

Antoinette Fauve-Chamoux, Ioan Bolovan and Sølvi Sogner (eds.), *A Global History of Historical Demography. Half a Century of Interdisciplinarity*. (Bern: Peter Lang, 2016). 683 p. ISBN 9783034323031.

Counting from today, more than seven billion people are living on our planet. Never before have there been so many individuals who have to define and shape their life course by making decisions within the ecological, sociocultural and economic constraints opposed by our societies. Demography studies humankind by examining these individual life courses to understand demographic processes, trends and developments. Yet, to be able to gain more understanding of these topics demographers have always looked back into time. Historians also deal with humankind, but focus on its multiple facets in the past. Yet, the last century historians also became more interested in studying life course trajectories, including their change and continuity throughout time and place in the duration and timing of major transitions between birth and death. As a result the field of historical demography developed as an interdisciplinary field where researchers of the humanities and science met and exchanged ideas. The book *A Global History of Historical Demography. Half a Century of Interdisciplinarity* describes the development of these joint interests of demography and history in people. Moreover, it gives a very broad overview of past and current debates and is therefore an excellent introduction for anyone who is interested in how and why the field developed as it did.

In the introduction and first contribution of the book the general trend of historical demography as a worldwide discipline is described. It especially focuses on the importance of international meetings, conferences and organisations, such as the SSHA and ESSHC, as places where international cooperation was established. The authors argue that because of international cooperation several na-

tional developments, such as the theoretical influence of the *Annales school* and methodical developments like family reconstitution, transformed the field of historical demography from an individual effort to a real community. Moreover, they demonstrate that nowadays the field has an united interdisciplinary perspective on how quantitative and qualitative sources and methods can and should be used. Besides these two contributions, the book includes thirty-five other contributions which describe the development of historical demography for specific countries.

For the Low Countries there are contributions on Belgium and the Netherlands. In chapter 7 Devos and Matthys describe the history of Belgian historical demography. They argue that the unique historical context, population history and rich sources attracted – and still attracts – the interest from historical demographers around the world. Four major stages in the development of historical demography are distinguished since its inception in the 1950s on the basis of the dominant use of particular methods and internal crisis caused by insights about the deficiency of current methods to answer certain research questions. Moreover, they also demonstrate that the history of the family, especially the composition of domestic groups and kin networks, became remarkably underrepresented because of these developments, while it received a lot of attention in the international literature. In chapter 26 Engelen and Van der Woude address the development of historical demography in the Netherlands. It describes – although less schematic than Devos and Matthys – the most important developments in the field from the human geographic research done at Wageningen University in the 1960s to the current research done by the NIDI and the Radboud Group for Historical Demography and Family History. However, the authors also note that the main focus on historical demography after 1850 leaves many questions about family life and life courses before 1850. Interesting is that while these contributions cover different countries, they both warn for the need to close the gap which grew between demographic history and related fields: ‘The translation of the most valuable research into accessible publications is a necessary step to keep the specialization as lively as it is now. If not, we deny other historians and the general public an insight into the most intimate aspects of human lives in the past’ (p. 488).

Although the book offers many interesting insights for people who would like to understand the development of the field of historical demography, it also has some drawbacks. For example, because the first idea to publish this book originates from 2010, most contributions could not reflect on the progress of the last five years. The major disadvantage, however, is that the reader has to compare the development of the field between specific countries himself to understand how new ideas spread in the internal community and interacted with the diverse national communities of historical demographers. In addition, the structure and content of each contribution also differs which makes it even more problemat-

ic to make comparisons. It would therefore have been beneficial if an additional chapter was written which offered an overarching overview. This could offer insight in how national developments of the field differed, overlapped and influenced each other. Lastly, it would also have been valuable if the book connected more to the recently published volume of Matthijs, Hin, Kok & Matsuo (eds.), *The Future of Historical Demography: Upside Down and Inside Out*. A welcome next step, in my opinion, would therefore be that the mentioned weaknesses are addressed in future works. Furthermore, a next generation of historical demographers could even go one step further by also investigating why certain advances in historical demography had a more significant influence in some countries than others as it could give valuable insights for future historical demographic research and international collaborations.

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