

Household, Land Tenure, and Occupation in North Italy in the Late Sixteenth Century

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The purpose of this article is to contribute to the growing, yet still fragmentary body of literature which, in recent years, has gone beyond the mere measurement of the mean size of pre-industrial households and the description of their different types and has focused on the links between household size and structure and the socio-economic context.¹ To this end the article will look at five communities in late sixteenth-century Lombardy, drawing its evidence from as many listings of inhabitants (*status animarum*), three of which refer to villages of the plain (Desio, San Giuliano, and Inzago), one to a village of the hillzone (Villa-d'Adda), and one to the market town of Gallarate.² All five listings were compiled in 1574 by local parish clergy in response to the detailed instructions issued in that year by the then archbishop of Milan,

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¹ For a survey and a critical discussion of the literature on the history of the family since the publication of P. LASLETT and R. WALL eds., *Household and Family in Past Time* (Cambridge, 1982), see M. ANDERSON, *Approaches to the History of the Western Family, 1500-1914* (London, 1980).

² The five manuscript listings are in ARCHIVIO DELLA CURIA ARCIVESCOVILE, Milan, *Archivio Spirituale*, Sez. X, Pieve di Desio, vol. 7 (for Desio); Pieve di Gorgonzola, vol. 12 (for Inzago); Pieve di San Giuliano, vol. 12 (for San Giuliano); Pieve di Brivio, vol. 12 (for Villa d'Adda); and Pieve di Gallarate, vol. 23 (for Gallarate).

Carlo Borromeo.³ The fact that those five communities are all located within 50 kilometres at most of one another will rule out any broad generalization applicable to the rest of north Italy. On the other hand, the fact that those communities belong to the same region and that the listings were drawn up according to the same guidelines, for the same purpose, and in the same year, ensures a high degree of homogeneity and consistency.

The five listings to be examined here are unusually detailed. Besides the names of all persons living in the parish in 1574, they include, as similar documents of that period often do not, a clear indication of where a household (*fuoco*, i.e., hearth or co-resident group) ends and another begins, the age of each household member, the occupation or status of the head of the household (*capo di casa*), and the relationship of each household member to the head — whether spouse, son, daughter, brother, sister, in-law, or servant. Clearly, these are exceptionally rich sources in that they enable us not only to know the size and structure of households, but also to relate these, at least in a rough way, to the occupational distribution of the population and to the kind of economy prevailing in each community. Moreover, knowing the age of all the individuals listed in the censuses can be useful for understanding the developmental cycle of the household.

Unfortunately, there is no way of testing the accuracy and reliability of the five censuses against other independent evidence. All one can do, under the circumstances, is to fall back on internal evidence, and I have done so by analyzing the age and sex structure of the five communities (Table 1). It stands to reason that, unless their age and sex composition is more or less consistent with that of other early modern communities, there is a strong presumption that our censuses contain either gross errors in the registration process or some bias on the part of the clergy who compiled them.

³ Borromeo's instructions have been published as an appendix to E. FASANO GUARINI, "Gli stati d'anime milanesi al tempo di Carlo e Federico Borromeo", in *Le fonti della demografia storica in Italia* (Rome, 1972), vol. I, pp. 127-154.

TABLE I
DISTRIBUTION OF POPULATION BY AGE AND SEX

| | Age | N of individuals | | | Percentages | | |
|--------------|---------|--------------------|-------------------|-------|-------------|------|-------|
| | | M | F | Total | M | F | Total |
| DESIO | 0-14 | 213 | 208 | 421 | 20.4 | 20.0 | 40.4 |
| | 15-59 | 286 | 287 | 573 | 27.4 | 27.5 | 54.9 |
| | 60+ | 24 | 20 | 44 | 2.3 | 2.0 | 4.3 |
| | unknown | 2 | 2 | 4 | 0.2 | 0.2 | 0.4 |
| | Total | 525 | 517 | 1042 | 50.3 | 49.7 | 100.0 |
| | | Sex ratio: 101/100 | | | | | |
| INZAGO | 0-14 | 217 | 211 | 428 | 18.2 | 17.6 | 35.8 |
| | 15-59 | 320 | 339 | 659 | 26.8 | 28.4 | 55.2 |
| | 60+ | 43 | 31 | 74 | 3.6 | 2.6 | 6.2 |
| | unknown | 16 | 18 | 34 | 1.3 | 1.5 | 2.8 |
| | Total | 596 | 599 | 1195 | 49.9 | 50.1 | 100.0 |
| | | Sex ratio: 99/100 | | | | | |
| SAN GIULIANO | 0-14 | 271 | 243 | 514 | 21.4 | 19.2 | 40.6 |
| | 15-59 | 374 | 329 | 703 | 29.6 | 26.1 | 55.7 |
| | 60+ | 29 | 13 | 42 | 2.3 | 1.0 | 3.3 |
| | unknown | 5 | 0 | 5 | 0.4 | 0.0 | 0.4 |
| | Total | 679 | 585 | 1264 | 53.7 | 46.3 | 100.0 |
| | | Sex ratio: 116/100 | | | | | |
| VILLA D'ADDA | 0-14 | 174 | 203 | 377 | 19.8 | 23.2 | 43.0 |
| | 15-59 | 196 | 259 | 455 | 22.3 | 29.5 | 51.8 |
| | 60+ | 30 | 16 | 46 | 3.4 | 1.8 | 5.2 |
| | Total | 400 | 478 | 878 | 45.5 | 54.5 | 100.0 |
| | | | Sex ratio: 84/100 | | | | |
| GALLARATE | 0-14 | 493 | 413 | 906 | 20.5 | 17.1 | 37.6 |
| | 15-59 | 666 | 715 | 1381 | 27.6 | 29.7 | 57.3 |
| | 60+ | 61 | 54 | 115 | 2.5 | 2.2 | 4.7 |
| | unknown | 4 | 4 | 8 | 0.2 | 0.2 | 0.4 |
| | Total | 1224 | 1186 | 2410 | 50.8 | 49.2 | 100.0 |
| | | Sex ratio: 103/100 | | | | | |

