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# PARAMETERS OF LIFE AND DEATH IN KARELIAN LOCAL PARISH COMMUNITY: YALGUBA AREA IN CONTEXT OF XIX CENTURY ARCHIVAL QUANTITATIVE DOCUMENTARY SOURCES\*

In this second part of the article (the first part was published in the previous issue of the journal) the author's attention is focused on the analysis of archival historical documentary sources of parish origin: metric books. The task is to recreate a picture of the parish inhabitants' life expectancy through such parameters as birth rate and mortality characteristics. Two questions are under consideration: what the main death causes were and what the general spectrum of diseases during the two comparatively searched periods of parish community demographical development was.

*Key words:* XIXth century, metric books, life expectancy, spectrum of illnesses, gender ratio of deceased, church parish community, historical demography

## OBSERVATIONS

As it was revealed in the first part of our article the demographic characteristics of the local parish community development during the XIXth century cannot be so easily explained. The data compiled in Table 1 clearly shows that before 1850 all Yalguba area villages were developing progressively. The next two double decades, then, seem to be core periods, with the population reaching its peak in 1873 and suddenly reducing in 1904. Hypothetically, some dramatic inner circumstances occurred there during the last quarter of the century. The number of population continued to increase only in two villages out of 14 (Berezovye Mosty and Yalgora), while one of them maintained almost the same number of inhabitants. One more village (Okulovskaya) underwent a short period of decline somewhere between 1850 and 1873 and grew to become the biggest one in 1905. Six other villages (four in the Suisar' area, as well as Emeliyanovskaya and Ankhimovskaya villages) obviously diminished after 1873. Five more villages: Sel'ga, Minki Babkina, Karpovskaya, Kullievskaya and Baraniy Bereg stopped to be mentioned as separate settlements even before that, somewhere after the middle of the century.

It should be additionally emphasized that the evident decrease of the population in Ankhimovskaya and Emeliyanovskaya villages happened notwithstanding the fact that inhabitants of Minki Babkina, Karpovskaya and Kullievskaya villages became the members of these two communities namely, in the vicinity of which the former villages were located (see Pict. 1).

As Table 1 clearly demonstrates, the population has reached its peak around 1873. The common dynamic in the number of parish inhabitants was still

positive, even though two villages bearing the status of pochinov (newly founded settlements), Sel'ga and Baraniy Bereg, disappeared between 1850 and 1873, which obviously implies the attenuation of progressive tendency in economic-household development. Nevertheless, the total number of population of the parish area continued to increase up to 1342 pers. of b. g. in 1873, and then, instead of growing further, decreased over the next decades to 1300 pers. of b. g. In order to understand when and why the progressive tendency in the parish population growth was disrupted, we should analyse data provided by metric books (metric books) concerning the number of the newborn and the deceased over two decades preceding the peak registered in 1873 and compare it with the duration-matching period within the decrease phase of the total number of parish inhabitants to the level of 1904.

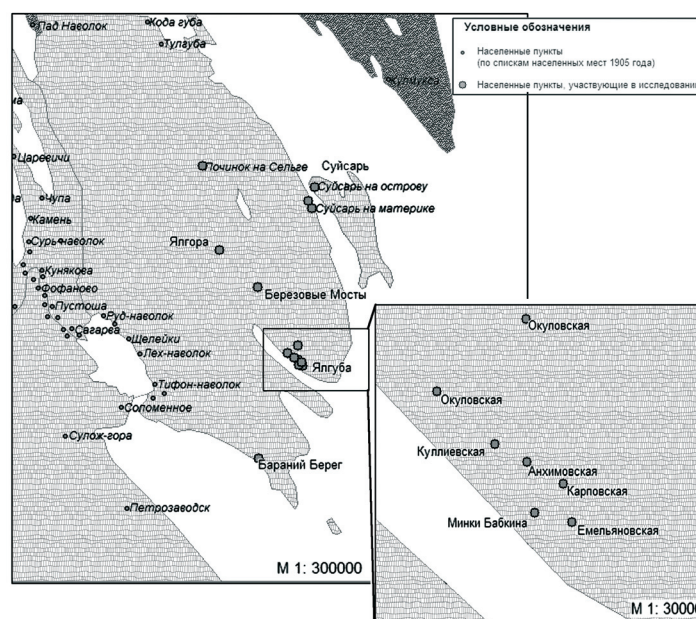
Our observations show the following. There were several time-periods during the 1860s when the number of deaths significantly exceeded the number of births: in 1863, and then in 1867–1868, while in 1864 the number of the deceased people and the number of the new-born children seems to be equal and quite high (more than 160 pers. of b. g. altogether). Extremely high mortality predominance was observed in 1872. The number of deaths (95) was almost twice as large as the number of births (65). It means a lot in the context of the coming 1873 peak in the population density of this particular parish territory (Fig. 1).

