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The 1881 census in the Russian Baltic provinces: An inventory and an assessment

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Abstract

The 1881 census of the Russian Baltic provinces of Livland, Estland, and Kurland was the first modern-type systematic population enumeration in the Baltic area. It had been preceded by enumerations of other kinds—land cadastres that included aggregate population counts (during Swedish control of the area) in the 17th century, and fiscal revisions (during Russian control of the area) that did list residents by name but did not follow any principles of modern census-taking. The Baltic German politico-economic elite, which controlled public affairs in the Baltic provinces, decided to carry out a census of a modern kind, and produced the 1881 count. Although initially the initiative was coordinated by the statistical specialists of the three provinces, the publication of results was decentralized, resulting in a series of volumes that supplied different tables for each province. The article analyzes the contents of the census, some of its shortcomings, as well as its strengths.

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1. Introduction

An early contribution to population enumerations in the eastern Baltic littoral was made by Sweden, which in the 17th century carried out several cadastres in the territories acquired there after the Livonian Wars of the late 16th century. The cadastres were not, of course, censuses in any strict sense, but besides information on land, they did ask about the number of people on the land. The resulting aggregated, largely undifferentiated, and incomplete figures were the first concrete population data historians have for this area, and thus form an invaluable historical starting point. Nonetheless, until the 20th century, the Swedish cadastres and all subsequent Baltic enumerations were carried out in an area in which the

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enumerators and the enumerated belonged to different language communities. Swedish, German, Polish, and Russian speakers were the dominant orders, on the one hand; Estonian and Latvian speakers were the subordinated populations, on the other. That fact raises numerous problems, and the longer history of these remains to be written. The present article deals with one phase of this longer sequence—the second half of the 19th century—and with another turning point in the story, the 1881 Baltic census.

By that time, the territory in question had become the three Russian “Baltic provinces”: Estland (in Russian, *Estlandskaia guberniia*; in English, Estonia), Livland (Russ. *Lieflandskaia guberniia*; Engl. Livonia), and Kurland (Russ. *Kuriandskaia guberniia*; Engl. Courland). The 1881 enumeration preceded by 16 years the Russian Imperial Census of 1897—the only general census ever conducted for the whole of the Empire. On balance, the materials in the 1881 census have been somewhat neglected by population historians of the Baltic provinces, making long overdue an inventory and an assessment of them (see [Plakans, 1995](#)). In the final analysis, it was precisely this census that provided inhabitants of the Baltic provinces, and outsiders who made use of it, the first nuanced portrait of the population structure and dynamics of this region in terms of coverage and detail that earlier enumerations had not been able to achieve.

2. Pre-1881 population counts in the Baltic provinces

The 17th-century Swedish cadastres in Livland were concerned primarily with fixing the size of land units (mainly farmsteads) from which services and goods were obtained and which also served as units of taxation ([Dunsdorfs, 1950, 1974](#); see also [Zeids, 1992](#)). In these surveys, concern was minimal for the human population residing on the farmsteads: at best, the record for each enumerated unit mentioned the name of the farmstead head, and then summarized by sex and age group the number of others living on the unit (< 15 years, > 15 years). Although of limited significance for structural and behavioral analysis, cadastre information has been used by 20th-century historians to produce multipliers for aggregated estimates of the region’s population in the cadastre years ([Dunsdorfs, 1962, pp. 175–200](#)). From the mid-17th until the last quarter of the 18th century, there is no evidence that the governments of the Baltic provinces—the *Ritterschaften* (organized nobilities) in Estland and Livland, and the ducal house in Kurland—were interested in population counts of any kind. Policymaking appears not to have involved measures in which population numbers would have been crucial (in spite of the mercantilistic, and often cameralistic, attitudes of the Kurland dukes). Tax and labor levies based on size of holdings (imposed by provincial governments on owners of landed estates and by owners of estates on enserfed peasants) continued to be reckoned in terms of the numbers produced by the Swedish cadastres, even after Sweden’s loss of her eastern Baltic territories in the Great Northern War with Russia (1700–1721).

Peter the Great created a qualitatively different kind of fiscal census for the Russian Empire in the 1720s. This was the now familiar “revision of souls,” which came to be applied to Livland and Estland in the 1780s and to Kurland in 1795. In principle, the revisions were to be population listings of inhabited places, compiled every 15th year. Information from them was to be used to reckon the amount of imperial head tax to be paid by estate owners on the “souls” in their estates, and by other persons individually (see [Wörster & Hoheisel, 1998](#)). Imperial ukases were issued for each revision, and these specified ways in which the gathered information was to be presented. Judging by the Baltic revisions alone, however, no effort was made to impose procedures locally; the resulting listings (household lists, to use the modern designation) varied tremendously from place to place.