As shown in Table 1, three of our communities had normal sex ratios. In Villa d'Adda, however, women outnumbered men by a considerable margin (84 men for 100 women), while the opposite was true of San Giuliano (116/100), but in both instances the imbalance can be plausibly explained, as will be seen in a moment, on the basis of the different economic structure of the two communities. As regards the age structure, the high proportion (35-43%) of children under 15 (the combined effect of a high birth rate and a high infant and child mortality) is not out of line with the

proportion found in other communities of early modern Europe: 38.7% in Prato in 1470, 41% in Carpi in 1579, 38.9% in the Parma countryside in 1594, 40% in Verona in 1585, 34.9% in Ealing in 1599, and 38.4% in a number of English villages in 1695.⁴ If our listings suffer from inaccuracy, it is in the recording of the age of adults, as revealed by the frequency with which ages ending in either 0 or 5 (20, 25, 30, 35, etc.) turn up in the listings as opposed to those ending with intermediate digits. This is not uncommon in documents of this kind and reflects not only the fact that a good many individuals had no precise notion of their own age, but also the fact that the parish priests, while instructed to use the utmost care in recording the age of children and adolescents in order to ensure that they would receive first communion at the appropriate age, were simply asked to give only a reasonable estimate in the case of adults.⁵ Such lack of precision, however, need not represent a major stumbling block as long as one makes use (as will be done here) of five- or ten-year cohorts when dealing with questions involving the age structure of the population under study.

1. The setting

Three of the five communities discussed in this paper are located in the plain around Milan: Desio is 10 km. due north of that city, Inzago 25 km. to the east, and S. Giuliano 12 km. to the southeast. Desio is now part of the urban sprawl north of Milan and its economy is wholly industrial and commercial, but in the

⁴ These percentages are derived from C. KLAPISCH, "Declino demografico e struttura della famiglia: l'esempio di Prato (fine XIV sec. - fine XV sec.)", in G. DUBY and J. LEGOFF eds., *Famiglia e parentela nell'Italia medievale* (Bologna, 1977) p. 183; D.C. COLEMAN, "Labour in the English Economy of the Seventeenth Century", in E.M. CARUS-WILSON ed., *Essays in Economic History*, vol. II (London, 1962), p. 296; M. ROMANI, *Nella spirale di una crisi: popolazione, mercato e prezzi a Parma tra Cinque e Seicento* (Milan, 1975), pp. 50-51; and P. LASLETT, "The Study of Social Structure from Listings of Inhabitants", in E.A. WRIGLEY ed., *An Introduction to English Historical Demography* (New York, 1966), p. 204.

⁵ For Borromeo's instructions cf. note 3 above.

past it was part of that distinctive agricultural region known as *alto milanese* (Milan's high plain) characterized by dry farming and interculture, that is to say, by the presence on the same field of grain crops and tree crops (vines and/or mulberry trees). By the late sixteenth century most farmland in the area was owned by absentee landlords from Milan who let their medium-sized farms to tenants known as *massari* for nine-year periods under a form of contract that combined a fixed rent in kind (i.e., payable in grain) and a share (usually half) of the wine and silk produced on the estate. Inzago and San Giuliano, on the other hand, belong to the low plain, then as now the pride of Lombard agriculture: an extensive network of irrigation canals had made possible since the fifteenth century the adoption of convertible husbandry whereby arable land (under wheat, rice, or flax) was periodically turned into artificial meadows, thus dispensing (in a way that was not possible in the dry uplands) with the need for the periodical fallowing of the fields. The presence of luscious, well-watered meadows, in turn, meant that livestock played a key role in farming and that dairy products were as important as grain in the local economy. Farm units of the irrigated plain were in general much larger than those north of Milan; their absentee owners let them to *massari* for fixed rents that were paid partly in grain (for the arable fields) and partly in money (for the meadows where they grazed their livestock). In San Giuliano, alongside *massari*, one finds also a few *fittabili*, a term that denoted at the time the tenant of a large farm primarily devoted to stock raising and one who paid rent entirely in money.⁶ Despite some differences attributable to local farming practices,

⁶ On Lombard agriculture at the time cf. D. SELLA, *Crisis and Continuity: The Economy of Spanish Lombardy in the Seventeenth Century* (Cambridge, Mass., 1979) and the bibliography cited therein; on agrarian contracts and definitions of *massaro* and *fittabile* cf. G. GIORGETTI, *Contadini e proprietari nell'Italia moderna* (Turin, 1974), ch. VI; G. CHITTOLINI, "Alle origini delle 'grandi aziende' della bassa lombarda", *Quaderni storici*, 39 (1978), pp. 830-831; and E. ROVEDA, "Una grande possessione lodigiana dei Trivulzio fra Cinquecento e Settecento", in M. MIRRI ed., *Ricerche di storia moderna*, vol. II (Pisa, 1979), pp. 33, 111-112.

Desio, Inzago, and San Giuliano had a great deal in common: a market-oriented agriculture, absentee ownership, large farm units run by tenant farmers, and, lastly, the presence of day labourers (*brazzanti* and *pigionanti*), who were hired for wages by the tenant farmers at peak times.⁷

The other two communities belong to quite different economic contexts. Villa-d'Adda, the smaller of the two, is a village perched on the hills on the left bank of the Adda river, at about 35 km. northeast of Milan. Poor soils and the uneven lay of the land precluded the more profitable farming of the plain and left room only for what was largely a subsistence type of farming, with some wine and perhaps silk providing a tenuous link with outside markets.⁸ Not surprisingly, tenant farmers are not mentioned in the Villa-d'Adda listing, but peasant owners (*agricultori*) are a clear confirmation that the place held little attraction for absentee landowners. Nor is it a mere coincidence that, as mentioned before, in Villa-d'Adda women outnumbered men by quite a margin: this imbalance is to be ascribed to the permanent emigration of young males either to the cities or to the large estates of the plain where the emigrants could hope to find employment as day laborers.⁹

Gallarate, 40 km. northwest of Milan, presents a totally different picture. It was then a thriving market town which a 1578

⁷ *Brazzanti* or *braccianti* is the standard term for landless day labourers. The term *pigionanti* (literally "renters") is no longer used in Lombardy, but, judging from a 1550 contract quoted by ROVEDA, "Una grande possessione" cit., p. 112, it referred to day labourers who lived on the landlord's premises and paid rent accordingly. According to GIORGETTI, *Contadini e proprietari*, cit., p. 325, *pigionanti* enjoyed a somewhat more stable employment relationship than *braccianti*.

