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Age at first marriage in eighteenth and nineteenth-century Russia and the Netherlands: tradition or economic and social circumstances?

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Introduction¹

Hajnal's ideas on the difference between marriage patterns in Western and Eastern Europe have been very influential in historical demographic research.² According to John Hajnal, marriage patterns in Europe can be divided into two distinct groups to be found to the east and west respectively of an imaginary dividing line between St Petersburg and Trieste (Italy). To the West relatively high ages at marriage³ for both brides and grooms resulted in the vast majority of people living in nuclear families as a result of such marriages.⁴ Not only was the nuclear family the preferred household structure but the large differences in age between the generations made three-generation households an infrequent phenomenon. By the time the children were ready to establish their own families the parents were usually already dead. In general, three-generation households occurred only during a short span of the family lifecycle.

In the East the situation was supposed to have been rather different with low ages at marriage for both men and women. As a result the differences in age between parents and children were relatively low and this facilitated extended families with three, or even more, generations living together in one household. The newlywed couples usually lived under the supervision of

¹ An earlier version was presented at the Conference on Demographic History in Tambov, 20–25 May 2002.

² J. Hajnal, 'European marriage patterns in perspective', in: D.V. Glass and D.E.C. Eversley (eds.), *Population in history. Essays in historical demography* (London 1965); J. Hajnal, 'Two kinds of pre-industrial household formation', in: R. Wall (ed.), *Family forms in historic Europe* (Cambridge 1983) 65–104.

³ Age or average age at marriage refers to first marriages only.

⁴ The average age for men was over 25 years and for women 24 years, F. Hendrickx, 'Een onzichtbare grens? Hajnals' huwelijks patroon in Taiwan en Nederland', *Tijdschrift voor Sociale Geschiedenis*, 27 (2001) 309–321. Originally, in: 'Two kinds of pre-industrial', Hajnal stated ages of 26 for men and 21–23 for women as the dividing lines between the two systems.

their parents or even their grandparents.⁵ This also resulted in more couples of the same generation living together in one household, a situation rarely encountered in the West. According to Hajnal and others, households in the East frequently showed a much more complex family structure as compared with those in the West.⁶ Because of this, age at marriage determined large parts of the social structure at the micro level of the family and/or household in a society, making the study of age at marriage of central importance in understanding daily life in the past. In particular, it is crucial to study and assess the determinants of age at marriage.

Some claim that the age at marriage mainly depends on cultural norms or, more exactly, traditions in a society.⁷ By 'traditions' is meant those social and cultural rules for the behaviour of people in a community which are forced upon the members of that community with great vigour by that same community. Because of this it is very difficult for the individual members to deviate from the majority, the penalty being social exclusion. If tradition really determines this aspect of the marriage pattern one should expect only very small differences in the age at marriage within a society. This will also be true in a temporal sense: only modest variations in the age at marriage can occur in response to changing circumstances. An adaptation to changes in social, economic or personal circumstances in fact *first* requires a change in tradition. Traditions, however, are extremely rigid and, at best, change slowly. Both arguments seem to indicate a very homogeneous age at marriage. If only traditions were of importance one can, in principle, also expect that there would be no huge differences in ages at marriage between socioeconomic groups in a specific society, unless the traditions were partly socially bound. Differences in average age at marriage between regions, or even neighbouring communities, have to be explained completely by differ

⁵ Compare B.A. Engel, *Between the fields and the city. Women, work, and family in Russia, 1861-1914* (Cambridge 1994) 10-13, 17-19.

⁶ P. Laslett, 'Introduction: the history of the family', in: P. Laslett and R. Wall (eds.), *Household and family in past time* (Cambridge 1972) esp. 60-62; P. Laslett, *Family life and illicit love in earlier generations* (Cambridge 1977) 12-30; E.A. Hammel, 'The zadruga as process', in: Laslett and Wall (eds.), *Household and family*; M. Mitterauer (ed.), 'The family in Eastern Europe', special issue of *Journal of Family History*, 7 (1982) 1-131; D.L. Ransel (ed.), *The family in Imperial Russia* (Urbana 1978); P. Czap, 'The perennial multiple family household, Mishino, Russia 1782-1858', *Journal of Family History*, 7 (1982) 5-26; P. Czap, 'Age family: the peasant's greatest wealth: serf households in Mishino, Russia, 1814-1858', in: Wall (ed.), *Family forms in historic Europe*, 105-151, esp. 144-146; C.D. Worobec, *Peasant Russia. Family and community in the post-emancipation period* (Princeton 1991) 107-117; I. Devos and L. Kennedy (eds.), *Marriage and rural economy; Western Europe since 1400* (Turnhout 1999) several articles; T. Trokhina, 'A typology of the Russian peasant family of the Upper Volga region', in: P. Kooij (ed.), *Where the twain meet. Dutch and Russian regional development in a comparative perspective 1800-1917* (Groningen/Wageningen 1998) 175-184; V. Kanitshev, R. Kontchakov, Y. Mizis and E. Morozova, 'The development of the family structure in the Tambov region, 1800-1917', chapter 11 in this volume; I. Chernyakova, 'Marriage behaviour in pre-industrial Karelian rural parishes', chapter 4 in this volume.

⁷ T. Engelen, 'Labour strategies of families: A critical assessment of an appealing concept', *International Review of Social History*, 47 (2002) 453-464, esp. 457-458.

ences in tradition. If differences in traditions are small, again only small differences in the average age at marriage can be expected. Of course, tradition cannot be the sole explanation for a specific average age at marriage, while tradition itself must have come into being at some time. The origin of a tradition presumably lies in social and economic circumstances in the past.

On the other hand, it is possible to put forward an argument that the age at marriage is mainly related directly to social and especially economic circumstances, which can differ between societies, but also between individuals. Evidently, changes over time would then be expected because of economic and social developments.⁸ By implication, the age at marriage will adapt much faster when determined by socioeconomic factors than when determined mainly by tradition. If this is the case people are able to use age at marriage to direct their own life. The chosen age at marriage will be an instrument in the life strategy of individuals or in a family strategy.⁹ All the decisions on a micro level together will determine the average age at marriage at a macro level.