By the 19th century, provincial governments issued standardized forms to enumerators in each locality, but gave no instructions about what to place under the columnar headings in the forms. As a result, the revision listings in the Baltic provinces range from sparse lists of names with ages to rich records that show individuals by name, household status, and their kinship links to other households members, and even to some with kin links to other members of the community. The advantage of the revisions over the cadastres for population analysis is, of course, patent. The revisions were nominal lists, aiming for complete coverage and creating opportunities for the analysis of microstructures, such as families, households, and kin groups, as well as migration. Each revision document contained three columns: the first showed the population as it stood at the last revision, the third as it stood in the current revision, and the middle column as to what had happened to each individual in the interim period (death, out-migration, relocation to a different place in the estate). As ongoing research has shown, it is possible to use the revisions to reconstruct precisely both the structure of domestic groups and the kin relations between groups, across space and time (Plakans, 1983, 1984; Plakans & Halpern, 1981; Plakans & Wetherell, 1988, 1992, 1995; Wellman, Wetherell, & Plakans, 1994; Wetherell, 1998). The imperial government discontinued the soul revision series in 1859.

The revisions created the aggregate statistical information about the Baltic populations that came to be used in a genre of descriptive publications characteristic of the last decades of the 18th and the first half of the 19th centuries (e.g., Bienenstamm, 1841; Hupel, 1785; Keyserling, 1805). The authors of these accounts did not probe at all into questions of population structure or change, but merely listed the total population of inhabited places (normally providing totals for males and females). Two others genres complemented this one in the middle decades of the century, by revealing a deepening interest in population questions. One of them was a more sophisticated version of the earlier descriptive accounts, drawing on both revision information as well as, apparently, on parish registers, and adding tables on birth and death statistics to aggregate numbers (Heyking, 1867; Jung, 1863, 1864; Jung-Stilling, 1866a, 1887; *Statistisches Jahrbuch für das Gouvernement Kurland für*, 1861, 1862). The second was a cluster of publications with the term *Biostatik* in their titles (Behrn, 1868; Kieseritsky, 1882; Kluge, 1867; Körber, 1864, 1902; Oehrn, 1888).

For the most part, these were local medico-demographic studies, initiated by specialists at Dorpat (Tartu) University in Estland, with the intent of probing the “biological” characteristics of local communities. “Modern governance”—especially during the reign of Alexander II (1855–1881)—entailed governmental concern over “public health,” and the *Biostatik* series, continuing until the early 20th century, seems to have been a manifestation of this impulse.

In the same time period, similar impulses were changing the census strategies in western European countries (see Szreter, 1996). These studies were concerned particularly with what were taken to be “negative” social indicators of various kinds—low fertility, high infant and adult mortality, birth defects, incidence of insanity, divorce—as well as such phenomena as twinning and illiteracy. To assess their frequency, an entire community’s demographic profile was reconstructed. Unfortunately, the number of such studies is relatively small (in relation to the total number of human communities in the Baltic area), and researchers used no identifiable sampling techniques in the selection of communities to be analyzed. Nonetheless, the *Biostatik* studies evidenced not only an unprecedented exactitude but also an open recognition among the governing elite that public policy had to be preceded by an understanding of the structure of the populations toward which the policy was directed.

The expanding need for demographic information led to a mid-19th-century decision by the Baltic provincial governments—as distinct from the imperial government—that more general statistical

information about the provinces' populations was necessary. The result was the creation, by the governing *Ritterschaften*, of three "statistical committees"—one for each province—which were charged with the general task of handling population information, as well as with the specific task of creating an infrastructure for a "scientific" census. The Livland Statistical Committee, under the leadership of Freiherr von Jung-Stilling, was the most active, carrying out two trial enumerations in Livland (Jung-Stilling, 1866b), and then, in 1867, a general enumeration of Riga and nine Livland cities (Jung-Stilling, 1867). The practical experience obtained from the trial counts and the 1867 urban census fed directly into the preparation of the enumeration infrastructure of the 1881 count (Stieda, 1881; Wittschewsky, 1881). The 1881 census was carried out on 28–29 December 1881, and its results were presented in a series of 16 volumes published over the next 6 years in Reval (Estland), Riga (Livland), and Mitau (Kurland) (Baltic Census, 1881).