⁸ Cf. SELLA, *Crisis and Continuity* cit., p. 5.

⁹ On migration from the mountains and the hills to the plain cf. F. BRAUDEL, *The Mediterranean and the Mediterranean World in the Age of Philip II*, Engl. transl. (New York, 1972-73), pp. 25-52, 334-338; also D. SELLA, "Au dossier des migrations montagnardes: l'exemple de la Lombardie au XVIIe siècle", in *Mélanges en l'honneur de Fernand Braudel* (Toulouse, 1973), vol. I, pp. 547-554; and R. MERZARIO, *Il paese stretto: strategie matrimoniali nella diocesi di Como, secoli XVI-XVIII* (Turin, 1981), pp. 100, 134.

document describes as "a place of traffic" whose residents "are nearly all artificers" and where "a great market is held every Saturday whereto commodities are brought from diverse parts, as well as cattle and other things".¹⁰ The distribution of households by occupation bears out the predominantly commercial and artisanal character of the Gallarate economy: in the 1574 census, out of 469 households 61 were headed by merchants (many of them cattle merchants) and as many as 235 by shopkeepers and craftsmen such as weavers, tailors, furriers, hat makers, shoemakers, smiths, ropemakers, and so on. Tenant farmers were not totally absent, but, with a mere 14 households, they represented only 3 percent of the occupational spectrum.

The fairly homogeneous economic structure of the three villages of the plain and the contrast provided by Villa-d'Adda on the one hand and Gallarate on the other are borne out by the data in Table II. It will be noticed that in the first three communities tenant farmers and their families represented between 10 and 23 percent of all households and between 22 and 38 percent of the population; by contrast, Villa-d'Adda had no tenant farmers and in Gallarate the latter formed but a negligible group. In the plain (and especially in the low plain) day labourers loomed large and in one village (San Giuliano) claimed half of the households; in Villa-d'Adda and Gallarate, on the other hand, they were a clear minority. As for tradesmen (under this heading I have included merchants and shopkeepers as well as craftsmen), they held pride of place in the market town of Gallarate, with 62.9 percent of all households and 67.5 percent of the entire population, while elsewhere they represented less, and sometimes much less, than one-third of both households and population. Finally, a word about the other two occupational groups: gentry and "services". As for the gentry, no geographical pattern is discernible. "Services" (by which is meant public officials, lawyers, notaries, physicians, bar-

¹⁰ Quoted in SELLA, *Crisis and Continuity* cit., p. 14.

TABLE II
DISTRIBUTION OF HOUSEHOLDS AND MHS BY OCCUPATION OF HEAD

| | | Households | | Individuals | | MHS |
|--------------|----------------|------------|-------|-------------|-------|------|
| | | N | % | N | % | |
| DESIO | gentry | 11 | 5.9 | 64 | 6.1 | 5.8 |
| | services | 5 | 2.6 | 39 | 3.7 | 7.8 |
| | tradesmen | 54 | 28.9 | 301 | 28.9 | 5.6 |
| | tenant farmers | 31 | 16.6 | 257 | 24.7 | 8.3 |
| | labourers | 49 | 26.2 | 221 | 21.2 | 4.5 |
| | unknown | 37 | 19.8 | 160 | 15.4 | 4.3 |
| | Total | 187 | 100.0 | 1042 | 100.0 | 5.6 |
| INZAGO | gentry | 8 | 3.4 | 61 | 5.1 | 7.6 |
| | services | 1 | 0.4 | 5 | 0.4 | 5.0 |
| | tradesmen | 68 | 28.9 | 355 | 29.7 | 5.2 |
| | tenant farmers | 24 | 10.2 | 264 | 22.1 | 11.0 |
| | labourers | 111 | 47.2 | 426 | 35.7 | 3.8 |
| | unknown | 23 | 9.8 | 84 | 7.0 | 3.7 |
| | Total | 235 | 99.9 | 1195 | 100.0 | 5.1 |
| SAN GIULIANO | gentry | 1 | 0.5 | 14 | 1.1 | 14.0 |
| | services | — | — | — | — | — |
| | tradesmen | 25 | 12.0 | 152 | 12.0 | 6.1 |
| | tenant farmers | 48 | 23.0 | 484 | 38.3 | 10.1 |
| | labourers | 105 | 50.2 | 470 | 37.2 | 4.5 |
| | unknown | 30 | 14.3 | 144 | 11.4 | 4.8 |
| | Total | 209 | 100.0 | 1264 | 100.0 | 6.0 |
| VILLA D'ADDA | gentry | 3 | 1.9 | 21 | 2.4 | 7.0 |
| | services | 4 | 2.5 | 21 | 2.4 | 5.2 |
| | tradesmen | 28 | 17.4 | 159 | 18.1 | 5.7 |
| | peasant owners | 49 | 30.4 | 298 | 34.1 | 6.1 |
| | labourers | 24 | 14.9 | 99 | 11.2 | 4.1 |
| | unknown | 53 | 32.9 | 280 | 31.8 | 5.3 |
| | Total | 161 | 100.0 | 878 | 100.0 | 5.5 |
| GALLARATE | gentry | 8 | 1.7 | 51 | 2.1 | 6.4 |
| | services | 25 | 5.3 | 125 | 5.2 | 5.0 |
| | tradesmen | 296 | 62.9 | 1627 | 67.5 | 5.5 |
| | tenant farmers | 13 | 2.8 | 85 | 3.5 | 6.5 |
| | labourers | 73 | 15.6 | 314 | 13.0 | 4.3 |
| | unknown | 54 | 11.5 | 208 | 8.6 | 3.8 |
| | Total | 469 | 99.8 | 2410 | 99.9 | 5.1 |

ber-surgeons, teachers, and clergy) were heavily concentrated, as one would expect, in Gallarate.

