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Growth and Maturity: A Quantitative Systematic Review and Network Analysis in Anthropometric History

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Abstract: This paper reviews the current wealth of anthropometric history since the early efforts of Robert Fogel in the 1970s. The survey is based on a quantitative systematic review of the literature and counts a total of 447 peer-reviewed articles being published in the main leading journals in economic history, economics and biology. Data are analysed using network analysis by journal and author and the main contributions of anthropometric history are highlighted, pointing to future areas of inquiry. The contributions of books and book chapters are also quantified and analysed.

1. Origins of Anthropometric History

Almost four decades ago, a group of historians led by Robert Fogel began to explore the potential of anthropometric measurements (principally, records of human height and weight), for answering a range of historical questions, largely, but not limited to, those concerning health and wellbeing.¹ Height, a useful indicator in historical research, especially in circumstances where data on more conventional or modern indicators are lacking, is a cumulative measure of conditions affecting the life of the individual throughout the growth period, and is affected by the quality and quantity of an individual's diet, and by the demands placed on the body's resources by exposure to disease and the use of energy for play and work. Despite genes being very important at the individual level (around 80% of the height component is genetic), nutritional and environmental conditions from conception to maturity

¹ Although the first historians to make any significant use of anthropometric evidence within a large population were Le Roy Ladurie et al. (1969), it is arguable that it was Fogel's work that first made use of anthropometric sources for comparative purposes in the study of economic and demographic history.

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