Some factors likely to be influential cannot be fitted easily into an approach recognizing only strictly traditional or strictly socioeconomic determinants of the age at marriage. Irina Chernyakova points to the role of general juridical rules, the church and its ecclesiastical rulings and the landlord in shaping the age at marriage.¹⁰ A minimum age at marriage was often stated, but in most cases such a minimum was either too low to have any practical influence on the age at marriage or could easily be circumvented. Most of the worldly rulings followed existing practice and in this way confirmed the existing marriage pattern, rather than the other way around. The role of the church is also vague. Marrying young may have been stimulated to avoid pre-marital sexual intercourse, on the other hand celibacy and saving may have been promoted thus creating reasons for postponing marriage. In specific cases landlords could have had an interest in low ages at marriage to promote population growth, that is to increase the size of the potential labour force. However, if complete obedience to the landlord was lacking, his pressure has to be seen only as a socioeconomic factor. As will be discussed later, landlords in Russia could use a system of land allocation for their serf families

⁸ For example, R.M. Smith, 'Relative prices, forms of agrarian labour and female marriage patterns in England, 1350-1800', in: Devos and Kennedy (eds.), *Marriage and rural economy*, 19-48, esp. 20, 26-30, 38-39; F. van Poppel and J. Nelissen, 'Economic opportunities and age at marriage: an analysis of 19th-century micro data for the Netherlands', in: Devos and Kennedy (eds.), *Marriage and rural economy*, 152-178; C. Lundh, 'Marriage and economic change in the 18th and 19th century', in: Devos and Kennedy (eds.), *Marriage and rural economy*, 217-241, esp. 228-234.

⁹ See for instance T. Engelen, J. Kok, and R. Paping (eds.), 'Family strategies in the low countries. Four case studies', *The History of the Family. An International Quarterly*, 9 (2004).

¹⁰ Chernyakova, 'Marriage behaviour'. See also S. Golubeva, 'Age and patterns of marriage of Russian farmers in the Upper Volga Region, in: Kooij (ed.), *Where the twain meet*, 169-174, esp. 170.

which set a premium on early marriages. On the other hand landlords (in the case of estate serfs) or the government (in the case of soldiers and civil servants) could also prohibit specific groups from marrying.¹¹

This chapter aims to explore the determinants of ages at marriage in the Netherlands (especially Groningen) and Russia (especially the Yaroslavl, Tambov and Olonets region). The evidence presented here cannot be completely conclusive as it is based on work which is still in progress. An exhaustive survey of the existing literature has still not been carried out and was not the primary object. It was also not always possible to assess the spread in ages at marriage within a particular society as indicated by the standard deviation because of lack of data. The data that has been used is mostly derived from the Russian-Dutch co-operation on Integral History.¹² The general data for different regions in Russia and the Netherlands will be considered first. Next, a closer look at developments through time will be taken. Section four deals with the differences between social groups and finally, data on differences in ages at marriage within communities will be considered.

Differences between regions

As Table 1 shows, there were large differences in the average age at marriage between several areas of both Russia and the Netherlands. It is striking that low average age at marriage for men was found only in the Yaroslavl and Tambov regions. The data for both the Olonets region (Karelia) and the Netherlands are more in line with each other. With an average age at marriage of around 25, the Olonets region seems to be positioned on Hajnal's

¹¹ See for instance M. Akolzina, V. Dyatchkov, V. Kanitshev, R. Kontchakov, Y. Mizis, and E. Morozova, 'A comparison of cohort and other methods of demographic microanalysis used in studying the Tambov region, 1800-1917', chapter 3 in this volume; S.G. Kachtchenko and S.S. Smirnova, 'Conjugalities in the Olonets province in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Some inferences drawn from information taken from the registers of births, deaths and marriages', chapter 5 in this volume.

¹² Data on the Olonets region from Kachtchenko and Smirnova, 'Conjugalities in the Olonets province' and work in progress of the St Petersburg science group of S. Kachtchenko; for the Tambov region (Malye Pupki, Kalugino, Rasskazovo and Morshansk) from V. Dyatchkov, V. Kanitshev, Y. Mizis, V. Orlova, L. Protasov and S. Protasov, 'Cohort analysis of Malye Pupki's population: some preliminary results', in: Kooij (ed.), *Where the twain meet*, 141-153; Akolzina et al., 'A comparison'; for the Yaroslavl region (Velikoye and Vyatskoye) from Golubeva, 'Age and patterns of marriage', 170-171; for the Yaroslavl region (Archangelsky and Sandyrevski) from I. Shustrova and E.V. Sinityna, 'Demographic behaviour in the Yaroslavl loamy area: The results of cohort analysis for two typical rural parishes', chapter 1 in this volume; for the City of Groningen from P. Kooij and A. Mennens-van Zeijst, 'Demographic behaviour in the Groningen clay area. The results of cohort analysis', in: Kooij (ed.), *Where the twain meet*, 189-201; for Roman Catholics in the Groningen countryside from R.F.J. Paping, 'Papisten in de Ommelanden 1730-1810: Een onderzoek naar enige aspecten van de sociaal-economische geschiedenis van de Ommelanden, aan de hand van de katholieke gemeenschap aldaar (Unpublished doctoral thesis, History Groningen 1988); for the Groningen clay area from the Groningen Integral History Project; for Duiven from A.J. Schuurman, 'De bevolking van Duiven 1665-1795. Een historisch-demografische studie', in: *A.A.G. Bijdragen*, 22 (Wageningen 1979) 138-189, esp. 163; for Maasland from D.J. Noordam, *Leven in Maasland; een hoogontwikkelde plattelandssamenleving in de achttiende en het begin van de negentiende eeuw* (Hilversum 1986) 231.

dividing line between East and West, with the men conforming more to a western marriage pattern. There seems to be a different division for the women, however. With few exceptions all Russian data considered in this chapter show the same results.¹³ The average age at marriage for women in the Netherlands is clearly different, being considerably higher. Surprisingly, the average age at marriage for women in the Olonets region, unlike that of the men, fitted more into the eastern European marriage pattern.

