveyor's audit since "the results of land assessment, on contrary, very reasonable".⁸³ When displeased peasants went to the Governor-General for the second time, they then attacked the estate administrator directly (unfair punishments, bad timing for corvée, etc.). These supplications were regarded as "rather unfounded".

When the land settlement results were read out to the peasants of Häädemeeste (*Gudmannsbach*) in 1838, no objections or protests were heard. But with the end of land settlement, they started making complaints against uneconomical land settlement. Some peasants claimed that they had been left with pieces of swampland and fallow land for farming, and therefore some of them were on the brink of ruin. According to the Livonian Office of State Domains, established in 1841, those complaints were not without founda-

⁷⁹ Baltic Governor-General to Livonian Fiscal Office, 24 August 1832 (LVVA, 77. f. 15., 481. l., 1–1v. lpp).

⁸⁰ LVVA, 77. f., 15. apr., 481. l., 19–19v, 31–31v, 50–51. lpp.; 186. f., 3. apr., 34. l., 166–166v, 175–177v. lpp.

⁸¹ Livonian Fiscal Office to land survey commission, 24 May 1834 (LVVA, 186. f., 3. apr., 34. l., 303–304. lpp.).

⁸² Vice-Governor to Baltic Governor-General, 24 May 1834 (EAA f. 2054, n. 1, s. 183); report of the economy department of the Livonian Fiscal Office, 18 April 1833 (LVVA, 77. f., 15. apr., 481. l., 35–40. lpp.).

⁸³ LVVA, 77. f., 15. apr., 482. l.

tion.⁸⁴ The latter illustrates how Kiselev reforms had changed the attitudes of state officials towards peasants and their right to have a say in their matters.

Peasants' supplications could elicit new legislation, but not necessarily in the interests of the suppliants. Even after the liberation of serfs, calculating cottagers' *corvée* was based on the agrarian law of 1804. Cottagers' supplications to various bodies and the fact that the district court used to free those cottagers from *corvée* who performed a man-day once a week for the manor lord,⁸⁵ actuated the bodies responsible for administration of state domains to review existing regulations. Pursuant to new rules, the estate administration had the right to conclude a contract of *corvée* rent with cottagers living on farmland or manor land, in the first case an agreement had to be reached about the manor lord's compensation to farm heads for the work of cottagers.⁸⁶ The labor dues of cottagers and farmers alike were to be based on "a free agreement" between the two parties concerned. Hence the resolution of conflicts depended on the negotiation and compromise skills of the concerned parties. Although according to the rules applicable from 1796, stating that male cottagers perform one *corvée* day without a horse per week was declared invalid with the law of 1819, it was very difficult to find some adequate measurable basis for their (labour) dues since the size and value of their plots was unknown and they also had access to communal lands. The new regulation did not stop the flood of supplications from cottagers; instead it increased potential intra-community conflicts between farm heads and cottagers. In 1839, Governor-General Pahlen required the parish courts of mainland Livonia together with the district commissioners to determine the amount of *corvée* of cottagers for the benefit of farm houses *resp.* estates. As a result, the order from the Livonian Fiscal Office from 1 January 1840 calls for all the cottagers to perform annually 23 *corvée* days without a horse in exchange for firewood and the right to pasture.⁸⁷

Supplications drew attention to cases where rules in force were not respected and thus contributed to the actual functioning of protective

⁸⁴ Livonian Office of State Domains to land survey commission, 24 June 1846 (LVVA, 186. f., 3. apr., 171. l., 199. lp).

⁸⁵ Lust, *Pärisorjast päriskohaomanikuks*, 58–59; Pärnu district court to Baltic Governor-General, 3 February 1830 (EAA, f. 2054, n. 1, s. 96, l. 2–3).