3. The 1881 census: an inventory

3.1. Geographic organization of information

In organizing the publication of the population information gathered by the various teams of enumerators, the editors of the printed volumes did not depart from the practices of the past, one of which was provincial particularism (see Table 1). The census volumes made no effort to portray the Baltic provinces as a region and offered information separately about a quartet of places: the provinces of Estland, Livland, and Kurland, and the city of Riga. Although the raw information on the three provinces was internally comparable (judging by the information forms), not a single table in the 16 volumes brought the three provinces into a comparative framework. Later analyses of the census data continued to go their separate ways: Paul Jordan's book analyzing the 1881 census in Estland, for example, contained only the barest hint that the Estland count was part of a larger effort covering the other two provinces (Jordan, 1886, pp. 1–2).

The decision to represent the information from Riga in two separate volumes (Baltic Census, 1881: Part I, Volumes 1 and 2) was logical, given the city's size and importance to the region. The city's population, as could be expected, was far more complex than the populations of the smaller towns, and the two volumes reported this complexity faithfully. Three important segments of Riga's population had to be segregated from the rest: the large Russian military contingents stationed there, the population on the numerous ships in the city's harbor, and the population in the *Patrimonialgebiet* (the lands adjacent to the city that in one sense or another still "belonged" to it). Within Riga, the volumes aggregated the population in terms of the administrative divisions of the city: the *Stadt* (old "medieval" part whose walls had been torn down in the 1860s), and the St. Petersburg, Moscow, and Mitau districts. These three districts had received their names in the course of the 19th century because they lay (looking from the *Stadt*) in the direction of their namesake cities: the St. Petersburg district to the northeast, the Moscow district due east, and the Mitau district in the southern direction one would have had to follow to reach the most important city of the adjacent Kurland province. These one-time "suburbs" of the old medieval town now lay within the ever-expanding external boundaries of Riga. The Moscow district was the largest in terms of areal size and population, as indicated by the five administrative *Quartiere* (quarters into which the district had been divided).

Table 1

Geographic organization of information in 1881 Baltic census

I. The City of Riga (Baltic Census, 1881, Part I, Volume 1 [Sections 1, 2, and 3])

- A. Military barracks (*Citadelle*)
- B. Central city (*Stadt*)
- C. St. Petersburg district (four quarters)
- D. Moscow district (five quarters)
- E. Mitau district (three quarter)
- F. Population on ships in Riga harbor
- G. Land adjacent to and owned by Riga
 - 1. Non-agricultural land
 - 2. Agricultural land
- H. Aggregated information on population in households

II. The Province of Livland (Baltic Census, 1881, Part I, Volume 2 [Sections 1 and 2], Volume 3 [Sections 1 and 2])

- A. Cities: Schlock, Lemsal, Wolmar, Wenden, Walk, Dorpat (three districts), Werro, Pernau, Fellinn, Arensburg
- B. Aggregated information on houses in cities
- C. The Livland countryside: Districts (*Kreise*) of Riga, Wolmar, Wenden, Walk, Dorpat, Werro, Pernau, Fellinn; Aggregated information on subdistricts (*Kirchspiele*) within each district
- D. The Ösel district (*Kreis*)

III. The Province of Estland (Baltic Census, 1881, Part II, Volume 1 [Sections 1 and 2], Volume 2, Volume 3 [Sections 1 and 2])

- A. The cities of Estland: Baltischport, Wesenberg, Weissenstein, Hapsal
- B. Aggregated information on houses in cities
- C. The Estland countryside: Aggregated information on districts (*Kreise*) and subdistrict (*Kirchspiele*) units (landed estates, etc.)
- D. The city of Reval: Seven city districts and population on ships in Reval harbor; Aggregated information on houses

IV. The Province of Kurland (Baltic Census, 1881, Part III, Volume 1 [Sections 1 and 2], Volume 2 [Sections 1 and 2])

- A. The Kurland countryside: Districts of Doblen, Bauske, Tuckum, Talsen, Goldingen, Windau, Hasenpoth, Grobin, Friedrichstadt
- B. Subdistricts (*Kirchspiele*) within each district
- C. Landed estates (crown and private, hamlets, and other inhabited places within each subdistrict)
- D. The cities and towns of Kurland: Aggregated information on Mitau (four quarters), Libau (five quarters), Goldingen, Tuckum, Bauske, Windau, Friedrichstadt, Jacobstadt, Hasenpoth, Grobin, Pilten