Large differences can be seen even within regions. This is most clear for Vyatskoye in the Yaroslavl region, where the age at marriage resembles that found for the Olonets parishes. However, within the Olonets region, the parishes of Megregsky and Loyansky also differed a great deal. In the first parish both men and women married on average two years later than in the second one. According to Christine Worobec, differences in the average age at marriage in Russia at the end of the nineteenth century have to be mainly ascribed to the economic structure of a region, with purely agricultural provinces showing lower ages at marriages than the more industrialized and urban provinces: 'Urban dwellers out of necessity postponed marriages until they could accumulate sufficient capital to establish new households and support families'.¹⁴

Significant differences are also evident in the small area of the Netherlands. In Duiven, (Gelderland) both men and women married two-and-a-half years later than in Maasland (South-Holland).¹⁵ This conclusion is affirmed by data from Frans van Poppel, who reported even larger differences. In the rural areas in South Holland, the average age at marriage for men hovered around 27.5 in the nineteenth century.¹⁶ However, in the Kempen area of North Brabant the average age was well above 30 in the same period. Men in the Bommelerwaard (Gelderland) married on average at the age of 30 while the average age at marriage in the province of Zeeland was only 26.¹⁷ The average age at marriage in South Holland for women was 25.5, about 1 year older than in Zeeland, while in the Kempen women married on average when they were slightly over 28 and in the Bommelerwaard at 27.

¹³ Worobec, *Peasant Russia*, 125, presents contemporary statistical data on the Central Russian provinces in the period 1882-1886. The lowest average age at marriage for men was found in Tambov, Penza and Riazan with 22.2 to 22.4, the highest surprisingly in Yaroslavl and Moscow with 25.8 to 26.0. The lowest age at marriage for women was in Tambov, Voronezh, Tula and Riazan with 18.7 to 19.0, while the women married latest in Moscow (22.7) and Yaroslavl (23.4). In general, the data for this study shows smaller age differences between groom and bride than these statistical figures.

¹⁴ Worobec, *Peasant Russia*, 125-127.

¹⁵ Schuurman, 'De bevolking', 163; Noordam, *Leven in Maasland*, 231.

¹⁶ F. van Poppel, *Trouwen in Nederland. Een historisch-demografische studie van de 19e eeuw en vroeg 20e eeuw* (Wageningen 1992) 140-144.

¹⁷ For Zeeland see also O.W. Hoogerhuis, *Baren op Beveland. Vruchtbaarheid en zuigelingensterfte in Goes en omliggende dorpen gedurende de 19e eeuw* (Wageningen 2003) 160-162.

Table 1 Average age at marriage in different places in Russia and in the Netherlands, 1731-1905

	Period	N men	Average age of men	N women	Average age of women
Velikoye parish - Yaroslavl region (all peasants)	1810-1870 (birth)	86	21.8	97	20.6
Vyatskoye parish - Yaroslavl region (all peasants)	1810-1870 (birth)	52	24.3	36	23.7
Sandyrevsky parish - Yaroslavl region (all peasants)	1810-1870 (birth)	55	19.1	51	19.2
Archangelsky - Yaroslavl region (all peasants)	1810-1870 (birth)	94	20.1	44	22.4
Malye Pupki - Tambov region (all peasants)	1811-1871 (birth)	105	18.9	78	19.6
Tukshinsky parish - Olonets (all peasants)	1806-1875 (birth)	851	26.5		
Tukshinsky parish - Olonets (all peasants)	1810-1870 (birth)	66	26.1	52	21.2
4 Olonets parishes (all peas- ants)	1793-1905 (marriage)	3,491	25.0	4,142	22.4
Tukshinsky parish - Olonets (state peasants)	1806-1875 (birth)	695	25.6	758	22.7
Megregsky parish - Olonets (state peasants)	1806-1875 (birth)	346	26.0	374	23.4
Kotkozersky parish - Olonets (state peasants)	1815-1875 (birth)	950	25.0	1,178	22.7
Loyansky parish - Olonets (state peasants)	1806-1875 (birth)	504	24.0	584	21.5
4 Olonets parishes (state peasants)	1806-1875 (birth)	2,630	25.1	3,024	22.5
City of Groningen (all inhabitants)	1810-1870 (birth)	133	27.5	158	27.2
Groningen clay area (Roman Catholics only)	1731-1790 (birth)	562	29.6	691	26.1
Groningen clay area (all inhabitants)	1811-1872 (birth)	896	28.5	1056	26.6
Maasland (South Holland) (all inhabitants)	1740-1799 (birth)	559	27.7	618	25.1
Duiven (Gelderland) (all inhabitants)	1711-1790 (marriage)	143	30.2	174	27.8

Sources: see note 12.

Ages at marriage in Groningen occupied a middle position for both men and women by Dutch standards. The small difference between men and women in the city of Groningen as shown in Table 1 is interesting. This is possibly related to the presence of a lot of women serving as live-in servants in the

city. After a long period of working, some of these female servants managed to marry relatively young men. They were attractive as partners for these younger men, because during their service they were able to save a considerable amount of money. However, it has to be pointed out that most of these city maidservants came from elsewhere, while the data in Table 1 relates to city-born women (and men) only. It seems that the presence of these foreign women created a female surplus and thus influenced the marriage chances of the native-born women.

Very low ages at marriage can be found in nineteenth-century Bailovka, Kalugino and Petrovskoe in the Tambov region with women marrying on average at the age of 18 or 19 and men on average around 20 years old.¹⁸ As an explanation for those low ages at marriage in Tambov villages, Akolzina et al. states that the peasants in these areas urgently needed to have more children for socioeconomic reasons; the socioeconomic rules (the system of land allotments) and the socioeconomic situation pushed the peasants into early marriages.¹⁹ The argument that large families were economically attractive for Russian peasants is often cited in the literature on Russian historical demography.²⁰ That the need for extra labour causes early marriages is, however, not very convincing because early marriages did not create net additional labour in the short term. One of the households (most often that of the groom) gained a labourer, while the other household (usually that of the bride) lost one.

