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Original Article

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OLD BELIEVERS OF SOUTH-EASTERN BELARUS IN THE MIDDLE OF THE 19TH — EARLY 20TH CENTURIES: SETTLEMENT PATTERNS AND POPULATION DYNAMICS

The article focuses on the settlement patterns and the dynamics of the number of Old Believers in the south-eastern part of Belarus based on statistical and demographic data of the mid-19th — early 20th century. The geographical framework of the research is limited to the central and southern parts of the Mogilev Province and the south-eastern districts of the Minsk Province according to the administrative division of that period. The analysis of the sources showed that during this period a significant number of Russian Old Believers lived in this territory, more than in any other Belorussian region. According to official data, in the 1860s there were about 20 thousand Old Believers, and in 1914 — over 45 thousand. In the middle of the 19th and early 20th centuries, Old Believers' population lived rather compactly in Gomel, Bobruisk, Mogilev, Igumen and Rogachyov districts. Two big areas of their settlement were localized in the region: Gomel-Vetka and Bobruisk. Most Old Believers in the south-eastern Belarus resided in rural areas, and the share of city dwellers was small during the investigated period. Gomel was the main urban centre of the region with a significant number of Old Believers. Some of them also lived in in Bobruisk, Rogachev and Rechitsa. There were no Old Believers in other cities of the region.

Keywords: *Old Believers, south-eastern Belarus, ethnic group, settlement, demography, ethno-cultural processes*

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