

# REVIEWS

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GOLIAN, JÁN. *KAPITOLY Z HISTORICKEJ DEMOGRAFIE: ANALÝZA CIRKEVNÝCH MATRÍK A MOŽNOSTI INTERPRETÁCIÍ* [CHAPTERS FROM HISTORICAL DEMOGRAPHY: ANALYSIS OF CHURCH REGISTERS AND POSSIBLE INTERPRETATIONS]. TRNAVA: UNIVERZITA SV. CYRILA A METODA V TRNAVE, 2024, 184 PP. ISBN 978-80-572-0426-8.

Although historical demography is a relatively new discipline, its development over the last few decades has been significant. By using quantitative methods, it has made a valuable contribution to the study of past populations and societies. The birth of scientific methods in historical demographic research is closely linked to the discovery of the church registers as a valuable source of information on population development throughout history. Church-register research is relatively well developed in Slovak historiography, but the quality varies. Compared with Western historiographies, Slovak demographical research lags in terms of both methodology and practice. From this perspective, any contribution to the research into church registers has a positive impact on historical demographic research in the territory of modern-day Slovakia.

Ján Golian is a historical demography researcher specialising in nineteenth-century sources. His textbook focuses primarily on the research area of church registers in the long nineteenth century. This period is pivotal in the development of the European population, as well as the population living in the territory of present-day Slovakia. Importantly, the textbook presents the research on church registers and their main areas, setting them into a wider methodological and interpretative context in dialogue with Western historiography.

In the first two chapters, the author outlines the key features of the research area. These include the origins of historical demography and the role of church registers within it. The second chapter establishes the necessary theoretical and methodological foundation upon which subsequent chapters build. It is important to note that the chapter focuses primarily on the methods of French and English historiography. However, in my opinion, it lacks a survey of the Czechoslovak (or, more accurately, Czech) school of historical demography, an analysis of the influence of Western studies on the field, and an explanation of reasons for the asymmetrical development of the field in countries that once shared a common state.

The third chapter deals with the Slovak historiography and its approach to church registers and their interpretation. The chapter's main thesis, as revealed by the survey, is that demographic research in Slovakia developed separately from European trends, particularly during the Marxist-historiography period. Even after 1989, significant goals in terms of population studies during the pre-statistics period were not achieved. Present-day Slovakian research in historical demography focuses primarily on local history and has evolved over the past 30 years to produce a wide range of papers and studies. This might seem a satisfactory situation where we only considering quantity. However, as the author points out, problems lie in the absence of proper methodology and the misinterpretation of church registers and other sources. This leads to unsatisfactory results or errors in local population history. According to the textbook, the three main areas of Slovak research in church registers are genealogy, microhistory and the history of epidemics. However, church registers have also been examined to analyse the confessional, ethnic and linguistic structure of the population and for linguistic research into Christian names and, to a lesser extent, surnames.

After an introductory section explaining the basic concepts and evaluating historiography and methodology, the subsequent chapters form the core of the textbook. They focus primarily on church registers as historical sources and on the application of historical demographic methods when working with them. First, the author discusses the history of record keeping, emphasizing the Council of Trent as a significant milestone in the Hungarian (and Slovak) context. Since then, the production of church registers has increased and the author provides a detailed overview of developments in each century up until 1948, when they were secularized. Alongside outlining the historical development of registers, these chapters contain sections on how the church registers were kept, their typology and the language used in them. The author also addresses the limitations of the source material from different periods, explaining how to correctly interpret the data contained within the registers.

Church registers are not the only historical sources that can be used to examine population during the pre-statistical and statistical periods. Chapters exploring population size provide an overview of population censuses from the reigns of Maria Theresa and Joseph II, as well as other sources, which reflect population size after 1869. This year marks a milestone in the history of the Hungarian (and Slovak) population, as it separates the pre-statistical and statistical periods. Church registers can be used not only to explore population size, but also the confessional, social and ethnic structure of the population. One chapter also addresses the possibilities for researching epidemics based on the exploration of church registers. The author's approach to the sources is not limited to statistics and quantitative methods; he also presents anthropological and cultural approaches, which focus more on individuals or families.

