REVIEW ARTICLES

Family and Household Across Time and Culture

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For the reader interested in history from a social science perspective, *Household and Family in Past Time* (Peter Laslett, ed., with assistance from Richard Wall, Cambridge University Press, 589 pp. and bibliography, $37.50) offers a wide view — in twenty-one varied samples — of work that has been done on many societies at many points of time concerning the size and structure of the household and the family which lived in it. The international analysis moves from England to Western Europe, through Serbia to Japan, and back via the American colonies. In time, it ranges from the now famous Florentine *catasto* of 1427 to a comparison of the Rhode Island censuses of 1875 and 1960. The contributing scholars [1] draw upon parish registers, tax lists, census schedules (some enumerating cows and goats as well as people), and religious surveys of Tokugawa administrators trying to stamp out the intrusion of Christianity. The subjects of these studies are families, nuclear or extended, but also their servants, resident kin, or boarders; and men and women living alone, even in ages not usually associated with such individual existence, or brothers and sisters working their way together in times when orphanage was common. There is much to be

[1] Peter Laslett, Thomas K. Burch, and Jack Goody in introductory analytical and comparative essays; Laslett, Richard Wall, W. A. Armstrong, and Michael Anderson on English family and household; Jean-Noël Biraben, Yves Blayo, and Jacques Dupâquier and Louis Jadin on France and Corsica; Christiane Klapisch on fifteenth-century Tuscany; A. M. van der Woude and Étienne Hélin on the Low Countries; E. A. Hammel, Laslett and Marilyn Clarke, and Joel M. Halpern on Serbia; Robert J. Smith, Akira Hayami and Nobuko Uchida, and Chie Nakane on Japan; Philip J. Greven, Jr., John Demos, and Edward T. Pryor, Jr., on the United States of America.

learned here about the comparative history of family and household; and it is valuable to have it all in one place.

Those who expect an easy as well as a varied introduction to the subject will, however, be frustrated. Mostly these are papers written by experts, involving the inescapable methodological technicalities as well as the current best interpretation of how household and family worked in past time. This is not to object to having thoroughly professional books such as this published. There should indeed be more of them, however difficult the economics of such publishing may be. It serves little purpose, though, not to recognize that this is a serious volume and to run the risk of talking down to the reader as the editor allows himself to do in the early pages. At the same time, the reader — social scientist or otherwise — who looks to this particular collection to *explain how* the household had a certain size or structure in particular historical settings, or had certain consequences for history, will sometimes be disappointed.

Laslett, who assembled the group of contributors for a conference at Cambridge in 1969, who provides eighty pages of what is called « analytical introduction », and who writes over a quarter of the book himself, gets things off to an unnecessarily slow start. About a third of the long introductory chapter is devoted principally to overturning the notion that in modern history there has been a general, cross-cultural evolution from the complex or « extended » family to the simple conjugal or « nuclear » family. It is important to realize how exaggerated this impression of a trend within recent history has been, how the error still persists, and how immune it remains to contrary evidence accumulated by social scientists and historians alike. (Laslett has the good grace in criticizing others to quote his own pre-conversion position, yet while doing so still manages to leave the impression that a special quality of truth exists in Cambridge and amongst historians). Those who have been willing to listen have now been hearing about all this for some time, however; and in spite of good points about the literature here and there, not much that is constructively new is to be found in the first section of Laslett's introduction. The anthropologist Alfred Kroeber was fond of relating the cross-cultural history of an artistic depiction showing a galloping horse with two legs forward, two legs back — a stride no moving horse takes. Known as the « flying gallop », this artist's license to represent speed and motion took in all sorts of peoples (except horsemen like the Scythians, or hunters like the Bantu) from Europe to China and back, from the Steppes to southern Africa, until it was laid to rest in mid-nineteenth century by photography and by the personal race-track habits of the painter Delacroix. Now that the historical untruth of the evolution from extended to nuclear family has been exposed by many writers in many disciplines, what do we have? A dead horse myth. Hopefully this does not have to be flogged any more. The urgent business now is to

get on with the job of explaining *why* historical and cross-cultural similarities in household size have existed and what *significance* those have had for the lives of people who have belonged to these households.

