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# The Impact of Religious Denomination on Mentality and Behavior. An Introduction

*Kevin McQuillan & Rolf Gehrman* \*

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**Abstract:** »Die Prägung von Einstellungen und Verhalten durch die Konfession. Eine Einführung«. For at least 500 years, differences in denomination have helped shape social life in Europe. How have religious perspectives influenced the perception of the other, lifestyles, and living conditions? How do we weigh the influence of religion in relation to other social characteristics – and is religion still relevant in modern Europe? This collection of papers in this HSR Forum addresses the role of religious affiliation and belief on demographic and social behavior in the past. Drawing on both qualitative and quantitative sources, the authors seek to understand how attachment to particular religious denominations shaped the attitudes and behavior of people in a variety of European societies in previous centuries. The papers focus on denominational differences in demographic and economic behavior in Germany, Switzerland, the Netherlands, Poland and Albania. While aware that religion was not the only determinant of differences in thought and behavior, they argue that religion influenced mentalities and actions, especially in societies divided by denomination.

**Keywords:** Religious denomination, mentality, demographic behavior, economic behaviour.

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## 1. Introduction

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Religion has long been viewed as a significant determinant of demographic behavior. In Western European and North American societies, that often meant a focus on Catholic-Protestant differentials and the prime object of study was differences in fertility. Many of the earliest post-war fertility surveys charted the magnitude of these religious differences and explored the reasons for them. The higher fertility in many Catholic communities was linked to differences in religious teaching, in particular, the continuing opposition of the Catholic Church to the use of artificial means of contraception.

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Attention to the influence of religion on demographic behavior in an historical context was slower to develop. Many of the early, influential studies of historical demography, beginning with the work of Louis Henry and followers in the French school of historical demography, were conducted in religiously homogeneous communities. Henry's *Crulai: Paroisse Normande* (Gautier and Henry, 1958), the founding study of modern historical demography using the methods of family reconstitution, examined fertility, mortality, and marriage in an exclusively Catholic village. Henry's successors (Goubert 1960; Le Roy Ladurie 1969; Dupaquier 1979) built the foundations of the field, but their work largely avoided questions of religion as few studied regions with significant religious diversity. A similar story can be told of early studies in other countries, where village-level studies lacked religious diversity or where an absence of information on religious affiliation limited the ability of demographers to address the question.

The 1970s saw a huge increase in interest in historical demography, an interest partly driven by a hope of finding "lessons from the past" that might influence population policies in the developing world. One element of this new current of research was the Princeton studies of the decline of fertility in Europe. The project, which included studies of many major European nations, used aggregate data drawn from vital statistics systems and national censuses to examine the decline of fertility at the sub-national level in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. The use of aggregate data prevented the close analysis of fertility patterns possible in family reconstitution analyses, but the European-wide approach complemented the growing number of village studies and raised new questions about fertility change. In particular, the project focused on social and economic correlates of fertility change and directed attention to questions of language, ethnicity, and religion. The overall conclusion of the project was that cultural factors played a larger role in predicting the timing of the fertility decline than did economic change (Coale and Watkins 1986). That conclusion has not been universally accepted, but the project stimulated further work on how and when cultural characteristics might influence demographic behavior.

A second significant development was the appearance of historical demographic studies of religiously diverse communities especially in Germany, the Netherlands and Switzerland. In these lands deeply touched by the Reformation, historical demographers began to draw attention to marked differences in demographic behaviour across confessional boundaries. To a lesser but still important extent, studies of religious minorities raised the possibility that religion might have helped to determine the demographic patterns of communities even in the era of "natural fertility" that preceded the demographic transition.

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## 2. Demographic Differences by Confession in European Populations

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Generalizing about differences in demographic behavior between populations of different religious identity is not easy. There was substantial variability among adherents of the same faith in different parts of Europe; indeed, there is evidence of significant local variation, some no doubt related to local customs and different economic forces, others perhaps an artefact of available data. Nevertheless, there is now a substantial body of evidence that points towards important differences by confession across European regions.