2. The size and structure of households

In the five communities under discussion the mean size of households (MHS), as shown in Table III, falls between 5 and 6

TABLE III
MHS AND RANGE OF SIZES

| | Population | Households | MHS | Range of sizes |
|--------------|------------|------------|-----|----------------|
| DESIO | 1042 | 187 | 5.6 | 1-21 |
| INZAGO | 1195 | 235 | 5.1 | 1-25 |
| SAN GIULIANO | 1264 | 209 | 6.0 | 1-24 |
| VILLA D'ADDA | 878 | 161 | 5.5 | 1-14 |
| GALLARATE | 2410 | 469 | 5.1 | 1-17 |

individuals. This is somewhat higher than the corresponding MHS documented in fifteenth-century Tuscany (4.4) and early sixteenth-century Lombardy (3.3), but it must be borne in mind that these two areas still bore the mark of recent epidemics and also, in the case of Lombardy, of recent devastations wrought by warfare.¹¹ Our MHS is also higher than that found in a large sample of English communities in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries (4.7), but is close to the mean size obtaining in much of central France (around 6.0) and in southern France (5.5), in a number of Dutch villages of the seventeenth century (5.3), and in the Parma countryside in 1593 (5.1).¹² In short, one feels justified to say that our five communities do not constitute abnormal cases when compared to available data for other parts of Europe, although they clearly belong to the upper side of the spectrum.

What is distinctive about the five Lombard communities, however, is the far greater dispersion of family size around the

¹¹ Cf. D. HERLIHY and C. KLAPISCH-ZUBER, *Les Toscans et leurs familles* (Paris, 1978), p. 472: MHS was 4.42 in 1427. In Lombardy in 1541 it was around 3.3 according to C.M. CIPOLLA, "Per la storia della popolazione lombarda nel secolo XVI", in *Studi in onore di Gino Luzzatto* (Milan, 1950), vol. I, p. 151.

¹² On England cf. P. LASLETT, "Mean Household Size in England since the Sixteenth Century", in LASLETT and WALL eds., *Household and Family*, cit., p. 133; on France, P. GOUBERT, "Family and Province: A Contribution to the knowledge of Family Structures in Early Modern France", *Journal of Family History*, II (1977), pp. 182-188; on Holland, A.M. VAN DER WOUDE, "Variations in the size and structure of households in the United Provinces of the Netherlands in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries", in LASLETT and WALL eds., *op. cit.*, p. 307; for Parma, ROMANI, *Nella spirale di una crisi* cit., pp. 43-45.

mean: while in the English sample 89 percent of the parishes had between four and six members,¹³ in Lombardy only 40-50 percent of the households fell in that range and a sizeable percentage was either larger or smaller: as many as 10 to 16 percent had one to three members and nearly half had more than six (Table IV).

TABLE IV
PERCENTAGE DISTRIBUTION OF HOUSEHOLDS BY SIZE

| | 1-3 | 4-6 | 7-9 | 10-12 | 13-15 | 16+ |
|--------------|------|------|------|-------|-------|-----|
| DESIO | 9.4 | 45.1 | 27.5 | 8.2 | 7.8 | 2.0 |
| INZAGO | 16.5 | 37.3 | 20.7 | 9.9 | 7.2 | 8.4 |
| SAN GIULIANO | 9.8 | 35.1 | 25.1 | 10.1 | 11.1 | 8.8 |
| VILLA D'ADDA | 8.7 | 47.4 | 29.4 | 8.1 | 6.4 | — |
| GALLARATE | 12.8 | 49.6 | 24.4 | 8.4 | 3.4 | 1.4 |

The lesser degree of homogeneity among Lombard households, when they are classified on the basis of size, reveals itself as well when they are classified on the basis of type. This is done in Tables Va and Vb where households (and the individuals living in them) are sorted out according to the typology established by the Cambridge Group for the History of Population and Social Structure.¹⁴ According to that typology, there are five main types of households: solitaries, no family household (two or more co-resident relatives or unrelated persons), simple family household (married couple with or without children, widow or widower with children), extended family household (a simple family plus one or more relatives living in), and multiple family household (two or more married couples related to one another either vertically or horizontally).

The first obvious fact in Tables Va and Vb is the predominance of the simple family household: about 60 percent of all households were of such type and something like 50 percent of the entire

¹³ J.L. FLANDRIN, *Families in Former Times*, Engl. transl. (Cambridge, 1979), p. 55.

¹⁴ LASLETT and WALL eds., *Household and Family*, cit., p. 31.

TABLE Va
DISTRIBUTION OF HOUSEHOLDS BY TYPE

| | DESIO | INZAGO | SAN GIULIANO | VILLA D'ADDA | GALLARATE |
|--------------------|----------------|----------------|-----------------|-----------------|----------------|
| 1. Solitaries | 1.6% (3) | 5.1% (12) | 2.9% (6) | 3.7% (6) | 1.9% (9) |
| 2. No family | 3.2% (6) | 4.2% (10) | 2.9% (6) | 0% (0) | 3.2% (15) |
| 3. Simple family | 66.3% (124) | 61.3% (144) | 59.3% (124) | 60.8% (98) | 67.2% (315) |
| 4. Extended family | 17.7% (33) | 18.7% (44) | 17.2% (36) | 23.0% (37) | 20.0% (94) |
| 5. Multiple family | 11.2% (21) | 10.6% (25) | 17.7% (37) | 12.4% (20) | 7.7% (36) |
| Total | (187) | (235) | (209) | (161) | (469) |
| Subtotal 4+5 | 28.9% (54) | 29.3% (69) | 34.9% (73) | 35.4% (57) | 27.7% (130) |

