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الموضوع: شهادة نشر بحث

بالإشارة إلى بحثكم المقدم للنشر في المجلة والموسوم ب: historical demography

يسرني إعلامكم بأن هيئة التحرير قد قررت قبول بحثكم الذي ورد إلينا للنشر؛ وقد نشر في العدد (المجلد 17، العدد 05) في شهر: نوفمبر من سنة: 2025، وذلك في ضوء نتيجة تقييم المحكمين الإيجابية التي وردت إلينا، شاكرين لكم اهتمامكم بتقديم إنتاجكم العلمي إلى مجلة دراسات وأبحاث (جامعة الجلفة)، والمجلة تتمنى لكم كل التوفيق في جهودكم البحثية، ويسرها النظر في بحوث أخرى ترد منكم في مجال اختصاصها واهتماماتها البحثية. وتفضلوا بقبول وافر التقدير والاحترام،،،

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Historical Demography

الديموغرافيا التاريخية

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Abstract:

This article explores the development of historical demography as a scholarly field situated at the intersection of statistical analysis and historical inquiry. It focuses on the study of past population structures through the family reconstitution method pioneered by Louis Henry. The article highlights the methodological significance of this discipline in reconstructing individual life trajectories based on parish records, genealogies, and population censuses. It also demonstrates how this approach contributed to uncovering patterns of fertility, marriage, and mortality in pre-industrial Europe. Furthermore, the article addresses the theoretical and methodological challenges faced by the field, particularly concerning the reliability of historical sources and the limitations of their temporal and geographical coverage

Keywords: Demography ; Histirical Demography ; Family Reconstitution.

المخلص:

يتناول هذا المقال تطوّر الديموغرافيا التاريخية كفرع معرفي يتقاطع فيه التحليل الإحصائي بالبحث التاريخي، ويركّز على دراسة البنى السكانية الماضية من خلال منهج إعادة تشكيل الأسر الذي أسّسه لويس هنري. كما يُبرز الأهمية المنهجية لهذا التخصص في إعادة بناء السير الحياتية للأفراد اعتمادًا على سجلات الأبرشيات وسجلات الأنساب والتعدادات السكانية. ويُظهر كيف ساهم هذا المنهج في الكشف عن أنماط الخصوبة، والزواج، والوفيات في أوروبا ما قبل المرحلة الصناعية. ويناقش المقال أيضًا التحديات النظرية والمنهجية التي واجهت هذا الحقل، لا سيما ما يتعلق بمصداقية المصادر التاريخية ومحدودية تغطيتها الزمنية والجغرافية.

الكلمات المفتاحية: ديموغرافيا؛ ديموغرافيا تاريخية؛ تقنية إعادة تشكيل الأسر.

1. INTRODUCTION

Demography is defined as the scientific study of populations, a term derived from two Greek components: *Demo*, meaning "people" or "population," and *Graphia*, meaning "description" or "writing." Together, they convey the notion of describing or documenting populations. The term *demography* was first introduced by the French scholar **Achille Guillard** in 1855 in his book "*Elements of Human Statistics, or Comparative Demography*", reflecting his commitment to establishing human statistics as a distinct branch of knowledge.

As a statistical science, demography focuses on examining the size, distribution, and composition of populations, alongside identifying key demographic phenomena—such as births, deaths, fertility, and migration—and assessing their impact on social and spatial change. This analysis relies

on quantitative methods that help to reveal underlying demographic patterns and trends. From this foundation emerged a significant connection between demography and history. The data gathered across specific and consecutive periods allow scholars to reconstruct the demographic landscape of the past, providing insights into its direction, scale, and intensity. This evolution led to the emergence of **historical demography** in the mid-nineteenth century—a discipline dedicated to studying the demographic characteristics of historical populations within their broader social contexts.

Although early research in historical demography initially attempted to apply conventional demographic methods to the reconstruction of demographic history, scholars quickly recognized that the nature of their sources, documents, and research topics necessitated the adoption of distinct methodologies and analytical techniques,

different from those used in contemporary demography.

This raises several core questions: What is historical demography? How did it develop? And what are the principal methods and techniques it employs to study past populations?