The situation within another two-decade period under our observation looks much more favourable. First of all, the birth rate evidently increased: the biggest number of the newborn children was 97 (1885), the lowest – 64 (1892). These numbers could be com-

pared to 81 and 48 in 1864 and 1867, respectively. At the same time, in 1889 and then again in 1904, the number of deaths was equal to the number of births (77 and 76, 82 and 83 pers. of b. g. respectively). The mortality rate exceeded the birth rate only twice: in 1894 and 1897, and in both cases differences were not significant. The difference detected in the birth-death ratio seems to be of the most importance: in the 1850s – the beginning of 1870s 88 deaths took place there per every one hundred births, but at the end of the century this measure decreased by 9 deaths (i. e., 77 deaths per 100 births). Nevertheless, the total number of births and deaths in Yalguba parish during twenty years at the end of XIXth – beginning of XXth centuries significantly exceeded corresponding figures for the same time period following immediately after the middle of the XIXth century: by 21 percent ( $N = 339$  pers. of b. g.) and by 13 percent ( $N = 161$  pers. of b. g.), respectively.

**Table 1**  
Population of the Yalguba parish villages at the end of XVIIIth – beginning of XXth centuries

Village	1782	1816	1850	1873	1905
Okulovskaya	217	235	326	282	403
Berezovye Mosty (Mandera)	36	46	67	81	127
Yalgora (Tyur'mino)	17	45	63	71	72
Sel'ga	5	5	4	–	–
Minki Babkina	64	82	109	–	–
Suisar'	297	317	381	431	333
Emeliyanovskaya	135	120	133	290	215
Karpovskaya	38	37	53	–	–
Ankhimovskaya	85	79	103	187	150
Kullievskaya	56	67	76	–	–
Baraniy Bereg	–	4	–	–	–
Total	950	1037	1315	1342	1300



Pict. 1. The area of Saint Nicholas parish in Yalguba on the administrative Map of Volostnoe Delenie (division by districts), 1905 (This electronic map was created as part of the Interdisciplinary Project 05-07-97504 of ILLMiK and GIS department of PetrSU, sponsored by the Russian Foundation for Basic Research (RFBR) in 2005–2007)

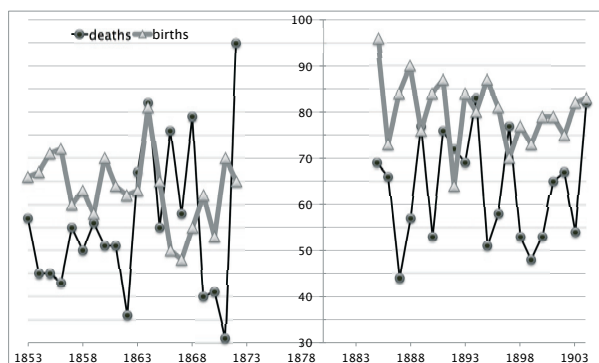


Fig. 1. Births and deaths in Yalguba parish in two periods: 1853–1872 and 1885–1905

In fact, over the two compared two-decade periods in Yalguba area more than 2860 pers. of b. g. were born and about 2400 died altogether (Table 2).