In my view, the greatest contribution of the textbook to the field is its ability to translate theoretical explanations into practice by applying historical demographic methods to specific sources. By doing so, the author provides students and the wider professional community with tools for analysing sources (especially church registers) and conducting historical demographic research that meets the standards of the discipline. The textbook presents several methods and their applications with formulas and examples with which students can practise in the application of specific methods. An aggregate analysis of church registers is presented in more detail in connection with registers, including all related issues, terminology and formulas. Another method, albeit more time-consuming, is family reconstruction, which the author presents in full. He also discusses the possibilities of historical-anthropological research, which is based on the analysis of registers and concerns the choice of first names, ethnic and linguistic minorities and other information about populations. A further area of research concerns epidemics and the methodological and interpretative issues that arise when conducting such research using church registers and other sources.

In conclusion we may say that the textbook *Chapters from Historical Demography* is an important contribution to historical demographic research in Slovakia. Rather than being merely a theoretical exercise, it provides valuable insights into the history and methodology of historical demographic research. It applies this research to sources kept in Slovakia and offers tools for studying its population, particularly during the pre-statistical period. The presentation of specific methods encourages educators to engage their students with historical population research, enabling them to conduct smaller studies on selected topics during the course. The aim of applying theoretical knowledge is reflected in the examples of sources, discussion questions and demographic-indicator calculations in the textbook. The textbook will also be of interest to the wider scientific community of historians interested in population research and working with these types of sources.

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SASHALMI, ENDRE. *RUSSIAN NOTIONS OF POWER AND STATE IN A EUROPEAN PERSPECTIVE, 1462–1725: ASSESSING THE SIGNIFICANCE OF PETER'S REIGN*. BOSTON: ACADEMIC STUDIES PRESS, 2022, 508 PP. ISBN 9781644694183.

Endre Sashalmi, in his book *Russian Notions of Power and State in a European Perspective, 1462–1725: Assessing the Significance of Peter's Reign*, builds upon his earlier Hungarian-language monograph *A hatalom és az állam problematikája Oroszországban 1462–1725 között európai perspektívából*, which he expanded in its English version with new research findings. In this work, the author strives for a scholarly understanding of the historical differences and interconnections between Russian and Western political thought – an endeavour that is particularly important today, when interest in the subject is growing and discussions on both sides are often burdened by prejudice and one-sided interpretations.

Sashalmi's book represents a significant contribution to the study of early modern Russian political thought. It focuses on the analysis of the concepts of power and state within the Russian context in comparison with those of Western Europe, drawing upon a wide range of written and visual sources as well as a rich body of secondary literature. The aim of the publication is to present the main characteristics and trajectories of political thinking in Russia. The author focuses on sources and thinkers who had a decisive influence on the understanding of power or initiated substantial changes in the study of political thought. The book therefore examines the abstract ideas of power and the state themselves, rather than their concrete manifestations in institutions or practical applications.

The publication is divided into five sections: an introduction, three extensive main parts, and an epilogue. The first of the main parts, entitled *Russia and Europe: Clarification of Terms and the Problem of the State*, forms the theoretical foundation of the work, clearly defining its methodological and conceptual framework. Sashalmi emphasizes the necessity of a comparative approach and applies the *longue durée* perspective of Fernand Braudel, which allows him to trace the continuity of ideas and mental structures. He stresses that his goal is not to write a complete history of Russian political thought, but rather to examine the conceptual world of a transitional period when the Russian political language was being shaped by both European intellectual influences and specific domestic developments. In this section, the author defines key terms, analyses their linguistic and cultural anchoring, and traces how European concepts were transformed in the Russian environment, while also showing that the Russian political vocabulary developed its own specific shades of meaning, distinct from those in the West. He first focuses on the development of Russian statehood, following the transition from the Grand Duchy of Moscow to the Russian Empire, and subsequently expands the scope through comparison with Western traditions and an analysis of the concept of the state as it evolved in Western monarchies. The text explores the role of metaphors, allegorical personifications and the European perspective in shaping the idea of the state and the formation of the Russian state narrative, as well as the particularities of Russian notions of power in the sixteenth–seventeenth centuries in comparison with Western models. The extensive first main section concludes with the ninth chapter, which reflects on the concept of *Samoderzhavie* – often regarded as the specifically Russian equivalent of sovereignty.

