

THE STRUCTURE OF
THE HOUSEHOLDS IN EUROPE
DURING THE EARLY MODERN PERIOD:

A Review of Three Works

no - you would be safer with
something like this: "Hand in Annaliste"

but you are getting there!

(B.A.)

(borderline grade)

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it should not be the purpose

The purpose of this paper is to compare three scholarly works which examine the an area of mutual interest - the structure of the family in Europe during the early modern period. The three scholarly works that will be compared are: "'A uno pane e uno vino:' The Rural Tuscan Family at the Beginning of the Fifteenth Century," by Christiane Klapisch and Michel Demonet; "The Scattered Family: Another Aspect of Seventeenth-Century Demography" by Micheline Baulant, and Families in Former Times: Kinship, Household and Sexuality by Jean-Louis Flandrin. The first two works appear in Family and Society: Selections from the Annales edited by Robert Forster and Orest Ranum.

Before making any further reference to Flandrin's book, both essays which appear in the Annales need to be reviewed in order to make any comparisons with Flandrin's book more meaningful. The Klapisch/Demonet essay deals with a structure of the family in a specific region, ^{only family in} Tuscany, ^{district} during a specific period of time, 1427-30. The information ^{country} cited in this essay comes from a population survey, called the Catasto, from which certain conclusions are drawn. The authors found the Catasto to be "especially interesting" because instead of being a sampling taken from groups which have already been studied, i.e., urban groups and the upper levels of society, the Catasto provides information concerning approximately 37,000 households which were rural. Not only did this represent a large sampling (some 175,000

persons)² but it produced new information concerning a group which previously had been a mystery. And the Catasto is even more significant because it provides specific demographic information concerning the "characteristics of the rural family group in Tuscany," compensating for the absence of other sources, such as "literary works, journals, genealogies, and parish registers, which might have shed light on the structure of the medieval peasant family...."³ In short, the Catasto could be viewed as a great discovery which sheds much light on an area of great sociological and anthropological interest which heretofore had been unknown and was merely a topic for speculation. Now Klapisch and Demonet offer hard data upon which to base their findings.

And what were their findings? Based upon the information from the Catasto, Klapisch and Demonet develop tables and graphs which provide a demographical overview of the structure of the rural family in Tuscany. The findings are interesting. Klapisch and Demonet found that "a little more than a third of all households [belonged]... to the category of 'extended families,' which were composed of several nuclear families..." a rate which approximated that found for Eastern Europe in the nineteenth century, when anthropologists thought they recognized "the archetype of the archaic European family community."⁴ In addition, it was found that a large percentage of households consisted of three or more generations,^{4a} and that the extended families

would break up during the third generation, between cousins or between an uncle and nephews, because the family property could no longer support all the members of the household.⁵ In view of the kind of information provided by the Catasto, the findings reported by Klapisch and Demonet are very convincing and provide an interesting and revealing insight into the structure of the rural family in a certain part of Western Europe during the early fifteenth century.

Micheline Baulant, on the other hand, explores a different area of Europe, the Parisian region of France, during the seventeenth century, and uses information obtained from sources significantly different from a census, such as the Catasto, upon which to base findings concerning the structure of the family. While Klapisch and Demonet offer a picture of the extended family in which several nuclear families are living in one household, Baulant talks about the "scattered" family, a family that is "incomplete"⁶ due to the pre-mature death of one of the spouses, leaving the children to be cared for by the surviving spouse who then needs help to care for the children. Baulant cites specific cases which underscore what happened to the children after a parent died and how quickly people re-married in an attempt to reconstitute a nuclear family and assure adequate care for their children. The cases cited were drawn from marriage records, property records, and other information found in parish archives.⁷

As an example, Baulant writes that "as a general rule, the men - sometimes saddled with children - remarried after several months or even several weeks" and then cites the cases of Etienne Becheret and Jean Becheret of Mareuil in 1691, Louis Choslin in 1709, and Jean Guillemot in 1729 who showed "no abnormal haste in contracting a new marriage at the end of two or three months."⁸ Baulant also offers statistics concerning the mortality rate for men and women who theoretically could father or give birth to children.⁹ The statistics cited suggests that the high mortality rates for both men and women resulted in many homes being shattered.

Like the conclusions arrived at by Klapisch and Demonet, Baulant's findings are based upon information derived from contemporary sources which seem to provide objective facts and can be considered reliable. The difference is that the Catasto provides a large quantity of data while the aggregate amount of information utilized by Baulant is considerably smaller although no less compelling. Nonetheless, whether these studies are of any real value in providing answers to questions relating to the structure and functioning of the family in Europe during the early modern period depends to a great degree on the reliability and credibility of the sources cited and the manner in which the information is interpreted.

While Klapisch, Demonet, and Baulant base their generalizations on data obtained from a small number of primary sources, Flandrin offers a picture of the household, and the conditions effecting the structure of the household, based upon information derived from an extensive array of sources. In addition, while Klapisch, Demonet, and Baulant focus their attention on specific geographical regions located on the continent, Flandrin broadens the picture to include information on the size and structure of households among the peasantry in pre-industrial England as well as information pertaining to households in France.

