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**Historical family systems and the great  
European divide:  
The invention of the Slavic East**

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invention of the Slavic East*

Abstract

In 1940, almost two years into World War II, the book, “*Agrarverfassung und Bevölkerung in Litauen und Weißrussland*” (Agrarian constitution and population in Lithuania and Belarus), was published. The habilitation thesis of the young German historian Werner Conze, the book was an extensive study of pre-modern family patterns of the peasant serf population in Lithuania from the 16<sup>th</sup> to the 18<sup>th</sup> centuries. In an approach that was innovative for its time, Conze used a type of historical source which, up to that point, had not yet received a lot of interest, namely, quantitative data derived from original inventory lists of historic estates. The analysis of the data led Conze to detect a difference between West and East. The comparison emphasised the cultural divide between the Germans and the Slavs to the East by postulating smaller family sizes throughout the western or German-influenced part of historic Lithuania, and larger families with more complex structures throughout the Slavic parts of the country. Thus, Conze also suggested that population growth in the Lithuanian west had been restrained, while the Lithuanian east had experienced abundant population growth.

Conze’s scientific insights remain present in today’s historical-demographic literature, and have become an essential building block of any argument in support of the validity and persistence of East-West differentials in family systems in East-Central Europe. Because of this study’s continued importance, it may prove useful to re-examine “*Agrarverfassung und Bevölkerung*,” looking at its auctorial and ideological context, its methodological procedures, and its empirical content. Our critical assessment of some of Conze’s basic assumptions reveals serious shortcomings in his analysis, which resulted from his tendency to make unwarranted inferences from non-representative and circumstantial evidence, and from his underlying motivation to search for German-Slavic differences. We will discuss the extent to which the pervading notion of the East-West divide in historical East-Central Europe must be revised in response to these shortcomings. By uncovering the inadequacies of Conze’s contribution, we hope to pave the way for a truly scientific understanding of familial characteristics of Eastern Europe, and to end the perpetuation of certain stereotypes of Slavic populations.

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## 1. Introduction

To many, Eastern Europe is a synonym for Slavic Europe. The equation is certainly not new. Hegel (1770-1831) considered “East of Europe” as the house of the “great Slavonic nation.” The 18th century also provided Western Europe with its first model of “Eastern Europe”. This was an underdeveloped and not yet quite enlightened world; again, in Hegel’s words, a body of peoples that “has not appeared as an independent element in the series of phases that Reason has assumed in the World” (Wolff, 1994). This framework was later remolded by the nationalist and racial discourse of the 19th century (more in Neumann 1999).

Slavic populations also played an important role in sociological and historical scholarship on demography and family. Within that discourse, a suggestive “invention” of Eastern European demographic and familial distinctness took place. F. Le Play was the first to suggest a gradient of family and household types running from east to west, and to locate patriarchal, patrilocal multigenerational households among “Eastern nomads, Russian peasants, and the Slavs of Central Europe” (Le Play 1982/1872: 259)<sup>1</sup>.

The notion of a demographically uniform Eastern European family system, in which people marry young and live in patriarchal households, continued, and most pervasively advanced in the 20th century by J. Hajnal’s 1965 path-breaking article on marriage patterns in Europe<sup>2</sup>.

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1 See also Le Play’s mid-19th family model map (Le Play 1877-1879 v. 1, in folio p. 640; see reprint in Fauve-Chamoux and Ochiai 2009, 44). The North-South fault line suggested by Le Play followed the major political divisions of that time, placing Austria proper and Bohemia to the West; and Slovakia, Hungary, Slovenia and Croatia to the East. More importantly, the axis divided historical territories of the then nonexistent Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth into three largely unequal parts. The very western fringes of the Polish Republic (areas covering the province of Royal Prussia, together with a large part of the geographic province of Greater Poland) were split between Le Play’s Northern and Western zones, and, one may presume, they were supposed to carry on the characteristics of the stem family systems. The rest of the historical Commonwealth, including the heartland of present-day Poland with Cracov and Warsaw, like all the territories located more to the East (Red Ruthenia, Ukraine, Lithuania-Belarusia), were lumped together with the Balkans, the Asian part of Russia, and the Moroccan and Syrian families, as all representing the patriarchal family system.

2 Hajnal summarised his theses, developed on the basis of an analysis of aggregate statistics from around 1900, in a very concise statement: “The marriage pattern of most of Europe as it existed for at least two centuries up to 1940 was, so far as we can tell, unique or almost unique in the world. There is no known example of a population of non-European civilization which has had a similar pattern” (Hajnal 1965, 101). With this observation, Hajnal became involved in introducing what had come to be the first such strong geographically oriented flavour in family history since the Le Play’s era. The “European pattern”, the distinctive features of which Hajnal considered to be a high age at marriage and a high proportion of people who never marry at all, pervaded, according to him, “the whole of Europe except for the eastern and south-eastern portion” (ibid.). Reiterating Le Play’s original spatial exercises, Hajnal introduced an East-West gradient in European demographic behaviours with much greater force, and argued that “the European pattern extended over all of Europe to the west of a line running roughly from Leningrad (as it is now called) to Trieste” (Hajnal 1965, 101). This is how the since so often cited and discussed “Hajnal line” was conceived, soon assuming a truly iconic status. Hajnal compared data from different part of the European continent (including European Russia) with surveys of Asian and even African societies. Hajnal’s text can also be read as strongly suggesting the incommensurability of early marriage behaviour (ascribed to Eastern Europe) with simple or stem family systems believed to prevail in other parts of the continent. In Hajnal’s account, the crucial element linking marriage ages and family structure was the question of how retirement and the whole process of devolution

Hajnal's article on marriage patterns was then followed by another paper in which he distinguished between two kinds of household formation system in preindustrial times (Hajnal 1982, 1983). By calling explicitly what he published in 1982/1983 a "sequel" to his famous 1965 essay, Hajnal seemed to suggest that the two supra-national, large-scale family systems he described (the simple and joint household systems) could be spatially conceptualised as referring to territories west and east of his famous line.

Although Hajnal's (as well as Laslett's) works are recognised as formative studies that have made a lasting impact on the field of research, they have, over the years, also been challenged, and have undergone a number of transformations. However, despite having been subjected to severe criticism over the last two decades (Kertzer 1991; Farago 1998; Goody 1996; Plakans and Wetherell 2001; Szoltysek, 2007, 2008a, 2008b)<sup>3</sup>, Hajnal's modelling propositions have recently made a comeback. They have been given new life in the works of M. Mitterauer and K. Kaser. By discussing the Hajnal line in the context of the regionality problem long known to mediaevalist scholars (i.e., the boundaries between Eastern and Western Christianity, and of mediaeval European colonisation), and by relating the line to the issue of the agrarian regimes widely recognised by economic historians, Mitterauer embedded Hajnal's original reasoning within a much more complex and ambitious framework for explaining family differentials in preindustrial Europe. Inspired by the explanatory power of Mitterauer's proposition, Karl Kaser of Graz has popularised the notion of a "Hajnal-Mitterauer line" (Kaser 1997).

While it is highly appealing from a theoretical standpoint, the concept of a Hajnal-Mitterauer line has not yet been sufficiently tested on the basis of data from the territories its authors were concerned with. Although Mitterauer and Kaser offer convincing data corpora and analysis of Eastern European family patterns, with an emphasis on Austro-Hungarian data pools, as well as on the Balkans and the South East, a much larger part of the supposed "transitional zone"—i.e., the one that spread across the historical Kingdom of Poland—has not been equally represented in their analysis and available data. Mitterauer balances that deficit by relying on literature, which upon further investigation was found to stretch back almost more than half a century, and is largely based on the writings and research of Werner Conze (Conze 1940).

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of property was arranged within the family. Also in this regard, he contrasted "European" with "non-European" patterns, and suggested that the demographic behaviours of Eastern Europeans were not congruous with a "niche system" he ascribed to the West (Hajnal 1965, 133). Hajnal's basic unit of analysis were national societies, although his secondary data may have referred to single regions or even locations.

3 Interestingly, Alan Macfarlane in an article published in 1980 suggested "that Hajnal's line seems to follow the Slav/non-Slav division, that the extended household region is that of dominant Roman culture," and that the distinctive features of the north-western pattern were to be found in their purest form in England, "that extreme example of a stranded Teutonic society (...)". Macfarlane tentatively suggested that the "demographic structures" uncovered by historians, but Hajnal in particular, were conterminous with broad "cultural regions" (Macfarlane 1980).

Conze's input into the field has therefore gone largely unexamined until today in the context of historic Eastern European family patterns.

In this paper, our goal will be to reveal some serious shortcomings of Conze's analysis<sup>4</sup>. By taking a critical approach to Conze's work, we will be suggesting that:

(1) His notion of the agrarian change in 16th-century Lithuania was partly misinformed, as it was derived essentially from the reading of "official" legal documents designed by the Duchy, but not those pertaining to practical considerations guiding the reform's implementation at the local level (e.g., magnate estates of Belarus)<sup>5</sup>.

(2) Both before the agrarian reform and just after, peasant families might have been predominantly nuclear both in the Lithuanian and the Belarusian ethnic territories of the Grand Duchy. By calling forth the quantitative and qualitative evidence available to us, we challenge Conze's claim that "in the 16<sup>th</sup> century the appearance of the extended family (*Grossfamilien*) spread across Belarus" (Conze 1940, p.36).

(3) Conze's tentative observation regarding the structurally-complex character of families Belarus (in particular, in Polesie area of southern Belarus) must be tested with the use of reliable household data, which is amenable to various kinds of statistical analysis. The same approach should be taken in relation to the supposed differences in family composition between Slavic (Belarusian and Ukrainian) and Baltic (Lithuanian, Latvian and Estonian) populations. By referring to an unprecedented collection of historical household listings for the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth of the 1790s,<sup>6</sup> we will show that neither of Conze's claims cannot be taken at face value.

We organise this paper into the following parts. We begin with Conze's biography, supplemented by his major study's auctorial and ideological context, its methodological procedure, and its empirical content. This is followed by a brief description of Mitterauer's and Kaser's contribution to the modelling of geography of family forms in historic Europe, with an indication of the role that Conze played in this theoretical framework. The next and largest section will re-examine "*Agrarverfassung und Bevölkerung*" using the three critical historical and statistical exercises already mentioned. We will conclude in the final part of the paper by suggesting the extent to which the pervading notion of the East-West divide in historical East-

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4 Conze's ingenious contribution to our understanding of the peasant family structure should not be overlooked, however. Modern family and household history has yet to capitalize more fully on Conze's two substantial insights, namely that (1) agrarian laws and constitutions have a profound impact on rural populations, and on population dynamics; and that (2) historical patterns of settlement provide important clues for the understanding of prevailing family and household structures.