### 2.1 Marriage

Nowhere does the connection between religious teachings and behavior appear more clearly than in the case of marriage patterns. Luther's critique of Catholic teaching on celibacy and marriage opened the door to a different view of the value of marriage and, despite the subsequent splintering of the Reformers into different Protestant denominations, all forms of Protestantism rejected the celibacy of the clergy and exalted the married state as the path for all to follow (Ozment 1993). The greater status accorded to the married state in Protestant populations came about not simply from the different rules governing the clergy but often as a result of higher proportions remaining celibate in Catholic communities even among those who did not enter religious life. Perhaps the greater status accorded to the celibate life, as a good in itself, legitimized the choice for those who never married. Although nuptiality patterns have not received the same depth of analysis as is true with fertility, evidence from France (Watkins 1986), Alsace (McQuillan 1999), Switzerland (Pfister 1985), Germany (Rettinger 2002) and the Netherlands (Engelen and Kok 2002) point to more restrained marriage among Catholic populations.

The issue of remarriage has received relatively little attention. The ability to remarry after the death of a spouse, especially for women, was much contested through the early history of Christianity (Goody 1983). While it is certainly true that such debates had been resolved by the beginnings of the early modern period, the more generally positive view of marriage in the various Protestant traditions may have made the decision to remarry for widowers and widows an easier one (McQuillan 2003).

### 2.2 Fertility

Historical demography has been driven, above all, by the quest to understand the nature of the fertility transition. Beginning with explanations embedded in the various versions of the theory of the demographic transition, demographers have struggled to understand the influence of economic and cultural factors on

the historic shift from relatively high levels of fertility to the replacement and sub-replacement levels that now characterize all Western societies and a growing number of societies in the developing world. It was this question that provided the inspiration for the Princeton Studies of the decline of fertility in Europe. One of the great challenges in this research has been to link the macro-economic and sociological changes which reshaped societies in the generations following what is commonly called the Industrial Revolution with the changes in modes of thought at the individual level that led couples to think about sexuality and childbearing in different ways. In trying to unravel this puzzle, demographers have turned their attention to culture and, in many cases, this has meant a focus on religion's influence on changes in fertility behavior.

A large amount of research on the period before the historic decline in birth rates that touched much of Europe and North America in the nineteenth century has undermined the mechanical view of fertility as uniformly high and uncontrolled. A variety of practices that varied across communities influenced the overall rate of fertility. Marriage practices played an especially significant role. Variation in age at marrying, proportion marrying, and remarriage practices regulated exposure to the risk of conception and, hence, served to raise or lower the overall level of fertility. As noted above, practices related to nuptiality were often shaped, in part, by religious values. Were these practices consciously developed as an indirect method for controlling fertility? Likely not, though Goody (1983) has suggested that Catholic restrictions on remarriage were partly based on the desire of Church authorities to increase the likelihood of people dying without an heir and thus increasing the chances that the Church would inherit the patrimony. Certainly at the individual level, however, it seems unlikely that men and women consciously delayed marriage in order to limit the size of their families. That said, it is probably also true that in a number of societies, families consciously limited access to marriage for some children as a way of reducing the eventual number of heirs and limiting the partition of landholdings. That this may have had a religious or cultural component – a more positive view of the celibate life or approval of the sacrifice made by one or more children to care for elderly parents – is also true.

The most pressing questions about the fertility transition have focused less on overall fertility and more on the course of marital fertility. Here, the issue has been the voluntary control over childbearing. As Henry originally conceptualized the problem, the pre-transition era was marked by “natural fertility,” defined as the absence of variation in parity-specific practices related to conception and birth. A good deal of research and commentary have called into question Henry's concept of natural fertility. In particular, a number of demographers have questioned whether variations in birth spacing across populations were simply the “unconscious effect” of practices such as the duration of breastfeeding or norms governing the resumption of sexual relations after childbirth. Still, there is little doubt that in most parts of north and western

Europe and North America, the last half of the nineteenth century and the early twentieth century saw dramatic changes in behavior that unquestionably resulted in major declines in both marital and overall fertility. And these changes reflected, in large part, conscious efforts on the part of couples to limit the size of their families.

