

## **Lithuania between East and West: longitudinal research on households of Pivašiūnai parish**

### EXTENDED ABSTRACT

The presentation introduces a longitudinal study of 19th century families and households in the parish of Pivašiūnai, representing the southeastern part of present-day Lithuania, which was in the Vilnius Governorate during the period under review.

The theoretical framework proposed by John Hajnal in his 1965 paper on European household and family formation patterns has long been regarded as one of the cornerstones of historical family demography. According to J. Hajnal, Europe was divided roughly along a line running from St. Petersburg to Trieste, separating two distinct marriage and household systems: the so-called “Western European marriage pattern,” characterized by relatively late marriage, a high proportion of permanent celibacy and the predominance of nuclear families households, and the “Eastern European pattern,” marked by earlier marriage and the predominance of multiple families households (Hajnal 1965). J. Hajnal's theoretical framework of household and family patterns, which has long been the main theoretical model in historical family demography, received considerable criticism, particularly from scholars in Central and Eastern Europe and in Asian countries (Saito 1998, Szołtysek, Zuber-Goldstein 2009, Szołtysek 2011), and there is still a matter of debate, with no consensus reached.

Lithuania, (together with parts of Belarus, Poland and western Ukraine) occupies a particularly interesting position in this debate. J. Hajnal himself referred to this territory as a possible “transitional zone,” and later research by Mikolaj Szołtysek and his collaborators has reinforced this interpretation. Using large-scale household reconstitution data and comparative regional analysis, M. Szołtysek showed that the family and household structures in the Lithuanian-Belarusian region exhibited features of both Western and Eastern systems (Szołtysek 2008, 2015). It is also known that in the mid-19th century, nuclear families were more common than other types of families in central Lithuania, but did not constitute the majority of households, as was previously thought. The structure of peasant households was also characterized by a significant proportion of extended households (Maslauskaitė, Leinartė, Dirsytė 2021). M. Szołtysek reveals the diversity of family forms and their development patterns in historical Central and Eastern Europe and seeks to change the historically formed stereotypical marginalised view of Western scholars of Eastern European countries as societies of composite households and strict traditional values (Szołtysek 2011).

Historical households in European countries have been studied extensively over the past decades, yet little systematic data has been collected on the Baltic region. This scarcity of information has led to the marginalization of Lithuania and its neighbouring territories in broader discussions on

European family models. The main findings of this research thus provide valuable evidence from one small area in the least explored Eastern Europe, contributing to the ongoing theoretical debate on family and household structures in the past. The inclusion of Baltic region data into comparative European demographic studies not only refines our understanding of spatial diversity but also fills an empirical gap.

Lithuanian historians date the 19th century from 1795 to 1915 and associate it with the period of occupation by the Russian Empire. Lithuania did not exist as an independent state in the 19th century. Until the second half of the mid-19th century, serfdom had not yet been abolished in Lithuania. The official reform of the abolition of serfdom took place in 1861. This change had a significant impact on the material situation of peasants and directly affected their daily lives and social relations: the majority of Lithuania's population became free, had the right to dispose of their property, live where they wanted, leave to work in cities, pursue education, etc. The abolition of serfdom initiated agrarian reform in rural Lithuania, which was a key factor in industrialization. Manufacturing was reorganized in the rural areas, with not only new equipment and technologies spreading, but also innovative methods of organizing production (Bairašauskaitė et al. 2011).

The changes in economic and social relations led to the social differentiation of the peasantry and initiated structural transformations within Lithuanian society, which likely had an impact on marital and fertility behaviour as well as on the transformation of household structures.

Parish population registers in Lithuania began to be compiled in the 18th century and started to be maintained on a regular basis from the 19th century onwards. Parishioner lists indicate parish settlements, households within them, and enumerate the inhabitants of each household (Garliauskas 2012). Unfortunately, many parishioner lists have not survived. The analysis uses a data set compiled independently by the author. The database was created using digitized parishioner lists of the Roman Catholic Church, which are publicly available in the Electronic Archive Information System of digital documentary heritage (E AIS) <https://eais.archyvai.lt/>. The entries contained in the parishioner lists were transferred into a digital database according to a pre-established matrix of variables. The classification of households and families is based on Peter Laslett's methodology (1974), widely used in historical demographic studies, according to which households are identified as nuclear, extended, and multiple families. P. Laslett also identifies non-family households. These include single-person households, as well as siblings living together, as they do not have a nuclear family based on marital ties. According to P. Laslett, such structural classification of households, despite local differences or changing historical periods, allows researchers to link demographic

indicators (e.g., fertility, mortality, etc.) to broader family factors and highlight household differences across different social strata. (Laslett, Wall 1972, Laslett 2001).