5 Description of the sources used by Conze is given in: Conze 1940,

6 The character of the data used in this research and its historical-socioeconomic context were described at length elsewhere (see Szoltysek, 2008a, 2008b).

Central Europe should be revised. The prospects for establishing a truly scientific understanding of familial characteristics of Eastern Europe, free from certain stereotypes about Slavic populations, will be also be discussed.

## 2. W. Conze and the East: Career and professional biography

Werner Conze (1910-1986) was born 1910 in Neuhaus in Northern Germany. Because of his father's occupation as a judge, the family moved frequently. Conze attended the Grunewald *Gymnasium* in Berlin from 1920 onwards, and finished school in Leipzig in 1929 (Dunkhase 2009, ch. 1). Thereafter, he decided to study art history, and enrolled at the University of Marburg. Later he switched subjects to become a historian and changed universities. Between 1929 and 1934, Conze studied in Marburg, Leipzig, Königsberg and the Herder Institute in Riga. His interests included agrarian history and the history of human settlements (Haar 2000, 89, ft. 79). It was also in these early student years that Conze joined the elitist and “*völkisch*”-oriented academic group DAG, or the *Deutsche Akademische Gildenschaft* (German Academic Guildhood). The organisation was part of the greater German “*Bund*” youth movement popular in the interwar period, which emphasised the outdoors, hiking, camping and staunch German patriotism (Dunkhase 2009, ch. 1).

During a field trip of the Academic Guildhood, Conze met the historian Theodor Schieder (1908-1984), then a student of history in Munich (Conze 1985, 23-32). Like Conze, Schieder was questioned about his involvement in National Socialist academic research in the post-war years of the *Bundesrepublik*. Conze's teachers in Leipzig included the right-wing sociologists Hans Freyer (1887-1969) and Gunther Ipsen (1899-1984), both outspoken practitioners of *völkisch* and racist population science. Gunter Ipsen, in particular, greatly influenced Conze. Ipsen's “*Blut und Boden*” (blood and soil) theories (Ipsen 1933),<sup>7</sup> along with his obsession with data, statistics and numeric patterns, left permanent impressions on Conze (Etzemüller 2001, 66). Soon after Conze met

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<sup>7</sup> It was mainly thanks to Ipsen's theoretical attempts at rethinking the relationship between population and resources in the light of Volkist theories of race that the Slavs of Eastern Europe came to occupy critical position in the construction of juxtaposed “population regimes”. In Ipsen's writings, “good peasants” from Wilhelm Riehl's ethnographies were invariably presented as unequivocally Germanic, and the “bad peasants” as Slavic (Ipsen 1933, 50). Consequently, it was claimed that the *Hufenverfassung* (“the hide constitution”), a specific landholding pattern imposed on German and other peasants of Western Europe by the nobility, distinguished “Germanic” rural societies from their Slavic counterparts. In Ipsen's accounts, the importance of the *Hufenverfassung* extended much beyond the specificities of the agrarian organization, since it supposedly captured the essence of the German peasantry throughout history. It prescribed the allocation of standardised units of arables known as hides (*Hufen*) to individual families, imposed the impartibility of holdings, as well as the prerequisites for marriage in the form of available self-sufficient positions or niches, all with the aim of facilitating the “autoregulation of population in the living space” (Schlumbohm 2000, 77; Ehmer 2000, 10; Fertig 2001, 18-19). Ipsen's account of Eastern Europe, by contrast, was seen foremost as the locus of the “agrarian overpopulation” caused by the Slavic inclination to the partibility of farms and joint property ownership, facilitating the complexity of residential arrangements and early marriage, in effect leading to an unbounded growth of each family and of the population at large (Schlumbohm 2000, 77; Ehmer 1992/1993; Fertig 2001, 19).

him, Ipsen went on to be one of the foremost advocates of “*Ostforschung*,” and became a passionate follower of National Socialism.

In 1931, Werner Conze left Leipzig and went to the University of Königsberg in East Prussia (Kaliningrad, today Russia) to look for a thesis adviser who could provide him with a topic. The Albertina University in Königsberg seemed like a good choice, and for more than just academic reasons. East Prussia had been geographically cut off from the German mainland since the Treaty of Versailles was signed in 1919. The East Prussian capital of Königsberg, now an even more insular outpost than before, had become a symbol for combative German nationalism. Throughout the inter-war period, the city received a massive influx of federal aid from the German state, and many incentives were created to encourage Germans to move from the mainland to the city. In addition, German students’ associations on the mainland actively promoted the preservation of the Prussian exclave. Their organisations made a point of exhorting their more nationalist-oriented members to spend at least one semester studying in Königsberg to demonstrate their patriotic solidarity. As a result, the number of students at Königsberg reached record highs. The mood at the university had been shifting, too. The institution’s traditional focus on mathematics and science was replaced by an emotional mix of nationalism and political agitation.

Conze found himself invigorated by that atmosphere. He became a student of Hans Rothfels (1891-1976), a nationalist and conservative historian whose main interest was in German *Ostforschung*<sup>8</sup>. Rothfels soon became the most influential mentor in Conze’s life. From 1929 onwards, he personally oversaw student excursions and field trips to neighbouring Baltic states that were designed to encourage students to conduct ethnographic, demographic and social field

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8 *Ostforschung* as an academic discipline had its roots in the late 19th century. But its formation took place around 1914, and was closely connected to WWI (Burleigh 1988, 24-75). An important distinction has to be made between *Ostforschung* und *Osteuropaforschung*. Whereas *Osteuropaforschung* regarded societies and countries of Eastern Europe as autonomous objects of research, *Ostforschung* was concerned with the fight for “Germandom”. After Germany’s defeat in WWI, it became a chief tool for challenging the Treaty of Versailles. Almost from the initialisation of *Ostforschung* after WWI, Poland became its main focus. Poland had been re-created an independent state in 1918, but it was not until 1922 that the frontiers had been established. Not only Germany, but also Poland resurrected national dreams from centuries past. For the Second Polish Republic, it was the Lithuanian-Polish Commonwealth of the 18<sup>th</sup> century and its myth of a Greater Polish realm. Vigorous historic research on both sides tried to establish senior claims in the territorial dispute, which were additionally fanned by separatist movements in the Baltics, Ukraine and Belarus. A race of kinds to investigate the archives developed during the 1920s, along with episodes of Polish and German archivists guarding against user applications from the other country. The *Geheime Staatsarchiv* in Berlin/Potsdam assumed the role of the keeper of the flame for the Weimar Republic. But Poland had stepped also up its efforts. Two “Baltic Institutes”, one in Toruń and one in Gdańsk, had sprung up and had begun to award scholarships to and promote the work of revisionist Polish researchers. By the early 1930s, Germany intensified its Polish studies in order to build a “properly armed, broad, defensive front to oppose the Poles.” (Burleigh 1988, 51). In 1932, the Prussian Ministry of State got involved and endorsed a plan to centralise the groups concerned with German *Ostforschung*. The result was the creation of a central agency in 1931-1933 and in 1933, shortly after the National Socialists had become in charge of government this administrative unit adopted the title *Publikationsstelle* (Publication Office), and became a public relations institution for *Ostforschung*. With the national-socialist knack for abbreviations, the Publikationsstelle’s became known as “PuSte” and evolved into the central agency for the coordination, endowment and publication of National Socialist research of the eastern regions until 1945.

research on settlement forms, history and language (Dunkhase 2009, ch. 2). It was on these trips, that Rothfels drew Conze's attention to the German language exclave of Hirschenhof (Conze 1934).<sup>9</sup> Hirschenhof became Conze's master's thesis topic. Thus, he entered the field of German *Ostforschung*.

In January 1933, the National Socialist Party came to power in Germany. Soon after, in May 1933, Werner Conze applied for NSDAP membership in the process of joining the SA (*Sturmabteilung*, or Storm Troopers). His entrance into the NSDAP was officially approved in 1937 (Dunkhase 2009, ch. 3.1). Conze's thesis advisor, Hans Rothfels, was frozen out and was finally dismissed from his post in 1934 because of his Jewish descent. Gunther Ipsen stepped in and guided Conze's work during its final stages. Conze's thesis, "*Hirschenhof. Die Geschichte einer deutschen Sprachinsel in Livland*" (Hirschenhof. History of a German Language-Island in Latvia), was published in 1934<sup>10</sup>.

In his study, Conze drew a distinction between the "*Deutscher Volksboden*" (Soil of the German Nation) and the "*Deutscher Kulturboden*" (Soil of German Culture) (Conze 1934, 8-9). This concept has been garnering attention in German nationalist geographical circles for some time. In 1926, an institute known as the "*Stiftung für deutsche Volks- und Kulturbodenforschung*" (Trust Foundation for German National Soil and Cultural Soil Research) had been founded in Leipzig (Burleigh 1988, 25). In the same year, the well-respected German geographer Albrecht Penck had suggested a more refined definition of the two concepts (Burleigh 1988, 25-27; Penck 1926, 62-73). "*Volksboden*" was defined as areas settled by the Germans, and territories where the German language was spoken. Only two-thirds of this area was within the boundaries of the post-World War I German Reich. *Kulturboden* was defined as constituting areas that had been touched by German cultural influence in the past, and where palpable traces of German culture could still be found. Substantial areas of Denmark, Poland, Czechoslovakia, Hungary, Yugoslavia and Romania were classified as German *Kulturboden* (Penck 1926, 72-73). The perception of the German cultural influence was derived from such parameters as settlement forms, building styles, family patterns and agricultural habits.

Conze placed Hirschenhof into the category of German *Kulturboden*. He gave further details by explaining the differences between the South and the German North East. In Yugoslavia, Czechia and Austria, German peasants would have settled and turned their surroundings into a permanent German *Volksboden*. The situation would have been different altogether in the North East. German settlers had taken on an active role as leaders, according to Conze, and had

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<sup>9</sup> This was a German settlement founded in the 18<sup>th</sup> century by Russia. In Conze's time, it was in Latvia and went by the name Irši near Liepkaļne.