However, it could be argued that easy access to common fields explains the very early marriages of Russian peasants, as the common lands were reallocated according to the number of male members and/or couples within the household.²¹ This is sufficient reason for delving a little deeper into the system of land allocation in Russian villages. Several land repartition systems seem to have been in use, at least after the Emancipation of 1861, which mostly seem to have older roots. Worobec states that arable communal land was normally divided in line with the labour strength of each household, which was measured by the number of *tiagla* (married couples between the ages of 18 and 60). To assign the land to the most productive households was attractive for the village community, because after the Emancipation the whole community had to pay the taxes and dues. However, the number of male members in each household or even the total size of the household was

¹⁸ Akolzina et al., 'A comparison'; S.L. Hoch, *Serfdom and social control in Russia. Petrovskoe, a village in Tambov* (Chicago/London 1986) 76-77.

¹⁹ Akolzina et al., 'A comparison'.

²⁰ Chernyakova, 'Marriage behaviour'.

²¹ See Czap, 'A large family', 105-106; S. Yesikov, 'The characteristics of the Tambov Region in the nineteenth century', in: Kooij (ed.), *Where the twain meet*, 7-15 esp. 13; Worobec, *Peasant Russia*, 43; V. Dyatchkov and V. Kanitshev, 'Tambov regional development in the context of integral history (1800-1917)', chapter 9 in this volume.

sometimes the decisive factor in the redistribution.²² On the other hand, Barbara Alpern Engel states that women could not claim a land allotment and households only received extra communal land if a son was born and not at the birth of a daughter.²³ It is clear that land allotment systems differed significantly in different areas of Russia.

Steven Hoch gives a very detailed description of the land distribution system for serfs in Petrovskoe in the Tambov region in the first half of the nineteenth century, which he claims to be relevant for large parts of Greater Russia. Husband and wife were seen as a work team (*tiagla*) that was entitled to a certain plot of ploughed land to be redistributed every year, after 1825 every two years, in return for taxes and for services performed for the landlord.²⁴ Such a male-female work team was seen as best fitting the daily agricultural work. Nevertheless, some single or widowed men also had the same rights if they were able to fulfil the necessary labour obligations, while widows received a 'widow's allotment'. On the other hand, as Hoch states: 'Single and widowed women were never part of a work team, and rarely did men carry a full *tiaglo* alone'.²⁵ The vast majority of the married men in the age group 15-19 received a full *tiaglo*, while the unmarried young men generally received half a *tiaglo* or even none at all.

Naturally, this rigid way of dividing the land and of creating working couples stimulated early marriages of both men and women. Hoch put it in the following way: 'When a young couple married it immediately formed a new *tiaglo* or work team, further increasing the productive capacity of the estate. The earlier serfs married, the sooner this economic benefit to the estate would be realized'.²⁶ In this system early marriages were not only beneficial for the landlord, but also for the individual households, the presence of unmarried women in particular in a household increased the labour/land ratio resulting in lower labour productivity. Upon marriage the household in which the couple settled down (usually that of the groom's family) received at least half a *tiaglo* of land almost immediately, while the other household (usually that of the bride's family) lost some of its labour force without losing land. A marriage therefore meant an attractive fall in the labour/land ratio and also in the short term in the consumer/land ratio. A common advice to young men was: 'Get married at 18 in order to settle a *tiaglo*'.²⁷ Normally the young men also had to pay a substantial bride price (or *kladka*) to her parental

²² Worobec, *Peasant Russia*, 22-25.

²³ Engel, *Between the fields*, 8.

²⁴ Hoch, *Serfdom*, 16, 23-28, 91-92, 107.

²⁵ Hoch, *Serfdom*, 92.

²⁶ Hoch, *Serfdom*, 93-95.

²⁷ Quoted by Hoch, *Serfdom*, 95.

household.²⁸ According to Hoch this redistribution of wealth was a compensation for the loss of labour of the full-grown daughter: 'Economic motives were clearly in the minds of the Petrovskoe serfs when they arranged marriages'.

Landlords exploited these economic motives to stimulate early marriages and increase their serf working force. In the first half of the nineteenth century each *tiaglo* in Petrovskoe in the Tambov region maintained on average 4.6 to 5.5 persons.²⁹ The risk of having too few land allotments for the size of the household, and thus an unfavourable consumer/land ratio, was lower in extended families consisting of more couples with better *tiaglos*. For this reason the division of households was resisted by the landlord and his representative in Petrovskoe.

The land distribution system will have promoted early marriages only if the repartitioning of the land took place regularly. This took place only once every 2 years in the serf village of Petrovskoe after 1825, whereas Worobec suggests that in post-emancipation Russia the redistribution took place 'every few years', and elsewhere she writes about 'periodic intervals of anywhere from three to twenty-five or more years'.³⁰ Some 40% of all the communes in European Russia did not repartition their land allotments in the decade after the Emancipation of 1861. Strong forces within the community from (formerly) larger but reduced households successfully opposed reallocations which would only have resulted in them losing some of the arable land at their disposal. Of course, longer periods without redistribution also made investments in the land more attractive to the peasants concerned. As well as complete repartition of land, partial repartition, reflecting the annual changes in household composition, was also practised in some of the Russian villages.

The provisional conclusion from the literature seems to be that in most areas in Russia the land allotment system was not flexible enough to make fast adjustments to household changes caused by (early) marriages. In some areas the land adjustment system, as in the Petrovskoe case, may well have made this possible. However, if the repartitioning took place less regularly it is not very rational to marry as young as possible and then have as many children as possible, because 6 or even 12 years is a very long period for a young couple to wait for land.

Also, it must be clearly pointed out that the increase in arable land per household did not necessarily result in any rise in the welfare of that household, if the number of members was increasing just as fast. There was a large risk that the amount of land would lag behind the size of the family, because

²⁸ Hoch, *Serfdom*, 95-105.

²⁹ Hoch, *Serfdom*, 41-43, 87-89.

³⁰ Worobec, *Peasant Russia*, 21, 25-27.

compensation in land was often received only years later. In such cases where the amount of land was kept constant the short-term result for the household was to be confronted with the Law of Diminishing Returns for Labour.

The argument that land redistribution promoted early marriages also does not seem to take into account the fact that, according to the same law, repartitioning land while the population is growing results in diminishing returns for the community as a whole.³¹ On top of that, frequent reallocation of land is a severe obstacle to an increase in agricultural productivity because it hampers investment in the fertility of the land. If, on the individual or family level, marrying young and having many children is not completely unattractive (although the character of the economic attractiveness remains doubtful in a lot of cases) it is still clear that it is very unfavourable for the community as a whole, decreasing the available amount of land per inhabitant. In this way it can be seen as the dismal result of Game Theory, each individual pursuing his own goal with unhappy results for the whole (including all the individuals).