TABLE Vb
DISTRIBUTION OF POPULATION BY TYPE OF HOUSEHOLD

| | DESIO | INZAGO | SAN GIULIANO | VILLA D'ADDA | GALLARATE |
|--------------------|----------------|----------------|-----------------|-----------------|-----------------|
| 1. Solitaries | 0.3% (3) | 1.0% (12) | 0.5% (6) | 0.7% (6) | 0.4% (9) |
| 2. No family | 1.9% (20) | 2.3% (27) | 1.3% (17) | 0% (0) | 1.9% (46) |
| 3. Simple family | 58.9% (614) | 49.3% (589) | 46.0% (581) | 54.1% (474) | 60.5% (1459) |
| 4. Extended family | 19.7% (205) | 22.4% (268) | 19.0% (240) | 27.4% (241) | 24.0% (578) |
| 5. Multiple family | 19.2% (200) | 25.0% (299) | 33.2% (420) | 17.8% (157) | 13.2% (318) |
| Total | (1042) | (1195) | (1264) | (878) | (2410) |
| Subtotal 4+5 | 38.9% (405) | 47.4% (567) | 52.2% (660) | 45.2% (398) | 37.2% (896) |

population lived in them. And yet, even though the type of household we now regard as "normal" or "modern" loomed larger than any other type, the percentage of more complex structures is striking: about 30 percent of all households were either extended or multiple (Table Va, line 4 + 5). This is a very high proportion indeed if compared to 8-9 percent of comparable households in

England and 7-10 percent in northern France in the eighteenth century, but is not far removed from the percentages observed in France south of the Loire in that same period, in eighteenth-century Tuscany and nineteenth-century Emilia.¹⁵

The true importance of extended and multiple family households in the five Lombard communities is even better appreciated if one considers how population was distributed among the different types. As shown in Table Vb, in three of our four rural communities nearly half the population lived in complex households. And while in none of the communities the proportion of multiple family households went beyond 18 percent, the percentage of people living in them could be as high as one third (as was the case in San Giuliano). By contrast, in the market town of Gallarate only 7.7 percent of all households were of the multiple type and only 13.2 percent of the population lived in them.

As one would expect, household size and structure were not unrelated. To be sure, an occasional simple family household could be very large: in Desio the household of Adam Castelletto, the local magistrate (*podestà*), included thirteen persons: the magistrate himself and his wife, four sons, three daughters, one lodger, and three servants; in Inzago, Antonio Zisevanno, a tenant farmer, lived with his wife, six sons and three daughters. These, however, were exceptions. On the average, extended family households were substantially larger than simple family households, and multiple ones, in turn, were much larger (in Inzago nearly twice as large) than extended family households (Table VI). Not surprisingly, the largest households I have come across in the course of this study were of the multiple type. Both were in Inzago

¹⁵ FLANDRIN, *Families*, pp. 68, 71; GOUBERT, "Family and Province", pp. 182-188 (30-40% of all households in central and southern France were not mononuclear); F. MCARDLE, "Another Look at 'Peasant Families East and West'", *Peasant Studies Newsletter*, III, 3 (1974), p. 11 (in 1767 at Altopascio, Tuscany, 36% of all households were either extended or multiple); D.I. KERTZER, "European Peasant Household Structure: Some Implications from a Nineteenth-Century Italian Community", *Journal of Family History*, II, 4 (1977), p. 338 (in Bertalia, Emilia the proportion was 33%).

TABLE VI
MEAN HOUSEHOLD SIZE BY TYPE

| | DESIO | INZAGO | SAN GIULIANO | VILLA D'ADDA | GALLARATE |
|--------------------|-------|--------|-----------------|-----------------|-----------|
| 1. Solitaries | 1.0 | 1.0 | 1.0 | 1.0 | 1.0 |
| 2. No family | 3.3 | 2.7 | 2.8 | — | 3.1 |
| 3. Simple family | 4.9 | 4.1 | 4.7 | 4.8 | 4.6 |
| 4. Extended family | 6.2 | 6.1 | 6.7 | 6.6 | 6.2 |
| 5. Multiple family | 9.5 | 12.0 | 11.3 | 7.8 | 8.8 |

and included twenty-five persons each. In one of them an 80-year-old tenant farmer, Cristoforo Cesarano, lived with his wife, four married sons and their wives, thirteen grandchildren, one nephew and his wife. The other consisted of three married brothers (a grain merchant, a tanner, and a shoemaker), their elderly mother, their respective wives, their eight children, two nephews, and a retinue of eight individuals identified as either servants (*servi*), journeymen (*famei*), or apprentices (*garzoni*).

The distribution of households by size and by structure was not random, but to a large extent reflected different economic and/or social roles. This pattern has often been observed elsewhere. In the fifteenth century, sharecroppers' households in the Florentine countryside were on average significantly larger and more complex than those of small owners and hired labourers.¹⁶ In Florence itself the largest households were those of the aristocracy and of members of the major guilds.¹⁷ In the late sixteenth century, in the countryside around Parma the MSH was five, but sharecroppers' households were roughly twice as large.¹⁸ Two centuries

¹⁶ C. KLAPISCH and M. DEMONEY, "The Rural Tuscan Family in the Fifteenth Century", in R. FOSTER and O. RANUM eds., *Family and Society* (Baltimore, 1976), p. 54.

¹⁷ C. KLAPISCH, "Household and Family in Tuscany in 1427", in LASLETT and WALL eds., *Household and Family* cit., pp. 276-277.