There is next a very useful section in which Laslett brings together from various sources — anthropological and sociological as well as historical — ways of identifying, defining, and depicting ideographically different forms of families and households and the components of these social units, and the various relationships between social structure and living space which can intrude upon and complicate many issues of study. (Where is a household not the same as a houseful? How do you distinguish an institution in historical records?). When Laslett then turns to apply this « model of classifying and comparing forms of household and family over time and between countries », however, he comes up more empty-handed than he ought to after all the groundwork. His repeated disclaimer about having « no theory of domestic group organization » may be indicative of where the problem lies. If one has no conception (albeit one to be tested, not rigidly assumed) of what the household *does* for family and for others who reside in it, how various members interact within the framework of a household, what social and economic dynamics in the environment of family and household do to effect or even reflect changes within these smaller social units, how *can* one explain much about why (to focus on Laslett's prime target) household size has or has not varied historically? Laslett falls victim to the approach of the very evolutionists whom he so ably criticizes. His own thinking remains far too taxonomic, not explanatory. This trouble pervades both the second, comparative half of Laslett's introduction and his essay on mean household size in 100 English communities from 1574 through 1821.

At the beginning of his international survey, Laslett talks about focussing on characteristics of local social structure « which we have found likely to explain variations in size and structure of household over time and space ». But he never delivers after this promising start. While he virtually states that mean household size is a poor way to get at answers to questions concerning family structure and process, he belabours evidence of an overall level of mean household size cross-culturally and through time, and yet does little to develop the insights which *do* exist in the available data to connect this summary measure of the domestic group to dynamics within the residential unit and linking it to the broader social structure outside. Not only is it « easy to be overimpressed with a uniformity never before noticed », it is also tempting to quit at this point without following one's curiosity into the « wearisome » and « exasperating » analysis of potential causal relationships in the data. The explanatory work is left to other minds.

Laslett, so far as we can tell (a second essay on the English materials has long been promised but apparently not yet published), prefers the com-

fortable — if not very convincing — position of defending the null hypothesis. To prove that the moderate mean size or simple structure of the English household is general for a large number of countries, he asks that « the community... differ in this particular respect from the English norm to such a degree that it is permissable to call the difference significant, in the statistician's sense », « usually » at the .01 level. This allows him such a large degree of probable error as to be of only limited scientific interest — 99 chances out of 100 before lack of fit has to be acknowledged. He does not report, moreover, how the data met significance tests in the many instances he cites.

In broader terms of criticism, Laslett does not pursue very far or very well the clues that do exist in the data for determining *how* or *why* regularities might be sustained historically or cross-culturally. Are between four and five people in a household the maximum for some purpose which is still consonant with the minimum for something else the domestic unit does? Unlike Anderson in his paper on mid-nineteenth century Preston in Lancashire, Laslett does not inquire into the dynamics which create the condition about which he wishes to generalize. The cross-cultural comparability, after all, does not exist just because it is some magic number. Most disappointingly Laslett makes little use of tantalizing opportunities in his own materials for posing and answering more informative questions. He notes for instance (as developed by Armstrong and Anderson) that family structure from pre-industrial to industrial England while not becoming larger became more complex. (Mean household size was 4.65 before 1850 and 4.68 afterwards, but extended or multiple families became more common). He also argues from his *international* sample that servants tend to be interchangeable with kin. How might these two findings be related to each other to explain the generality of an average household size or to connect the numbers of people to the functions expected of households? How are both findings connected to well-known nineteenth-century demographic changes in industrial Britain? It appears from Laslett's English data that the positive association of mean household size with complexity of family (percent extended plus percent multiple) — with a Spearman rank correlation of $r' = .276$ ($p < .10$) for twenty-three cases — depends entirely on the connection in those communities examined before 1850 ($r' = .500$, $p < .10$) and *not* on the other fifteen with data from 1851 onwards ($r' = .045$). This would seem to indicate that comparable household size after industrialization might mean something else structurally and functionally.