As it is difficult to find strong socioeconomic benefits of very early marriages in the nineteenth century, it cannot be ruled out that in the special case of the Tambov region tradition played an important role in determining the age at marriage. A possible reason for the preference for very low ages at marriage in parts of the Tambov region can be found in the past. In the seventeenth century this region was still very thinly populated, the soil, however, was very fertile (the so-called 'black earth'). Hence, it might have been attractive to marry young. There were no economic reasons for postponing marriage while there was enough fertile soil available and there were no reasons for restricting the number of children. In these special circumstances marrying as young as possible could easily have become a tradition supported by the landlord, who could also reap some benefit from the rising number of serfs, if they were able to produce an extra surplus. The population in the Tambov region increased rapidly in the following century.³² By the nineteenth century the region can be characterised as being overpopulated with many people living near subsistence level. The tradition of marrying young became a burden, which, in some Malthusian way, was held in check by high mortality rates. However, the tradition of marrying young did not change and the system of regularly redistributing land according to the number of persons in a household reinforced this tradition.

On the other hand, Worobec tries to give a more rational explanation for the early marriages: 'Equal partible inheritance, the apportionment of full communal land allotments to married men alone, the incorporation of new

³¹ Compare Yesikov, 'The characteristics', 8-10.

³² Yesikov, 'The characteristics', 8; Akolzina et al., 'A comparison'.

conjugal units into existing patriarchal extended family households, and supplementary incomes from domestic industries encouraged men and women to wed early'.³³ However, most of these arguments only show that there were not many drawbacks to early marriage. Perhaps the land division argument already discussed provides an explanation, but loses much of its force if land division did not take place regularly. Although there could have been an economic explanation at one time, early marriages in these Russian villages seem more related with traditions, as illustrated by the following popular sayings quoted by Worobec: 'The earlier the marriage, the more profit for the house', and 'If you rise early you will do more, if you marry young you will have help sooner', which totally overlooks the economic burden of young children and a large family and the problem of the scarcity of land.

One important reason for postponing marriage in the Netherlands, as in other parts of Western Europe, was that it was economically attractive for unmarried men and women to work on an annual basis as live-in servants on farms, for artisans or in bourgeois households.³⁴ Saving was usually of major importance when newlyweds set up households of their own. A marriage was generally only undertaken when this was economically feasible. Because sexual intercourse was postponed, forced marriages were not uncommon, in particular in the lower strata of society. However, in the Netherlands, even people who were forced to marry because the bride was pregnant were generally not extremely young.³⁵

A system with financially relatively attractive jobs as live-in servants (free food and lodging, no risk of unemployment, some salary) for unmarried young adult people did not really develop in the Russian countryside, making it necessary for juveniles to stay in the parental household until they married if they did not migrate to the large cities. Several (traditional) social events existed in the Russian peasant villages where these unmarried sons and daughters could meet each other and where early marriages were stimulated. Although premarital sexual intercourse was highly disapproved of and great value was put on the virginity of daughters, it seems that unmarried Russian juveniles were actually quite sexually active, at least at the end of the nineteenth century. This can be concluded from the percentages of illegitimate children born in the provinces in 1897, which ranged from 0.5% of all the children born in Voronezh and 0.8% in Tambov to 2.8% in Yaroslavl and

³³ Worobec, *Peasant Russia*, 126.

³⁴ Hajnal, 'Two kinds of pre-industrial'; G.A. Collenteur and R.F.J. Paping, 'De arbeidsmarkt voor inwonend boerenpersoneel in het Groningse kleigebied 1830-1920', *NEHA-jaarboek voor Economische, Bedrijfs- en Techniekgeschiedenis*, 60 (1997) 96-137.

³⁵ J. Kok, *Langs verboden wegen. De achtergronden van buitenechtelijke geboorten in Noord-Holland 1812-1914* (Hilversum 1991) 49-50; T.L.M. Engelen and M.M. Meyer, 'Gedwongen huwelijken op het Nederlandse platteland, 1812-1862', in: *A.A.G. Bijdragen*, 22 (Wageningen 1979) 190-220, esp. 202-203.

even 4.8% in Pskov.³⁶ Although there is no data on forced marriages available, these figures suggest that premarital sexual relations were not uncommon in the Russian villages during the very short period between maturity and marriage. Free sexual behaviour by the youth, which contrasted quite sharply with the official sexual morals claimed by the village community, may have stimulated parents to insist on early marriage, thus reducing the chances of the shame of illegitimate children. An interesting question in this respect is why it seems to have been easier for Western European than for Russian young adults to refrain from reproductive sex during a long period of sexual maturity.

Another possible explanation for marrying relatively young in Russia was that mortality rates were higher than in the Netherlands. This could mean that at marriage the parents were already dead, although the partners were only 20 to 25 years old. However, this cannot be the explanation for an average age at marriage of around 18 years leading to extended families, which was the case most of the time in the Tambov and Yaroslavl regions.³⁷ The very low ages in the Tambov region suggest instead that parents were trying to keep a hold on their descendants by organizing their marriages when they were still in a subordinate position and were not able to escape their parents' will. In this way, the very hierarchical mode of organizing family life in the broadest sense was duplicated through the generations. Because there were few possibilities of earning and saving money as an unmarried person there was no reason to postpone marriage, especially when it was easier after marriage to get access to the common fields of the village thanks to the system of redistribution of common lands according to the number of *tiaglo* as discussed earlier.

In eighteenth and nineteenth-century Russia, paternal power, practices of dividing common land, high mortality rates, the absence of a wage and money economy and traditions from the past all helped to keep the average age at marriage low for both men and women. These factors operated differently from place to place and from region to region, with the Karelian parts of Russia more or less forming a transition area between Eastern and Western Europe. This last statement is in line with the frontier in marriage patterns, which according to Hajnal ran between Trieste and St Petersburg.