In seeking to understand this change of historic importance – indeed, possibly the most important change in the history of the species – attention has been directed in the first instance to economic factors. The profound social changes brought about by technological change and economic development surely influenced the way men and women think about childbearing and family life. Most immediately, as standards of living began to rise, rates of infant and child mortality declined. The effective size of families would thus grow if fertility patterns remained unchanged as more and more children survived to adulthood. And the new industrial economy and associated pace of urbanization changed the calculus of costs and benefits associated with childbearing as well. In the long run, it is true that an increased standard of living and very low levels of infant and child mortality led to low levels of fertility across all human societies. But to say that is not to ignore the fact that the timing and pace of decline and the persistence of differences in rates of fertility across societies, communities and social groups need further explanation. In attempting to do so, demographers have turned their attention to cultural beliefs and practices and chief among them is the role of religion.

As noted above, religion was not a focus of attention for Henry and his followers who established modern historical demography. Religion was more of an issue for English demographers but analysis was made difficult by the absence of high-quality data sources for English dissenters (Wrigley, et al. 1997). Early studies of Ireland certainly drew attention to the influence of Catholicism, but it was based more on the delayed fertility transition in Ireland as a whole rather than rigorous comparison of Protestant and Catholic communities living in regions of Ireland (Teitelbaum 1984).

Several of the Princeton studies of the decline of fertility in Europe drew attention to religion as part of a broader interpretation that questioned the impact of economic variables and identified cultural variables as important determinants of fertility change. Given the nature of the data used in the project, which was based on aggregate measures for provinces and regions, it was hard to assess the significance of religious factors.

A turning point in the study of religion's role was the appearance of works that explicitly focused on countries and regions marked by religious diversity. Perhaps the most extensive work has been done in the Netherlands with its complicated religious geography and strong sense of religious identity through the demographic transition (van Poppel 1985). As in much work that has been done in various parts of Europe, the primary focus has been on Protestant/Catholic differences, but the Dutch situation is complicated by the

diversity in the Protestant community. The Protestant population was divided into a variety of groups, some more liberal in orientation and others highly orthodox. In Kok and Van Bavel's study of Rotterdam and Utrecht, it was the more liberal branches of Protestantism that seemed to have led the way in the fertility transition with Catholics and orthodox Protestant couples later to adopt deliberate fertility control (Kok and Van Bavel 2006). Schellekens and Van Poppel also point to a delayed transition to fertility control among Catholics in their analysis of data from The Hague (Schellekens and van Poppel 2006). To be sure, the influence of religion was mediated by other factors, and Kok and Van Bavel point to the weakening effect of religious affiliation in urban areas. Still, the Netherlands, where religious identity was strongly held and associated with other social processes, provides strong evidence for a religious effect on fertility.

Switzerland has also been an important focus for research on historical differences in fertility by religion. Perrenoud was among the earliest to point to the potential role of Protestantism as a determinant of fertility (Perrenoud 1974). Head's work also underlined the significance of Protestantism as a determinant of fertility in Switzerland (Head 1999). Praz examined the regions of Vaud and Fribourg, the former largely Protestant, the latter predominantly Catholic (Praz 2006). Again, the Catholic population demonstrated higher fertility and a later transition to fertility control. Praz links this difference to views on the family and specifically on the role of girls. The greater commitment to providing schooling for female as well as male children increased the costs of children for Protestant couples and helped to speed the use of fertility control in the Protestant communities. Catholic populations were more resistant to supporting schooling for girls and she associates this with lower motivation to control fertility. Germany is fertile territory for studying confessional differences in demographic behavior, though there is less research available than one might have expected. Knodel drew attention to the potential role of religion in his monograph in the Princeton series, noting in particular the very high rates of fertility in the Catholic Bavarian region (Knodel 1974); however, the aggregate data available limited the scope of analysis. In his in-depth study of 14 communities in southern Germany that used family reconstitution data (Knodel 1988), he cast doubt on the importance of religion, though 11 of the 14 villages studied were almost uniformly Catholic and the communities that were largely Protestant were grouped together in one region. Zschunke's pioneering work on the small town of Oppenheim (Zschunke 1984), though based on relatively small samples, pointed to greater control among the Protestant populations. McQuillan's work on the French region of Alsace focused on largely German-speaking villages and found striking similarities in fertility between the Catholic villages in rural Alsace and the Catholic villages studied by Knodel (McQuillan 1999). In contrast to Knodel's sample, however, which contained no predominantly Protestant communities in Baden, McQuillan's study of