<sup>10</sup> The monograph offered a classical historical structure and did not yet seek to address demographic questions.



become the ruling class. But they remained a minority, and merely infused their surroundings with German culture, thus making the land German *Kulturboden*, instead of demographically converting it into *Volksboden* (Conze 1934, 8-9). Conze's position was a moderate one, given that there were more anti-Slavic views in circulation at the time.<sup>11</sup>

Ipsen and his circle of preeminent National Socialist population theorists had also transferred to Königsberg en masse in 1933, filling the anticipated void, as well as positioning themselves in the frontline of the "*Volkestumskampf*" (National Struggle). Consequently, Königsberg rose to become one of the most important centres of National Socialist *Ostforschung* in the years leading up to WWII. Conze started the habilitation process under the guidance of Ipsen, and was made Ipsen's university assistant in November 1935. At this time, the two men had already decided on a topic, melding Conze's previous training as a historian with Ipsen's interest in *völkisch* population research (Dunkhase 2009, ch. 3.1)<sup>12</sup>. Ipsen recommended Conze's habilitation candidacy to the public administration, along with the observation that Conze had already proved through his Hirschenhof study that he was able, in character and scientific training, to participate successfully in the *völkisch* frontier struggle (ibid.).

There are several characteristics that have been found to be crucial for German *Ostforschung* at that time. First, there was a strong connection between population and *Lebensraum*. Demographic development is understood as a function of the territory available for human habitation (Mackensen & Reulecke 2005, 230). Second, it was widely advised that the concepts of *Volksboden* and *Kulturboden* be adopted. Third, research goals were highly politicised, and were conceptualised as representing long-range historical arguments to challenge Poland<sup>13</sup>. Fourth, an emphasis on pre- and medieval history was encouraged because of the utility of providing arguments for "Germandom" (ibid.), as well as an interdisciplinary framework merging history, agrarian studies, sociology and archaeology. Fifth, special emphasis was placed on the revaluation of archival mass sources, which were thought to have the potential to become "weapons forged from the sources" (Maschke 1931, 37-39). Finally, researchers were advised to stress continuity over historical change. All of these characteristics can be found in Conze's second book.

Conze worked on his habilitation for five years. His thesis was approved in October 1940 at the University of Vienna, where Ipsen had earlier taken a prestigious teaching position. The habilitation, "*Agrarverfassung und Bevölkerung in Litauen und Weißrussland*," appeared in print in

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<sup>11</sup> The main assertion was that Slavic settlement in the Northeast was only to be seen as interlude in history because the area had really been Teutonic first.

<sup>12</sup> Conze's sketchy outline of ideas from 1935 mentioned: "...the development of the old Lithuanian-Belarusian areas ... the great agrarian reform of the 16th century... the link between agrarian constitution, social structure, and population growth."

<sup>13</sup> A distinction should be made between *Ostforschung*, which focused on Poland, and *Osteuropaforschung*, provided contemporary analysis of the Soviet Union (Burleigh 1988, 32).

Leipzig in the same year<sup>14</sup>. The academic community received it with praise, and generally commented positively on the utilisation of its quantitative data. The study is written with a notable absence of political haranguing. Conze certainly did not share Ipsen's seething racism or his dark visions of ethnic obliteration. Comparatively, Conze's presentation is constrained and dry, taking a decidedly objective perspective. The few anti-Semitic diatribes found in Conze's work seem moderate, and are more in line with an outdated 19<sup>th</sup> century anti-Semitism than with the National Socialist effusions of his time. While these remarks remain a shortcoming of his work, they represent almost the only overt concession Conze made to the racist ideology of the National Socialists. This is surprising given that he was working in a *völkisch*-nationalist setting.

Even so, "*Agrarverfassung und Bevölkerung in Litauen und Weißrussland*" was steeped in German *Ostforschung*. It almost exemplarily followed the movement's most important narratives and theoretical approaches. In addition, the study's academic origin is intrinsically linked to places and organisations, which not only spearheaded German *Ostforschung*, but more or less invented it. Just a few months into working on his habilitation, Conze resigned in Königsberg and accepted a scholarship for *Ostforschung* with the PuSte, the *Publikations-Stelle* (Publication Office) in Berlin. This was part of a plan to mould the young historian—then aged 26—into an expert on the "Wilna Region" (now in Lithuania). Some of his mentors who had written recommendations supporting his acceptance to PuSte included Theodor Oberländer (1905-1998), a dyed-in-the-wool National Socialist since the beginning and a trained agronomist and economist, and Albert Brackmann (1871-1952), the director of the *Geheime Staatsarchiv*. The scholarship enabled Conze to travel to north-eastern Poland and to Wilna. Conze returned Königsberg in 1937 to resume his post as Ipsen's assistant (Dunkhase 2009, ch. 3.2). Back in Königsberg, Conze embarked on a NODFG-sponsored research trip to the archives of Wilna, and he was on the payroll of the 1937 PuSte founded journal "*Jomsburg*" (named after a Viking settlement on the island of Wollin), which was to popularise the fruits of *Ostforschung* to a wider public (Burleigh 1988, 139). Conze's biographer, Jan Dunkhase (2009, ch. 3.2), has shown that the years 1936-1939 brought about an intensification of Werner Conze's German nationalist and anti-Semitic views, and an increasing convergence with National Socialist politics concerning the plans for the "East".

The habilitation research of W. Conze was meant to provide the most thorough "empirical" support for Ipsen's theories of population by proving the incommensurability of the

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14 As indicated by the double title and the insertion "*Teil 1*" (Part 1), the opus was planned as a two-volume book. But the second part, "Belarus," was never finished. According to the historian Wolfgang Schieder, Conze's student and research assistant during the post-WWII Münster and Heidelberg years, Conze had indeed already started some preliminary research in the 1940s, but the material was most likely abandoned in Königsberg in 1945. And, later, work was not resumed on this topic. Schieder's personal communication with B. Zuber-Goldstein (E-Mail MPIDR, 23.01.2009).

Slavic “way of life” with the demographic behaviour characteristic of German or non-Slavic communities in the German Baltic *Kulturboden* (Conze, 1940, 1-4). Conze used historical materials found in Vilnius, Kaunas and Kaliningrad (then *Königsberg*) to examine the demographic effects of introducing the “hide constitution” (*Hufenverfassungssystem*)<sup>15</sup> on rural populations of Belarusians and Lithuanians in the Grand Duchy from the 16th century up to 1795<sup>16</sup>. Conze claimed that the rates of population growth in early modern times differed significantly between the two groups, since only among the Slavs did population numbers double between the 16<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> centuries (Conze 1940, 206). He attributed this difference to diverging attitudes towards the newly implemented hide system. The latter was accepted by the Lithuanian population, which complied with the farm size tailored to a nuclear family. On the other hand, the Slavs (Belarusians) of the eastern part of the Grand Duchy refused to accept the system, and continued to follow their “small peasant instincts,” as manifested in the real partition of their allocated hides, and worked the land with complex families up to the late 18<sup>th</sup> century (Conze 1940, 122-123, 140-141, 174, 206). Conze attributed this difference in attitudes between the Lithuanians and the Belarusians to long-term cultural preferences regarding family co-residence and property devolution, as well as to historic settlement patterns (Conze 1940, 27 ff.)<sup>17</sup>. Whereas Lithuanians were displaying less complex familial organisation as early as in the 16<sup>th</sup> century, large families (*Grossfamilien*) were widespread throughout the whole of ethnic Belarus (33-36)<sup>18</sup>. Admittedly, extended families also existed in the Lithuanian regions, but their size was on average much bigger in Belarus. The above-average occurrence of extended families, Conze claimed, was detectable in the “backward” region of Polessia in the southern marchland area of Belarus (Conze 1940, 36).

According to Conze, the socio-demographic fault line between these two different agrarian regimes lay somewhere between the south-western fringes of Samogitia (Polish: *Żmudź*) and the Grodna area (Conze 1940, 124-125). To the north of this area, the “auto-regulative” agrarian system based on nuclear families was supposed to prevail among Lithuanians; while to the south and south-west, a divisibility of holdings, coupled with a propensity towards more communal forms of residence, was believed to be much more prevalent (Conze 1940, 122-129).

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15 The reform led to the following: a compulsory consolidation of the intermixed manorial estates; equal distribution of the arable land among peasant families and the re-organisation of open-field agriculture into “włóka” (*manus*; hide; 33 morgi or some 60 acres), which then were to be subdivided into three parallel strips or arables; introduction of a three-year crop rotation; extension of manors; turning the peasants into serfs; and, replacement of all older systems of property management by the system of land-holding in return for labour service on the demesne estates.

16 Conze claimed his research referred to the whole of Lithuania within its boundaries of 1569 (Conze 1940, 5-12).

17 “The reason why the reforms of the 16th century created bigger villages in the Eastern Slavic areas rather than in the Lithuanian obviously stems from the difference between Slavic ‘*Dvorišče*’ types and Lithuanian farmhouses. The ‘*Dvorišče*’ has been stronger occupied than the homestead of the Lithuanian farmer” (Conze 1940, 27).

18 One of the early reviewers of Conze’s work claimed that it “clearly demonstrated, that there is a stronger biological reproduction of the Slavic population element than there is of the Eastern Balts – and this despite unfavourable social and settlement conditions” (Seraphim 1941, 39).

Not long after its publication, Conze's work was heavily criticised for not fully acknowledging its inferences to limited source material with substantial holes (especially for the time period of the 17<sup>th</sup> century), and for its unbalanced geographical distribution. Łowmianski objected to Conze's population estimates for the 16<sup>th</sup> and the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> centuries (including his estimates of the mean household size), and also to his uncritical examination of the estate inventories. According to Łowmiański, Conze's attempt at explaining differences in demographic, family and economic characteristics between the households of the Lithuanians and the Slavs in ethno-cultural terms was totally unjustifiable, since such divergences could be explained in purely economic terms (i.e., while Lithuanian areas were more involved in grain production for export, peasant agriculture in Belarus was of a more subsistence nature, with only a marginal share of an export-oriented crop production) (Łowmiański 1947; Zorn 1987). Morzy (1965) also claimed that Conze's population estimates were not convincing (p. 4). For Wauker, in turn, even Conze's distinction between the populations of the Lithuanians and the Belarusians seemed dubious (Wauker, 2003, 368-370). Wauker also noted that the body of sources was, in general, a weakness of Conze's study, and asserted that the hide constitution was effectively put to use at an earlier point in time in a much greater number of demesne estates than Conze acknowledged (Wauker, 2003, 370). He also pointed out some blatant errors in Conze's arithmetical calculations, which enabled him to conclude that "Conze's population estimates are completely worthless, while at the same time he was not able to demonstrate sufficiently without doubt, that there is in fact a noteworthy difference between the population growth of Lithuanians and Belarusians" (Wauker, 2003, 373).