³⁶ Worobec, *Peasant Russia*, 126–150. Worobec suggests that a quite strict sexual behaviour on the part of unmarried people in the villages was enforced by the community, but this does not correspond with the relatively high numbers of illegitimate children for a society with low ages at marriage and a nearly universal incidence of marriage.

³⁷ Trokhina, 'A typology of the Russian peasant family'; Kanitschev et al., 'The development of the family structure'.

Differences over time

Differences over time are studied using the data for the Groningen and Olonets areas only. Although data for the Tambov region is available, it is incomplete because no information on the numbers involved is given.³⁸ These figures show that average ages at marriage in Tambov were not constant. In the period 1840–1917 men in Malye Pupki always married between the ages of 19 and 20 but the age at marriage of women fell from 20.4 in the period 1840–1849 to around 19.0 after 1880. There were some changes for both men and women in Bailovka in the same period. The average age at marriage for men fell from nearly 21 in the period 1840–1869 to less than 19.5 after 1880 while for women the average age at marriage fluctuated from 19 (1840–1859) to about 17.5 (1860–1889) and back to 19 again (1890–1917).³⁹

The Olonets area shows only a slight variation in the age of marriage for men (Table 2). In the nineteenth century the average age of grooms only varied between 24.2 and 25.6. A slow increase until the middle of the century was followed by an equally slow decline until the beginning of the twentieth century. The same pattern can be observed for women, but it is far less distinct. The differences between the lowest and highest (average) age at marriage was less than 1 year (21.9 in 1891–1905 compared with 22.8 in 1831–1850). The age at marriage for men at the end of the century was somewhat higher than at the beginning whereas that for women was somewhat lower. As a result the average age difference between male and female marriage partners decreased.

Strikingly enough, the overall pattern of the average age at marriage for both men and women in the Netherlands is virtually the same. According to Van Poppel, the average age for men declined slowly from about 29 around 1825/1830 to about 27.5 at the turn of the century. The fall in the average age at marriage for women is somewhat more marked with a decline from 27.5 around 1825/1830 to 25.7 by 1900. He also observed a slow rise in the age at marriage for both men and women in the decades before 1825/1830.⁴⁰ His findings are corroborated by the Groningen data given in Table 2.

In the Groningen clay area the average age at marriage of men fell considerably from well above 30 around the third quarter of the eighteenth century to about 28 for men marrying in the last quarter of the nineteenth century. The picture is less clear for women. The birth cohort of 1761–1790 married on average at the lowest age. At the start of the nineteenth century

³⁸ Akolzina et al., 'A comparison'.

³⁹ As the number of cases for the Tambov data is unknown, it is not clear if changes over time in these parishes are significant.

⁴⁰ Van Poppel, *Trouwen in Nederland*, 22–26; also Hoogerhuis, *Baren op Beveland*, 159–160.

the average age at marriage rose, while in the second half of the nineteenth century women again started to marry younger.

Table 2 Changes in average age at marriage over time in the Olonets region 1793-1905 (marriage dates) and the Groningen clay area 1731-1870 (birth dates)

	Period	N men	average age of men	N women	average age of women
4 rural parishes Olonets region	1793-1810 (marriage)	251	24.2	308	22.4
4 rural parishes Olonets region	1811-1830 (marriage)	399	24.7	423	22.3
4 rural parishes Olonets region	1831-1850 (marriage)	585	25.6	638	22.8
4 rural parishes Olonets region	1851-1870 (marriage)	850	25.1	927	22.5
4 rural parishes Olonets region	1871-1890 (marriage)	777	24.9	1,016	22.3
4 rural parishes Olonets region	1891-1905 (marriage)	629	24.9	830	21.9
Groningen clay area - Roman Catholics	1731-1760 (birth)	242	30.7	320	26.8
Groningen clay area - Roman Catholics	1761-1790 (birth)	320	28.8	389	25.6
Groningen clay area	1811/6-1830/4 (birth)	459	29.0	542	27.1
Groningen clay area	1850/4-1870/2 (birth)	437	28.0	514	26.1

Sources: see note 12.

In general the similarities in the patterns in age at marriage tend to obscure the variations in a certain region. It is, however, important to assess the magnitude of those variations in order to determine the likelihood of traditional or socioeconomic explanations for the age at marriage. It is clear that the average age at marriage was not constant in any of the regions in the Netherlands or in Russia. There were some changes in the course of time everywhere. However, the changes were never very significant and the differences between regions did not really disappear because of these changes. The small magnitude of the changes may indicate that traditional factors were of importance, but it may also suggest that the social and economic circumstances for the people making marriage decisions did not change dramatically over time in the second half of the eighteenth and in the nineteenth century.

Differences between socioeconomic groups

If socioeconomic factors are an important factor determining when to marry, one would expect certain differences in the average age at marriage between different socioeconomic groups in a specific society. Also, the average age at marriage will develop differently between such groups through the centuries because economic changes have diverging effects on different groups.⁴¹ Unfortunately, however, there is not much evidence available for making comparisons between socioeconomic groups within a specific village.

According to Van Poppel, the average age at marriage for men in the Netherlands was highest for the upper middle class, most of whom did not marry until over the age of 30, somewhat later than the intellectuals, the lower middle class and the farmers who married on average between the ages of 27 and 28.⁴² Rural labourers married on average when between 26 and 28 years old. The lowest age at marriage was observed amongst the urban unskilled and semi-skilled labourers (including self-employed artisans) at about 26 years old. In general, women marrying casual, unskilled or skilled labourers were on average the oldest (26-28). Women marrying farmers or rich or lower middle class men were slightly younger (25-27) and women marrying farm labourers were relatively young (23-26).

There is not much data available on differences in marriage behaviour between the social classes in Russia. However, data for 11 rural parishes in the province of Olonets in the period 1897-1905 indicates that male peasants, the vast majority of the population, married younger than the rest of the population (25.0 compared with 27.7). In addition, variation in the age at marriage seems to have been largest amongst the peasants (with a standard deviation of 4.4 compared with 3.7 for the total population). The explanation may be found in the fact that soldiers formed a large part of the rest of the population and there were severe legal restrictions preventing them from marrying young.⁴³ These hindrances were even larger before 1861/1874, that is before the abolition of serfdom and the military reform in Russia.