Accordingly, the purpose of this article is to examine how modern demography laid the groundwork for the emergence of historical demography, to identify the primary sources used for data collection in this field, and to outline the main methodological and analytical approaches upon which it relies.

2. The Emergence and Development of Historical Demography

Historical demography is considered a branch of demography that deals with the study of populations in the past, meaning it draws its substance from the past. Historical demography cannot be confined to the statistical study of populations and their measurable characteristics and behaviors; it is also concerned with studying populations in terms of their movements, composition, spatial distribution, the crises, epidemics, famines, and disasters they experienced, as well as systems of marriage, mortality, inheritance, and more. According to **André Nouchi**, it "is not only concerned with knowing the broad lines of the demographic evolution of a specific human group but also with charting the history of the health development of this population, including diseases and epidemics, and studying crises and Internal and international migrations." (حالي، 2014، ص9)

For his part, the historian **Fernand Braudel** went so far as to consider demography one of history's auxiliary disciplines when he addressed the relationship between history and other human sciences. Hence, historical demography is a manifestation of history's absorption of these sciences (حالي، 204، ص12). This was not previously acknowledged, as both fields (demography and history) believed they had the right to lead. As **Pierre Goubert** said, "the old lovebirds were not childhood friends". Before 1944, historians, at least in France, showed only superficial

and intermittent interest in population issues. This was confirmed by Louis Henry in 1924, who stated that population problems were not well-known and were left to arithmeticians, statisticians, and a few health scientists.

With the exception of a few pioneers like Levasseur or Esmonin, and a small number of medievalists who worked with remnants of tax records and some old censuses, history, especially concerning the 16th to 18th centuries, remained confined to ethics and politics. When some historians raised questions about the population size of a city or region, they relied on printed sources rather than original documents, often picking up a figure here or there without scrutiny. In the provinces, local researchers would browse parish registers and create approximate genealogies. On the other hand, demographers were confined to administrative circles; they dominated the official statistics agencies and remained enclosed within them. Demography did not enter the university as other sciences did after the abandonment of the old school.

Although it is widely accepted that historical demography was established by the French demographer Louis Henry in the 1950s, interest in population history had existed long before the twentieth century, and many researchers engaged in the study of past population changes and made great contributions to the development of historical demography. As early as the seventeenth century, John Graunt (1620-1674) already critically examined available demographic data. His insightful analysis led to the publication of a landmark study, *Natural and Political Observations Made upon the Bills of Mortality* in 1662, which in many ways laid the foundation for the development of demography. Thomas Robert Malthus also systematically examined demographic data available to him, and published, between 1798 and 1826, six editions of his famous treatise, *An Essay in the Principle of Population*. Malthus's population theory, though very controversial, has profoundly influenced the intellectual thinking, especially the development of

population thoughts, in the world over the following two hundred years.

By the early twentieth century, interest in historical demography had grown significantly enough for a Commission for Historical Demography to be formed in 1928 under the auspices of the International Congress of Historical Sciences. The number of scholars working on historical demography and related issues continued to increase.

Some researchers also started to explore the potential of using surviving parish records of births, marriages, and burials in the study of population history. In the 1940s, for example, Hannes Hyrenius, a Swedish demographer, analyzed parish registers and applied methods similar to those used by Henry a decade later. The impact of Hyrenius' work was rather limited, however, partly because it was published in Swedish, and appeared during the Second World War. A great change took place after the war. Historical demography established itself as an academic discipline in the 1950s and soon entered a period of rapid development.(Zhongwei, 2010, pp40-41).

2.1. The Emergence and Development of Historical Demography in France

In France, as in most developed countries, the sudden return to high birth rates after World War II was unexpected and came as a great shock to demographers. They saw it as a direct challenge to the prevailing theoretical models that linked fertility decline to industrial and cultural modernization. Even before this phenomenon was factually observed through data, some indicators of the shift had appeared during the war years, raising the question of understanding the determinants of reproductive behavior in Western societies.