⁸⁶ *Ibidem*. See also Livonian Fiscal Office's precept to Saaremaa economic administration, 21 August 1830 (EAA, f. 310, n. 1, s. 48, l. 36v–38v), and the placard of the Saaremaa economic administration from 31.05.1833 (LVVA, 185. f., 9. apr., 401. l., 21–21v. lpp.). The latter had to be read out from the pulpit by local priests in Estonian to the peasants.

⁸⁷ Lust, *Pärisorjast päriskohaomanikuks*, 58.

measures towards state peasants. The inheritance case concerning a prosperous Sumbaki farmhouse between the widow of the former farm head and the Holstre leaseholder gave rise to new general guidelines. They stated that from that time on state estates, one should follow the principle based on the opinion of the Ministry of Finance, according to which the farmstead is left to the heir of the former farm head, although the law from 1819 states that under the given circumstances the tenancy agreement would be terminated.⁸⁸ This precedent was used later to settle similar disputes.⁸⁹

Even if government officials held the estate administrator's actions in a specific matter to be lawful and founded, the complaint could still evoke measures to improve the overall welfare in the community. For example, though the investigation proved that the complaints of peasants from Häädemeeste to the Governor-General in 1834 that they had been evicted arbitrarily from their houses and denied support by the estate manager had no basis in fact, the Governor-General still requested the Livonian Fiscal Office to undertake measures to combat poverty among local peasants who were heavily in arrears with their manor lord (allowing them to cut firewood from the state woods for selling, etc.). The fiscal office proposed starting land settlement and assessment, temporarily allowing to cut 50 (later 100) cords of firewood annually. The estate administrator was obliged to help peasants, desist from oppression, and be more relaxed about corvée requirements, etc. The district commissioner was obliged to report annually about the effectiveness of these measures to the fiscal office.⁹⁰

Concluding remarks

The Livonian state peasants achieved some success in their demands vis-à-vis the manor lord, whether by supplications to government officials or complaints to the courts. Although their supplications, irrespective of their addressees, were in most cases settled by parish and district courts anyway (as was the case of peasants on noble manors), and the Governor-General seldom refused his approval of their judgements in order not to undermine the court's authority, it cannot be said that state peasants did

⁸⁸ Baltic Governor-General to Livonian Fiscal Office, 10 December 1834 (EAA, f. 2054, n. 1, s. 286).

⁸⁹ See for example the case of widowed Ann Matzsohn from Kollope farmstead (Aidu) at Pärnu district court in 1838 (EAA, f. 2054, n. 1, s. 508).

⁹⁰ Supplication to the Baltic Governor-General, 13 February 1834 (LVVA, 77. f., 15. apr., 492. l., 2–3v. lpp.); Baltic Governor-General to Livonian Fiscal Office, 23. April 1834 (*ibidem*, 23–24. lpp.); proposed measures of the latter, 1 June 1834 (*ibidem*, 43–44v. lpp).

not receive protection from the arbitrariness of manor lords. As long as the peasants' requests were justified within the general confines of the existing legislation, they did not go unheeded. As a consequence, the leaseholders were reminded of laws in force and were required to adhere to them. The supplications might have received positive results since on many occasions authorities, including the district commissioner, studied the supplications themselves and the intervention by the Governor-General might have indirectly influenced the decision-making process. Frequent revisions guaranteed constant supervision over manor lord-peasant relationships.

So, as it has been shown above, the peasants' supplications were effective only as long as they did not question the existing agrarian order. The supplications forced the rulers to react to specific problems.⁹¹ For a general improvement of the situation of peasants, however, exploitative and oppressive legislation had to be changed. Some confirmation that resistance in its various forms (supplications in combination with resistance, disobedience, etc.) could affect policy-making and legislation is to be found in the Kiselev reforms in the 1840s–50s, which addressed some of the main issues constantly raised in supplications. Supplications were collected from peasants also in 1837, shortly before the establishment of the new state estate management rules, and according to H. Strods those complaints played an important part in the improvement of the situation of peasants.⁹²

State authorities tried to deal with peasants' supplications at the lowest possible level. The aim in that case was to restore peace after social conflicts and not strive for punishment. The possibility that peasant protest could effect real change in the Baltic provinces was minimal since the power imbalance among different social classes was too significant. Upon accepting the peasants' complaints and discussing them, authorities tried to localize and solve the conflicts and to avoid revolts (to that end an office of peasant affairs was established by Governor-General), but during the nineteenth century a political aspect was added. Under the threat of disorder and the peasantry's economic collapse, the central authorities began to assume a much more important role in regulating the relationships.