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The week before the German invasion of Poland in 1939, Conze was drafted to reserve duty, but stayed around Königsberg for the next few months, which allowed him to continue working on his habilitation. In April 1940, he was transferred to the 291<sup>st</sup> Infantry Division and was later deployed to France for active duty. Wounded, he spent the second half of 1940 in Königsberg, where he put his finishing touches on his habilitation. The thesis defence took place in Vienna in December of the same year. Soon after, Conze returned to active duty, participating in the invasion of Russia from 1941 onwards. In October 1942, he was appointed to a position as a professor at the *Reichsuniversität* Posen, the National Socialist SS replacement of the previously Polish Piast University in Poznań. During a front leave he delivered his inaugural lecture, once again focusing on his *leitmotif*, overpopulation against the backdrop of land allocation. Conze spent most of the remaining years of the war at the front, interrupted by months-long layovers in military hospitals. When World War II ended, Conze was taken into

briefly into prisoner-of-war custody by the USSR, but was released soon after. The Conze family was reunited in Bad Essen in Lower Saxony in the summer of 1945.

After several years spent in limbo after WWII, Conze managed to secure a lecturer position with a steady salary in Münster 1950-51. He then went on to reinvent himself as a highly respected historian of the *Bundesrepublik*<sup>19</sup>. He was even appointed a rector of the University of Heidelberg (the oldest university in Germany) for half a year (1969-1970) before retiring. In his later years, he returned to his research interest of his youth, German history in the East. He died in Heidelberg six years later at the age of 75.

Posthumously, Werner Conze and his colleague Theodor Schieder became the centre of a critical controversy at the German *Historikertag* of 1998 in Frankfurt, and this has triggered a new wave of interest in German historiography by younger historians. Nonetheless, Conze's notion of persistent differences in familial organisation between Slavs and non-Slavs of East Central Europe outlived its author.

### **3. The vicious circle: The Hajnal-Mitterauer line and the restatement of the great divide in Eastern Europe.**

Notwithstanding all uncertainties regarding the appropriateness of Hajnal's positioning of demographic regimes in Eastern Europe, his modelling propositions were given a new life in the works of M. Mitterauer (also K. Kaser). According to Mitterauer, it was the *Hufenverfassungssystem*—i.e., the specific landholding pattern based on the impartible *manus* or hide, discussed earlier in the works of G. Ipsen and W. Conze—that had formed the foundation for the unique European household formation pattern in Western and Central Europe, but only in some parts of Eastern Europe. In its origin and disposition, there were two essential features of the *Hufe* system. One was the principle of single-heir impartible farm succession, whereby only one of the sons could inherit and marry. The second was a “one couple-per-farm policy,” the rule originating in the Carolingian period which stated that only one married couple with children could live off a particular hide<sup>20</sup>. According to Mitterauer, the uniform populating of *Hufe* with nuclear families, and the simultaneous prevention of a numerical accretion of farming families on

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<sup>19</sup> He published numerous works on German history, many of them becoming standard textbooks, like *Deutsche Einheit* (German Unity), Münster 1958; *Geschichtliche Grundbegriffe. Historisches Lexikon zur politisch-sozialen Sprache in Deutschland*, co-edited by Otto Brunner (transl.: Basic Terms in History. Historic Dictionary on political-sociological Language in Germany), 8 volumes, starting in 1972; *Deutsche Geschichte. Epochen und Daten* in the prestigious Series “PLOTZ”, 1972; *Der Nationalsozialismus 1919-1933*, and *Deutsche Geschichte im Osten Europas*, 10 volumes, brought out in a new edition 1994 by the eminent Siedler Verlag.

<sup>20</sup> Additional rules stemmed from certain characteristic of the *Hufe*, such as the following: (1) no marriage previous to the succession of property, (2) frequent handing over of farmsteads through remarriage of a widow, (3) retirement (*Ausgedinge*) as a form of maintenance of the parents within a household which has been passed down to younger generation and, above all, (4) life-cycle domestic service as a flexible form of labour supplementation according to the individual needs of the farmstead (Mitterauer, 1999, 214-215; repeated in Kaser, 2001, 31 ff.).

them, were the result of a systematic policy of the seignury devised so as to facilitate the most beneficial collection of a tribute (Mitterauer, 1999, 204, 211, 213). However, both features worked against the formation and sustainability of complex families. Although households with co-residing relatives could occasionally also emerge under the *Hufenverfassung* rules, such multi-generational units would differ structurally from complex residential arrangements typical of joint family systems, if only in terms of their exclusively linear extension, and the placement of the authority position in the middle generation (Mitterauer, 1999, 203-204, 211-216; also Kaser, 2000, 67-74; Kaser, 2001, 39-40; Kaser, 2002)<sup>21</sup>.

Both Mitterauer and Kaser maintained that the *Hufenverfassung* system was spread over part of other Eastern European territories due to the German colonisation movement of the Middle Ages (Mitterauer, 1999, 210 ff.; Kaser, 2001)<sup>22</sup>. Mitterauer, however, rightly took pains to delineate precisely the eastern boundary of this agricultural pattern. Drawing heavily on the German literature on medieval colonisation and rural settlement patterns, he claimed the eastern border of the hide system was to be found in the Baltic provinces, the former East Prussia, Pomerania, Brandenburg, Silesia, Bohemia, Moravia and southern Poland; as well as in large parts of western Hungary, Lower Austria, Styria and Slovenia. The main point that should be emphasised in this context is that Mitterauer's description of the eastern extension of the *Hufen* system, with its characteristics of late marriage, simple household structure and diminished lineage, bears a striking resemblance to the Hajnal line (Mitterauer, 1999, 210; Kaser, 2000, 67)<sup>23</sup>. To the east of this region, Mitterauer argued, a sort of "transitional zone" became apparent, an area "in which the settlement pattern may not be exclusively defined by methodical village structures [inherent to the *Hufenverfassung*], but where they are very frequent. This particularly applies to large parts of the medieval kingdom of Poland. In the early modern period, methodical settlement in this region was intensified and partially extended beyond it, for example in the Grand Duchy of Lithuania. This East Central European zone of planned settlements marks the

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21 For Kaser, the very meaning of social structures created by the *Hufenverfassung* system and, consequently, the importance of the Hajnal-Mitterauer line rests primarily on dividing areas with impartible inheritance (*Anerbenrecht*) from those displaying partible inheritance systems (Kaser, 2000).

22 Neither Mitterauer, nor Kaser seem to be concerned with debates and controversies surrounding the topic of "German colonisation of the East." However, as Piskorski put it recently with reference to mainstream historical works on the topic written 1840-1970 by both Germans and the Poles, the "research on the medieval 'colonization of the east' is (...) a model example of utilitarian conceptions of the past, and is in this sense an excellent illustration of what historiography should not be" (Piskorski, 2004, 325; there, a review of most important literature). Typically, the German way of instrumentalising the "Medieval colonisation" was to argue that East-Central European lands were only able to develop at all from the 10th century onwards thanks to the achievements of German culture. "The arrival of numerous German settlers, importing this culture in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, enabled the countries of east central Europe to enter the family of 'civilized' states. They owed all their later successes to their embracing of German culture, and all their failures to their rejection of it" (Piskorski, 2004, 323).

23 "The extension of the Medieval colonization movement in Eastern Europe corresponds with the border which John Hajnal found for distribution of the "European Marriage Pattern" in 1965 in an obvious way" (Mitterauer, 1994, 4).

region that was successively penetrated by patterns of western agricultural form from the high Middle Ages up to the Early Modern period” (Mitterauer, 1999, 210).

Mitterauer attributed the limited penetration of the *Hufen* system in Eastern Europe to differences between Eastern and Western Christianity. Homogenous social structures produced by the colonisation movement, he argued, “never went beyond the dividing line between the Western and Eastern Church. Also, the outposts of the colonisation only rarely went further than this border” (Mitterauer, 1994, 3; Mitterauer, 2003, 42 ff.; also Kaser, 2000, 65, 69, 73-75). It was only through the values of Western Christendom that a high marriage age and the overcoming of patrilineal principles of household formation was finally possible within the seignorial framework (Mitterauer, 1994, 3; Mitterauer, 1999, 220). According to Mitterauer, this diverging effect of Western and Eastern Christendom is explained less by differences in family and marriage regulations between the two churches, as by the weaker institutional power of the Orthodox church to prevail against long-term effects of the kinship customs and practices of the pre-Christian substratum (religiously motivated idea of lineage; the Levirate; ancestral worship) (Mitterauer, 1994, 11-12; Mitterauer 1996, 394-395; Mitterauer, 2003, 42-43; Kaser, 2000, 69, 73). Other factors responsible for sustaining “non-Western-like” family and kinship patterns east of the “transition zone” were the isolation with regard to transport, the low degree of urbanisation, the absence of feudal structures and the low penetration by state authorities (Mitterauer, 1994).

While it is highly appealing from a theoretical perspective, the concept of the Hajnal-Mitterauer line has not yet been tested sufficiently on the basis of data from the territories its authors were concerned with. Although Mitterauer and Kaser offer convincing data corpora and analysis of Eastern European family patterns, with an emphasis on Austro-Hungarian data pools (Ehmer, 1991; Cerman, 2001; Kaser, 1997) as well as in the Balkans and South East (Kaser, 2000), a much larger part of the supposed “transitional zone”—which spread across the historical Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth—has not been equally represented in their analysis and available data<sup>24</sup>. Mitterauer balances that deficit by relying on literature, which, upon further investigation, stretches back almost more than half a century, and is largely based on the writings and research of W. Conze (Mitterauer, 1999, 217 ff). Referring to the Commonwealth’s eastern

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24 Although Austrian scholars had a good empirical knowledge of the variability of family systems in preindustrial Russia (Mitterauer and Kagan, 1982; Cerman, 2002), their sense of the familial constitution of the Lithuanian, Belarusian and Ukrainian populations derives not from a direct observation and research on demographic patterns, but primarily from the German *Ostforschung* literature, with its focus on settlement and inheritance patterns (see, for example, Kaser’s usage of Wilfried Krallert’s research on patterns of village settlement in Eastern Europe; Kaser 2000, 120-124; on Krallert: see Burleigh, 1988, 244 ff; Achim 2005). Only five positions in Polish related to family history were available to the authors, and only one that actually contained a direct empirical investigation of family composition in some Polish territories (see Kaser, 2002, 376). Kaser (Kaser, 2000) rightly refers to the only available published research on family structure in Lithuania (Višniauskaitė, 1964), with, however, no indication that Višniauskaitė’s findings and hypotheses undermine his very argument about Eastern European divergent family developments.

territories, Mitterauer translated Conze's arguments about differences between Lithuanian/Latvian and Slavonic (Belarusian) settlement and agrarian patterns into modern kinship and household structure terminology. While patterns prevalent among the former were supposed to lead to diminished lineage relationships and nuclearised residential patterns among the peasantry, a historically widespread system of "big families" (*Grossfamilien*) based on the collective ownership of land and free divisibility of holdings in Belarus did not permit the concept of single-family farming based on *Hufe* to become widespread (Mitterauer, 1999, 217-219)<sup>25</sup>.