One of Laslett's major difficulties arises from his dealing with time in gross, rigid, and perhaps unperceptive categories — e.g., English data 1574-1821, or 1650-1749 vs. 1750-1821 vs. census data since 1851. If the local findings on average household size in England — about 500 cases from Laslett and Wall, omitting London — are in turn averaged out for decades

(mean of local means) or examined even more finely by medians for individual years, as in Figure 1, the more sensitive time analysis may put regional and temporal differences into more comprehensible and less « exasperating » perspective.

The question whether mean household size fell during industrialization, rose, or remained unchanged depends on where one starts — and stops — measuring. With the data broken down into finer units of time, for substantial periods of history there is perhaps even more convincing evidence for the lack of trend, or long-term stability in average household size, which Laslett generalizes than his own broad chronological groupings permit. There also appear, however, patterned changes *within* such a summary view which open up important insights into what may have sometimes altered household size (perhaps household structure as well), and when and why this happened. The evidence for the 1760's and early 1770's, for example, shows smaller households than for the remainder of the eighteenth century. So do the 1861 and 1871 data and the limited local evidence available for a few years following 1670 suggest reduced households relative to preceding and suceeding periods within the long-term pattern. The low household (and family) size of the 1960's and early 1970's is well known. Does this pattern of smaller households in the third quarter of the century — not once, but over and over again — have anything to do with industrialization? Are perhaps the upheavals in values and attitudes in England (with parallels in America and on the Continent) which came in the wake of the Reformation, the Civil War and the Thirty-Year's War, a mid-eighteenth-century period of both revivalism and Enlightenment, the events epitomized by 1848, and World War II more relevant than industrial factors in accounting for such once-a-century lowpoints in household size?

Is it possible to argue further that *non*-industrial causes were also responsible for the downward trend in household size which eventually did occur in England and Wales, but only after 1891? Judging from Laslett's Longuenesse data and the work of Blayo and Hélin, a similar trend to smaller mean household size may have begun in northern France and Belgium near the time of the French Revolution, reaching the « modern » 3.0 level about a century ago — and approximately a century ahead of England. While Blayo states that Grisy-Suisnes (Seine-et-Marne) was in advance of other localities in this process, Liège was well down in household size by 1801, and perhaps we can regard at least the more forward communities of the region by then to have been in such a « lead » pattern of change relative to post-1891 English experience. Were the « civic » (Max Weber) secular value changes culminating in the French Revolution — or Dutch burgher self-assertion and self-consciousness perhaps as early as the late 1600's, as suggested by van der Woude's data for the western regions of the United Provinces — more relevant for the reduction of household size than the