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⁹¹ J. Kahk has also argued that peasants' supplications and protests forced the rulers to deal with setting limits to corvée requirements (Kahk, "Eesti talurahva maailmavaatest", 11).

⁹² Strods, *Kurzemes*, 39. In Courland, state peasants used intensively the opportunity to petition. In Saaremaa, by contrast, their supplications related to some minor issues (EAA, f. 296, n. 9, s. 425).

KOKKUVÕTE: *Liivimaa kroonutalupoegade kaebused 1820–1841*

Kaebeõigus andis lihtrahvale võimaluse edastada oma soove ja tahtmisi valitsejale. Artiklis käsitletakse küsimust, kuidas said Liivimaa kroonutalupojad anda võimudele teada oma soovidest ajavahemikul pärisorjuse kaotamisest kuni kroonumõisate uue valitsemiskorra kehtestamiseni. Järgides uuemaid suundumusi talurahva ajaloos, mis keskenduvad pigem sotsiaalsetele praktikatele kui seadusnormidele, on artikli tähelepanu keskmes küsimus, kuidas ja kui tulemuslikult kasutasid talupojad neile erinevate õigusaktidega lubatud kaebeõigust ja -võimalust. Töö tugineb kroonutalupoegade mõisavastastele kaebustele Läti Riiklikust Ajalooarhiivist ja Ajalooarhiivist Tartust.

Liivimaa kroonutalupoegade mõisavastased kaebused nii kroonuametnikele kui ka kohtuasutustele olid tulemuslikud seni, kuni nad nõudsid kehtiva korra järgimist ja mõisniku omavoli piiramist. Kaebamise tagajärjel tuletati mõisarentnikele meelde kehtivaid seadusi ja määrusi ning nõuti neist kinnipidamist. Kaebuste tagajärjekusele aitas ilmselt kaasa ka nende kontroll kroonuametnike poolt; samuti võis kindralkubernerite sekkumine vaidlusküsimuse lahendamisse kaudselt mõjutada langetatud otsuseid. Mõisate revisjonid tagasid pideva järelevalve mõisa-talu suhete üle kroonuvaldustes.

Riigivõim püüdis viia talurahva kaebuste lahendamise võimalikult lokaalsele tasandile. Seejuures oli eesmärk leevendada pingeid ja omavolitsenud mõisnikke mitte karistada. Balti provintssides oli võimalus, et talurahva vastupanu kaebuste vormis suudaks esile kutsuda tõsisemaid muutusi, klassijõudude ebasoodsa vahekorra tõttu väike ja võimud püüdsid talupoegade kaebusi vastu võttes ja arutades tekkinud konflikte lokaliseerida ja rahutusi vältida. Kuigi talurahva olukorra parandamine eeldas talurahvast kurnava ja rõhuva agraarkorralduse muutmist, said nad oma kaebuste abil sundida valitsevaid kihte tegelema vähemalt üksikküsimustega (teoorjuse normid, vabadike teokohustus jne). Et talurahva vastupanu oma eri vormides (kaebustest vastuhakkudeni) suutis mõjutada riigivõimude poliitikat ja seadusandlust näitab see, et 1840.–50. aastatel kroonuvaldustes läbi viidud nn Kisseljovi reformid puudutasid mitmeid neist probleemidest, mida talupojad olid oma kaebustes korduvalt tõstatanud.