Still, however, Mitterauer's and Kaser's concept of a transition zone between different family and kinship systems in East-Central Europe does not specify what sort of demographic and family phenomena, and in what proportions, researchers are likely to encounter within the transition areas. Thus, these phenomena must be investigated through the use of a "real" data from the regions of interest to the two authors. More importantly, neither Mitterauer nor Kaser seem to be concerned with debates and controversies surrounding the topic of "German colonisation of the East," and all the related topics so essential to the work of Conze. In addition, neither of them was in a position to verify the validity of Conze's empirical findings.

## 4. Re-examining Conze

**4a.** Although a classic form of the three-field system based on hides was introduced into Lithuania as early as the middle of the 15<sup>th</sup> century, decisive steps to disseminate this method were first taken in mid-16<sup>th</sup> century (the so-called "*voloka* reform"; Polish, *pomiara włóczęna*). Conze is right in attributing to that agrarian change a decisive role in transforming the family and residence patterns of the East European peasantry. Many researchers, both before and after Conze, have suggested that the main effect of *pomiara* was the decline in "big, multigenerational households," although, unlike in Mitterauer's contribution, this influence was never conceptualised precisely by Eastern European scholars. Morzy (1965, 122-123) argued that *pomiara* accelerated the already ongoing process of the individualisation of families (also Kernazhycky 1931, 123). Pochilewicz reiterated that argument, but warned that the reform was not fully capable of eliminating joint families from the Belarusian landscape (Pochilewicz 1957, 16, 27).

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<sup>25</sup> "The situation in the Grand Duchy of Lithuania after the introduction of the *Hufe* reform by King Sigismund August", he concluded, "is a strong argument for the hypothesis that an interrelation exists between east colonisation and the development of the Hajnal line. The Hajnal line runs between the old Lithuanian settlement region and the formerly Rurikid princedoms in White Russia, which had come under Lithuanian rule. It thus corresponds to the deviation between areas of the Grand Duchy where the *Hufe* reform had been successfully introduced and those where this succeeded incompletely or not at all. The rules of household formation drawn up by Hajnal apply for these regions (...)" (Mitterauer, 1999, 219).



What differentiates those scholars from Conze was their perception of the reform's spatial coverage. French argued authoritatively that "the uniformity with which the three-field system was introduced into Lithuania was remarkable, as was the wholesale nature of the reform. Arable and villages were transformed, in what must have been an upheaval of considerable scale (...). No less was the speed with which the reform was accomplished. By 1569, (...) the work was apparently complete in the three principal [ducal] provinces of Lithuania." He added that "the majority of church and noble landowners followed the royal example, with the consequence that the new regime was introduced over a wide region in a very brief period of time" (French 1970, 106, 118). Many other scholars have suggested that, in the second half of the 17<sup>th</sup> century, the reorganisation of open-field agriculture into 'włóka' (*manus*; hide; 33 *morgi*, or some 60 acres) was widespread in central and western Belarus (Picheta, 1958, pp. 228-242; Ochmański, 1986, pp. 163-165, 175-183, 187-195; Kozlovskij, 1969, p. 43; Kozlovskij, 1970, p. 209).

Indeed, the reform was not implemented equally easily, or to the same degree, everywhere in Belarus. Conze is certainly right in pinpointing difficulties that the reform's introduction faced in the Polessia region. However, it is difficult to escape the feeling that his arguments about the refusal of the Belarusians to accept the hide constitution represent fallacious testimony resulting from selective and biased treatment of archival resources.

The reform's implementation in Polessia was severely challenged, but this was essentially due to the region's harsh ecological conditions. French offers a reasonable explanation for why the redistribution of the peasant arable lands and their subdivision into three fields in 1557 failed in some dozens of villages in Polessia. "In those areas," he wrote, "swamps were extremely extensive, (...) and they covered many hundreds of square miles and the only dry sites for settlements and fields were tiny 'islets' of sand. Such hostile conditions completely frustrated the overseers; in these great swamps lay the 71 unreorganized villages, with their arable scattered about as of old in dozens of minute plots, perched on higher 'islets' of dry ground. In these villages the *dvorishche* remained as the unit of land-holding and the pre-reform scale of tax assessment was continued. Needless to say, in such conditions no attempt was made to establish demesne" (French 1970, 115-116). Independent accounts of similar difficulties in Polessia have been given by other authors (Kernazhycky 1931, 73).

Conze's notion of the Belarusians' refusal to accept the hide constitution is essentially based on scanty evidence, such as a report of peasants' protests against the implementation of the new agrarian order in one district of north-eastern Polessia (Bobruysk *starostvo*)<sup>26</sup>. A more careful look at the circumstances prevailing in the area in question reveals, however, that the peasants'

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26 Conze admitted himself that apart from Bobruysk *starostvo* cases of the peasants' open defense against the reform are not reported in the sources [sic!] (Conze 1940, 122).

material and economic concerns, rather than their familistic orientation, were decisive in the prolonged failure of the reform in that setting. The goal of the reform was a decisive redesigning of the very structure of the peasant' living environment, and it thus, objectively speaking, imposed strong coercive pressures on the villagers. The hide constitution not only forced them to abandon the arables they had been cultivating for decades in favour of the new ones allocated to them by the overseers, it also demanded that peasant houses and premises be relocated. The latter, understandably, implied the expenditure of enormous amounts of material and human resources, which had to be generated by individual families or domestic collectives (Kernazhycky 1931, 89-90). Given such material and economic pressures, it is possible to imagine that the peasants' refusal to follow the new rules could have easily arisen regardless of concerns about intergenerational and kin co-residence. Last but not least, the results of the peasant resistance in *Bobruyskie* must not have left a big mark on the villagers' post-reform residential patterns. In the 1930s, Kernzycki applied a strict formal typology of domestic groups to the listing of families, which was part of the area's inventory that was taken shortly after the reform had been fully implemented. He found that, in 1639, over 58% of all domestic groups were households of individual families (Kernazycky 1931, 126-133).

Another factor overlooked by Conze was the role of local agency, as represented by local landlords, in the way the reform was implemented in a given place, and the flexible ways in which local estate managers and owners responded to the general pattern of new order. There is an abundance of information suggesting that Eastern European landlords were customarily concerned with their peasants' residential arrangements. They often required the latter to be modified, and usually had the real power necessary to implement their wishes (Bieńkowski 1959, 69-70; Kapyski & Kapyski 1993, 44-45; Pawlik 1915, 48, 133-134; Łysiak 1965, 161-162). Estate instructions from the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth suggest that, in all parts of its entire territory, the need for the sustainment (or, if necessary, the restoration) of tax-payable or labour-capable family units belonged to the realm of the landlords' most explicit economic interests. At the same time, the reform created strong incentives for neolocal household formation among the subject farmers (Szoltysek & Zuber-Goldstein 2009). Usually, however, these "neolocal incentives from above" were subjected to an ecological sustainability test. This can be illustrated with several examples.

As early as during the first wave of the *voloka* reform in the southern, or Polessian part of Belarus of 1557 (*Pinske starostvo*), an interesting alteration in the general policy towards peasant residential rules can be observed. This aspect went unnoticed by Conze, despite his otherwise extensive use of the same archival material. As in many other places where *pomiara* was taking

place, in the Polessia area surrounding the town of Pinsk, estate administrators relocated peasant families and domestic groups so as to create peasant landholdings equally equipped with manpower. Interestingly, after having faced a spatial pattern of highly dispersed arables in the Pinsk area of the late 1550s (caused by the prevalence of swamps and marshes), the inspectors decided to follow the rule that each holding of an equal size of *voloka* should be cultivated either by a father with an adult (married) son, or by two married brothers (Kosman 1970, 132). This pattern of restructuring “from above” was responsible for sustaining a large number of multigenerational or otherwise joint-family households in that area. The cultural inclinations of the peasantry did not seem to play any role at all in this process. More generally, in Belarus, where the mid-17<sup>th</sup>-century wars caused severe population losses, and where a substantial amount of non-cultivated arable land existed until the very end of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, the serf-owners’ perennial desire to repopulate deserted holdings on their estates by splitting up large farms and supporting individual families was often hindered by place-specific agricultural conditions. Despite the abundance of land which was suitable for re-cultivation by the rural classes, the scarcity of labour and the almost complete non-existence of a market for hired labor, coupled with the low levels of agricultural development typical of Belarus, made the effective multiplication of the numbers of labour-capable household units on the basis of nuclear households unlikely in the “east” (Szołtysek, 2009). Lithuanian-Belarusian landlords seemed to have been well aware that certain socioeconomic and ecological conditions imposed constraints on their otherwise more-or-less “western” economic orientation. The *Instructions* suggest that Belarusian seigneurs understood quite well that, given the poor agricultural conditions of Belarus and the often limited resources available for supporting individual families, a temporary co-residence of several (usually two) family units might help to prevent the creation of economically unviable households (Pawlik, 1915, 134, 167). “*The estate manager should not allow family households to split*”, one of the *Instructions* stipulated, “*unless there are two male adults in the subunit wishing to stay where it was before, and at least one adult son in the branch is intending to become independent (...)*”. This is “*because singletons (single householders) split between two households are likely to fall into poverty due to the lack of sufficient manpower*” (Grodzińska Crown estate, 1777; source: Pawlik 1915)<sup>27</sup>. Another *Instruction* provided even more details regarding such practices among the landowners: “*(...) it is a duty of a peasant supervisor (dziesiętnik) to make sure that none of the peasant householders having only two persons capable of working (“osoby zgodne do roboty” - adults) will not split apart to occupy a separate dwelling,*

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27 Since landlords made an effort to stipulate rules prohibiting separation of single nuclei, there must have been a peasant practice (or an inclination) favouring splitting up and household independence that would have encouraged such laws to be put forward. If that had been the case, then we will have proof of the existence of “atomistic” principles of household organisation among the population traditionally thought to have adhered to collectivism and familism. See also Verdon, 1998.

*unless they have children sufficiently grown up to provide support in all household tasks?*” (Grodzińska Crown estate, 1777; source: Pawlik 1915).

