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HISTORICAL-ANTHROPOLOGICAL FAMILY RESEARCH. A CASE STUDY ON MARRIAGE AND FAMILY IN ESTONIA (1750–1850)

ИСТОРИКО-АНТРОПОЛОГИЧЕСКОЕ ИССЛЕДОВАНИЕ СЕМЬИ: CASE STUDY БРАКА И СЕМЬИ В ЭСТОНИИ (1750–1850)

У працы разглядаюцца тэарэтычныя і практычныя праблемы вывучэння гісторыі сям'і ва Усходняй Еўропе. Для прыкладу даследчыца ўзяла навет Урвасце ў Эстоніі, дзе былі ў другой палове XVIII – першай палове XIX ст. распаўсюджаныя дзве мадэлі сям'і: малая нуклеарная, характэрная для Заходняй Еўропы, і вялікая, пашыраная, распаўсюджаная, галоўным чынам, ва Усходняй Еўропе. Кожная з дзвюх пералічаных мадэляў фарміравалася пад уплывам пэўных сацыяльна-эканамічных прычын, але і сам выбар той ці іншай мадэлі вызначаў спецыфіку сацыяльных і чалавечых адносін у грамадстве.

Research into the family in the field of historical anthropology is currently focused very much on Eastern Europe, where there is a need for more extensive study. Practices in Eastern European households, e.g. the ways in which members were organized into working groups, were especially varied. Both early and late marriage patterns existed simultaneously, as did both extended and nuclear family and household models, and the reasons for the extension of families were not consistent. In Eastern Europe a household meant a working community, and extension of the family was connected with the organisation of this community for the purposes of collective labour. Where young people in Western Europe served as a labour force for different

298

households, young married couples in the area to the east of the dividing line running from Trieste to St. Petersburg stayed in the home of the bride's father. The constructing of frameworks to explain their divergent development patterns of these eastern and western models poses a major challenge for family historians.

The present research is focused on this problem, but another significant aspect is introduced in the Estonian context by the incorporation of artificial kinship into a household by way of a partnership contract, the need for labour being filled by bringing in a partner with whom a detailed mutual contract was made.

The research emphasizes extended families in the district of Urvaste in Estonia, an area in which the contractual partner model and the extended family were typical features of the household structure. The population of the Urvaste district in the 1780 was 8820 persons, occupying 627 houses or farms and 60 tenant cottages. The population registers of 1811 indicate that there were 3732 agricultural serfs in the district and that the total number of inhabitants of all population groups, including the servants employed by the estates, was 8415.

Marriage has been regarded historically as a universal phenomenon. As far as Eastern Europe (east of St. Petersburg – Trieste line) is concerned, the majority of the men in the

population would have been married at least once in their lives and most people married relatively early, whereas Western Europe followed a rather different marriage tradition which implied a fairly high age at marriage, so that almost 2/3 of the men and practically a half of the women would still be single at the age of 25 – 30 years. These differences in marriage pattern affected people's lives in many ways. Youth constituted a relatively long period in the lives of people in Western Europe, and when it was time to marry and move on to adulthood this caused a sharp break and change in the persons life. Many people would spend their youth working in the service of another household in order to afford to start a family of their own. No such break occurred in Eastern Europe, however, or at least not in the lives of the men, as a newly married couple could continue living in the household of the bride's father, under the authority of her parents. In fact, a younger brother would scarcely be able to alter this arrangement in any way in the course of his life.

Age at marriage, and above all the women's age at first marriage, has been regarded as a major factor in shaping the nature of the family, for it was this that determined the number of children. Women in Western Europe tended to marry at ages over 24 years, while those in Eastern Europe would do so at just under 20 years. Finland was interesting in this respect, as features of both models can be found, the former prevailing in the west, most notably in South-Western Finland and its archipelago, whereas the pattern in the province of Kymi and in Eastern Finland came close to the latter. It should be noted, too, that even the landless population of the eastern parts of Finland married young. Analyses of the situation in Estonia show that age at marriage followed the east – west cultural boundary that crosses the country, being lower in the east, where the villages were dispersed, with long distances between the farms, than in the west, where the villages consisted of tight groups of houses.

Of particular interest for the history of the family are institutions that can be regarded as having arisen in the boundary zones between east and west. The international literature traces the origins of the cultural boundary that crosses Europe to the Middle Ages.

Where the 1686 ecclesiastical law gave no precise minimum age for marriage, only a vague reference to the law as applied in Sweden, the 1832 law laid down ages of 16 years for the woman and 18 years for the man. Since a young person was regarded in the Russian Empire as coming of age at 21 years, written permission from the parents or guardians was required for marriage before that age.