Alsace included two Lutheran communities, and these communities were marked by lower overall fertility and what appears as an earlier start to family limitation. Gehrman's study of three villages in the Upper Rhine presented in this HSR Forum support the finding of higher fertility among Catholic populations in Germany.

Ireland has long been identified as a "laggard" in the transition to lower rates of fertility. As late as the 1970s, the total fertility rate in the Republic of Ireland was close to 4 children per woman. The powerful role of the Catholic Church in Ireland and its influence on politics, schooling, and public order suggest that the Church was an obstacle to the spread of fertility control and delayed the transition to replacement level fertility, a milestone that was achieved only in the 1990s. That fertility was high and remained high in Ireland is not in dispute. But the role of religion in producing and sustaining high fertility is not universally accepted. Part of the problem in assessing the influence of Catholicism is the shortage of studies of Catholic and non-Catholic populations in the same regions of the country that would allow for a finer analysis of religion's role. The work of Guinnane and his colleagues on Dublin is thus of special significance (Guinnane, Moehling and O'Grada 2001). Drawing on data for a suburban region of Dublin, he presents convincing evidence of religion's influence on demographic patterns that worked in part through economic difference and social segregation.

Less work on religious differences is available for North American populations of the past, but what has been done in the largely French-speaking province of Quebec has yielded important insights. Gauvreau examines differences by both religion and ethnicity in Montreal during the 19th and early 20th century when the city was divided into 3 important communities: the majority and almost exclusively Catholic French community; an established English Protestant community mostly of English and Scottish origin; and a growing Irish Catholic population. The author emphasizes the influence of language and social class in addition to religion. Still, the two Catholic groups appear to be later in adopting fertility control, with the French population being the latest to do so (Thornton and Olson 2006).

Studies of the religious dimension of fertility change in Europe and North America have focused above all on the role of Catholicism as an obstacle to fertility decline. The usual comparison has been to the dominant Protestant denomination in the region studied, though some work has paid attention to differences among various streams of Protestantism. Often overlooked were the Jewish communities that were of importance especially in many urban settings across Europe and in North America. Livi-Bacci suggested that Jews might have been "forerunners" of the fertility transition (Livi-Bacci 1986). Jewish fertility rates were indeed lower in a number of settings, but the evidence for the Jewish community playing a leading role in fertility decline is mixed. Schellekens and Van Poppel (2006) find no evidence for this in their study of



the Hague while Derosas (2006) found evidence of earlier fertility decline among the Jews of Venice only for those who lived outside the ghetto.

### 2.3 Mortality

While our knowledge of mortality trends in the past has grown, data on differences by such social characteristics as religion remain limited. Family reconstitution studies are not well suited to studying mortality across the life course as out-migration from the communities being studied leaves researchers with a biased sample of persons for whom death records are available. This is less the case when studying infant and child mortality, however, and we have learned something about the role of religion as a determinant of death rates in early life. Zschunke's (1984) study of Oppenheim, a small German city with Catholic, Lutheran and Calvinist communities found evidence of higher infant and child mortality among the Catholic population. The selection of communities in Knodel's study of 14 German villages is not designed to compare Protestant and Catholic populations living in the same communities. There is some evidence of lower mortality in the largely Protestant villages in the study, but the effect is tempered by a variety of other social and economic factors that vary among the villages. McQuillan's (1999) study of Alsace provides some of the clearest evidence of a religious effect. Focusing on the period from 1785-1860, his analysis shows better survival prospects for both infants and young children in the Lutheran population even when controlling for a number of demographic and social characteristics.