**Table 2**  
General number of births and deaths over two two-decade periods in the second half of XIXth – beginning of XXth centuries

Years	Births	Deaths
1853–1872	1265	1113
1885–1904	1604	1274
Total	2869	2387

Observed closeness of demographic figures is suggestive of the fact that periods subjected to intent attention do reflect normal everyday course of life

of inhabitants in this part of Prionezhie. That is why the analysis of the number of deaths based on the data collected from two decades at the beginning of 1850s – beginning of 1870s and from the same time period in the middle of 1880s – beginning of 1900s (Table 3) promises to form an adequate idea about the most vulnerable age groups among men and women inhabiting the parish in the XIXth century.

Table 3

Number and age of the deceased in Yalguba parish during two periods: 1853–1872 and 1885–1904

Age	1853–1872			1885–1904		
	Men	Women	Total	Men	Women	Total
Before 5 years	352	322	674	459	378	837
6–15	27	36	63	22	29	51
16–25	33	25	58	20	26	46
26–35	15	21	36	12	22	34
36–45	31	27	58	19	20	39
46–55	16	23	39	19	23	42
56–65	30	61	91	27	26	53
66–75	35	39	74	55	53	108
76–85	19	30	49	19	36	55
86–95	5	10	15	4	5	9
Total	563	594	1157	656	618	1274

The presented data confirms once again our conclusion made primarily on the base of the general decrease in parish population. Demographic situation became more complicated at the end of XIXth century compared to its middle. Even without emphasizing the larger number of the deceased over the same period of time (1157 and 1274 pers. of b. g., respectively), one cannot avoid noticing that the most vulnerable social group – children under the age of five – whose mortality rate was already absolutely prevalent before, further increased in number proportionally.

During the analysed twenty-year time periods of the XIXth century the share of children who did not live to five years among all the deceased amounted to 58 % (N = 674 pers. of b. g.) in the middle of century and to 66 % (N = 837 pers. of b. g.) at its end.

Another fact, which attracts our attention, is a smaller share of long-livers – those who died after reaching the age of eighty-six. The elderly at the end of the century by far more seldom lived to such age. In the last decades of the XIXth century the increase in mortality of women of reproductive age – usually a priori considered to be vulnerable members of societies such as Yalguba parish – looks more evident. It should be noted though that our sources rarely mention cases of death while giving childbirth. Women in general lived longer, as can be concluded based on their numerical prevalence over men in the next to last age group of seventy-six to eighty-five year olds.

However, one cannot avoid paying attention to the fact that a share of persons that died at the age of fifty-six – seventy-five years old (a critical age

period for peasants, who traditionally worked hard and usually did not receive qualified medical help) turned out to be practically the same in both studied periods, reaching 14 % (N = 165 pers. of b. g.) and 13 % (N = 161 pers. of b. g.), respectively. Similarity in fluctuations of quantitative indexes in other age groups is also quite evident.

The number of deceased adolescent children remained quite high. At the same time, there has been some decrease in absolute figures for young boys, as they would be defined nowadays, which does not entirely conform to the conception of age gradations accepted in earlier times. Indeed, starting from the last third of the XVIIth century a person officially became a grown-up or an adult much earlier – at least in the view of the state. When registering fifteen-year old adolescents in tax records officials already considered them not as *nedorosli* (minors), but as so-called *rabotniki* (workers).

One more visible increase of absolute figures concerns the age of death by natural causes – closer to sixty, seventy and eighty years old. However, the main conclusion is that both studied periods are characterised by an overwhelmingly great share of deaths among children within the first five years of life.

Internal parish church recordings of such events depended largely on a good will and readiness of local priests to fill in stencilled reports more or less carefully and did not require obligatory apportionment of children who died before reaching their first year birthday when putting together final tables for a year. Our analysis of actual records containing this information has shown that a share of children which did not manage to overcome the five-year age point stayed approximately the same during the whole second half of the XIXth century and that within this group infants started to constitute a noticeably greater share at the centuries' threshold (Fig. 2).