Since the church records in Urvaste do not contain indications of the ages of persons who were married there until 1835, it is possible to determine these ages only for a short interval

299

within the first half of the 19th century. Such an examination gives us the following figures for persons entering into their first marriages

	Men	Women
1835	23.35	21.06
1840	23.91	22.19
1845	25.6	22.83
1850	26.02	22.9

As seen in the table, ages at marriage increased over this interval, fairly markedly among the men but only slightly among the women. Comparison with contemporary figures for other parts of Europe suggests that an eastern marriage pattern prevailed in Urvaste, as the age for women was indeed low. Men normally marry at a higher age than women.

One interesting question affecting the history of human mentality is whether the young people in peasant families were able to marry on emotional grounds or whether their actions were inevitably bound by practical realities. Was it in general even possible for these young

people in Urvaste to marry beyond their status? If we consider the strata that existed in the local society it is possible to conceive of a hierarchy which may have affected marriage prospects. The main social groups in Urvaste were the nobility and officers, a group composed of the German artisans, the servants working on the estates and the merchants, and the largest group of all, the Estonian peasant farmers, and it is evident that marriages across the boundaries between these groups and classes in society were very much an exception. Not a single record of a marriage between a member of the nobility and a member of the peasant farming class exists for the period studied here, and about 70 % of all marriages were between persons not only belonging to the same social group but even living on the lands of the same estate.

Studies of Finnish and Estonian extended families in the agrarian economy emphasize the difference between slash-and-burn cultivation and agriculture. The former continued in eastern Finland until the second half of the 19th century, whereas in Estonia crops were usually being cultivated in fields by this time.

The Estonian sources indicate a tendency toward larger households and extended families in southern Estonia. Work on these is still in progress, so that it cannot be determined yet exactly how much this tendency resulted from families extending by kinship and how much it can be explained by the institution of “co-partner (Germ. *Hälfner*). Significant changes took place in the family and in village communities in the period from 1650 to 1850. The expansion of an estate usually resulted in a decrease in the number of houses, but the contrary was also possible. The duties required by estates increased simultaneously. The number of joint families and servants grew with the population, and the *vabadiku* (cottager) families, which included married servants, craftsmen etc, were multiplying. Their structure was simpler, however, as they usually lived in nuclear families.

The market existing in Russia began to have an influence on economic life in southern Estonia from 1766 onwards. The idea of a trading connection between Estonia and Russia is an interesting one, as discussions regarding the influence of the monetary economy on the formation of families have emphasized that areas with a tendency to develop joint families are often ones to which the monetary economy spread only to a minor degree. In simple terms, the diffusion of a monetary economy into the villages may be interpreted as following a pattern in which the closer the peasant farmers lived to the towns, the wealthier they were.

It is possible with the aid of the revision material for Livonia to determine the numbers of able-bodied adult men on individual estates and farms, from which it can be assumed that not all the households had hired labourers, as many would have had sufficient manpower available within the family itself. We see, for instance, that 32 farms in the area of the Urvaste estate had hired labourers in 1811, 13 having one laboured, 11 having two, five having three and one having four. Five years later, in 1816, there were only 27 such farms, of which 11 had one

300

labourer, eight had two, five had three and three had four. If the size of a farm was about a quarter of a ploughland unit, it would need at least three men to work it, together with women and 3 -4 yoke of oxen. In addition to its own work, a farm would have to provide a horseman for the estate for three days a week throughout the year and people to help with the haymaking in summer.

The economy of the estate itself was depended on the labour input of the peasant farmers. The main activity was the cultivation of grain, to the extent that the estate owners of Estonia obtained 80 – 95% of their grain from their own fields and only 5 – 20 % directly as payments in kind from the peasants.

In the early 19th century a new means of expanding the economies of the estates was introduced that was again based on the growing of grain, namely the distilling of spirits, partly

for the Russian market. 638 distilleries had been set up on estates in Livonia by 1836. These produced spirits for the local market, but the economic incentives offered by St. Petersburg are reflected in the fact that 176 similar distilleries had been set up exclusively to serve the Russian market.

The peasant farming families developed with time into large joint families, so that even by 1752 the households were larger than a nuclear family, in 67 % of cases and almost all the farmers were living in something more than a simple household. By 1797 the simple households had gained ground somewhat, but the families of the farmers were still extremely extensive, and 82 % of them were larger than a simple household. The prevailing situation in which services rendered to the estate called for large amounts of adult labour exercised a substantial influence on the family as an institution. The organisation of the labour to be executed by different groups can be seen most clearly through the prism of economic activity, the increase of which required flexibility from joint families. In Urvaste there was also a clear shift towards payment in cash to the estates from the late 18th century onwards.