This challenge was not merely theoretical. In France, the population issue took on a clear political dimension, especially against the backdrop of the shock of the 1940 defeat, which was often attributed to

demographic weakness. Consequently, the state established new demographic institutions, including the National Institute for Demographic Studies (INED), founded in 1945. In this context, the state's goal was not only to understand the population but also to influence it by formulating an effective population policy. The INED was intended to function as a dual instrument: for research on one hand, and for guidance on the other.

For Henry, who joined the institute in its early days, this mission required establishing a modern demographic science capable of understanding population phenomena in their long-term context. He later wrote: "We must build a precise knowledge of the historical changes in reproductive behavior in order to understand contemporary fertility movements, instead of merely comparing them with assumed theoretical models".(Rosental, 2003, p103-136).

In his quest to understand the modern population boom, Henry faced a major obstacle: the scarcity of contemporary data suitable for detailed analysis. Demographic studies at the time relied on statistical data published by the public administration, such as general fertility rates or age-specific birth rates, which were insufficient to answer fundamental questions about individual reproductive behavior. What was missing, from Henry's perspective, was the ability to track reproductive behavior at the household level to deduce the relationship between birth order, marriage duration, birth spacing, and influential social factors. For this, censuses or aggregated community-level indicators were not enough; sources of an individual and longitudinal nature were essential.

However, despite the existence of civil status records in France since 1792, access to detailed data remained limited due to administrative restrictions, a lack

of systematic archiving, and negligence in the preservation of some records. Faced with this deficit, it was logical to return to older sources: church registers, which covered baptisms, marriages, and burials from the 16th and 17th centuries.

This return to the past was not merely a choice of necessity but a methodological one. Henry saw in traditional societies—which had not yet experienced voluntary control over reproduction—an ideal model for studying "natural fertility," that is, fertility unaffected by cultural or economic constraints on reproductive behavior. He thus formulated the hypothesis that these societies, despite poverty and limited medical tools, were subject to scientifically understandable demographic laws. From this emerged the need to recover historical data and analyze it with modern demographic methods, which paved the way for the establishment of historical demography as an independent discipline. Louis Henry stated in this regard: "It may seem strange that, to answer the two fundamental questions: 'Where are we?' and 'Where are we going?', we first start with a third question: 'Where were we yesterday and the day before?' Yet, this reference to the past is necessary, because it alone makes it possible to understand tomorrow".

2.2. The Emergence and Development of Historical Demography in England

Another milestone in the development of historical demography was the founding of Cambridge Group for the History of Population and Social Structure in 1964. As its name suggests, research activities at the Cambridge Group concentrated, particularly in the early years, largely on the following two areas: population trends in historical England and their inter-relationship with socio-economic changes; and micro-social structure, especially household formation and composition, and its impact on the society.

Work on population history at the Cambridge Group also started with family reconstitution. E. A. Wrigley published his family reconstitution results for Colyton, an English parish in East Devon, in 1966 (Wrigley 1966a). The paper immediately attracted the attention of demographers and historians and greatly promoted the development of historical demography. Wrigley and his colleagues were aware that findings derived from the family reconstitution for a small area were likely to be affected by random variations that limited the broader relevance of the results. They therefore launched a much larger investigation

Over the next three decades, researchers at the Cambridge Group coordinated family reconstitution of Anglican registers of many English parishes, which were the most important data source for the investigation of demographic changes in England before the modern census started. The work of the Cambridge Group was particularly concentrated on 26 parishes where better registers were available, and this led to the reconstruction of their population history between 1580 and 1837. The results of this reconstruction, as Wrigley and his colleagues evidently show, 'are representative not only of the demographic situation of the parishes from which the data were drawn, but also of the country as a whole'. Their analysis of past demographic behaviors and their outcomes has been conducted in such detail that now much more has been 'known about many aspects of English demography in the parish register period than about the post-1837 period when the Registrar-General collected and published information'. Today, English Population History from Family Reconstitution 1580-1837 is widely seen as one of the most significant and influential books ever published in historical demography. Because of the vast amount of work involved in family reconstitution, it is very difficult to apply the method to a national or sub-national population with a large size. (Zhongwei, 2010, p44).