⁴¹ For example, Evergem (Belgium) 1806-1847: I. Devos, 'Marriage and economic conditions since 1700: the Belgian Case', in: Devos and Kennedy (eds.), *Marriage and rural economy*, 101-132, esp. 107. See also Van Poppel and Nelissen, 'Economic opportunities', 165-175; F.M.M. Hendrickx, 'Marriage in Twente: nuptiality, proto-industrialisation and religion in two Dutch villages', in: Devos and Kennedy (eds.), *Marriage and rural economy*, 179-202, esp. 189-196; S. Sogner, 'Marriage and the early modern state: the Norwegian case', in: Devos and Kennedy (eds.), *Marriage and rural economy*, 203-216, esp. 210.

⁴² Van Poppel, *Trouwen in Nederland*, 50-59. Because exact data is missing in his study, only approximations are given. High marriage ages of farmers are also reported for nineteenth century Utrecht and Beveland (Zeeland) by M. Kalmijn, 'Bruid, bruidegom en bruiloft' in: K. Mandemakers and O. Boonstra (eds.), *De levensloop van de Utrechtse bevolking in de 19e eeuw* (Assen 1995) 86-102, esp. 96; Hoogerhuis, *Baren op Beveland*, 163-166.

⁴³ For instance see Kachtchenko and Smirnova, 'Conjugalinity in the Olonets province'.

Table 3 Differences in average ages at marriage between several socioeconomic groups in the Groningen clay area 1731-1870 (birth dates)

	period	N men	average age of men	N women	average age of women
Roman Catholics - Groningen clay area 'poor'	1731-1790 (birth)	218	29.6	274	26.9
Roman Catholics - Groningen clay area 'middle'	1731-1790 (birth)	135	29.7	180	26.0
Roman Catholics - Groningen clay area 'rich'	1731-1790 (birth)	209	29.5	237	25.3
Groningen clay area 'labourers'	1830-1872 (birth)	238	26.7	303	26.0
Groningen clay area 'middle class'	1830-1872 (birth)	267	28.9	267	27.0
Groningen clay area 'farmers'	1830-1872 (birth)	104	30.1	116	27.1
Groningen clay area 'other occupations'	1830-1872 (birth)	96	28.9	151	26.3

Sources: see note 12.

It is quite easy to distinguish between different socioeconomic groups for the Groningen countryside.⁴⁴ The distinction, however, is not completely the same for those born in the period 1731-1790 as for those born in the period 1830-1872.⁴⁵ In the eighteenth century, differences in the age at marriage for men from different social groups were only small. In the nineteenth century, however, labourers – mainly farm labourers – married significantly younger than farmers (a gap of 3.5 years!) with the middle classes and the other occupations maintaining a middle position. In the nineteenth century, the necessity for (farm) labourers to postpone marriage had lessened, because there was no need to save large amounts or to wait for the parents to die to profit from any inheritance. The rising social division in the Groningen countryside between 1770 and 1820, partly caused by increasing land prices,⁴⁶ made it nearly impossible for young people descended from farm labourers to buy even a small farm. However, for the male farmers, postponement of marriage remained an attractive strategy if they wanted to obtain a farm.

⁴⁴ Large farmers, and for instance rich merchants from the middle classes and other occupations like medical doctors, form the group labelled here as 'rich'; the 'middle' group consists mainly of families from the middle class and smaller farmers; all other occupations, such as labourers, a small part of the middle class such as employees or self-employed in industry and economic services are labelled 'poor'.

⁴⁵ For the period 1830-1871 only information on occupations is used for classification. However, for the period 1731-1790 this information is combined with data concerning property.

⁴⁶ R.F.J. Paping, *Voor een handvol stuivers. Werken, verdienen en besteden: de levensstandaard van boeren, arbeiders en middenstanders op de Groninger klei, 1770-1860* (Groningen 1995) 186-189, 204-205, 215-216.

Postponing marriage had been normal for all social groups in the eighteenth century, when farm labourers still had to wait for a regular position on a farm and men from the middle classes had to wait for the moment they could start their own business, which was not easy for young men at that time. It seems that in the nineteenth century earning an independent income was easier as many married men could find work as casual labourers, while farmers tended to hire an increasingly larger part of the required labour for only short periods. Hence, men could earn more at a younger age as non-resident casual labourers, without it being necessary to become a live-in farm hand.

The situation for women was rather strange. The situation in the eighteenth century can be summarised easily – the poorer she was the later the woman married. Postponement of marriage was a normal practice in the labouring classes, while rich farmers could afford to marry relatively younger women. As a result farmers' families were much larger than those of labourers. With the increasing opportunity for becoming a casual labourer, the average age at marriage for women in this social group fell somewhat, while it rose in the social groups of the farmers and the middle class. The age differences between the marriage partners decreased considerably in these last two groups. It seems that the role of women in the accumulation of starting capital increased. Hence, for men in the middle classes or for a farmer it seems to have become more attractive than before to marry older women who had had more chance of having inherited or saved a large sum of money. Where in the eighteenth century it was much more important to secure a position, in the nineteenth century the role of money, in particular the amount available when starting a family, increased because of the rising values of farms, shops and houses.

Differences within communities

Because the original data is not available, it was not possible to calculate the standard deviations for the average age at marriage in each instance. However, in a few cases some information is available. The basic hypothesis is that the higher the spread in age at marriage, the less probable it is that traditional factors played a major role in the decision to marry at a certain age. Reasoning along these lines, it is clear from Table 4 that tradition was very unimportant in the Groningen clay area. There was a large spread in average age, making it both possible for men and women to marry around 20, or to wait till after the age of 30. Society did not force young people to marry at or around a specific age. There seems to have been a large amount of freedom in choosing when to marry in nineteenth-century Groningen.

The spread in age at marriage in the Olonets region was somewhat lower. However, in this part of Russia a rigid social-cultural law forcing people to marry at or around a certain age does not seem to have existed either. There was still room for making own decisions based on specific social, economic and personal circumstances. This freedom was, however, considerably less than in the Groningen clay area.