¹⁸ ROMANI, *Nella spirale di una crisi* cit., p. 43 n. The same contrast between sharecroppers' and day labourers' households still existed in 19th-century Emilia: cf. C. PONI, "Family and podere in Emilia Romagna", *Journal of Italian History*, I, 2 (1978), p. 204.

later, the sharecroppers of the Nivernais in central France lived in households that were more numerous and more complex than those of small owners and artisans,¹⁹ while in Lower Austria a similar contrast has been found between peasant owners and landless peasants.²⁰ On the other hand, in late seventeenth-century northern France and England social status rather than land tenure seems to have determined the size and composition of the household: in France government officials and magistrates headed the largest households, while in England the gentry did.²¹

In our five Lombard communities the link between household size and socio-economic roles is no less visible (Table VII) with two groups standing out on account of the size of their households: gentry and tenant farmers. By contrast, day labourers con-

TABLE VII
MEAN HOUSEHOLD SIZE BY OCCUPATION
a) SERVANTS INCLUDED
b) SERVANTS NOT INCLUDED

| | | DESIO | INZAGO | SAN GIULIANO | VILLA D'ADDA | GALLARATE |
|-----------------|----|-------|--------|--------------|--------------|-----------|
| gentry: | a) | 5.8 | 7.6 | 14.0 | 7.0 | 6.4 |
| | b) | 4.4 | 4.5 | 3.0 | 3.3 | 4.7 |
| services: | a) | 7.8 | 5.0 | — | 5.2 | 5.0 |
| | b) | 6.8 | 4.0 | — | 5.2 | 4.5 |
| tradesmen: | a) | 5.6 | 5.3 | 6.1 | 5.9 | 5.5 |
| | b) | 5.3 | 4.9 | 6.0 | 5.6 | 5.3 |
| tenant farmers: | a) | 8.3 | 11.0 | 10.1 | — | 6.5 |
| | b) | 7.9 | 10.2 | 9.4 | — | 6.5 |
| small owners: | a) | — | — | — | 6.1 | — |
| | b) | — | — | — | 6.0 | — |
| day labourers | a) | 4.5 | 3.8 | 4.5 | 4.1 | 4.3 |
| | b) | 4.5 | 3.8 | 4.5 | 4.1 | 4.3 |
| unknown: | a) | 4.3 | 3.6 | 4.8 | 5.3 | 5.1 |
| | b) | 4.2 | 3.2 | 4.4 | 5.2 | 4.9 |

¹⁹ L.K. BERKNER and J.W. SHAFFER, "The Joint Family in the Nivernais", *Journal of Family History*, III, 2 (1978), pp. 157, 162.

²⁰ Cf. L.K. BERKNER, "The Stem Family and the Developmental Cycle of the Peasant Household: An Eighteenth-Century Austrian Example", *American Historical Review*, LXXVII, 2 (1972), pp. 406-408.

²¹ FLANDRIN, *Families* cit., pp. 56, 90.

sistently appear on the low side of the spectrum. The case of the gentry need not detain us long: not only did they represent a negligible minority, but the size of their households reflected, not surprisingly, the presence of numerous servants. In San Giuliano, for instance, the only gentry household included fourteen people of whom eleven were servants.

3. Tenants and day labourers

Of special interest are the two large groups whose MHS shows the sharpest contrast: tenant farmers (generally over the eight-person mark) and day labourers (generally around four). How do we account for the difference?

If we focus on the three villages of the plain (Desio, Inzago, and San Giuliano) where those two groups loomed especially large, we can find the answer in the prevailing structure of their respective households (Table VIII). Taking the three communities together,

TABLE VIII
DISTRIBUTION OF HOUSEHOLDS BY TYPE
(TENANTS AND DAY LABOURERS ONLY)

| | DESIO | | INZAGO | | SAN GIULIANO | | TOTAL | |
|-----------------------|-------|-------|--------|-------|--------------|-------|-------|-------|
| | N | % | N | % | N | % | N | % |
| Tenant farmers | | | | | | | | |
| 1. Solitaries | 0 | 0.0 | 0 | 0.0 | 0 | 0.0 | 0 | 0.0 |
| 2. No family | 1 | 3.2 | 0 | 0.0 | 0 | 0.0 | 0 | 0.0 |
| 3. Simple family | 14 | 45.2 | 10 | 41.7 | 13 | 27.1 | 37 | 35.9 |
| 4. Extended family | 3 | 9.7 | 3 | 12.5 | 8 | 16.7 | 14 | 13.6 |
| 5. Multiple family | 13 | 41.9 | 11 | 45.8 | 27 | 56.2 | 51 | 49.5 |
| 6. Total | 31 | 100.0 | 24 | 100.0 | 48 | 100.0 | 103 | 100.0 |
| Subtotal 4+5 | 16 | 51.6 | 14 | 58.3 | 35 | 72.9 | 65 | 63.1 |
| Day labourers | | | | | | | | |
| 1. Solitaries | 0 | 0.0 | 8 | 7.2 | 4 | 3.8 | 12 | 4.5 |
| 2. No family | 0 | 0.0 | 2 | 1.8 | 3 | 2.9 | 5 | 1.9 |
| 3. Simple family | 40 | 81.6 | 83 | 74.8 | 77 | 73.3 | 200 | 75.5 |
| 4. Extended family | 7 | 14.3 | 14 | 12.6 | 15 | 14.3 | 36 | 13.6 |
| 5. Multiple family | 2 | 4.1 | 4 | 3.6 | 6 | 5.7 | 12 | 4.5 |
| Total | 49 | 100.0 | 111 | 100.0 | 105 | 100.0 | 265 | 100.0 |
| Subtotal 4+5 | 9 | 18.4 | 18 | 16.2 | 21 | 20.0 | 48 | 18.1 |

it will be seen that just about half (49.5 percent) of the tenant farmers' households were of the multiple type as against a mere 4.5 percent in the labourers' case. When it comes to simple family households, the situation is reversed: whereas only 13.6 percent of the tenant farmers' households belong to this type, 75.5 percent of the labourers' do. The two groups, on the other hand, had about the same proportion of extended family households.