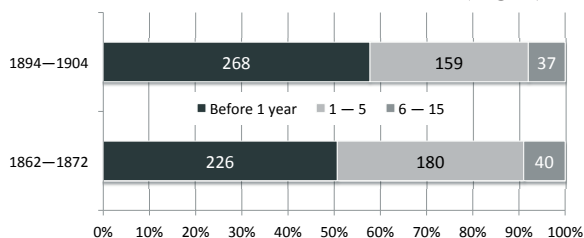


Fig. 2. Age groups ratio of deceased children in Yalguba parish in the middle of XIXth century and at the XIXth – XXth centuries' threshold

#### DEATH-CAUSING DISEASES

We assume that systematisation of information about diseases which caused deaths of peasants inhabiting this part of Prionezhie will allow us to make more specific observations about the reasons of demographic slump that took place in this area over the turning decades between XIXth and XXth centuries, therefore, we shall analyze the causes of death following the records of priests. Keeping such



records apparently was done on the grounds of words of other household members in every case when a burial service for a deceased person was conducted in a local parish church.

Three groups of death causes can be distinguished: diseases (general and infectious), accidents and natural death due to old age. It immediately becomes clear that these causes were not equally significant for the middle of XIXth century and for its last decades.

Graphically presented information from metric books for every studied period is quite demonstrable. In this case the records of Yalguba parish metric books in their part "*ob umershikh*" (about the deceased) for the periods of 1847–1862 and from years 1885, 1887, 1893, 1898, 1899, 1901–1905 were analysed (Fig. 3) [1].

Accidents with fatal outcomes happened very rarely and very few such records have been made. In dozens of records concerning the deceased only a few drowned persons were mentioned; sometimes accidents happened in the forest or at home: "*ushib derevom*" (injured by a tree), "*ushib golovoi*" (head contused), "*obzhog*" (burn); there is one mentioning of a woman who perished in a fire.

Evidently, in the end of 1840s – beginning of 1860s people lived long enough to die of old age – "*natural'no*" (naturally), as our source puts it – much more seldom than at the end of the century. Only one fifth of all the deceased in this period died of natural causes. On the other hand, at the end of the century it increased by one half.

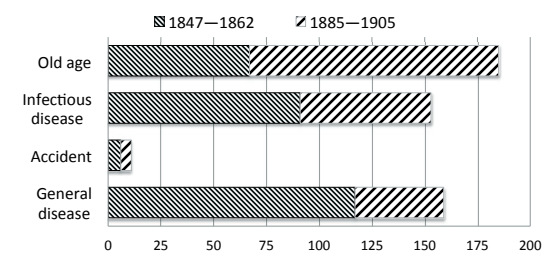


Fig. 3. Causes of death of adult population in Yalguba parish in two periods: 1847–1863 and 1885–1905

Share of deaths due to general diseases decreased extraordinarily – more than twice. As for infectious diseases, their share also diminished quite noticeably although not so significantly.

General spectrum of diseases and its changes that took place over half a century are demonstrated by the following diagrams (Fig. 4).

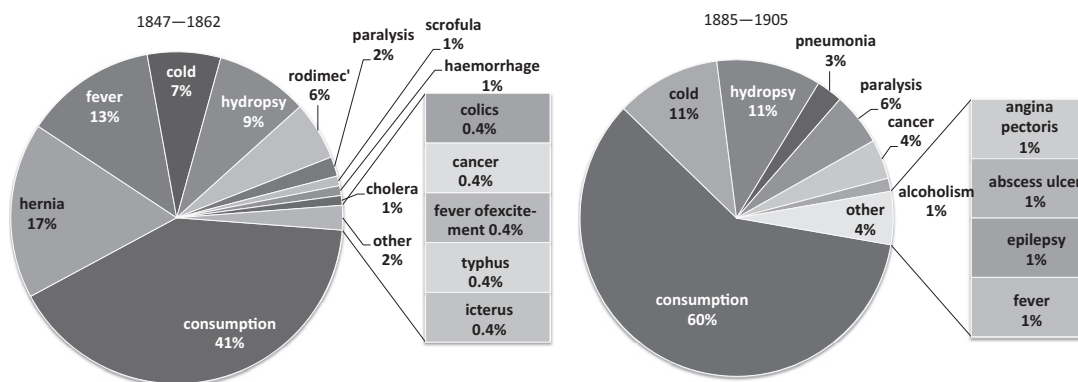


Fig. 4. Diseases that caused deaths of Yalguba peasants at the age from sixteen to ninety-five year old in two periods: 1847–1862 and 1885–1905