Work on both Ireland and the Netherlands points to higher mortality in Catholic populations. O'Grada's (2008) study of Ulster notes higher rates of both infant and child mortality in the Catholic community, though, as is often true, the Catholic population faced greater economic disadvantage, which he believes to be the real source of higher mortality. Similarly, van den Boomen and Ekamper (2015) find higher rates of infant mortality in Catholic regions but also doubt whether religion played any causal role.

One of the proximate determinants of infant mortality that is often a topic of investigation is breastfeeding norms. Knodel (1988) pointed to the custom of early weaning in Bavaria as a source of the very high rates of infant mortality in the province throughout the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Van den Boomen and Ekamper point out that differences in breastfeeding norms by confession have been identified by some observers as responsible for Protestant/Catholic differentials in the Netherlands, though they remain sceptical of how widespread this was. Increasingly stringent ideas about modesty have been argued to have led to earlier weaning in Catholic communities, which, if true, would suggest a direct link between religion and infant care practices associated with a differential risk of dying. A similar contention has been made concerning Jewish populations in several settings. Although equally

poor as the French-Canadian population, extended breastfeeding among Jewish mothers appeared to significantly improve infant survival prospects in nineteenth-century Montreal.

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### 3. Does Religion Really Matter?

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The historical record provides ample evidence of significant differences in demographic behavior among religious groups. But the issue that has intrigued historians and demographers is the causal effect of religious belief, organization and practice. Religious affiliation was often associated with other social characteristics that may have played a more direct role in shaping demographic behavior, including marriage patterns, fertility and mortality. O'Grada has underlined the importance of higher rates of poverty and disadvantage as the key element that shaped Irish Catholic demography. Once we take account of these associated factors, religious differences in behavior often shrink in importance or disappear entirely. It is also possible, of course, that there is a link between religious belief and practice and those aspects of social organization that are associated with differences in demographic behavior. Literacy is a good example. The higher levels of literacy that emerged earlier in some Protestant populations may well have had religious origins and paved the way for economic development as well as changes in gender roles and family life. The importance of Scripture in the Protestant tradition appears to have increased the importance attached to schooling as both boys and girls were encouraged to learn to read. This began a change of developments that ultimately influenced a wide range of behaviours. Although discussion of the religious influence on demography has usually focused on specific religious teachings concerning sexuality or contraception, a proper understanding of the religious effect requires a broader view of how religious beliefs, practices, and social organization can shape other aspects of human behavior.

The work in this volume focuses on the connection between religion and demography in the past. It necessarily emphasizes the quantitative element as the material available to us comes primarily from official records of births, marriages, and deaths. But to understand the influence of religion on demographic differences requires attention to the history of mentalities, a topic of special relevance in this anniversary year of the Reformation. When studying the past, scholars are often limited to indirect evidence of the religious influence on values, attitudes, and mentalities. Nevertheless, the contributions by several generations of historical demographers attest to the importance of religious affiliation in the past. But the decline in religious practice, the weakening role of religious institutions in society, and the increasing influence of secular ideologies such as feminism and environmentalism cast doubt on the role of

religion as a determinant of demographic behaviour in the early twenty-first century.

There is not space here to explore this question, but it is worth noting that a growing body of literature, much of it tied to the European Values Survey and the European Social Survey, points to a continuing role for religion in modern societies (Halman and Riis 2003). It is less the teachings of a specific denomination that seem most important today, however; rather, it is religious practice or what sociologists refer to as religiosity that is more important. In a number of European and North American societies, active involvement in a religious group is associated with differences in marriage patterns and childbearing (Frejka and Westoff 2008). To be sure, group differences in demographic behaviour, especially fertility, are modest in size. And other social characteristics such as education and ethnicity, as well variations in social policy influence birth rates and marriage patterns. Yet differences in beliefs and practices continue to distinguish the religious from the non-religious in the demographic realm, reflecting the enduring influence of religion in the area of family life.

