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Antoinette Fauve-Chamoux, Ioan Bolovan and Sølvi Sogner (editors), *A global history of historical demography: half a century of interdisciplinarity* (Bern: Peter Lang, 2016). Pages xiv + 683, including figures 12 + tables 11. €95/£76 paperback and ebook.

Historical demography now seems to be old enough to have itself become a topic of investigation, generating reflections, reports, assessments and perspectives on the current state of the discipline, its history and even its future. For instance, one of the key institutions of historical demography, the French *Société de démographie historique*, was founded in 1963 and so celebrated its 50th anniversary a few years ago with a commemorative conference and a special issue of its journal, *Annales de démographie historique*, entitled '50 years of historical demography: historiographic assessment of a field in renewal'. With a more forward-looking ambition, a recent book published in 2016 by Leuven University brought together a large number of contributions on the future of historical demography.

This book is very much in that line, proposing to sum up, country by country, how historical demography, as a field, evolved all over the world. It is the result of an initiative from the International Commission for Historical Demography (ICHD), one of the scientific societies at the heart of the discipline. The question of whether historical demography should be considered an autonomous discipline is briefly addressed in a short introduction by the three editors. In particular, the way historical demography came to gain autonomy and distinguished itself from 'population history' is explained. More could have been done, however, to discuss the intellectual foundations of the field and the inevitable tensions between history and demography that shaped the evolution of historical demography (with the balance between these two components shifting over time). It is nonetheless interesting to revisit the circumstances that gave birth to a new discipline. In particular the first chapter by Antoinette Fauve-Chamoux gives a concise account of the institutional background and its evolution over time.

What the book then offers is an overview – not really a 'history', more a descriptive account – of historical demography in various parts of the world. Each of the 36 chapters is devoted to a specific region: 'Historical demography in Argentina'; 'Historical demography in Denmark'; 'Historical demography in Russia'; and so on. Thus each chapter covers one country and describes the evolution of the discipline over time, either through anecdotal evidence, descriptions of the sources employed, or a summary of the topics studied and the results they produced.

There are various ways to write the history of a scientific discipline. One might emphasise its findings, the research questions asked and the results obtained; or focus on methodology, the way source material is exploited and analysed and how this changes over time. Alternatively, one might look more towards the institutional background, the scientific societies, their interactions and their influence on the topics studied; or at scientific roots, the influence of other disciplines or of specific people in shaping the evolution of the discipline. Apparently no choice of methods or aims has been made here, and instead, each author was left to choose for themselves which aspects to emphasise. As a result, there are great variations in content between chapters, with some focusing mainly on the results (the chapters on Russia or Korea, for instance) while others are entirely dedicated to institutional history (the one on the Czech Republic, for instance), and most chapters falling somewhere in between.

This lack of homogeneity makes it difficult to obtain a wide-ranging view, both of the discipline as a whole and of its evolution. It is all the more damaging that there is no concluding chapter that could aim to link these 36 national histories together. So the book is not so much a global history as the sum of many local histories, drawn from all over the globe. Some chapters do refer to the same authors, concepts or methods, but the chapters rarely make reference to each other.

A more substantive issue is the focus on only one of the branches of historical demography: family reconstitutions. In so doing, the book minimises or omits whole parts of the field and greatly reduces the extent of historical demography. Thus, there is almost no mention of the link with economic history, which has been one of the most successful programmes in historical demography, following the work of Jean Meuvret (take for instance the work of David Weir who, among many others, is

never mentioned). The Princeton European Fertility Project is mentioned here and there but is never acknowledged as something worthy of consideration in its own right.

Ultimately, this book will interest everyone working in family history: it gives a sense of what has already been done in the field during the past decades and, in consequence, suggests many new paths to be taken for future research. The lack of uniformity between the very numerous chapters is both a limitation – it prevents getting a truly ‘global’ view of the evolution of the discipline and its intellectual foundations – and a quality – it shows the incredible diversity of countries and the wide variety of research questions that exist in the field.

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