As is clear from the data presented, there were no records of deaths caused by *rodimec* anymore, as well as by typhus, hepatitis, cholera, scrofula in the last decades of the XIXth century. Undoubtedly, this can be seen as evidence of successful state policy as well as efforts of priests, who were imposed with the duty of carrying on propaganda for universal vaccination of population.

What attracts attention among causes of death revealed by our analysis of metric books is that consumption, or phthisis, was extremely widespread. At the same time, rate of morbidity due to lung tuberculosis among adult parish's population at the end of the XIXth – beginning of the XXth centuries looks much more significant than three or four decades earlier: a share of deaths caused by consumption has increased by 20 %.

The second most common disease was rupture (hernia), which, undoubtedly, serves as evidence

that people were forced to carry out hard physical work. However, it seems that by the end of the century doctors did learn to treat hernia by preventing its strangulation as this diagnosis has not appeared anymore.

Also, we should mention the frequency of dropsy, since in average every tenth of the deceased within the analysed time periods had *vodyanka* (literally water sickness), as this disease caused by heart or renal failure was called in those times.

It might be ascertained with some surprise that there was a significant number of people who did not manage to recover from ordinary cold, which then seemed to have developed into a fever. Following our documentary sources, we distinguish between these two diseases; although it might well be that the situation in question is one and the same, even more so since priests occasionally recorded it as *prostudnaya goryachka* (cold fever). At the end of the centu-

ry mere *prostuda* (cold) appeared to be the most frequent sickness. However, it is very likely that more serious illnesses of virus nature, perhaps influenza, may be hidden behind these definitions.

Women from Yalguba villages more often than men died of consumption (58 % – hereinafter among those died by the same disease), were much more likely to get dropsy (68 %) in the middle of the XIXth century and were almost as prone to this illness as men during the century's last decades (59 and 55 % respectively); they suffered more often from fever (67 %) in the middle of the century and died from catarrhal illnesses (75 %) at the end of it. The true curse for middle-aged men was hernia (78 %) until the cure for it was discovered.

### CONCLUSION

Documented parish church statistics draws a picture of health condition of South-Karelian parish Yalguba inhabitants that is quite far from being optimistic. However, it gets even more aggravated when looking at the revealed data concerning infant mortality [4; 131].

Our attention is drawn to the fact that by the end of the century proportional weight of tuberculosis (consumption) in the spectrum of deadly diseases had evidently grown: from 41 to 60 % in the spectrum on the whole. The term *kolotie* (stitch), which might sound quite amorphous, was used by priests and deacons apparently to determine the first stage of tuberculosis [2; 42].

It is quite likely that what we observe is an evident lack of immunity of a great part of Yalguba parish population. Hypothetically, the evident narrowness of traditional marriage behaviour, that was discovered in our previous research of local demographical parameters on the example of Suisar villages and villagers life expectancy in the long perspective [3; 50–53], and was supported subsequently by a discovery of the fact that the absolute majority of the local population marriages in the XIXth century were entered into within a five-kilometre zone [5; 223–226], suggests an idea of probable genetic factors being an underlying cause of oppressive situation with population health status as it have been reflected in the documentary sources of local parish origin: metric books.

\*Продолжение. Первую часть статьи см.: Чернякова И. А. Local Karelian parish community as object for social and demographic research: Yalguba area in the context of the XIXth century archival quantitative documentary sources // Ученые записки Петрозаводского государственного университета. Сер. «Общественные и гуманитарные науки». 2012. № 5 (126). С. 30–35.

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