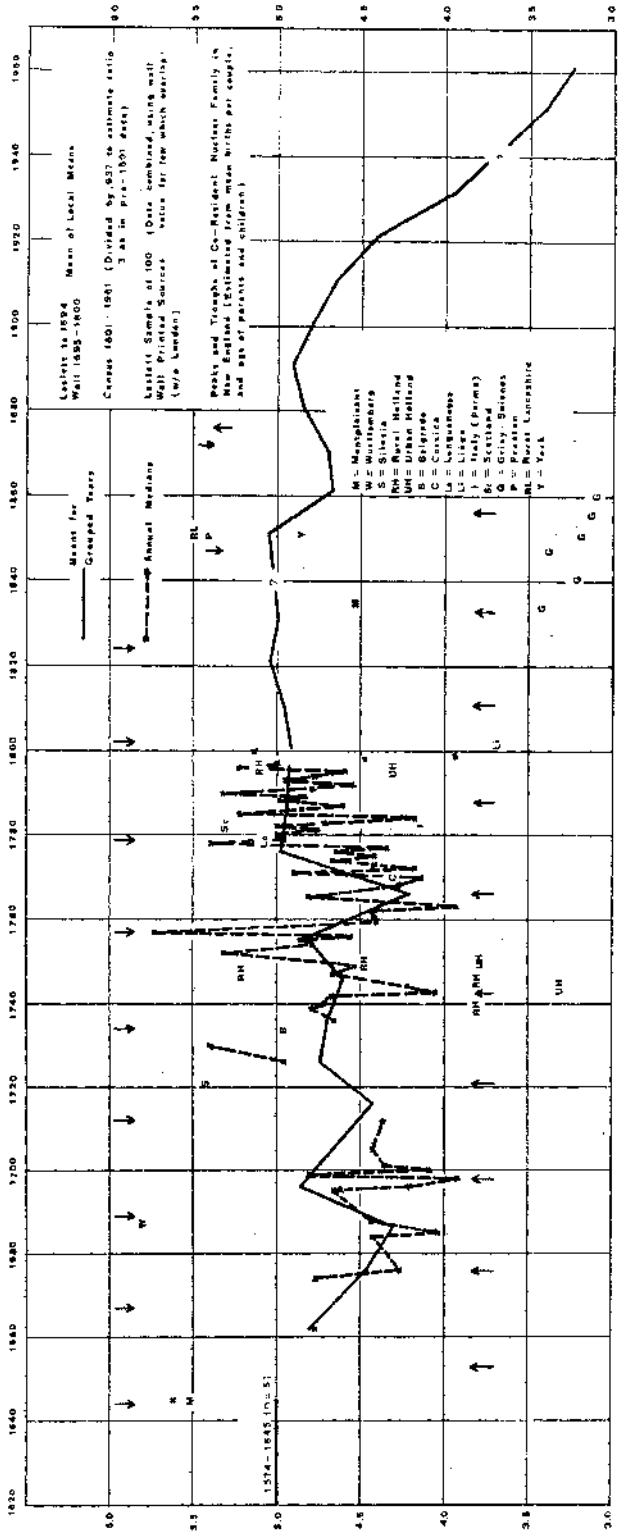

FIGURE 1. — Mean and English Household Size 1574-1961, with Some European Comparisons.

process of industrialization per se? « Modernization » historically has involved several dimensions — religious and political as well as economic, commercial as well as industrial. The search for determinants of household or family size and structure may be stressing the wrong factor in the complex. Now more than a decade ago, William J. Goode in his widely read *World Revolution and Family Patterns* set forth a more varied and more adequate array of possible dynamics of this sort. Many of them seem highly relevant to the kinds of historical change or international comparison with which this volume concerns itself. Some have little to do directly with industrialization. Perhaps Laslett has been busying himself with the wrong sociologists. Anderson, meanwhile, shows how *more* complex family structure helped people to adapt to industrialization (as Reuben Hill and his students have demonstrated about « extended » family functions in America during the Great Depression). The American Revolution, like the French, was accompanied by an apparent secular trend towards smaller family size. Since the American family was less complex than other families in the international sample, and since servants were relatively rare, household size in America must have fallen in a way roughly parallel to the French experience in this period. The evolution of political and social values may have been more important for family and household than anything directly derived from the historical process of industrialization.

Why then, one may ask, did the downward trend in household size occur a century later in England and Wales? Perhaps England, like a modern mother, gave birth to the Industrial Revolution without bothering to adapt her way of life to it, at least when it came to standards, values, and traditions. Jacquetta Hawkes used to criticize this cultural lag for social purposes both pointedly and effectively: an overbearing emphasis on country houses, punts, and village greens while the large majority of English men and women grew up and tried to eke out an existence in the big and small Manchesters, Tynesides, and Potteries of the land. By the waning decades of the nineteenth century, however, politics, education, more broadly the culture of English society could no longer so cavalierly escape being affected by industrialization. Similarly, while Smith and Hayami and Uchida show the extent of simplicity in Japanese households even in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, Nakane demonstrates that the final, substantial drop in size occurred virtually since 1955. Almost a century after the Meiji move to open up and industrialize Japan, the basic shift came in the wake of a weakening of traditional views by military defeat and occupation. This is admittedly largely speculation; but these are the kinds of interpretations to which such comparative study ought to be able to address itself.