Such a policy could have been effective enough to create a relatively high quota of extended and multiple-family households in Belarus. Reading *Instructions* and other archival materials of that time, one can easily get an impression of the landlords’ persistent attempts to cope in a highly flexible way with Belarus’ economic disparities relative to other parts of the Commonwealth (Szoltysek & Zuber-Goldstein 2009). The cultural or economic preferences of Belarusian peasants for any specific type of residence can hardly be detected from available sources. Łowmianski must have been right when he argued—in stark disagreement with Conze—that all differences in demographic, family and economic characteristics between the households of the Lithuanians and of the Slavs in the Grand Duchy can be satisfactorily explained in purely economic terms. The ethno-cultural explanations suggested by Conze are too far-reaching, and do not seem to be justified.

**4b.** One of the major problems with Conze’s reasoning regarding Lithuanian and Belarusian demographic regimes was that it never operated with a precise typology of family or households arrangements. This is not an unusual situation, even with regards to more contemporary investigations into the familial organisation of the inhabitants of the historical Polish Commonwealth. For instance, Belarusian-Soviet scholars who attempted in the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century to reconstruct the agrarian regimes and the material conditions of the lives of the peasantry on its eastern fringes either did not touch upon the issue of family systems at all, or refrained from exploring the question after few cursory remarks. Interestingly enough, Pochilewicz argued that what characterised the Belarusian peasantry was the “*balszoja złożona siemja*” (large joint family) made up of both distant relatives and unrelated persons. According to Pochilewicz, families of this type supposedly expanded even to the size of a tiny village (“*dworzyszczka*”), remaining organised on a scheme of land and duty sharing. Up until the mid-16<sup>th</sup> century, the existence of such big families, often comprising 10 to 20 males, was necessitated by labour requirements inherent to the situation of peasants occupying large holdings (one *włoka*). Only during the second half of the century did family arrangements of this sort gave way to patterns of small individual families. By the mid-17<sup>th</sup> century, large joint families were most likely already vanishing from Belarus, except from its most eastern part, where the process unfolded with up to a century of delay (Pochilewicz, 1952, 338, 386-87; Pochilewicz, 1957, 15, 27; Pochilewicz, 1958, 745, Pochilewicz, 1973, 63; also Morzy, 1965, 122-123). However, Pochilewicz’s reasoning, like that of many others, suffered from relying on circumstantial and

non-systematic evidence, and therefore can be of little help to us in investigating the validity of Conze's claims.

However, with recourse to estate inventories from various areas of ethnic Lithuania from the period between the 16<sup>th</sup> and the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> centuries (overall, data for 1,083 households were used), Višniauskaitė demonstrated that the “grand indissoluble family” (*bolschoya nerazdelennaiia semya*), a Russian term which is equivalent of the “joint family” term commonly used in the West did not constitute a dominant household form in any of the time periods under scrutiny (Višniauskaitė, 1964). By transposing the Lithuanian data from 1594-1700 onto Laslett's typology, we get the percentage of simple households, estimated at 81%, with only a very slight contribution of multiple-family domestic groups, valued at 6.9%<sup>28</sup>. As Višniauskaitė puts it, this highly nuclearised family system was a direct consequence of two connected processes: the decomposition of the lineage relationship, which affected the Balts as early as in the 13<sup>th</sup> and 14<sup>th</sup> centuries, and the marked decline in family communes (*semeyna obschina*) that followed. According to Višniauskaitė, both of these processes were additionally strengthened by the agrarian reforms of the mid-16<sup>th</sup> century, which Conze, Mitterauer and Kaser were all concerned with (Višniauskaitė, 1964, 4). Moreover, she notes that the later periods—especially the 18<sup>th</sup> century, which brought about a significant increase in peasant obligations due to manorialism and the compulsory labour it inflicted upon the peasants—led to a drastic rise in the number of multiple family households in Lithuania: between 1700 and 1800 they already constituted 33% of all domestic units. Following this thread, the change in residential patterns of the Lithuanian peasantry was supposedly caused by economic factors, such as the accumulation of family labour on the holding. The latter tendency acquired the status of the most significant local familial strategies, which brought forth the imposition of restraints on neolocal household formation. This, in turn, meant that the division of larger household communes became less frequent (Višniauskaitė, 1964, 5).

What may present itself as a perfect validation of Conze's notion of the specificity of the Lithuanian demographic and familial conduit is actually contradicted by similar evidence from various Belarusian territories. Zinovy and Boris Kopyski (Kapyski & Kapyski 1993) processed data for 252 settlements, for which the estate inventories ascertained kin relations between co-residing males (5,663 households or *dymy*). They concluded that, on average, one household in the territories under scrutiny comprised no more than 1.2 conjugal-family units (CFU). Moreover, 85.6% (4,741) of the total households had only one CFU (including, potentially, some extended households), and the remaining 14.4% were of the joint type. Out of the latter, 10.6% (745

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28 Aggregated data for 15 estates with 791 households; see Višniauskaitė, 1964, 8-12.

households) contained two small families co-residing, whereas only 3.8% (266 cases) consisted of three and more families (Kapyski & Kapyski 1993, 43). In line with Višniauskaitė's assertions pertaining to Lithuania proper, Kopyskis also argued that in Belarus the transition from the 16<sup>th</sup> to the 17<sup>th</sup> centuries was marked by an increasing simplification of peasant residential patterns. It is generally acknowledged that, between the end of 16<sup>th</sup> and the mid-17<sup>th</sup> centuries, one-family households came to make up the majority of domestic units throughout the Belarusian territory (Kapyski & Kapyski 1993, 43).

V. Golubev, in turn, has estimated somewhat smaller figures. True, he saw Belarusian landlords of the second half of the 16<sup>th</sup> century as actively pursuing the process of splitting multiple-family units into individual households (Golubev, 1992, 63), a phenomenon Conze also mentioned. By the end of the century, along with the introduction of peasant compulsory labour within the manorial system, individual families operating on one holding started to play a decisive role in Belarus (Golubev, 1992, 88). However, according to Golubev's estimations based on the inventories of church estates (1,700 peasant domestic units), only 73% of all households consisted of individual families (some of which may have actually contained individual relatives). The share of the latter would, however, decline on a trajectory of movement to the east (only 46.5% of total households in eastern Belarus) (Golubev, 1992, 88).

V. Nosevich, who analysed micro-census data for several communities of central Belarus (north from the city of Minsk) between the mid-16<sup>th</sup> century and the 1850s, went even further (Nosevich 2004). He asserted that, at least according to the 16<sup>th</sup>-century data, there was no reason to draw a sharp distinction between domestic group structures in Eastern and Western Europe. With recourse to estate inventories, Nosevich demonstrated that nuclear family households (heads living with or without sons) dominated in Belarus between 1545 and 1596 (between 70% and 89% of total households), whereas in some places, such a pattern developed even before the great agrarian change brought about by the *voloka* reform (Nosevich 2004, 81-87). However, in accordance with the earlier framework put forth by Višniauskaitė, he also pointed out the emergence of a more distinct and more complex family pattern in central Belarus during the 18<sup>th</sup> and the 19<sup>th</sup> centuries, linking it to the gradual increase in feudal obligations imposed on the peasantry by the landlords (Nosevich 2004, 157-176). Even so, however, over almost the entire 18<sup>th</sup> century, as long as agricultural population in Belarus remained relatively free from the most exploitative forms of serfdom control, it followed a rather moderate pattern of household complexity, which still stood in marked contrast to patterns characteristic of 19th-century Russia. Towards the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, particularly after the annexation of Belarus-Lithuania by the Russian Empire, the family pattern in Belarus gradually transformed into more communal forms

already typical of the vast regions of Russia, where the share of multiple families was significantly above 50%. It was this 19th-century phenomenon, but not its various antecedents, that made the distinction between family structures in Eastern and Western Europe so attractive to Western scholars (Nosevich 2007).

The above-mentioned studies are certainly not free of drawbacks, and the data they present should be accepted with certain limitations<sup>29</sup>. However they surpass Conze's contributions in several respects, such as data collection or geo-spatial awareness. This is why we argue that they can be preliminarily taken as refuting Conze's claims regarding the persistence of extended family predominance across early modern Belarus.

**4c.** Another drawback inherent in Conze's homogenising approach to the Belarusian family system was that he neglected the region's internal demographic variation. This problem can now be elaborated by referring to more reliable statistical information on household composition and structure, which is available from an unprecedented collection of historical household listings for the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth of the 1790s. The statistics for the Lithuanian-Belarusian territories used in this subsection derive from the Russian fifth "soul revision" of 1795, or micro-censuses listing all individuals by residential units.<sup>30</sup> These censuses are especially rich in detail, and are generally characterised by a high degree of internal logic and consistency in describing relationships between individuals. However, like many other types of sources from the pre-statistical period, they are not without drawbacks (Szołtysek, 2008a, 5-7). This body of data forms a part of much larger data collection designed to enable the analysis of household structure and composition of communities located both west and east of Hajnal's and Mitterauer's lines (**Map 1**). More than 90% of those listings come from the period 1766-1799, while all precede the abolition of serfdom in the territories in question. If reference were made to historic Polish boundaries just before 1772, then the 159 parishes would form a long belt spread over the eastern parts of Prussian Silesia (reg. 7) and the western fringes of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth (regions 1 to 5). The coverage would then run through the western outskirts of the province of Lesser Poland (reg. 6) and stretch in the eastern direction towards the historic area of Red Ruthenia (reg. 8), central (Minsk voivodship) and southern Belarus (Polessia region)

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29 In the estate inventories of Lithuania-Belarus of that time, single widows and widowers in the population, and sometimes even retired parents, were frequently not registered.

30 The data comes from National Historical Archives of Belarus in Minsk (microfilms in the possession of Family History Library, Salt Lake City, Utah, USA, were used).

(reg. 11N and 11S respectively), and, finally, towards present-day western Ukraine (reg. 9 and 10)<sup>31</sup>.

In our first exercise we used a very simple indicator (the relationship between the proportion of simple households and the proportion of multiple-family households) to plot the distribution of different family patterns among location points west and east of Hajnal's line (**Map 2 & Figure 1**). Contrary to the highly condensed distribution of score points for communities located to the west of the line, the east reveals striking diversity in the arrangement of values of the selected variables. Although we may agree that a relatively homogenous pattern of nuclear household structure west of the supposed transition line existed, to claim that a similar uniformity in living arrangements existed for the eastern areas would be entirely misleading. Approximately half of the communities from the east revealed compositional characteristics more like the western pattern, and their substantial number would probably be undistinguishable from the latter in structural terms. Others, however, leaned towards a strikingly different direction. Still, however, households in the eastern territories were generally of a more complex structure than those in western Poland.