Thus new horizons have been opened to us through projects like the European Values Study that measure more directly the impact of religion on the values and beliefs of individuals (Lujikx, Halman, and Sieben 2016). Although they refer to present-day societies, these findings can be helpful to historical researchers in developing a theoretical framework for understanding the role of religion both past and present. Moreover, they force us to reconsider long-accepted ideas such as secularization, which appear limited in their explanatory power when examined in the light of survey data, which show the continuing influence of religion on individual attitudes and behavior, even in societies where religious institutions play a much smaller role (Bréchon and Campiche 2011; Pollack and Rosta 2015, 473).

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#### 4. The Contribution of this HSR Forum

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The articles of this volume deal with a subject which is not only present on an international level, but also in Germany, among others by the discussions in the “*Arbeitskreis für Historische Demographie*”. By organizing interdisciplinary workshops, the latter provided the framework for communication between the scholars who eventually have contributed to the publication introduced here. It attests an effort to enrich German social history by using demographic-based analyses to discuss the international dimension of religious denomination as a historical and sociological problem. No-one will be surprised, however, that the empirical studies in this HSR Forum come from countries with a situation of religious pluralism. Sometimes the religious diversity was reinforced by ethnic differences and, in some cases, by social ones too, making of each of these studies an exploration of the impact of culture in relation to other factors.

Representing a country with a long tradition of historical demographical research and intensive work in this field, *Anne-Lise Head* is well-positioned to present results that are no longer only general hypotheses based on isolated local studies. Her comprehensive overview is a short modern demographic history of Switzerland from the 18th to the 20th century, for which the distinction between the Christian denominations is fundamental. Before industrial migrations “Catholics and Protestants lived in completely different worlds”, and evidence for this is variegated. Catholics did not only practice the more “classical” form of fertility regulation through higher levels of permanent celibacy and later marriage, they also had more children – in rural Uri three times more than in Calvinist Geneva – and, in general, a higher infant and maternal mortality. Like Kok, Head draws attention to the important differences within the same denomination, for example, the particularities of Pietists. Her material allows her to detect, and to illustrate by colorful quotations from the people concerned, the mechanisms by which the Churches controlled and influenced their flocks. Only migration, which finally became a main factor for the general fertility decline, allowed people the chance to escape from this control system.

Although he also presents a general overview, *Jan Kok’s* approach is somewhat different from Anne-Lise Head’s. He treats a more recent period (1850-1970) and his study is based on a different kind of data – a file of more than 30.000 reconstructed life courses. Not only the denomination, but also the general tendency of the religious groups is specified, so that misleading general labels like “Protestant” can be avoided. For analytical purposes, the subdivision is limited to four categories (Liberal Protestants, Orthodox Protestants, Catholics and Jews), but this allows him to consider a wide variety of features, such as leaving home, living with kin, sexuality and marriage, migration, birth control, and mortality, in relation to religious differences. Thus it is possible to detect typical life-courses. The result of the study is, however, that there are no specific ‘life scripts’, but differences that are shaped more by identification with the clergy, social control, communication, and finally group culture, than on general norms. For instance, there were differences in behavior that grew from the 1850s onwards, when the churches realized a tighter control on education. Some differences, such as the later age at marriage of Catholics, are well-known, whereas the relatively low rate of infant mortality runs counter to other opinions on this subject. Independently of the denomination, faith also had significant effects on mortality at old age and acceptance of the needy in the household.