If, on the other hand, one looks at time *very* finely, plotting the ups and downs of annual data as in the dotted line of Figure 1 depicting the medians for English localities known for given years, there is evidence that

whereas long-term mean household size kept returning to or hovering around a familiar base level from the early 1600's through the late 1800's, as summarized by Laslett, it did not stay there. Rather, average household size tended to fluctuate up and down, perhaps in a fairly regular and predictable way linked to what the domestic group was doing for its members in a varying, not static, social and economic environment.

The « predicted » peaks and troughs in family size, and therefore probable household size, are taken from samples of colonial New England families where varying numbers of births, ages of children and parents, and mortality rates produced large or small families from one era to the next through a process of continual change involving that « life cycle » of families which Laslett notes along with other contributors like Blayo, and Dupâquier and Jadin. The same recurrent clusterings of larger or smaller numbers of children have now been found by Allan Kulikoff in the slave population of prince George's County, Maryland, as the expansion of settlement in the Chesapeake ebbed and flowed. The timing of such variations is projected across the graph at 22½-year intervals, following the form of growth cycles, Kuznets cycles, or « long swings » which many writers have discussed in the economic and demographic history of the North American mainland and trans-Atlantic migration. The dynamics used to explain these recurrent variations involve the manner in which economic conditions, demographic behavior such as age of marriage, non-marriage, numbers and timing of children, and probably environmental dimensions like crowding, climate, and disease all interact, interlocking economy, personal life, and bio-physical context into interdependent systems. The point here is that there are at least possibilities that median household size in England followed fluctuations of both this type and timing down to about 1850. Not only was recent population growth around 1620 an important factor in the early stages of English colonization, as Notestein argued years ago, setting off echoes perpetuated in the dynamics of growth in the new settlements, but temporal clusterings of nuclear families at certain critically large or small phases of their life cycles kept recurring — the present fragmentary evidence suggests — through two and a half centuries of English history at home. The overall mean for localities across large stretches of time may be technically accurate yet at the same time obscure how the size of the household was in fact involved in very active dynamics concerning who had families and who didn't, how many children there were, what survivors from previous generations were present, what sorts of lodgers or extended kin were welcome as residents or not. These cyclical movements are not beyond argument, by any means; but they do remind us that the study of family and household must be one of process, not merely static condition synthesized in what Armstrong calls « a gigantic averaging... which may conceal significant regional and temporal variations ».

Some interesting if speculative possibilities arise from that line of thinking for non-English findings reported in this volume as well. Is Biraben's mean household size in 1644 for Montplaisant in the south of France one member bigger than that for 1863 because of the almost two-century space in between or as result of the timing of the first date at the peak of the hypothesized cycle, the latter immediately after the trough? If Blayo's data are viewed as part of a basic French trend to smaller household size through the early and middle decades of the nineteenth century (parallel to later secular change which Laslett shows for England), then the quinquennial date with peak family size comes in 1846 relative to a theoretical expectation of 1847 (though the preceding trough at 1841 is a few years late). Does Laslett's Württemberg data for mean household size in 1687 loom higher than the Silesian finding for 1720 because of a long-term trend, or cultural differences from German to Polish society, or because in a central European region of somewhat larger households than those characteristic of the West these were approximately peak and through points in cyclical movements, too? Similarly the sole Scottish insight into household size may be large relative to the English findings because of its timing at a peak, the Parma mean low because it is observed a few years later on the way to the next trough in 1788. The Corsican result of 1770 may be low relative to the Pas-de-Calais in 1778 or even Montplaisant in 1836 not just from the recent fighting as interpreted by Dupâquier and Jadin (and what is the role of demographic pressures in determining when wars take place?), but because of more general cyclical timing phases. As far afield from the North Atlantic economy as Japan, the detailed Yokouchi research of Hayami and Uchida displays cycles in numbers of births and numbers of children under ten in the household at the same interval though in somewhat different phasing than in England and America, for instance peaks of births in the late 1680's, around 1710, 1732, and 1755. Anderson's Preston and rural Lancashire findings may show bigger household size than Laslett's pre-1820 data mostly because the 1851 census may have been taken at the last peak of English demographic response in this fashion, though the York materials of Armstrong remind us, like the different general levels of central and western Europe and northern and southern France, or between rural and urban localities in the Netherlands according to van der Woude and between Tokugawa village and town, that not all variation which has to be explored more sensitively and perceptively is temporal. (Though Dutch rural and urban means of household size each separately show some adherence to the fluctuating model). In this very vein of intra-societal comparison, have some social scientists and historians made the illegitimate leap from *current* rural/urban differences (evident in this volume from Tuscany in 1427 to Jamaica and Morocco in 1960) to supposed « rural » and « urban » stages in the evolution of societies, hence accounting for the persistent myth