In order to remove the effects brought into Figure 1 through the data on Ukrainian and Red Ruthenian communities, we repeated the same exercise with Belarusian and western data alone (**Fig. 2**). The close resemblance of some eastern and western communities observed previously has now disappeared: The majority of locations in Belarus exhibited more complex patterns of household structure than the west. However, the basic pattern of high data dispersion has been retained for Belarus. This high variability in the share of nuclear and multiple households suggests that those 90 Belarusian communities represented in Figure 2 varied enormously in their families' propensity towards different types of residence. The steady and even gradient of the value of the two variables between the extreme poles on the scale (from some 60%-70% of nuclear households and 15%-25% of multiple ones, to the absolute domination of joint units with only a 20% share of simple domestic groups), makes it very plain how inappropriate it would be to attribute one common family system to late 18<sup>th</sup>-century Belarus.

Indeed, additional statistical experiments performed on the 1795 micro-censuses corroborate that picture. The results of analysis of variance and pairwise multiple comparison procedures (the *Holm-Sidak* method) revealed significant differences on six out of eight selected

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31 Parishes and estates from the Regions 11N and 11S were already at the time of census-taking annexed by Imperial Russia, and were included into new administrative units.



variables between northern and southern Belarus (regions 11N and 11S respectively) (**Table 1**)<sup>32</sup>. This suggests that two distinct family systems existed in northern and southern Belarus. More careful comparison of statistics on household and individual level variables for those two regional patterns will be meaningful (**Table 2**).

First, the revealed regionalisation partly corroborates Conze's insights into family patterns in historic Belarus. Both in his accounts, as well as according to the results produced by our experiments, the region where family households were most densely inhabited by co-resident kin was Polessia (reg. 11S). In this area, the mean household size was close to 6.5 persons, but almost a quarter of the whole population lived in domestic groups consisting of 10 persons or more. Out of almost 4,000 households, less than 35% had a simple structure, whereas more than half of them were multi-generational, multiple-family domestic groups. All in all, 67% of the total population in the Polessian sample lived in multiple-family households in the census year.

Polessia can, however, by no means be considered representative of the whole of Belarus, and its peculiarity extended much beyond the specific unfavourable ecological conditions that prevailed in this remote area (Obrębski 2007). Not surprisingly, areas located more to the north, while still confined to Belarusian (or, East-Slavic, to be on safer ground) ethnic territories, displayed decidedly different family patterns. Data referring to the Minsk, Vileyka, Nowogrodek and Sluck districts of central Belarus (reg. 11N) all point to visibly more moderate levels of kin-related household complexity. In those areas, half of all households in the census year were of a simple structure, and the share of multi-generational units was nearly 50% smaller than in Polessia. The percentage of the population living in particularly large households was also visibly smaller, making up only half the proportion seen in southern Belarus. Living in a multiple-family environment was significantly less widespread in the centre, where it was experienced by only slightly more than 40% of all persons registered in the census. All in all, although levels of household complexity in central Belarus unquestionably remained far above those typical for Western European societies, they still differ from the patterns seen in the southern, Polessian part of the region. Beyond any doubt, these non-negligible differences in the numerical value of household- and individual level variables point to the existence of different family systems in historic Belarus.

The standardised form in which the data on household structure and composition are presented in Table 2 makes them, at least to some extent, amenable to cross-regional

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32 The variables included: percentage of nuclear households, percentage of all multiple-family households, percentage of all “*zadruga*-like” multiple-family households, percentage of ever-married males in the age group 20-29; percentage of ever-married females in the age group 20-29; percentage of conjugal family units (CFUs) residing in multiple-family households; co-resident kin as a percentage of all household members (average); percentage of households with servants.

comparisons. The issue of supposed differences in household patterns between Lithuanians and Belarusians has been already touched upon in the previous sections. Here, our intention is to extend comparative procedures so as to include other representatives of the Baltic ethnic group.

In **Table 3**, the available data related to household typology in the Baltic are compared with two Belarusian files. The results are striking, but not surprising. No clear-cut differences between Slavic and non-Slavic households patterns, as postulated by Conze, can be detected in the data covering the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> centuries. This evidence of moderate household complexity in central Belarus is generally similar to data from two Estonian localities of the late 18th century. However, both in Urvaste in 1797, as well as in Karuse some 20 years earlier, shares of multigenerational households always exceeded the respective proportions of domestic groups in central Belarus. Seemingly, those two Estonian localities exhibited household systems that lean more towards kin-co-residence than was the case among Belarusian Slavs. This pattern is illustrated to an even greater extent by the comparison of Slavic data with mid-18th-century data from Urvaste, and with Courland files from 1797. Again, household complexity (proportions of multigenerational domestic units), is higher in the latter two files than in Belarus, regardless of whether the northern or southern parts of the latter region are compared. The complexity of the Polessian family pattern, so distinct within Belarus of the 18th century, is very much paralleled (or even exceeded) by data from Baltic areas<sup>33</sup>.

We can argue that, even though Conze rightly attributed a strong propensity towards co-residence with kin to the Polessian part of Belarus, he still wrongly assumed that pattern to be very different from tendencies observed among the Balts.

## 5. Conclusion

Conze's scientific insights continue to serve in today's historical-demographic literature as an essential building block of the argument that asserts the validity and persistence of the East-West differentials in family systems in East-Central Europe (Mitterauer 1999). Our attempt at merging intellectual history with historical-demographic investigation suggests that such a practice should be viewed as highly unprofitable from a scientific perspective. The re-examination of "*Agrarverfassung und Bevölkerung*" in light of other existing theories of spatial patterns of family in

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33 Comparing means for larger groupings with means from single communities may be misleading, however. Standard deviations for proportions of multiple-family households in Belarussian regions tell us very clearly that in none of them are the various examples tightly clustered around the mean (reg. 11N=16,2, reg. 11S=13,9). However, 95% confidence intervals suggest we are on safer ground. In central Belarus, the probability of observing a value of share of multiple-family households outside confidence limits of (29.7; 38.2) was less than 0.05. Respective data for Polesia were 50.4 and 58.1. This suggests that, even if during various sampling procedures the excess of complexity in the Baltic relative to the Belarusian settlement locations were to diminish, an overall similarity of Slavic and non-Slavic patterns would be retained.

Eastern Europe and available qualitative and quantitative evidence has revealed serious shortcomings in Conze's analysis. These problems result from making unwarranted inferences based on non-representative and circumstantial evidence, which derive from Conze's underlying motivation to identify German-Slavic differences. The use of Conze's work in contemporary historical-demographic research must be meticulously revised, if not entirely abandoned. Referring to Conze's supposed "empirical" findings does not prove anything, but perpetuates certain stereotypes of Slavic populations and consolidates an opaque understanding of the East-West differentials in historical family forms.

Modern social science history and historical demography related to the Eastern European space (but not only, of course) should remain particularly cautious when trying to accommodate highly ideologised and politicised works of the 1920s and 1930s into their corpus of knowledge. Many of those works, and Conze's pre-1945 contributions, serve as excellent examples of studies that hardly meet the requirements of modern social science methodology, especially when they generalise from single case studies. Failure to exclude these works may result in extravagant extrapolations from single cases or other non-representative datasets that would continue to foster tacit assumptions about European families in the past.

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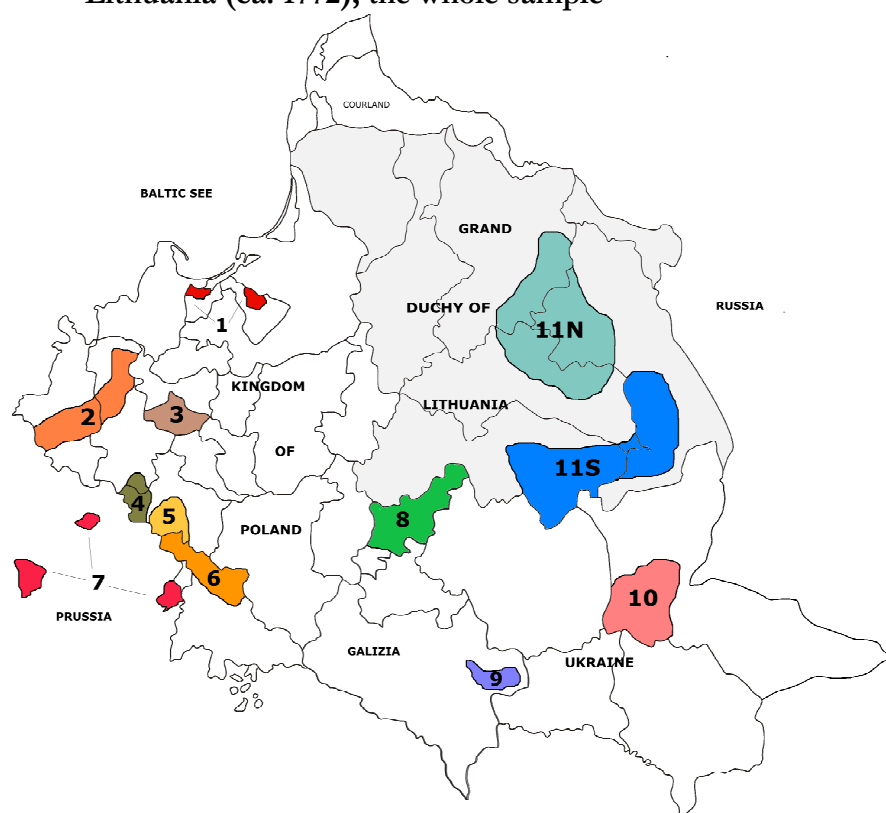
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## MAPS, FIGURES, TABLES

Map 1. *CEURFAMFORM* Project: Data spatial distribution within Poland-Lithuania (ca. 1772); the whole sample



