

**OTTOMAN SOURCES ON HISTORICAL
DEMOGRAPHIC DEVELOPMENT OF
BULGARIAN LANDS IN THE 18TH AND 19TH
CENTURIES (UNTIL 1878) AND THE PLACE OF
NÜFUS DEFTERS**

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There are many factors having key influence on research as historical demographic issues are developed and these may not be underestimated, however what any research work largely need is the answer to a fundamental question: the sources. Full revealing, objective interpretation and critical analysis of the available source material are of crucial significance for the quality of any historical demographic research.

The issue with the sources is among the first issues to have been looked into by K. J. Beloch, whose works are regarded as the cradle where the scientific discipline of historical demography originated (Beloch, 1886; Beloch, 1913: 321 and following pages). By the end of the 19th century appeared the first work especially dedicated to that issue. The point at issue is about is an article of Polish researcher Z. Daszyńska published in German Economics and Statistical Journal in 1896 which contains a description of a number of sources on the “historical statistics of population” and analyses of their relevance to this type of research (Шелестов, 1987: 107 and following pages).

However, it was until the middle of the 20th century when there was no purposeful research of the sources in historical demography. It is assumed that the author of the first attempt to summarise the precedent source studies and to make an inventory of available data on the sources relative to this research envelope was the Belgian scientist L. Genicot and was made in the early 1950s (Genicot, 1952: 446–462).

Subsequently, a great number of source classifications appeared that were used in historical demography based on a variety of categorical patterns (Стоянов, 2000:

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179 and following pages; Стефанов и кол., 1971: 33 and following pages; Тотев, 1981: 36; Ковальченко, 1987: 108 and following pages, 122 and following pages; Καραδήμας, 1978: 11 and following pages; Τσαούσης, 1986: 9 and following pages).

In the historical demography has the view that, according to the *period of creation*, sources are divided into “pre-statistical”, i.e. including all sources dated before the application of the statistical methods in population censuses, both archaeological and narrative (although some authors tend to split them into two separate groups: “pre-literate” and “pre-statistical”) and “statistical” (Тотев, 1972: 320 and following pages; ДЭМ, 1985: 159; Историческая демография, 1989: 110 and following pages, 150 and following pages, 163 and following pages; Плющева, 2002: 3 and following pages; Παναγιωτόπουλος, 1980: 152 and following pages). There has been a long-lasting discussion between the researchers of this matter on their possible attitude to the so called “pre-statistical” sources. Most demographers emphasise on their low applicability levels or their impracticability in respect to any statistical study and their insufficient reliability for the purposes of coming to any verisimilar conclusions and therefore there was no place for them in the historiographic substruction of historical demographic studies. In turn, historians are point-blank that, however imperfect from the perspective of the views on what modern statistical information is, the “pre-statistical” sources should never be considered as invalid or inexistent, quite the opposite, the in-depth analysis thereof will transform these into a first-class platform for demographic studies of the so called “pre-statistical” historic ages. We should like to skip any insight or details of this discussion, however we should underline that the relevant opinion expressed on the impossibility, on the grounds of this group of sources, to go into historical demographic studies, is extreme and imprecise, to say the least. It is also true that there is no full information on the studied issues in the so called “pre-statistical” source material. This however does not mean that it would be impossible, on the grounds of existing data, provided the appropriate methodology is applied, to carry out some microstudies and come to results that will not be different from those obtained upon the study of the whole general aggregate. This is an opinion that by no means repudiates the place of such kind of sources in the historical demographic studies.

Furthermore, the contentions on the so called “statistical” source material also put a variety of questions. Most of these concern the main issue: the accuracy and reliability of such data, and the controversial answer to that question is provoked by the specificity of such sources (Миронов, Степанов, 1975: 27 and following pages; Миронов, 1991: 40 and following pages). A historical study requires data covering a longer period of time and more space. This however entails the creation of statistical lines of significant length; therefore the data composing them prove to be heterogeneous, as a rule.

Alongside with this, there are inevitable errors in the primary statistical data and these affect the results obtained in the course of their further processing. Although, according to B. Mironov, as they accrue and cumulate, the totals of individual errors go down (Миронов, 1991: 43 and following pages); they do affect directly the quality of the obtained scientific product.

The above findings, however, should not cause rejection of the use of statistics in the study of our historical past. Instead, careful analysis using all methods for assessing reliability may turn them into a foundation for clarifying the studied historical processes.