To say that, in a given year, the tenant farmers' households were predominantly of the multiple type and the day labourers' of the simple type, does not do full justice, however, to the place different household types held in the life of a tenant farmer or day labourer. To appreciate this point we must consider the distribution of households by types while controlling for the age of the male head.²²

The relevant data appear in Table IX. Although not fully conclusive, given the relatively small number of observations in each age cohort, they suggest that the household of both tenants and day labourers passed through phases in the course of the head's lifetime. It is clear, first of all, that very few tenant farmers (four out of a total of 97) could hope to head their own household before their thirtieth birthday; the few that did were heads of simple family households and, as such, probably had to depend to a large extent on hired labour to work their farm. Past age 30, on the other hand, an increasing number of tenants were heads of extended or multiple family households and could thus rely on the labour of siblings, their offspring, or other relatives; by their sixties 70 to 80 percent of tenants presided over multiple family households that included more often than not three generations. In

²² The usefulness of this approach has been demonstrated by BERKNER, "The Stem Family" cit.; see also his article "The Use and Misuse of Census Data for the Historical Analysis of Family Structure", *Journal of Interdisciplinary History*, V, 4 (1975), pp. 721-738.

TABLE IX
 TYPE OF HOUSEHOLD BY AGE OF MALE HOUSEHOLD HEAD: DESIO,
 INZAGO, AND SAN GIULIANO COMBINED

| | 20-29 | 30-39 | 40-49 | 50-59 | 60-69 | 70+ | Total |
|-----------------------|---------------|---------------|---------------|---------------|---------------|--------------|-------|
| Tenant farmers | | | | | | | |
| Simple family | 75.0% (3) | 35.7% (10) | 39.1% (9) | 62.5% (10) | 18.7% (3) | 0.0% (0) | (35) |
| Extended family | 25.0% (1) | 21.4% (6) | 13.0% (3) | 6.3% (1) | 12.5% (2) | 20.0% (2) | (15) |
| Multiple family | 0.0% (0) | 42.9% (12) | 47.9% (11) | 31.2% (5) | 68.8% (11) | 80.0% (8) | (47) |
| Total | (4) | (28) | (23) | (16) | (16) | (10) | (97) |
| Day laborers | | | | | | | |
| Simple family | 50.0% (11) | 80.0% (68) | 93.4% (42) | 80.0% (20) | 66.7% (12) | 50.0% (5) | (158) |
| Extended family | 50.0% (11) | 18.8% (16) | 4.4% (2) | 20.0% (5) | 11.1% (2) | 20.0% (2) | (38) |
| Multiple family | 0.0% (0) | 1.2% (1) | 2.2% (1) | 0.0% (0) | 22.2% (4) | 30.0% (3) | (9) |
| Total | (22) | (85) | (45) | (25) | (18) | (10) | (205) |

NOTE: The smaller number of households in this table as compared with Table VIII reflects the fact that households headed by women are not included.

other words, if a tenant lived long enough, he was almost assured of spending the later part of his life at the head of a large, multiple, three-generation household.

Not so the day labourers. While a higher proportion (over ten percent) among them could start an independent household in their twenties, during most of their lives their households were of the simple or, less frequently, of the extended type as they were joined by a widowed mother or an unmarried sibling. The experience of heading a multiple family household was exceptional for them and only very late in life did 20-30 percent of them have such an experience — a far cry from the proportion of tenant farmers at a comparable age.

Why such marked preference for the large, complex household among tenant farmers? Since we are dealing with small rural communities whose members presumably shared the same values, we

can rule out cultural differences; and since we are dealing with two groups that owned no land, we can rule out the influence of inheritance laws or custom. We are thus left with the different economic functions those two groups performed on the large estates of the plain where both of them worked.

Given the very substantial size of those estates and the complexity and labour intensity of their operation (reflecting a combination of arable farming, wine making, and the raising of silkworms in the high plain around Desio, and of convertible husbandry, stockraising, and the meticulous care of the irrigation network in the low plain around Inzago and San Giuliano), it made sense for absentee landowners to entrust their cultivation to a family large enough to supply most of the labour needed on the estate in normal times, while relying on hired labour at peak times. Such a tenant family, then, was, much as the sharecropping family in the Nivernais and in Emilia,²³ a "labour sharing group" that had the advantage of providing, in the person of its head (the *massaro*), the unified management indispensable for the smooth performance of the sundry tasks involved in either interculture or convertible farming. Leasing the farm to a large tenant family also meant that the labour force provided by the family itself had a strong incentive to maximize output, for under the terms of the lease it retained whatever was produced over and above the rent due. At the same time, to the tenant a large family meant reducing the cost of hired labour; besides, securing a tenancy represented to him a limited, but important, form of security in the sense that for the duration of the lease (usually nine years) his family had a place to live and a source of livelihood.

Day labourers, on the other hand, were needed as individuals

²³ Cf. BERKNER and SHAFFER, "The Joint Family" cit., p. 156, and KERTZER, "European Peasant Household Structure", p. 336. See also M. BARBAGLI, *Sotto lo stesso tetto. Mutamenti della famiglia in Italia dal XV al XX secolo* (Bologna, 1984), pp. 203-15, for a fine analysis of the joint development of large estates and large tenant families in Italy since late medieval times.

only when work on the estate required extra hands. With employment fluctuating from day to day and from season to season; with little or no security of either employment or residence; with no land on which to grow their own food, day labourers had little incentive to form large households and, in fact, had every reason for keeping them small. Living in a large household consisting of two or more married couples might well be to them an ideal to be hoped for or perhaps a necessity to be endured (as when old parents had no choice but to share a dwelling with a married son), but it would certainly not enhance their chances of finding employment, might reduce the family's mobility, and might make it even harder to find living quarters.

4. Peasants and merchants

The contrast that set apart the tenant farmers' households from the day labourers' of the plain was thus rooted in their respective economic roles. But other roles and occupations, too, could leave their mark on the size and structure of the household. This is borne out by an analysis of the other two, quite different communities in our sample, namely Villa-d'Adda and Gallarate.

As mentioned before, in Villa-d'Adda subsistence rather than commercial farming formed the economic basis of the community, with wine and perhaps silk providing a link to outside markets. Not surprisingly, in Villa-d'Adda no tenant farmers are listed and the range of household sizes turns out to be narrower than in the communities of the plain (Table III). Even there, however, the community was far from being homogeneous. Besides a few gentry and a handful of tradesmen, two sizeable groups are discernible in the village: small owners and landless labourers. The former lived in households that were larger on average (about six members) than the labourers' (about four members) (Table VII). Moreover, the number of multiple family households and the number of persons living in them was considerably smaller in

Villa-d'Adda than in the villages of the plain a consequence, one is inclined to believe, of the fact that in the hills farm units were relatively small and, as such, neither required nor could support a large family.