The province of Livland was itself somewhat problematic in terms of data presentation. First, the province contained Ösel, an island district in the Gulf of Riga with its own organized German-speaking *Ritterschaft*, and for a long time had been a world apart from the rest of the province in other ways. It clearly deserved, and received, separate treatment. Then, also, Livland was the most “urban” of the three provinces, containing most of the larger provincial cities outside of Riga. These cities were accorded two separate volumes (Part I, Volumes 2 and 3). The bulk of the Livland population, however, lived in the countryside (*auf dem flachen Lande*), and in the census volumes, it was segregated from the rest. The tables concerning the Livland countryside reflect the decision of the census takers *not* to tabulate information in units smaller than *Kreis* (district) and *Kirchspiel* (subdistrict), the two most prominent administrative divisions as reflected in the judicial system. For most of the rural population in Livland and elsewhere, however, the two most natural units of sociocultural orientation were the landed estate (in German, *Gut*; Latvian, *muiza*) and the county (Ger. and Latv., *pagasts*). The old “patriarchal” landed estate of the early 19th century was now gone because of serf emancipation in 1819, and the sale of estate land to peasants, starting in the 1860s. *Pagasts* (the county) was replacing it as the peasant’s frame of reference. Still, the

local “baron,” his “land,” and his “peasants” remained a recurrent cultural force at a level of life that the census did not try to reach.

In terms of area and population, Estland ([Baltic Census, 1881, Part II, Volumes 1–3](#)) was the smallest of the Baltic provinces. Bordered on the north by the Gulf of Finland, in 1881 Estland constituted roughly the northern half of what would become the modern state of Estonia in 1918. It consisted of only one major city, Reval (Est., *Tallinn*), four smaller towns; and a countryside composed of four rural districts (*Kreise*), each subdivided into subdistricts (*Kirchspiele*), as in Livland. The tables of the 1881 Census volumes followed these divisions faithfully. Yet, in contrast to the Livland tables, the Estland tables did move downward to the next population unit—the landed estate—presenting the male and female breakdown of the population of each subdistrict by landed estate. They also contrast with the Livland (and Kurland) volumes in their preoccupation with both urban and rural physical dwellings—number of houses, house types, and roof types, as well as in containing the only table on livestock in the entire census.

The Kurland volumes ([Baltic Census, 1881, Part III, Volumes 1 and 2](#)) featured as the leading table (and longest of the entire census)—Volume 1, Table 1, 43 pages—a breakdown of the Kurland countryside by district, subdistrict, and *bewohnte Punkte* (inhabited places). This last category included population counts, first and foremost, of the landed estates of each subdistrict (*Kirchspiel*), and the most important residential units of the estates—the *Gesinde* (peasant farmsteads), as well as mills, taverns, and *Flecken* (hamlets). This table was the only one in the entire census to provide population information at the residential group level, including a mean residential group size carried out two decimal points (Volume 1, Table 1, last two columns). The rest of the Kurland information is presented in terms of conventional administrative units: rural districts (*Kreise*), hamlets (*Flecken*), cities, and towns. The province had only two cities—the administrative center of Mitau (Latv. *Jelgava*) and the port city of Libau (Latv. *Liepāja*)—in the presentation of which the tabulators used “quarters” (*Quartiere*) to break down the two cities’ aggregated populations.

The volumes for Kurland province noted information about the one district in the Baltic provinces in which the census was a failure, Illuxt at the southeastern tip of the province. The compiler of the Kurland volumes commented dryly on this situation: “Even though the census effort was ordered and supported by the highest ministerial levels, the majority of the population of Illuxt district opposed its implementation in a manner that promised bloody confrontations. All efforts at adjudication and friendly advice were futile. Thus, the decision was made not to enumerate this district, but to be satisfied with estimates” ([Baltic Census, 1881, Part III, Volume 1, Section 1, p. iii](#)). Conceivably, the diverse makeup of the district might have contributed to local opposition to an enumeration. Lying between Lithuanian and Belorussian territories to the south and southeast, and Lettgallian districts of Vitebsk province to the north and northeast, the Illuxt district was ethnically diverse because of its complex history. Here a mix of Polish, Russian, Belorussian, Lithuanian, and Yiddish speakers, who professed Roman Catholicism, Russian Orthodoxy, and Judaism, confronted German-speaking (and Lutheran) administrators (and census enumerators). Moreover, the landed elite was predominantly Polish- and Russian-speaking, not German-speaking. Quite possibly, these people saw the census effort as the provincial government meddling in their internal affairs.

3.2. Variables

The joint census commission for Riga and the three provinces negotiated and formed agreements on the information that the enumeration teams would gather. Three kinds of forms would be completed: one

for each individual, one for the household unit, and one for the inhabited place. The *personal form* asked for the individual's first and last name, sex, age in years and months, marital status (single, married, widowed, separated), religious faith, nationality, language used, literacy (neither reading nor writing skills, reading only, writing only), occupation, place of residence, place of registration, blindness (from birth or later), deaf–blindness, mental impairment (from birth or later). The *household form* (cities and towns) and *house form* (rural areas) required a listing of all the present and absent members of the domestic group, together with each member's position in the group, marital status, and occupation. The *form for an inhabited place* required a listing of all the houses or households of that place, and information of whether each particular house was inhabited, and about the materials from which houses and their roofs were constructed.