In the 19th century Lithuania lived adherents of several major religious denominations (Catholics, Orthodox Christians, Evangelicals, Old Believers, Muslims, Jews, Karaites, and Uniates). According to available data, changes in the confessional structure and distribution of the population in the 19th century were insignificant (Bairašauskaitė et al 2011). Since the majority of the population of Lithuania during the investigated period (with the exception of the Grodno Governorate, which is not included in this research) were Catholics<sup>1</sup>, the Catholic parish was chosen as the main administrative unit for the research. After reviewing all available digitized parishioner lists, Pivašiūnai parish was selected for the research as it meets the criteria of data completeness and parish size throughout the investigated period. This parish is representing the southeastern part of present-day Lithuania, which was in the Vilnius Governorate during the period under review.

Considering that demographic processes change gradually, the research period was divided into approximately 10-year time steps, ensuring that at least one data source would remain available for each decade. This time step was chosen after analysing the availability of data sources. The research covers a 75-year period (1835–1910). This timeframe was chosen based on the chronological continuity of the available Roman Catholic parishioner registers and the earliest accessible data from official Lithuanian statistics.

*The main research questions seek to answer* what the dominant household and family pattern was characterized Pivašiūnai parish and how 19th-century changes in land tenure, from the abolition of serfdom to small-scale ownership, shaped family and household structures.

*Preliminary empirical analysis*, based on data from the 1835–1910 Pivašiūnai parishioner lists, reveals a diverse household structure in this rural community. The nuclear households usually consisted of a married couple and their unmarried children with or without servants. Extended family households were not predominant either. The largest share of this type of households consisted of married couples with children and other relatives, such as unmarried brothers or sisters, or one of the parents (more often the mother). At the same time, a certain share of multiple-family households remained present throughout the period. These households most often consisted of families linked by close kinship ties, such as siblings families living together with one of the parents or other relatives by blood or marriage, showing that kin-based co-residence continued to be socially and economically important. However, identifying such relationships becomes more challenging in the later decades of the study period, since parishioner lists increasingly omitted information about

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<sup>1</sup> In 1857, in Kaunas Governorate, Catholics constituted 81.76 percent of the total population, in Vilnius Governorate – 63 percent, in Suwalki Governorate – 73.4 percent (Bairašauskaitė et al 2011)

the kinship ties of secondary or additional families living within the same household. Nevertheless, by referencing earlier data and considering the prevailing social context, it can be reasonably assumed that these households were formed by relatives of different degrees of kinship rather than by unrelated individuals. (Maslauskaitė, Leinartė, Dirsytė 2021).

A tendency toward smaller and more autonomous family units can be observed across the period, closely associated with the transformations following the abolition of serfdom and the gradual reorganization of land tenure. After emancipation, households that had previously included several related family groups, most frequently brothers or sisters families co-residing together, tended to divide into separate domestic units. This process reflects a broader shift toward economic and residential independence, encouraged by changes in landholding patterns and the growing recognition of individual property rights within peasant society.

Additionally, after the abolition of serfdom, the records ceased to explicitly mention servants. Despite this omission, many households include one or several young, unmarried individuals who have no declared kinship relation to the household head. It is likely that these persons served as domestic workers or agricultural labourers. This assumption can be supported by the researchers. J. Hajnal's arguments regarding late marriages are based on the household system that prevailed in northwestern Europe, which meant that married couples had to establish separate households, so both men and women were forced to postpone marriage for economic reasons and marry at a later age because they had to work and save until they had accumulated enough resources to get married (Hajnal 1965). Based on his research, P. Laslett noted that, given that the average age of servants was lower than the average age of marriage, service in other households could be regarded as a stage in the life cycle before marriage (Laslett 2001). According to Swedish economic historian Christer Lundh, being a servant was, in this way, an integrated part of the European marriage pattern within an individual's life cycle (Lundh 2013).

It should be noted that in 19th-century Lithuanian peasant families, unmarried adult children often remained living in the households of their married brothers or sisters. Although listed in the parishioner lists as relatives, they usually performed the roles of hired servants within the family household (Maslauskaitė, Leinartė, Dirsytė 2021).

Preliminary empirical analysis shows that nuclear family households accounted for more than a third of households, but extended family and multiple families' households were not predominant either. A declining trend in household size is observed, linked to changes in land tenure and emancipation. The main findings of this research complement the existing research field and provide information on one small area in Eastern Europe that is relevant to this large theoretical discussion of historical demography.