Gallarate, as a market town that lived on regional trade and on handicraft industries, presents a very different picture. Here tenant farmers and day labourers formed but negligible groups in the occupational spectrum, as the bulk of the population derived their livelihood from services, trade, and crafts. To be sure, the MHS in Gallarate (5.1 persons) was the same as in the rural community of Inzago and not too far apart from that of the other rural communities. Gallarate, however, had the lowest percentage of multiple family households (7.7 percent) (Table Va) and their average size (8.8 persons) was lower than in the villages of the plain (Table VI). On the other hand, it had the highest percentage of simple family households (67.2 percent).

Here, too, household size was related to occupation or status (Table VII): labourers lived in smaller households than did either the few tenant farmers or the far more numerous tradesmen. As to multiple family households, it is interesting to consider who lived in them: out of a total of thirty-six such households, five were headed by merchants, twelve by shopkeepers, thirteen by craftsmen, two by tenant farmers, and three by individuals whose occupation is not known. In other words, the multiple family household which we saw to have been typical of the tenant farmers of the plain could also be viable, albeit in a limited number of cases, in the world of merchants and craftsmen.

Why those urban entrepreneurs would choose to form such large and complex households is difficult to tell. And yet, when, for instance, we come across the thirteen-member household of one Simone Melchiotto, shoemaker (Simone himself, two married sons and their respective wives, five grandchildren, and three unmarried sons) and we learn that the two married sons were shoemakers like their father, we cannot but assume that here was a

substantial family workshop in which labour was supplied by the sons themselves working side by side with their father. Likewise the household of Francesco Marro, cloth merchant (two married brothers and their wives, ten children, one unmarried brother, and two servants for a total of seventeen people) must have been a commercial firm of some stature as the three co-resident brothers are all listed as "merchants". Clearly, the multiple family could serve a useful purpose even in a non-agrarian environment as a way of expanding a business without bringing outsiders into it.

A further confirmation of this is afforded by another (and quite different) Lombard community in those same years.²⁴ In 1579 Laorca, a village of nearly 500 souls perched on the hills overlooking the eastern shore of Lake Como near the iron mining district of Valsassina, was a community that lived almost entirely on industry: 58 out of its 90 heads of household were listed as iron workers, 9 as iron merchants, a mere 4 as farmers, and the remaining 19 were divided among a variety of occupations such as tanner, carpenter, mason, and innkeeper. In this manufacturing community the mean size of the iron merchants' households stood at 11.5, that of the iron workers' at 5.3. More strikingly, 90 percent of the iron merchants' households were equally divided between the extended and the multiple types (and none of them included servants or apprentices), whereas only 18 percent of the iron workers' households were extended and a mere 7 percent were multiple, the pattern found in the villages of the plain is here reproduced in an even more salient form despite a totally different economic context. Apparently, the Laorca "business elite" (those iron merchants who, most likely, combined the role of purveyors of hardware with that of manufacturers under the putting-out system) found the large, complex household an arrangement well suited to the needs of their business.

²⁴ D. SELLA, "An Industrial Village in Sixteenth-Century Italy", in *Wirtschaftskraefte und Wirtschaftswege: Festschrift für Hermann Kellenbenz* (Bamberg, 1978), vol. III, pp. 37-46.

5. Conclusion

The foregoing analysis shows that even within a small region and despite roughly similar mean household sizes, communities could differ widely in terms of the size and structure of households. It also shows that in Lombardy as in other parts of Europe the large, complex household was tied primarily, although not exclusively, to specific land tenure arrangements—in this instance the leasing of large commercial farms rather than sharecropping. Lastly, our analysis supports the more general view that those large households were to a great extent *ad hoc*, flexible adaptations to specific economic needs and functions rather than expressions of deep-seated cultural values and kinship ties.²⁵

This being the case, one should regard those large households as somewhat precarious arrangements whose existence and duration ultimately depended on their ability to perform certain economic tasks. To this particular aspect of the household our listings of inhabitants, providing as they do a static cross-section of communities in a given year, offer no guide. But we do know that, even though some tenant families stayed on the same farm generation after generation, others failed to get their lease renewed or were evicted before their term was over, and their place was taken by new families.²⁶ We know, in other words, that there was a measure of mobility within peasant society and we can confidently assume that the turnover of tenant families involved some reshuffling of household arrangements. Presumably, an upwardly mobile day labourer who was offered a lease on a vacant farm would call upon parents or siblings to join him and form a larger household suited to his new responsibilities. As for the large household of an unsuccessful tenant, it very likely broke up into smaller units — those

²⁵ Cf. ANDERSON, *Approaches* cit., pp. 69-75, for a discussion of recent literature on "the family economy of the western peasant"; also BERKENER and SHAFFER, "The Joint Family" cit., p. 156; and MCARDLE, "Another Look" cit., p. 12, for specific applications of the economic approach to the sharecropper family.

²⁶ Examples in ROVEDA, "Una grande possessione" cit., pp. 115-116 and 128-134.

simple family households whose existence and cohesion were largely immune from the ebb and flow of economic fortune.

To say that the merging of two or more simple family households into a more complex unit was an *ad hoc*, temporary response to specific economic needs and goals is not to deny the existence, in the peasant culture of sixteenth century Lombardy, of stronger and more enduring ties between families related by blood. On the contrary, the very fact that, as has been seen, co-resident couples in the complex households of *massari* were invariably related by blood, either vertically or horizontally, clearly suggests that loyalty and cooperation based on kinship played a key role in the formation of those households.²⁷ This, however, is a separate subject which only a different kind of sources will be able fully to clarify.²⁸

²⁷ I am indebted to Angela Groppi and Stuart J. Woolf for bringing this point to my attention.

²⁸ A promising start in this direction has been made by MERZARIO, *Il paese stretto*, cit.