of change from large extended to small nuclear households and families historically?

Win or lose with these particular kinds of alternative interpretations offered here, it is essential to work inquiringly and flexibly with comparative materials like those presented in this volume to answer questions about the historical processes in societies in which household and family played a part, or to which they had to adjust. Fortunately for the reader interested in England, Wall, Armstrong, and expecially Anderson do this. Wall gives the reader a thorough, intelligent, and well-written introduction to the problems of using printed sources on English household and family. He does more, however: he shows that regional differences — even distinctions among types of towns — may be insightful, that the time dimension has to be viewed more sensitively (by decades at least), and that family and household rather than existing in demographic vacuum must be related to local rates of growth, and those dynamics of population which encourage or retard local regional growth — migration, mortality, and fertility within the immediate family itself, as well as questions of kin, servants, inmates, and so forth in the sometimes larger arena of the household. Armstrong is fully aware of the distinctiveness of York compared with more industrialized cities of England by 1851. Not only does he inquire into the reasons for the relationship between higher social position and larger household size under these urban conditions (here carrying forward one of Laslett's more useful lines of comment), he speculates provocatively about the unusual presence of single females relative to the pre-industrial English situation. Perhaps most nicely of all, Armstrong shows how in York relative to findings on English communities prior to 1820 there were fewer servants, more kin and lodgers, but more households headed by single females and less likely to contain children. Thus he begins, at least, an explanation of *how* comparable mean household size could be created historically by different internal structure and dynamics. He knows, that is, that net descriptive constancy can conceal fundamental changes which need explanation. Anderson, finally, begins to investigate *why* households are likely to have a given size or structure by exploring the way jobs were obtained through kin in industrial England, where resident parents were likely to be a family asset and where they would constitute a burden, what might keep children at home longer, and how as nuclear family size declined there was both more physical space and more use for other relatives and non-related residents. In spite of the fact that his causation may put too much stress on the economic, calculating nature of men and women — both have been known to want children or to care for parents for far more psychological (though not necessarily unselfish) reasons than the ones he discusses — and that in places he raises more questions than he can at the moment answer, Anderson exemplifies perhaps best of all the contributors to this volume how family

and household can and *must* be analyzed as part of the flowing life processes of whatever community is studied in whatever time. When they are done this way, such researches hold great promise for both social and economic understanding.

Biraben's description of work on Montplaisant in the seventeenth century makes the demography of early America look like writing novels. The resources in France are so varied, so informative. His discussion of the *protective* function of a large household in a period of unrest is an important one to remember, and has relevance even for the contemporary urban setting of gang warfare and ethnic feuding. He does, too, seem to have evidence — for this community at least — of a real decline since the seventeenth century in not just other vertical generations but collateral relatives present in the household, though the connection to occupational changes which he emphasizes over the same two centuries is rather left up to the reader to explain, and may or may not be so very causal in nature. Blayo, on the other hand, in his study of a northern French village of the nineteenth century argues that the simplification of the household there between 1836 and 1861 principally involved having fewer ascendant or descendant kin in residence (contrary to what seems to have been the English urban form of adjustment in 1851). Is he, then, in fact mostly giving us evidence of short-term, reversible variations in the local distribution of families in their life cycles, a glimpse at the workings of an underlying long-term trend, or both? The occupational changes he cites are scarcely sufficient to explain the household change found, nor are they used effectively to do so. More hopeful is the excellent strategy of following the *same* households from one quinquennial observation point to the next. This seems both a fruitful and an indispensable technique, wherever possible, for getting at some of the reasons for change (or lack of it) which several contributors allude to more than actually unravel.