Table 4 Spread in the age at marriage (standard deviation) in the Groningen clay area and Olonets region

	Period	N men	average age of men	Standard deviation men	N women	average age of women	Standard deviation women
Olonets region (state peasants)	1806-1835 (birth)	998	25.9	4.9	1,053	23.0	4.1
Olonets region (state peasants)	1836-1855 (birth)	865	24.6	3.6	939	22.4	4.1
Olonets region (state peasants)	1856-1875 (birth)	767	24.6	3.5	1,032	22.1	3.3
Olonets region (11 parishes)	1897-1905 (marriage)	1,492	25.5	4.3	1,459	21.8	3.4
Archangelsky (Yaroslavl region)	1810-1870 (birth)	94	20.1	3,7	44	22.4	6.1
Sandyrevsky parish (Yaroslavl region)	1810-1870 (birth)	55	19.1	2.4	51	19.2	2.7
Groningen clay area	1830-1834 (birth)	268	28.8	5.3	321	27.2	6.0
Groningen clay area	1850-1854 (birth)	254	28.4	5.4	287	26.4	5.3
Groningen clay area	1870-1872 (birth)	183	27.4	5.7	227	25.7	5.3

Sources: see note 12.

The data for the two Yaroslavl parishes is interesting. Sandyrevsky had a very low average age at marriage for both men and women, combined with a low spread in marriage ages, suggesting a relatively traditional marriage pattern as a result of strong social pressure within the community. However, the situation in Archangelsky was completely different. Marriage ages were higher, but more importantly the spread in ages was also much larger, pointing to some room for own choices. This was especially so for women in Archangelsky where the standard deviation for the age at marriage was as high as in the Netherlands. However, it must be taken into account that the numbers involved are only small. The differences in age at marriage between the two Yaroslavl villages can be attributed to socioeconomic differences. Sandyrevsky was a rather uniform peasant society with a minor cottage industry, while in

Archangelsky people seem to have had more alternative non-agricultural sources of income.⁴⁷

As has already been stated, it is tempting to conclude that a very traditional marriage pattern existed in parts of the Tambov region, with men and women marrying as young as possible, preferably between the ages of 16 and 20, just as was the case in Sandyrevsky in the Yaroslavl region. This is most clearly the case in Malye Pupki, though it can also be seen in Bailovka in the period 1840–1917. The standard deviations for women were around two years, sometimes even less, though with peaks up to three years.⁴⁸ The picture is less clear for men. In Malye Pupki, standard deviations were mainly around three years or less. In Bailovka, in half of the period it was less than three years, though in the period 1840–1879 it ranged up to four and above. The data from the cohort analysis confirms the hypothesis that tradition played a major role in determining the age at marriage. This data indicates that it was very unusual to marry after the age of 25 in Malye Pupki. Of the 105 men who married, 77% were under the age of 20 and only 3% were over the age of 25. Only 62% of the brides were under the age of 20 but no women married above the age of 25 (n=78).⁴⁹ The decision to marry had to be taken and implemented within a very short period. Actually getting married seems to have been more important than who to marry. Only a few people took the risk of postponing marriage, which suggests strong social pressure on marrying young.⁵⁰ Early marriages may possibly have been stimulated by land allocation practices by landlords and later village communities, sometimes allocating a full share of the common arable land to newlywed couples. Further research on the way the land was redistributed and how frequently this took place in specific villages in relation to the marriage pattern appears to be necessary. However, it is clear that individual social, economic and personal circumstances played only a minor role in determining the age at marriage in the Tambov parishes.

Conclusions

The data presented allows some brief conclusions to be made. The age at marriage in the Netherlands was determined mainly by social, economic and personal factors. The choice of the moment for marriage could be part of a life strategy of individuals and/or families. Different circumstances in different regions had serious effects on the average age at marriage of both men and women. Although the average age at marriage varied only slightly with time, it is clear that there were significant differences between several social groups

⁴⁷ Shustrova and Sinitsyna, 'Demographic behaviour'.

⁴⁸ Akolzina et al., 'A comparison'.

⁴⁹ Dyatchkov et al., 'Cohort analysis of Malye Pupki's population', 146–147.

⁵⁰ Compare Hoch, *Serfdom*, 77.

which were determined by socioeconomic factors. The large spread in the ages at marriage in the Netherlands indicates that there was no rigid tradition on when to marry. Men and women could just as well marry quite young around the age of 20, or wait till their thirties to give their consent.

The situation is less clear cut in Russia. The marriage pattern in the Olonets region more or less resembles that of the Netherlands, although men and women married some years earlier and there is less spread in ages. However, the spread in ages at marriage is not so small that one could think of a rigid tradition forcing people to marry around a specific age. There is also some indication of differences between social groups, but as the majority of the population is part of the large group of peasants, it is not easy to derive clear conclusions in this respect. Differences within the Yaroslavl region are large, which also points to socioeconomic factors and not only tradition playing a decisive role in determining the average age at marriage.

The Tambov region more or less stands apart. A very rigid marriage pattern with men and women all marrying before or just around the age of 20 was found in at least some of the villages. The spread in age at marriage is very low compared with other regions studied. This points to very restricted possibilities for deciding when to marry. Hence, economic and social factors seem to have been less important than elsewhere, even though there were some changes over time. The argument that marrying young was not at all a rational strategy, and certainly not if the land was not redistributed annually, has been put forward. The hypothesis for the explanation for the low ages at marriage and also for the measures taken by the landlords to stimulate these early marriages is that it stems from the past. Land was widely available in the seventeenth century so there was no reason to postpone marriage. The Law of Diminishing Returns for Labour did not yet apply as it did in the nineteenth century.

Hajnal's ideas concerning the different marriage patterns in the West and the East are largely confirmed by the findings. Low ages at marriage seem to correlate with a strong influence of tradition and measures from above (landlords), whereas high ages at marriage seem to correspond with social, economic and personal determinants of age at marriage. The regional variation in marriage patterns and the explanations for the differences observed suggest a slightly different dividing line than the one proposed by Hajnal. The data studied here suggest that the northern parts of Russia, as represented by the Olonets and partly also by the Yaroslavl regions, belong to a more western type marriage pattern where economic, social and personal circumstances played a major role in determining the average age at marriage for men and women. A marriage pattern largely shaped by tradition and with little room for personal choices is observed in the Tambov region and in some villages in

the Yaroslavl region, and was possibly also of importance in many other parts of the Russian countryside.