2.3. Historical Demography across different Countries

Before 1945, the study of population history was a German specialty. Scholars such as Karl Bücher, Julius Beloch, Paul Mombert, and Erich Keyser founded a veritable school, producing numerous books and theses (some of which still hold value today), not only in German universities but also in neighboring countries like Austria, Hungary, Switzerland, Denmark, and Sweden. Belgium joined this current through the works of Alfred Hansay, Henri Pirenne, Joseph Cuvelier, Arthur Cosmans, and Roger Mols. This school was particularly distinguished for publishing the oldest population censuses and for analyzing the growth of cities.(Imhof, 1976, p77-108). In Canada, specifically in the province of Quebec, researchers like Hubert Charbonneau applied Henry's method to Catholic peasant communities, taking advantage of the rich and systematic records left by the clergy. This contributed to the establishment of what is known today as the "Quebec Population Register Program," which has become a global reference. In other countries, such as the Netherlands and Italy, researchers adapted to the nature of their local records and invested in building massive historical databases, often with the help of developing computer technology. In the United States, despite a weak tradition of birth and death registration before the 19th century, projects like the "Historical Social Data" project emerged, which sought to integrate censuses with civil status records in an attempt to apply the method to diverse American societies.

In East Asia, studies applying the family reconstitution method to family records in China and Japan began in the 1990s. This occurred despite the different nature of the documents there, which demonstrates the conceptual flexibility of this model and its ability to adapt to different archival cultures.

3. Sources of Historical Demography

Historical demography relies on the use of special sources. In Europe and in countries with populations of European origin, it is primarily based on old church registers in which priests recorded baptisms, marriages, and burials. Given the particular nature of

these sources, historical demographers focused on family reconstitution, which enabled them to achieve very rich results. For non-European populations, the same type of source was also used in Japan. In addition to church registers, genealogies preserved within notable families can also be utilized. Old nominative lists, often created for tax or military purposes, can also be used, although they do not permit analyses of the same richness.

3.1.Parish Registers

Parish registers, which originated in some Italian cities during the Middle Ages, are among the oldest sources used for documenting vital events like baptisms, marriages, and burials. This practice gradually spread throughout Western Europe, especially France and England, from the 16th century onwards, where it played a pivotal role in preserving population information over centuries.

In France, for example, parish registers went through four main historical stages, as recorded in the book by Garno, which can be summarized as follows:

- **1539 Edict of Villers-Cotterêts:** The king issued an order to generalize the registration of baptisms by the priests of the French kingdom. This practice had been initiated earlier by some bishops but remained difficult to implement, especially in the context of the 16th-century Wars of Religion (as Protestants were, of course, not registered in Catholic records).
- **1579 Edict of Blois:** The king now required priests to record the "three rites" (baptism, marriage, and burial) and ordered that the register be deposited annually at the nearest court. This practice thereby became more of a political surveillance tool than a religious one. However, the application of this edict remained confined to areas where the king was able to enforce it.
- **1667 Edict of Saint-Germain-en-Laye (or Code Louis):** Under a now stronger royal authority, the previous rules were enforced and clarified precisely. It was

required to keep the register in two copies: one remaining in the parish, the other delivered to the king's representative (the intendant or other). Furthermore, the content of the registers was standardized through precise procedural rules, particularly regarding witnesses, bringing the register into a formal legal framework.

- **1736 Royal Declaration:** A royal declaration clarified the rules of the "Code Louis" and obliged priests to maintain the two copies simultaneously. Some had been content to copy the register at the end of the year, which led to a large number of errors. Thus, an attempt to standardize the quality of statistical data becomes apparent. (Grasland, 2023, p29)

From the above, it is clear that the process of collecting statistical data was not generalized across the entire kingdom of France until 1667. This led to the standardization of the content of the registers, transforming them into administrative documents rather than religious ones, thereby cementing the rise of bureaucracy and a form of universal public law, where every individual was recorded regardless of lineage, sex, or wealth.

Despite their initial simplicity, the level of detail in these registers varied by time and place, later coming to include precise data about individuals and their families, which enabled researchers to use them for family reconstitution and analysis of population structure. Nevertheless, these registers have methodological limitations; they are Christian religious records that include only those belonging to the church and exclude adherents of other faiths. They also do not provide comprehensive information about the population, residence patterns, or mobility, as they only record those who actually participated in religious rites. Despite this shortcoming, similar registers appeared in non-Christian societies, such as Japan, where some Buddhist temples maintained civil records known as *Kakocho* or "Books of the Past".

