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Marriage and Markets in Imperial Russia

The past few years have seen renewed interest in the so-called European Marriage Pattern (EMP) – a pattern of late marriage and nuclear family households observed in much of preindustrial northwest Europe. Recent research has suggested a link between this pattern and economic growth, noting that those parts of Europe where the EMP prevailed were also the most economically advanced. This paper examines the relationship between economy and demography, using micro-level data for several serf estates in central Russia in the early nineteenth century. This evidence indicates that it was not household and marriage patterns which determined the character of rural markets, but political economy – especially institutions such as serfdom, peasant communes, and merchant guilds – which affected both the demographic decisions peasants made as well as the economic opportunities available to them.