Judging by the instructions issued to enumerators, the *personal form* was to be filled out (“in pencil,” the instructions said) as the enumerators questioned a particular person. Special instructions were given on what to enter when obtained information was not precise: if a person did not know his or her age, it could be given as “over 10,” “over 25,” etc.; children were assigned the religion of their parents; nationality and language used by parents should also be listed for the speech- and/or hearing-impaired and for children; and literacy information should be gathered only for those over age 14. Since the enumeration was to be carried out during the nighttime hours of 28 to 29 December 1881, special instructions were issued to the keepers of public places, such as taverns and inns, on how their guests should be registered. The *house (household) form* and the *inhabited place form* were to be filled out by the numerator on the same visit, presumably from personal observations combined with questioning of household heads and local officials.

The public discussion of the forthcoming census (Stieda, 1881; Wittschewsky, 1881) suggests that, based on experience with various earlier but limited counts, the census commission fully recognized which questions on the forms could yield ambiguous information. Thus, for example, the commission knew that self-identification in terms of “age” could be problematic, as well as the questions regarding “nationality,” “language used,” and “religion.” The 1881 census took place at a time when self-conceptions of “nationality” were changing for many of the inhabitants of the Baltic provinces. The 1850s had ushered in the so-called period of national awakening for Estonians and Latvians, requiring many to think about this aspect of social identity for the first time and to be ready to declare it publicly. While the questions about religion and language used could be answered by reference to everyday practice and formal enrollment in a congregation, “nationality” asked about consciousness of a much less concrete membership, and could prove to be problematic, especially for persons in urban areas where assimilation processes were more successful than in the countryside.

A comparison between the information available on the original census forms and that presented in the tabulated results in the census publications suggests the extent to which the analysts for the four geographical units (Riga and the three provinces) were free to innovate. All analysts extensively used the three principal demographic variables of age, sex, and marital status (see Table 2), but differed over age grouping (using months only for infants under one year of age, aggregating by individual years and by age groups). The tables using cultural variables (nationality, language, religion, and education) in all four units were constructed more or less uniformly and unproblematically, even though earlier and subsequent discussion of the meaning of these variables suggested that they were indeed problematic. In any event, the numerous subcategories that had to be employed in all four units (especially for religion, nationality, and speech) underlined the cultural diversity of the counted population, as well as the lack of fit between existing political and cultural boundaries.

Table 2
The variables of the 1881 Baltic census

Variables	Specifications
<i>Demographic</i>	
Age	1st year of life by months; thereafter by years
Sex	Male and female
Marital status	Unmarried, married, separated, widowed
<i>Cultural</i>	
Nationality	German, Russian, Latvian, Estonian
Language	German, Russian Latvian Estonian, Yiddish
Religion	Protestant, Roman Catholic, Russian Orthodox, Hebrew, Raskolnik
<i>Education</i>	
	Reading and writing, reading only, writing only
<i>Occupation</i>	
Producing	Occupation or status by name
Consuming	Occupation or status by name
<i>Legal structure</i>	
Civil status	Civilian or military
<i>Personal–medical</i>	
Mental	Mentally impaired
Physical	Deaf, deaf and blind, physical defect
<i>Residential</i>	
Dwelling unit	By type or material
Residence	Place of residence, place of registration
Coresidence	Coresidential group
Residential structure	Apartment house, solitary dwelling, etc.
Rural residence	Estate, farmstead, mill, workers' dwelling, etc.
<i>Incidental</i>	
Livestock	By type

More Estonians resided in Livland than in Estland, for example, because the ethnic boundary between the Estonian and Latvian peasantry lay far to the south of the political boundary between these two provinces.

In terms of table space, the variable “occupation” proved to be the most interesting to the tabulators, because they used maximum discreteness in presenting occupational descriptions. The distinction between “producing” and “consuming” occupations—a conventional one for the 19th century—was retained throughout, a practice that, of course, embedded certain assumptions about the nature of work. Most married women who had no independent source of income were uniformly listed as “consumers,” for example, in spite of household maintenance (urban and rural) most definitely contributing to the total sum of economic wealth. The immense variety of nonagricultural occupations that the tabulators chose not to aggregate into larger categories suggests a fascination with the economic differentiation the provinces were undergoing in those decades.

With respect to macro-classifications, the used variables always differentiated between civilian and military populations. It made a difference in the analysis of such strategically significant urban areas as Riga, Reval, and other port cities, but was not as significant a distinction for the countryside. Somewhat surprisingly, the census made very little of the continuing division of the population into social orders (*Stände*: nobility, burghers, clergy, the *Literatenstand*), which continued to be used popularly for various other extra-censal classificatory purposes.