3.2. Population Registers and Census-type Materials

The census is currently considered a standard source of demographic data collected within a limited time frame and covering all persons in a country or a specific part thereof. It is a periodic process during which the population is officially counted, and the obtained results are then analyzed and published. Censuses are conducted periodically, according to United Nations recommendations, once every 10 years.

However, many ancient societies collected data on their populations to obtain reliable information for military recruitment and taxation. Religious authorities also gathered required population data by maintaining and regularly updating population registers. Thanks to these efforts, a vast amount of historical population data has been compiled in many countries.

The world's first census was conducted in 3440 BC for the purpose of waging battles and planning for war. China also has a long history of population censuses, surpassing those in Europe, with population registration systems dating back 2000 years that became increasingly comprehensive over time. There are more than 400 national population figures available for China covering the period from the 7th to the early 20th century. The abundance of records may be partly due to the widespread use of paper in China.

The population Registers and Census-type materials were generally maintained for governmental administrative purposes such as tax collection but they might also have religious purpose Shumon Aratami Cho, for example, literally meaning « religious faith investigation registers », these registers were widely used during Japan's Tokugawa period to control the spread of Christianity, they recorded religious beliefs and detailed demographic information or household members, similarly catechetical examination registers, which are essentially a kind of population register, were produced and used by clergymen in Sweden to identify eligible parishioners whose knowledge of the Bible was to be examined, listings of inhabitants were also compiled by clergymen in some parts of England. (Zhongwei, 2010, p51)

As for Arab and Islamic countries, they did not have systematic registration of demographic events. Instead, matters related to marriages, births, deaths, and lineages were recorded when needed for social and scientific fields other than population studies, such as assessing the reliability of narrators, determining the death dates of scholars, documenting tribal genealogies, and managing the administrative and financial organization of the Islamic state through the creation of *diwan* registers (such as the army diwan, the tax diwan, and the stipends diwan). We often read in historical accounts that a certain person was born in such-and-such year, as they dated some population events by major occurrences and incidents preserved in their collective memory. (حالي، 2013، ص58).

3.3. Family or Lineage Genealogies

Genealogies are written records that document the members of a family or lineage, showing descent from ancestors through a sequence of generations. This practice originated long ago and is found in many societies, particularly in regions settled by immigrants or where strong lineage bonds were formed. Genealogies have played a pivotal social and cultural role and have varied in their form and level of detail from one place to another.

In their simplest form, genealogies mention the names of individuals and their relationships to one another, but they may also include detailed demographic and social information such as dates of birth, death, and marriage, as well as academic and political achievements. For this reason, genealogies are a rich source for historical research, especially for studying social mobility, population structure, and genetic diversity.

Genealogies are distinct from other population records in several respects, most notably that the individuals listed often share a common ancestor and are not typically bound by strict geographical or religious limits. Although they do not provide comprehensive data on the total population, they are very useful for studying geographical and lineage movements,

especially when information on migration patterns is available.

However, despite these benefits, genealogies are susceptible to biases resulting from the nature of their collection. They have often been created over multiple generations and under varying conditions, and long periods may separate the occurrence of an event and its recording. They also frequently reflect motivations of family glorification, which can lead to the exclusion of certain individuals, such as children who died at an early age, women in patriarchal societies, or those who brought shame to the family.

3.4. Other Data Sources

Parish registers, population censuses, and family and lineage records are among the most frequently used sources in historical population studies. However, other data sources are available and can be used to study populations. The researcher T.H. Hollingsworth pointed to a wide range of documents such as bills of mortality, financial documents, military records, eyewitness estimates, archaeological records, genetic records, and pilgrimage registers, which are important tools for understanding population transformations over time.

Korean clan genealogies have been kept from the late 15th century, and often include details not available in Chinese genealogies, including social status and details of daughters.