On the level of a small region, *Rolf Gehrman* tries to take into consideration Kok’s conclusions, although the small amount of qualitative sources does not allow him to analyze the channels of communication and other mechanisms of translation of religion into a social fact. That denomination was a strong factor of group identity, which clearly outweighed other social differences, can be proved by data obtained from village genealogies. The Lutheran population

of the Ortenau is an outstanding example of an early fertility reduction achieved by stopping childbearing, a pattern that can be observed at least until the end of the period under observation (marriage cohorts 1770-1840). This was rational behavior applied to the domain of childbearing. Protestantism allowed more liberty to individuals to limit their fertility though Lutheran doctrines related to sexuality and childbearing were not directly responsible for the resulting differences. From a Weberian point of view, such a pursuit of individual interests can be connected to the emergence of a specific economic behavior and by this the social success that can be observed by the different wealth statuses of Protestants and Catholics in Baden.

*Grażyna Liczbińska* focusses on another demographic subject, mortality, in Greater Poland, which in the period studied was a part of Prussia. Its population was a particular mixture of Poles and Germans, of Catholics, Protestants and Jews, all of them urban or rural to a varying degree and where wealth and social status were not equally distributed. The main task is thus to disentangle the different factors that may have influenced mortality by using a factor analysis. The outcome of this statistical procedure is that denomination was not the most important determinant of the higher mortality of Catholics. The place of residence, which was at the same time a marker of social status and gave access to different kinds of water supply, stood in the first line, followed by what is called the biological factor. Thus culture is relegated to the third rank, by contrast to other, essentially Western, results which are mentioned by the author.

In order to check for the impact of religion on marriage as compared to other factors, *Siegfried Gruber* takes advantage of a precious source for Albanian history, which has been ignored for a long time and which is accessible in a machine-readable form since 2003: the individual entries of the 1918 census. This material provides new answers to diverse questions about marriage patterns, which are fundamental for cultural systems. Finally the role of religion is more ambiguous than it might have seemed at first. Doubtlessly Muslims married earlier than Christians (the Catholic and Orthodox minorities), but factors other than religion were more important, like the difference between rural or urban residence, literacy, and occupation. In one case, however, the role of religion is confirmed – as we have found elsewhere, the share of unmarried women was higher in the Catholic community. Gruber's study makes evident the futility of mono-causal explanations on this subject, and shows once more the explanatory power concealed in micro-data.

Whereas the distinction between factors is the main problem in quantitative sources, the evaluation of the objectivity as well as the analysis of discourse practices is of greatest concern in the study of narratives. As *Christoph Nebgen* shows in his study on travel writers in the 18th century, contemporaries did not hesitate to take religion as a causal fact for economic backwardness. Doing this, they passed easily from partial observations to general conclusions and generated or repeated stereotypes. As such, the main importance of these travel

writings seems to be the documentation of such biases in perception. Descriptive analyses found that subjects under ecclesiastic rule were often better off than Protestant peasants suffering from higher taxes for the court and the army; however, this was often presented as a positive incentive for such peasants to work harder. Another stimulus was, said the travel writers, being a member of a religious minority, so that sometimes hard-working ascetic Pietists were opposed to monks and indulgent Catholics. Thus Nebgen's study reveals pre-Weberian conceptions concerning the work ethic of Protestants, which were in general as much due to Protestant incomprehension as to the observation of real "backwardness". Such an amalgam adds uncertainty as to the real impact of religion on economics at that time – an intriguing question in many studies, and in the present volume too.

The final contribution tries to detect subliminal structures of relationship to history and progress in present times. *Stefan Benz's* starting point is the results of a large survey among adolescents and teachers, from which their vision of history and the importance accorded to it can be inferred. Like Nebgen, he also deals with narrative concepts, but in the material he uses religion is not the principal matter of discourse any more. Nevertheless, according to Benz, it provides the best explanation for the opposition between traditional / static and genetic / dynamic views of history and life, the latter in general as a reduced form of a self-evident belief in progress. That means that even in secularized societies a transference of narrative pattern exists, and it is shaped by denomination. Benz checks his theses by examining the history of German philosophy and historiography as well as voting preferences in the 20th century. Thus his contribution spurs us to further reflections about the lasting impact of denomination on mentality and behavior, as it has been done in another way by Bréchon's (2013) conclusions from the European Values Studies.

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