In all four tabulations, separate tables were created to deal with the population that was in a state of dependency because of physical or mental disabilities. This concern reflected a growing recognition that the provincial, regional, and local governments were ultimately responsible for the care of such people, as well as the increasing consciousness in the Tsarist government about this subpopulation. Regionally, this identification of those with special problems continued the tradition that researchers at Dorpat University initiated earlier in the *Biostatik* studies.

Another feature reflected in all four units of the census was the preoccupation with the physical dwellings of the population. This manifested itself differently in the urban and rural enumerations, but appeared uniformly throughout the four sets of tables. In rural areas, enumerators sought to identify precisely the size of domestic groups and kinds of housing in which the rural population lived, but only in the Kurland count was the presentation of these figures detailed in the extreme. In urban areas, especially in Riga, the count noted how households were deployed within particular houses, resulting in tables that aggregated social–occupational information by the floor on which a particular household was located. Very likely, this preoccupation signaled a growing consciousness among the authorities about the allocation of urban living space. In Riga and other Baltic cities, the 1860s had ushered in an era of relatively activist urban governments, in part because of the vast increase of rural-to-urban migration starting in that decade. The gathering of information on this subject thus became one of the goals of the census.

3.3. Most frequently used cross-tabulations

In principle, the compilers of the published census volumes could have presented census results simply: one frequency table per variable. In fact, the choices that led to the volume tables diverged from that somewhat. A frequency count for all the variables identified as important (see Table 2) can be obtained from the tables. Some of these were one-way frequencies—how many of *x* were there?—but equally as many were embedded in cross-tabulations that used as many as three variables, such as Marital status \times Sex \times Religion (Table 3). Some cross-tabulations may have been carried out simply as a more economical means of data presentation, while others were clearly present because the enumerators had a special interest in the variables. We make judgments about interest not so much on the basis of questions asked, but on the basis of the choice of cross-tabulations (out of many possibilities) provided by the compilers.

A century of experience in the analysis of population structures has highlighted the central importance of the age variable. In the Baltic census, however, age does not appear to play a uniformly important role in efforts to understand all variables. Since it was used in conjunction with sex both in two- and three-way tables, it is possible to extract information for proportions married by sex in given age groups. Similarly, it is possible to produce rough estimates of fertility by using child–woman ratios, and to use the Coale indices for population groups defined geographically (Wetherell & Plakans, 1997). By contrast, age does not appear in any of the tables dealing with occupational questions; we have no information on the relative importance of different occupations among differing cohorts. Nor does age

Table 3

Most frequently used cross-tabulations

Age × Sex
Marital status × Sex
Language × Age × Sex
Education × Disability
Residence × Disability
Nationality × Language
Language × Occupation
Occupation × Disability
Religion × Age × Disability
Age × Language × Disability
Earlier occupation × Disability
Age (above 14) × Education × Language
Place of residence × Place of registration
Occupation × Standing in occupation × Marital status
Language × Occupation × Standing in occupation (<i>Stellung in Beruf</i>)
Age × Religion × Sex × Marital status × All persons having religious affiliation for all religions
Age × Confession × Sex × Marital status × Individual religion (Protestant, Russian Orthodox, Catholic, Raskolnik, Jewish, other)

appear in any of the tables presenting household information for both city and countryside, thus effectively hiding the presence of the household developmental cycle.

Judging by table sizes, the enumerators were most concerned with the population structures of different religious groupings, using tables for each religion to cross-tabulate age, sex, and marital status. Among the cultural variables, religion appears to have been the most important, because similarly detailed tables were not presented either for nationality or language groupings. This is somewhat surprising, because, as already mentioned, both nationality and language were featured prominently in the Baltic public debates in these decades. Various articles in Baltic German publications suggested ways of “germanizing” the Estonian and Latvian peasantry; on their side, Estonian and Latvian nationalists were calling upon their co-nationals to rediscover the value of both their nationality and language. A faint reflection of this debate is present in one type of table, in which nationality is cross-tabulated with language used at the provincial level. But the age variable is absent from this table also, making it impossible to judge the extent to which the nationality/language contrast was a generational phenomenon (such as people claiming Latvian nationality *and* speaking German as their used language).

The variously impaired populations (physically disabled, mentally ill, speech- and hearing-impaired) were of considerable interest to the tabulators because although their numbers were relatively small, they could be presented in tables that used age, language, occupation, and religion, in addition to the information about whether the disability existed from birth or appeared later.