### REG 11N

- Vileyka, Minsk, Nowogrodok, Sluck districts

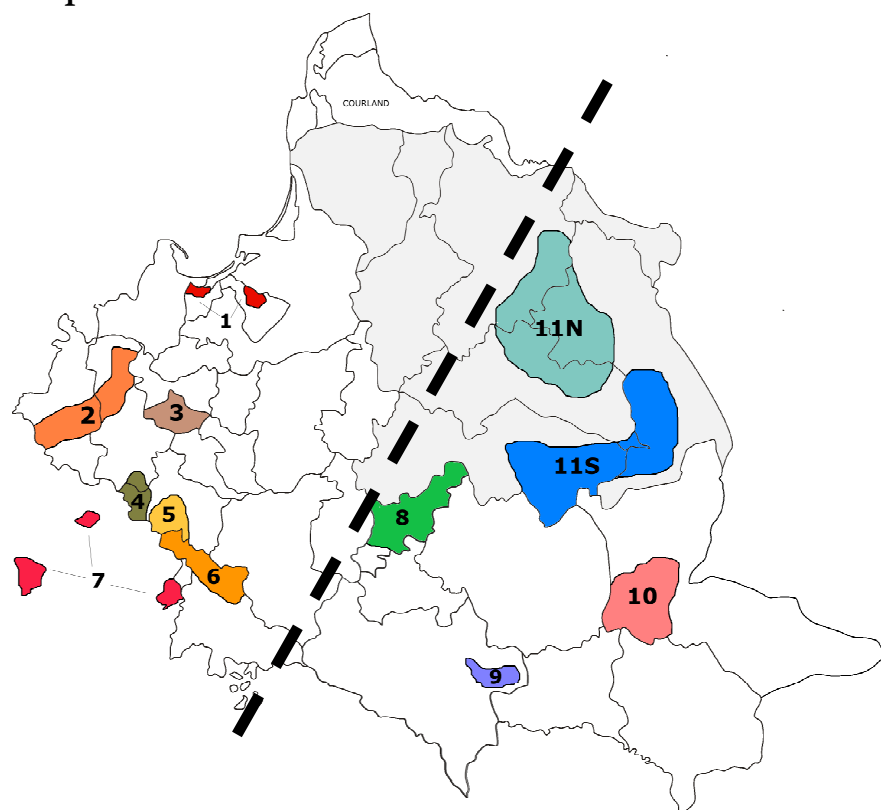
- 37 noble estates
- 3.378 households
- 19.146 individuals

### REG 11S: POLESSIA

- David-Gorodok, Mozyr, Bobruysk districts

- 42 noble estates
- 3.884 households
- 25.332 individuals

Map 2. 'West' and 'East' in historical Poland-Lithuania



### 'west of the line'

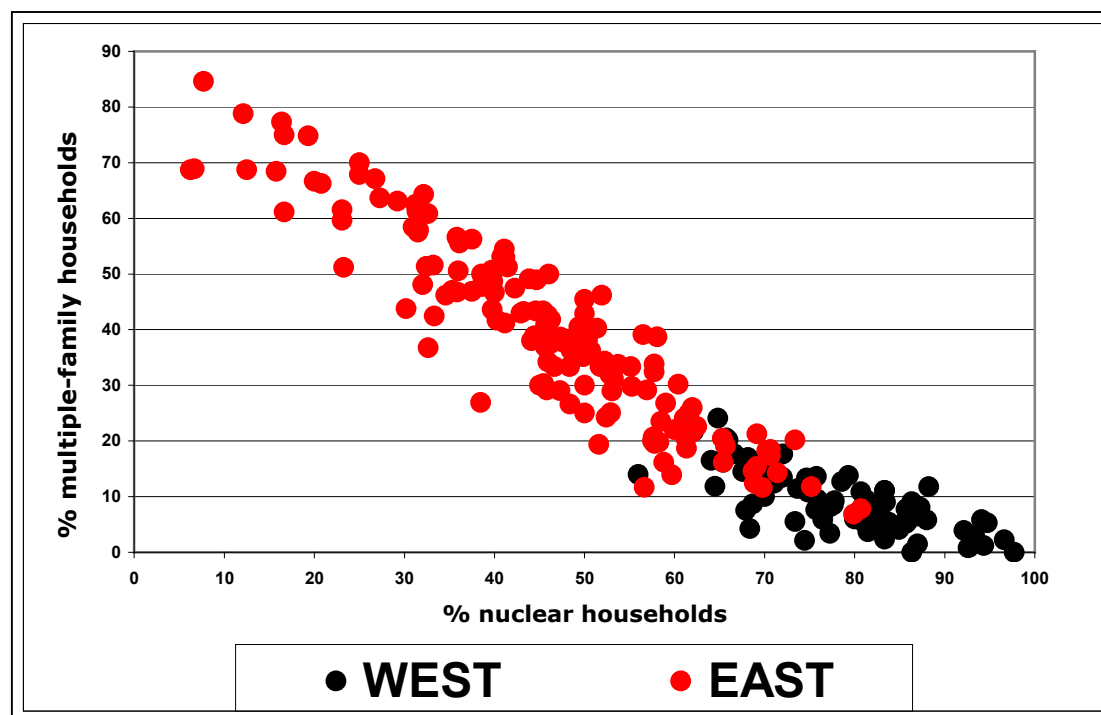
- 87 parishes
- 11.638 households
- 66.571 individuals

### 'east of the line'

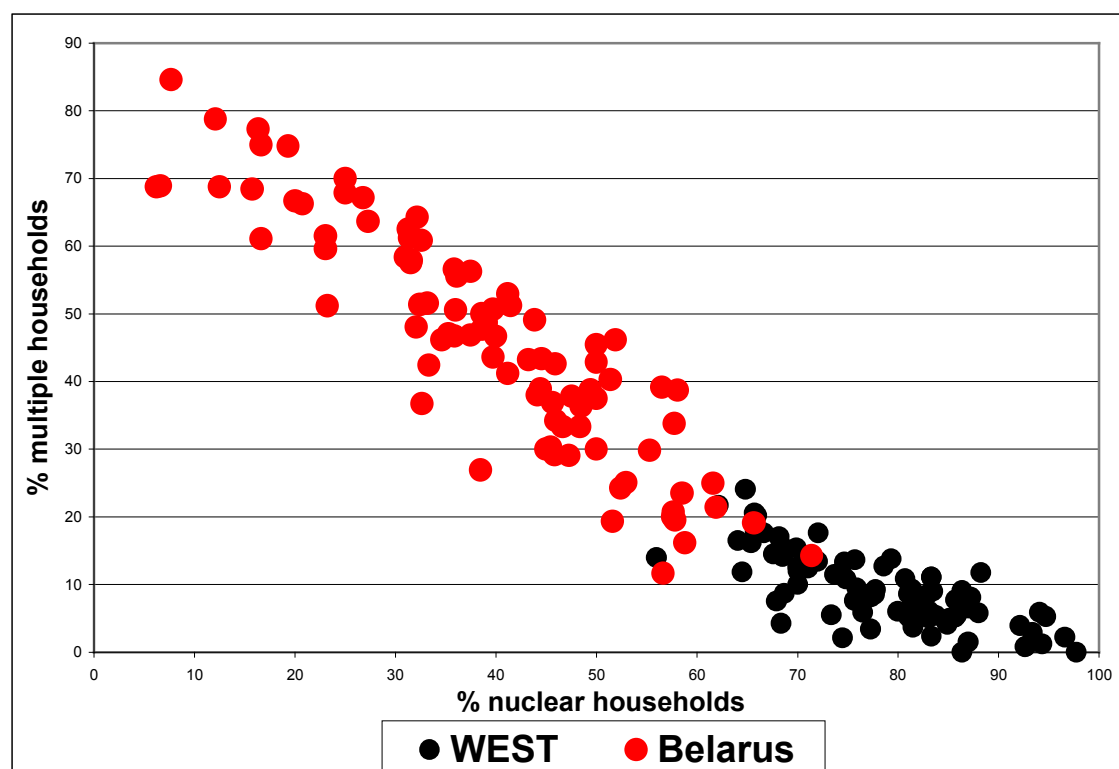
- 149 parishes
- 15.014 households
- 89.236 individuals

multiple-family households:  
Laslett's categories 5a-5f

**Figure 1.** Relation of proportion simple households to proportion multiple-family households: location points west and east of 'Hajnal's line'



**Figure 2.** Relation of proportion simple households to proportion multiple-family households: location points west and 18<sup>th</sup> -century Belarus





**Table 1.** Pairwise Multiple Comparison Procedures (the *Holm-Sidak* Method) for Regions 11N and 11S

<b>Factor</b>	<b>Diff of Means</b>	<b>t</b>	<b>Unadjusted P</b>	<b>Critical Level</b>	<b>Significant?</b>
% nuclear households	13,852	5,397	0,000000274	0,007	<b>Yes</b>
% of multiple households (overall)	20,23	7,352	1,38E-11	0,006	<b>Yes</b>
% 'zadruga'-like multiple households	10,122	5,819	3,73E-08	0,006	<b>Yes</b>
% males ever married (20-29)	25,331	7,709	2,39E-12	0,005	<b>Yes</b>
% females ever married (20-29)	7,564	1,912	0,058	0,009	No
% conjugal-family units in multiple households	20,709	7,165	3,79E-11	0,006	<b>Yes</b>
coresident-kin as % of household members	7,618	5,429	0,000000236	0,007	<b>Yes</b>
% households with servants	2,713	2,38	0,0187	0,013	No

Overall significance level = 0,05

**Table 2.** Summary characteristics of family systems: Southern (Polessia) and northern Belarus compared

<b>Variable</b>	<b>Polessia (reg. 11S)</b>	<b>Central Belarus (reg. 11N)</b>
<b>Total households</b>	3.884	3.381
<b>Total population</b>	25.333	19.177
<b>Mean size of household</b>	6.42 (6.58)	5.46 (5.69)
<b>Mean size of houseful (including lodgers)</b>	6.51 (6.69)	5.69 (5.97)
<b>% population in households of size <math>\geq 10</math></b>	24,6	12,0
<b>% population in multiple family households</b>	67,7	41,4
<b>% nuclear households</b>	33,9	50
<b>% extended households</b>	10,9	16,4
<b>% multiple-family households</b>	54,6	31,1
<b>Conjugal-family units (CFU) per one household (mean)</b>	2,1	1,5
<b>% households with CFUs of 2+</b>	54,8	31,3
<b>Offspring per household (mean)</b>	2.34 (2.51)	2.26 (2.44)
<b>Coresident kin per household (mean)</b>	2,2	1,4
<b>% households with coresident kin</b>	66,6	51,4
<b>Coresident kin as % of total population</b>	32,7	25,6
<b>Relatives (non-offspring) per 100 households</b>	331	215
<b>Servants per household (mean)</b>	0,0	0,1
<b>% households with servants</b>	1,7	3,7
<b>Servants as % of total population</b>	0,2	0,8

**Table 3:** Belarussian and Baltic household structure in comparison

Household type	REGION						
	Central Belarus (reg 11N), 1795	Polessia (reg. 11S), 1795	Urvaste, Estonia, 1752	Urvaste, Estonia, 1797	Vandra, Estonia, 1683	Karuse, Estonia, 1782	17 Couralnd estates (Latvia), 1797
Solitaires	1,1	0,2	0	2.71	3.8	0	-
No family	1,3	0,4	0.11	0.64	0.7	0	-
Simple households	50,0	33,9	30.99	41.24	65.2	48.0	33.3
Extended household	16,4	10,9	8.35	15.45	6.8	13.2	8.3
Multiple-family households	31,1	54,6	59.67	39.97	23.5	38.8	58.3

Household typology according to Hammel-Laslatt scheme.