The second major section, entitled *Notions of Power and State in the Context of "Proprietary Dynasticism": Russia and the Western Perspective*, deals with the problem of the state and power through a comparative analysis of Russian and Western understandings of these concepts. In this context, the author examines the notion of "*proprietary dynasticism*", defined as a condition in which the Russian tsar considers the state to be his personal property. Within this part, Sashalmi also critiques the interpretation of Russian history by Richard Pipes, who compares the development of the Russian patriarchal state with Western political evolution. Sashalmi challenges Pipes's assertion that the Russian concept of statehood was uniquely tied to the person of the ruler, arguing instead that proprietary dynasticism also existed in Western Europe, particularly in France during the *ancien régime*. The text provides historical examples demonstrating that, in the early modern period, monarchs in Europe frequently linked personal rule with the state in much the same way as in Russia.

The author further argues that the principal difference between Russia and the West did not lie in the mere existence of proprietary dynasticism, but in its degree of intensity. Whereas in Western Europe the idea of the monarch's universal ownership was debated and questioned, in Russia it remained largely uncontested. The Russian legal system did not recognize the concept of absolute private property, which reinforced the tsar's universal power over land and people. Ultimately, the text suggests that patriarchalism should not be viewed as an exclusively Russian phenomenon, but as part of a broader European context. According to Sashalmi, by removing value judgments, historians can better understand Russia's development within a comparative framework.

The third main part, *The Origins of the Theory of Law and State in the Works of Feofan Prokopovich: An Intellectual from the Kievan Nest in the Service of Peter the Great*, focuses on Feofan Prokopovich, the theologian and thinker who provided the theoretical foundation for Peter the Great's reforms. By examining Prokopovich's life and writings, Sashalmi demonstrates how the Petrine era transformed the concepts of power and statehood, how the political language became increasingly secular, and how the state gradually came to be viewed as an autonomous entity, distinct from the ruler's person. According to the author, Prokopovich's works are essential to understanding the ideological shift that produced a new image of Russia – embodied in the allegorical female figure symbolizing the empire.

Russian notions of the state were deeply rooted in the belief in the divine origin of the ruler's power: the tsar was regarded as God's representative on earth, and his commands were seen as expressions of divine will. Sashalmi traces how this sacral understanding of authority evolved through written and visual sources, revealing the processes of depersonalization and secularization that accompanied the emergence of the modern state. A key element of this transformation was Westernization, which accelerated during Peter the Great's reign. Yet, as Sashalmi points out, Peter ultimately viewed the state as a means to legitimize his absolute rule. His adoption of Western political and legal concepts served not only to shape his image as a European monarch but also to justify autocracy in terms comprehensible to Europe itself.

The book concludes with an epilogue that bridges the early modern period and the present. Here, the author examines the 1993 Russian Constitution alongside Vladimir Putin's speeches, identifying a striking linguistic and conceptual continuity between the use of terms such as *gosudarstvo*, *Rossiia* and *otechestvo* and the political rhetoric of the Petrine era. Sashalmi argues that the tradition of Russian political thought has consistently equated a strong state with the preservation of order and stability – a conception that links the tsarist, Soviet and post-Soviet periods.

The monograph thus offers a comprehensive, balanced and interdisciplinary perspective on the development of Russian conceptions of state and power within the European context. The author draws on a wide variety of sources and a broad range of theoretical insights, redefining the framework for interpreting the forms of the Russian state and power in the early modern period. Combining historiography, the history of ideas, linguistics and political science, the book provides a reliable theoretical and conceptual foundation for understanding the long-term patterns of Russian statehood. At the same time, the monograph synthesizes existing knowledge, introduces new perspectives and opens up further avenues for research. It is an exceptionally valuable work not only for specialists in Russian history and political thought, but also for those interested in the general questions of the formation of statehood, power and political culture within European civilization.

The need for an impartial and scholarly examination of the historical differences and interrelations between Russian and Western political thought is especially urgent today – not only because of the growing interest sparked by current political events, but also because such analyses are indispensable for overcoming the one-sided perspectives and mutual prejudices that continue to shape the discourse on both sides.

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