In light of other sociodemographic processes presented in the decade from the 1850s onward, it is also somewhat surprising that tabulators did not explore further the phenomenon of rural-to-urban migration (see Wetherell & Plakans, 1997). Only one type of table touches on this information: the cross-tabulation between place of residence and place of registration. Though the census instructions suggest that these variables should be used to identify those temporarily in transit, it is well known from other sources that rural-to-urban migrants as well as rural-to-rural migrants could spend years in new places before changing their official registration. The relative lack of interest in migration is also evidenced by the fact

that the census forms do not ask about birthplace, which would have revealed the scope of the phenomenon much more readily.

Assuming that the publication of tables was costly (most published volumes were less than 200 pages), it is also possible to detect province-level differences of interest. Jung-Stilling and Anders, the compilers of the Livland volumes, chose to dedicate the largest number of pages to a tabular portraiture of the religious communities and to the occupational breakdown of the Livland population. The compilers of the Kurland data, by contrast, dedicated the largest amount of space to one table (already mentioned) in which districts are divided into subdistricts, each subdistrict into inhabited places, and the latter into types of domestic groups and their size. Only Jordan, the compiler of the Estland volumes, was evenhanded, presenting roughly equal amounts of information on most of the important variables called for in the original census forms.

4. The 1881 census: an evaluation

The 1881 census differed considerably from all enumerations that preceded it, sharing some characteristics only with the limited 1867 urban census. In 1881, the provincial statistical committees were willing to pay for maximum coverage. They recruited and trained a large number of enumerators, made sure the count was carried out on the same day of the year, and tabulated the results in ways that permitted discovery of new features of the population. Nonetheless, the 1881 count embodied a certain number of conceptual difficulties, pertaining both to the design of the census forms and the structure of the tabulated results. These grew out of the linguistic layering of Baltic society and certain assumptions among the enumerators about “modernity.”

4.1. Distancing and language codes

Population enumerations in the Baltic area during the 19th century had progressed from the informal household lists (the revisions) to the refined 1881 census, but the improvements in technique were incapable of overriding the social and linguistic separation of the counters from the counted. The question remains whether enumerators overlooked, disguised, or violated the socio-familial categories and conceptualizations normally used by the counted to structure their own social universe. Primarily, this applied to the Latvian- and Estonian-speaking peasantry, but also perhaps to other non-German groups. In the dialogues that census taking entailed at its lowest level, the potential for misunderstandings was great and had been part of the cultural history of the Baltic area for a long time. The principal language “communities”—German, Russian, Latvian, and Estonian, among others—had remained socially and linguistically distinct since the 13th century, because (unlike in England after the Norman invasion) there was little integration among the speakers of these languages. The language hierarchy remained in place until the second half of the 19th century, when the “national awakenings” of the Latvians and Estonians demanded language equality. The looser requirements of the earlier soul revisions allowed much leeway in what was recorded. The listing format and relational kin terminology permitted estate scribes to accurately reproduce even the most complicated familial formation, and some did so with almost an anthropologist’s eye. The standardized forms of the 1881 census, by contrast, and the subsequent published tabulation, moved the analyzable results several additional steps away from the counted population. Compounding this separation were also the problems of accuracy of census

information on such questions as age, nationality, language, and religion, which the enumerators had to obtain from informants because they could not observe such characteristics themselves.

4.2. Terminology for collectivities

One possible source of misunderstandings was the collective and individual familial terms used by the enumerators and by the general population. An example comes from the Latvian peasantry: the German term *Familie* (as used in both the revisions and 1881 censuses) did not have a precise equivalent in Latvian. Much later, the Latvians employed the German form *familija* and sometimes a Latvian neologism, *gimene*. Throughout the period of the revisions (until 1859) and still at the time of the 1881 count, however, Latvians used the term *saimē* to describe the coresidential group of the farmstead and any other domestic groups that had a distinct head. This word referred to all those over whom the head—*saimnieks*—had authority: the spouse and offspring, other coresident relatives, farmhands, and various by-residents. In the revisions and the 1881 census, the German enumerators sometimes used the more inclusive *Gesinde* to designate familial groups, and sometimes *Familie*. The use of the term *Familie* (most frequently meaning “conjugal family unit”: husband, wife, and children) meant that enumerators were introducing delineating borders into a coresidential group, borders that the terminology of spoken Latvian did not recognize, or at least did not identify. The imported German terms were meant to attribute social significance to small, cleanly delineated family units, whereas the Latvian term *saimē* pointed to the far more porous borders of the group. In the 1881 census, the German term *Haushalt* (household)—for another kind of collectivity—was used frequently, but the word had no equivalent in Latvian throughout the 19th century. Neither *Haushalt* nor *Gesinde* meant specifically the same as the Latvian term *saimē*. The closest Latvian term *saimniecība* (an economic entity organized around a conjugal family unit) gained currency only in the 20th century.