Klapisch begins her analysis of Florence's survey of 260,000 persons in 60,000 households with a fine exposition of the nature of the document, how the attempt to evade taxes might or might not affect its reporting, and how this and other biases could be checked. (A similar exemplary exploration of the nature of the sources and their possible effects on the results of research is provided collectively for the Tokugawa shūmon-aratame-chō by Smith, Hayami and Uchida, and Nakane). Findings which stand out in the preliminary evaluation of the data include the typically older age of heads of households in the countryside. Klapisch, like the students of Corsica, cites recent fighting in Tuscany. It is important to remember with Burch, however, the potential effect of higher non-military mortality rates on family size in pre-public-health cities, or as in the early decades of settlement in unhealthy Maryland and Virginia contrasted with New England. The cross-culturally familiar increase in size of both family and household

with wealth is very evident in Florence. Widows and celibates were especially frequent in this population. In Corsica, three and a half centuries later, mortality still had important consequences. According to Dupâquier and Jadin the death of parents accounted for what turns out to have been mostly a *temporary* teaming up early in the life cycle of fatherless brothers, not a lifelong « frérèche ». (In early Maryland, the surplus of adult white males and the value of workable step-children provided a solution to paternal mortality differing from those of *both* Tuscany and Corsica — frequent remarriage). Poverty and hardship in Corsica also had to do with there being few servants, and partly for this reason smaller households.

Along with Goody's mid-twentieth-century comparative analysis, including peoples of Asia and Africa scarcely touched directly by industrialization, van der Woude's discussion of regional variation in the United Provinces in and before the eighteenth century offers businesslike understanding of the usefulness of having kin or servants present or absent for different kinds of economic life, particularly arable farming contrasted with livestock raising. Here is a model of getting at what households of different size and structure actually do, parallel to Anderson's attack on the problem in the English industrial city. Hélin tries to come to grips with similar relationships of function and structure using neighbourhood differences within the city and environs of Liège in 1801, perhaps a less successful way of coping with the problem. In much the same style, Smith for town and city wards, Hayami and Uchida for rural villages in Japan through the seventeenth, eighteenth, and early nineteenth centuries show how small family and household, in spite of practices of adoption and concern over continuity across the generations, were working components in both the urban and the rural property systems well before industrialization. The implication is that once industrialization came to Japan the process could move rapidly in part because of the groundwork in family and household structure already laid, including patterns of geographical mobility as families which are reminiscent of the business or academic middle classes in the modern United States.

Three analyses of the special Serbian complex living system known as the « zadruga », and three papers on the American household round out the collection. Greven's examination of the late eighteenth-century American family underscores once again the importance of substantial regional variation in many societies, variations linked to the nature of the local economy, the local rate of population growth (in a new society with special relationship to the ages of particular settlements), and dynamics of how people lived in domestic units of such sizes and shapes, however fascinating gross international tendencies towards small numbers and simple organization may seem. Demos calls important attention to the psychological implications of varying domestic arrangements, and once again to the changing picture of each family at successive phases of its individual history. The psychological

speculation, however, seems stretched rather thin at times. For one thing, evidence from court cases is likely to have biases towards aggression. Also, Demos has offered much of this rumination elsewhere. Those not willing to put more into a paper for professional discussion and publication might heed, not just quote, the advice of John Ward as cited in Mather's *Magnalia.* Pryor shows a number of consistencies in Rhode Island families across time and across ethnic groups. Perhaps most notable among the changes which took place from 1875 to 1960 was an increase in living alone rather than with relatives or as a boarder. Have we finally come full turn from the widowhood and celibacy evident in the Tuscany of 1427 as a result of the economic and technological feasibility of single housekeeping, and alterations in filial and sexual norms which have encouraged it?

Generally these are useful, thought-provoking contributions towards understanding what household and family have looked like over time and across cultures. They demonstrate the promise that we can expect from continuing study of how or why the domestic unit took on a given size or shape historically.