Consistent with Klapisch, Demonet, and Baulant, Flandrin wants to explore the structure of the peasant family. However, Flandrin recognizes the difficulty in doing research in this area where family records from that particular population may not exist, and the records that are available usually concern families in the "aristocratic and bourgeois circles"¹⁰ which are not representative of the households in the peasantry. Instead, Flandrin makes considerable use of demographic data obtained from studies completed by British and French researchers. The British studies are based upon a sample of one hundred censuses, taken between 1574 and 1821, of which five were taken between 1574 and 1645, forty-five between 1662 and 1749, and fifty between 1750 and 1821. This sample includes urban as well as rural parishes and covers all the counties of England.¹¹ The French studies contain information concerning the household structures in northern France, Corsica, and southern France.

In fact, it seems that much of Flandrin's book is based upon information derived

So the time period of the census differs from the other times

from other researchers. Although Flandrin presents the information in a well written and interesting manner, his findings and conclusions are essentially a reflection of what other researchers have found. For instance, for the table providing information concerning the size and composition of households in Goodnestone-next-Wingham (kent) in 1676, Flandrin cites a secondary source, P. Laslett, The World We Have Lost (London, 1965), p.64.¹² For another table which outlines the household structures in northern France, Flandrin cites five secondary sources.¹³ This does not mean that Flandrin's work is of any less value than Klapisch's, Demonet's and Baulant's works, which are based upon review of primary sources, but that Flandrin's work should be viewed primarily as a compendium of research done by others. This is borne out by a review of Flandrin's footnotes which reveals a preponderance of secondary sources.

A section of Flandrin's book that is particularly compelling deals with the question of the high infant mortality rate which, Flandrin suggests, existed in France during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. The figures presented by Flandrin are staggering, especially insofar as they far exceed the infant mortality rates found in some of the poorest countries in the Third World.¹⁴ Again, however, the information imparted by Flandrin is based upon research done by others whose findings

good point
but basically
does he ask
similar question
of legend
etc. and does
he cite similar
sort of history?

Flandrin must rely on.

Like Baulant, Flandrin offers specific examples to emphasize certain points. For instance, when discussing how pregnancy and childbirth posed serious threats to a woman's survival, Flandrin relates a story about how a mother advised sexual abstinence for her married daughter to illustrate the intense anguish felt by women over the issue of pregnancy.¹⁵ Flandrin also relates another situation which supports Baulant's view of how the high mortality rate among young adults contributed to a rapid rate of remarriage. In this case, Flandrin tells of a man, Guillaume Versoris, who was married five times, and lost three of his wives shortly after each gave birth.¹⁶ The difference between the examples cited by Baulant and those cited by Flandrin, however, is that Baulant's examples are presented as bits of information while Flandrin's examples take the form of personal accounts which more succinctly illustrate the point being made. Thus, in the case of Guillaume Versoris, Flandrin not only mentions that Versoris was married five times, but provides the names of his wives, when he and his wives were married, when his wives gave birth, and when they died. Baulant, on the other hand, would have simply written "Guillaume Versoris, married five times between 1523 and 1527, and lost three wives during that time" without providing any further details.

In conclusion, Klapisch and Demonet, Baulant, and Flandrin write about and offer conclusions concerning the same general topic - the structure of the family

Does this
make it a
different kind
of history
from Baulant's
etc.

found among the poor people who, unlike the wealthier dominant classes, left no written records. Each author addresses this topic in different ways and offers unique and revealing insights into what has been an obscure subject. As a result of their scholarly works, our understanding of how people lived two and three centuries ago has been greatly enhanced.

FOOTNOTES

1. Klapisch, Christiane and Demonet, Michel, "'A uno pane e uno vino': The Rural Tuscan Family at the Beginning of the Fifteenth Century," Family and Society: Selections from the Annales, Forster, Robert and Ranum, Orest, eds., (Baltimore), 1976, p.42
2. Ibid., p.42
3. Ibid., p.43
4. Ibid., p.45
- 4a. Ibid., pp.49-50
5. Ibid., p.52
6. Baulant, Michelene, "The Scattered Family: Another Aspect of Seventeenth Century Demography," Family and Society: Selections from the Annales, Forster, Robert and Ranum, Orest, eds., (Baltimore), 1976, p.104
7. Ibid., see footnotes on pages 104-115
8. Ibid., pp.104-105
9. Ibid., pp.111-112
10. Flandrin, Jean-Louis, Families in Former Times: Kinship, Household and Sexuality, trans. Richard Southern (Cambridge University Press), 1979, p.53
11. Ibid., p.54
12. Ibid., p.56
13. Ibid., p.71
14. Ibid., p.119. Also see The World Almanac and Books of Facts, 1990 (World Almanac, A Scripps Howard Company, New York), 1989, pp.690-771
15. Ibid., pp.218-219
16. Ibid., p.217

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Baulant, Michelene, "The Scattered Family: Another Aspect of Seventeenth Century Demography," Family and Society: Selections from the Annales, Forster, Robert and Ranum, Orest, eds., (Baltimore), 1976, pp.104-116

Flandrin, Jean-Louis, Families in Former Times: Kinship, Household and Sexuality, trans. Richrad Southern (Cambridge University Press), 1979

Klapisch, Christiane and Demonet, Michel, "'A uno pane e uno vino': The Rural Tuscan Family at the Beginning of the Fifteenth Century," Family and Society: Selections from the Annales, Forster, Robert and Ranum, Orest, eds., (Baltimore), 1976, pp.41-74