Pilgrimage registers have been kept in northern India for centuries. As each generation of a family makes a pilgrimage to a traditional place of pilgrimage, any updates to the family history, such as births, marriages and deaths, are recorded on long scrolls by pundits whose sole task is upkeep of these records. Some of these genealogies stretch back 20 generations.

Japanese religious faith registers were designed to assist in the extinction of Christianity in Japan from the time the religion was banned in 1638. They recorded the name, age and relationship to the head of the household of all people throughout Japan, and the Buddhist temple with which the head of the household was associated. Although

designed as a tool to help stamp out a religion, the rich data recorded for every family is a unique and lengthy series of records for historical demographers, placing each individual within their own family context.

Registers of 'virtuous women' and 'faithful widows' in China gave information on the date of death, age at death, number of children, age of parents-in-law and other details, thereby enabling calculations of mortality and fertility to be made.(Day, 2018, p10).

Moreover, regional records play a crucial role in historical demographic research. Examples include Chinese land registers, migration data, and ship manifests, all of which offer valuable and precise qualitative insights, despite their limited geographic coverage and the methodological challenges associated with their use.

4.Methods and Techniques

Since the beginning of the 20th century, demographers, following the lead of historians, have successfully made historical demography rely on both quantitative and qualitative approaches through the use of Longitudinal Analysis, Cross-sectional Analysis, Retrospective Analysis, and the technique of family reconstitution using slips, which is considered the most important technique in historical demographic studies.

4.1.Longitudinal Analysis

This method allows for the tracking of a demographic phenomenon within a specific generation or age group (a cohort) over time, either from birth (analysis by age) or from the occurrence of a founding event (analysis by duration). The phenomena studied can be either recurrent (like birth or migration) or non-recurrent (like death or first marriage). This type of analysis focuses on two main dimensions: the first is **intensity**, or the prevalence of the phenomenon within the studied cohort (such as the proportion of unmarried individuals at a certain age or the rate of divorce after a number of years of marriage). The second is **timing**, or the distribution of the phenomenon's occurrence

over time (such as the distribution of deaths by age).

In historical demography, this method is applied using data extracted from historical sources such as church registers (baptisms, marriages, burials), civil records, census statistics, and continuous population registers to reconstruct the life courses of individuals and families within specific historical and social contexts. The family reconstitution method introduced by the Frenchman Louis Henry contributed significantly to the development of longitudinal analysis, such as analyzing the first birth in relation to marriage duration, or remarriage according to age at widowhood. As a result, there is now a more precise understanding of legitimate fertility in the 18th century compared to the 20th century, at least concerning about a hundred villages and some small towns in France.

4.2.Cross-Sectional Analysis

Cross-sectional analysis refers to the study of a demographic phenomenon during a specific period of time (usually a calendar year). It is also known as synchronic analysis or "moment" or "period" analysis. This type of analysis examines all age groups (cohorts) that are likely to be exposed to the phenomena of interest during that period. It differs from longitudinal analysis, which focuses on the evolution of demographic phenomena over time within a single generation or cohort. The cross-sectional approach in demographic research developed before the longitudinal approach due to its reliance on analyzing statistical data collected over a relatively short period, whereas longitudinal analyses require data extending over long periods or even generations.

In historical demography, cross-sectional analysis refers to the study of demographic phenomena within a specific population at a particular moment in the past, using historical data available for that period. This approach is used to examine population structure and phenomena such as fertility, mortality, or marriage in a specific historical period, without tracking individuals or families over

time. This type of analysis is characterized by:

- Reliance on **contemporaneous sources** such as census records, church registers (baptism, marriage, burial), or administrative documents, which provide data at a single point in time or over a short period.
- Use of **period-specific indicators** (such as birth or death rates in a given year).
- Ability to describe **social or demographic patterns** related to the historical context, such as analyzing differences between regions or social classes.

Cross-sectional analysis is very useful when longitudinal data is unavailable or difficult to construct due to a lack of documentation or varying quality of sources, and it is often the first step in understanding the demographic structure before undertaking deeper longitudinal analyses.