4.3. “Disappearing” familial structures

Perhaps the most problematic attribute of the published 1881 census tables was the way they screened out information on social structures below the administrative subdivisions. Judging by the findings of the 1881 census, the researcher is tempted to hypothesize that the mid-century decades witnessed a major change in Baltic rural familial relationships. Judging by the tables, an era of complex rural family networks as depicted in the soul revisions seemed to come to an end abruptly, and an era of the simple family began equally abruptly. If in the revisions family-structural information was the principal context of all information, in the 1881 censuses family connections beyond the domestic group, in effect, were hidden from view, and the few tables offering familial information (a) focused on the frequency of some family events (marriage and cohabitation); and (b) clearly presupposed the husband/wife/children unit to be normative. The interests of the census takers—or, more accurately, the census tabulators—had shifted toward those of the provincial and imperial governments. Generally speaking, the census tabulators were principally concerned with the numerical size of geographically defined units that were inhabited places (such as towns, counties, and neighborhoods); birthrates and, to a lesser extent, migration; marriage, which was important, among other things, for identifying legitimate and illegitimate births; the number of people in different occupations and in different religious groupings. In all of these, familial networks, considered as social structures, remained in the shadows. When presupposed in some table columns—such as those cross-tabulating people by living spaces within apartment houses in the Riga volumes—the

germane family unit is assumed to be the domestic unit. This dethronement of structural questions about the family was a deliberate decision because the individual census forms offer information on structural connections straightforwardly. Thus, a major part of the data actually gathered by the enumerators were, in fact, never tabulated, and indeed never used.

A shift in Baltic family history in the middle decades of the 19th century so abrupt as to make the “typically modern” conjugal family unit normative for all social groups was highly unlikely. True, the simple family unit was already characteristic of the farmhand population even before mid-century (Plakans & Wetherell, 1988). A *prima facie* case can also be made for the loosening of family ties later. During the 1860s, the imperial reforms applied to the Baltic provinces, as well as the rest of the Russian Empire, severely reduced restrictions on geographic mobility, initiating a process of out-migration from the Baltic countryside and of urban and town growth. Continued land shortages in the countryside diminished the opportunities individuals had for establishing families. All general socioeconomic indicators show that Baltic society in these decades was starting to change dramatically, and social commentators among the Baltic German as well as the Latvian and Estonian nationalist intelligentsia complained about the destructive effects of individualism. Still, the already mentioned table in the 1881 Kurland census (mean farmstead population size by estate) shows that the figure in 1881 was somewhat higher than in the first half of the century. No structural information is given in the table, of course, but such large farmsteads were likely to consist of more than just heads, their wives, their children, and agricultural laborers unrelated to the head. In the first half of the 19th century, the enumerators who produced the revisions received no instructions to look for modernity, and therefore they depicted domestic groups, accurately or sloppily, as they found them. The censuses of the second half, however, were in themselves symptoms of administrators’ desire to supplement the tools of modern governance. Since “modern” government policy for both provincial and imperial administrators did not include family policy, the categories used and tabulated were keyed to other concerns; when mentioned at all, the “family” had become, more often than not, the “coresidential unit” and the “conjugal family unit.”

5. Conclusion

No evidence suggests that the imposition of non-indigenous census categories greatly disturbed those upon whom they were imposed. Therefore, one must resist the temptation of talking about “cultural hegemony.” The nationalists of the Latvian and Estonian “national awakenings” in the 1860s and 1870s were quite comfortable in using both the German-language revisions and census results as objective reportage of the way Latvians and Estonians actually were. Neither the enumerators nor the subordinated populations lived in hermetically sealed cultural boxes. Both were perfectly capable of adapting their understandings to ongoing language layering, and both communities knew at least enough of each other’s language to communicate across a broad range of social, economic, and political transactions. Our critique is retrospective and seeks an explanation of why a certain tilt was given to the obtained information in the tabular publications.

Somewhat more problematic is an easy acceptance of the aggregated numbers in the categories that pertain to national, linguistic, and religious identity. While certain demographic indicators—proportion of children under age five, for example—can be validated by comparison with demographic models of societies at certain stages of development, the proportion of a population professing a given nationality or religion cannot. Here we are at the mercy of the count itself, and on this point the 1881 figures must

be deemed “soft.” Similarly, the sudden disappearance of small-group complexity that was evident in the earlier soul revisions and the prominence in 1881 of the conjugal family unit needs to be investigated further. The 1881 count took place in a rapidly changing Baltic society, but it is unlikely that these changes included sudden transformations of fundamental social structures.

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