4.3. Retrospective Analysis

A method used to study demographic phenomena by collecting data on events that occurred in the past, starting from the state of the population at a specific moment (often the present or a later reference point). In this type of analysis, the researcher begins with a current temporal reference point (for example, the census year) and employs retrospective reconstruction to identify prior events in individuals' lives, such as marriage, childbirth, migration, and so forth.

In historical demography, retrospective analysis is applied to reconstruct demographic event sequences for individuals or families based on historical sources such as parish registers (baptisms, marriages, burials), civil or military records, and property or judicial documents.

This method has been particularly important in the technique of family reconstitution, which links individual records over past periods to form continuous family histories. It is also used in the analysis of fertility or mortality when complete longitudinal data are not available.

As an example, in historical fertility studies, it is impossible to fully analyze the fertility of a generation of women until they have

reached the end of their reproductive years (typically age 50). In such cases, retrospective analysis is employed to infer fertility rates from earlier recorded events.

4.4. Family Reconstitution Technique

Since the 19th century, demographic statistics began to acquire a more systematic character, but the limitations of the data constrained analytical possibilities, especially in historical studies. In contrast, the 18th century offered richer sources thanks to church registers, which allowed researchers like Pierre Goubert and Louis Henry to develop an original method: "family reconstitution". This method is based on compiling baptism, marriage, and burial records onto nominative cards from which family files are constructed, allowing for the longitudinal study of the demographic behavior of families. This technique enabled the analysis of fundamental elements such as marital fertility, child mortality, and age at marriage, among others, and revealed unexpected societal characteristics like the prevalence of nuclear families and late marriage.

Although the method requires painstaking effort and a long time, it has allowed for the construction of a precise and comparable database. Within a French national project, this method was applied to 40 rural parishes, with the understanding that its results remain approximate at the regional level and do not include urban populations. This method has a great capacity to renew historical research when combined with other sources, such as tax records, allowing for the study of the relationship between demographic behavior and economic and social variables.

Louis Henry founded this approach on the traditions of genealogy, but he transformed it into a systematic, quantitative analytical tool, using statistical instruments and rigorous criteria. He began an early application of it in the Crulai region, a model of a traditional French village. From just a single case, Henry was able to outline the features of pre-revolutionary French peasant society, which led to his work being subsequently replicated in hundreds of studies.

The idea of family reconstitution consists of tracking individuals through baptism, marriage, and burial records and linking these records together to form "family cards" that enable the study of family life longitudinally, i.e., over time. Thus, it becomes possible to follow reproductive behavior, the timing of marriage, the ages of parents, the intervals between births, and even early deaths within the same family unit. This methodology was entirely new in the science of demography, but it was based to a large extent on the genealogical sense—the art of tracing lineages—which was known to some local historians. The fundamental difference, as Henry saw it, was that these historians stopped at the descriptive aspect, whereas his goal was systematic, quantitative analysis that was generalizable and comparable. He wrote in this context: "What distinguishes historical demographic work is not the collection of facts, but the formulation of rules that allow these facts to be used in the analysis of collective behavior".

5.CONCLUSION

Historical demography has demonstrated its capacity to reshape our understanding of past societies by combining quantitative analytical tools with meticulous historical inquiry. The method of family reconstitution marked a qualitative leap in the study of individual life courses within their social and demographic contexts, drawing on diverse sources such as baptism, marriage, and burial registers, census records, genealogical documents, and local archives.

However, the variety and uneven quality of these sources require researchers to exercise a high degree of critical discernment, as temporal gaps, class or geographical biases, and irregularities in record-keeping present persistent challenges to accurately reconstructing demographic realities.

Moreover, the quantitative nature of the method necessitates balancing statistical models with shifting historical contexts, in order to avoid generalizations that could lead to misleading or fragmented conclusions.

Conversely, this approach has greatly enhanced our ability to understand changes in fertility, marriage patterns, mortality rates, and social mobility over long—sometimes discontinuous—timeframes.

With the advent of computational tools and big data analysis in historical research, historical demography is now positioned to expand its geographical and temporal scope and engage with adjacent disciplines such as sociology, historical economics, and anthropology. Yet this expansion remains contingent on researchers' ability to maintain a balance between methodological rigor, historical criticism, and openness to modern tools.

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