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## Book Reviews/Recensions

**Marzio Barbagli and David I. Kertzer (editors) *Storia della famiglia italiana 1750–1950*, Il Mulino. Bologna, 1992, pp. 367. (English version: *Journal of Family History*, vol. 15 no. 1990(4), 369–578. Monographic issue: *Italian Family History 1750–1950*).**

The last 25 years have been characterized – in Italy as in the whole of Europe – by a flood of historical studies on the family. In the introductory chapter of the Italian version, the editors observe that in Italy these studies have been developed mainly by five types of researchers: the historical demographers grouped in the Italian Committee for the Study of Historical Demography and, since 1977, the Italian Society of Historical Demography, a number of foreign historians and anthropologists who have dealt mainly with the Tuscan situation, a group of historian women who have focused particularly on different aspects of the condition of women, a small group of economic and social historians working with the review *Quaderni Storici* and associated with the French historians of the *Annales* and a number of sociologists who, in addition to carrying out wide-ranging research, have contributed to the spread, in the Italian scientific community, of important research carried out in other countries.

The book contains eleven articles by researchers belonging to these five categories. The aim is to collect together the main results of these years of intense study, discussing the validity and limits of the research methods adopted, highlighting important questions which have previously been neglected and examining prospects for the future.

The most interesting characteristic of all the articles is the attempt – for the most part successful – to follow an interdisciplinary approach. Nevertheless, the articles can be subdivided into four groups, differentiated also by the authors' methodological and disciplinary approach.

The articles by Massimo Livi Bacci and Marco Breschi (*Italian Fertility: An Historical Account*), Rosella Rettaroli (*Age at Marriage in Nineteenth-Century Italy*) and Giovanna Da Molin (*Family Forms and Domestic Service in Southern Italy from the Seventeenth to the Nineteenth Centuries*) – the latter containing an exceptional amount of documentation – use a mainly demographic-quantitative approach. Results of micro and macro studies are merged and the Italian situation is compared with that of other countries. In the studies by Da Molin and Rettaroli the unsatisfactory adaptation of

the Italian situation to the “classic” patterns of connection between nuptiality, formation of the domestic unit and the habit of going into service before marriage proposed by Laslett and Hajnal is underlined. On the other hand, Breschi and Livi Bacci point out that very few data are available and consequently the assessments possible even today as regards the level, characteristics and determinants of Italian fertility in the historical age are fragmentary. It is particularly difficult to assess the importance of fertility in determining population dynamics before the unification of Italy (i.e. before 1860).

It is perhaps worth adding that – both as regards the analysis of nuptiality and fertility in XVIII and XIX centuries – in Italy wide research projects are currently under way with the aim of constructing a more thorough overall picture, extending the documentation available and solving methodological problems, in particular concerning the analysis of non-nominative data using techniques developed in other contexts of demographic analysis and suitably adapted (the main one being the own-children method) together with other methodological tools like back-projection (used in Livi Bacci and Breschi’s study).

The articles by Pier Paolo Viazzo and Dionigi Albera (*The Peasant Family in Northern Italy, 1750–1930: A Reassessment*) and Anna Oppo (“Where there is no woman there is no house”, *Profiles of the Agro-Pastoral Family in Nineteenth-Century Sardinia*), even though built on consistent quantitative foundations, adopt a more general anthropological approach. Whereas a very distinctive, fairly recognizable and interpretable pattern appears to emerge almost all over Sardinia – combination of advanced age of the woman at marriage, neo-local residence, tendency to live near the wife’s family, central role of the woman in formation of the new family unit, including economic contribution – Northern Italy (or rather Piedmont and Lombardy, as other areas are only mentioned briefly) is characterized by a high level of variability. Very different family formation patterns co-existed, often with diverging behaviour between adjacent areas and between social groups that lived side by side in the same village, in close connection with the variation in agricultural organization. So “. . . it seems no accident that in the Alpine area nuclear family organization is best documented in those communities where animals were communally tended, whereas in most localities where joint family system existed, the summer pastures were managed by the individual households.” (p. 468 English version, p. 169 Italian version). Moreover: “. . . differences in household size and structure between groups and between the village and the surrounding countryside,

could hardly be more pronounced. In Scarnafigi (a parish in the lowland of southwestern Piedmont) the proportion of complex households in 1790 was 62.4% in the farms, 27.7% in the rural house, 17.3% in the village tenements." (p. 473 English version, p. 181 Italian version, Table 6). We have quoted these passages in full as they illustrate a theme that recurs throughout the book: all the authors underline the difficulty of finding unitary patterns and the prevalence of variability with respect to uniformity.

From a methodological point of view, these two studies move in the direction, if not of new theorizations, at least of an ordered organization of the results obtained from basically different sources, both quantitative and qualitative. From this reorganization it is evident that anyone wishing to undertake this type of study must now take account of at least three aspects: the formation of families, the transmission of property from one generation to the next and the production of income.

The studies carried out by Chiara Saraceno (*Women, Family and the Law 1750–1942*) and Maura Palazzi (*Female Solitude and Patrilineage Unmarried Women and Widows during the Eighteenth and Nineteenth Centuries*) have a very different point of view. Both the authors, analysing for the most part the development of legislation, observe the progressive establishment in Italy of the bourgeois family pattern as seen through the condition of women. Saraceno analyses the legislative definitions of the position of women in the family from the second half of the nineteenth century up to the Fascist civil code of 1942. Palazzi concentrates on the changes in the legal status of widows and spinsters between the XVIII and XIX centuries and the consequences on family relations in terms of extending widows' and spinsters' field of action and therefore the contribution made by these changes to the creation of a female subjectivity separate and separable from the family network.

As expressly declared by the authors, the source on which these studies are based also constitutes the main limitation: future research must concentrate on real behaviour quite apart from juridical precepts, distinguishing carefully between the different social strata. Habits and customs were often preponderant in determining family relationships and the "official" juridical constitution was often sidestepped or simply ignored, in particular among the lower classes.

Finally, the book contains two studies which, via the analysis of particular themes, underline some specific factors peculiar to the Italian situation. Raul Merzario (*Land, Kinship, and Consanguineous Marriages in Italy from the Seventeenth to the Nineteenth Centuries*), with an anthropolog-

ical point of view and using data from microstudies on communities in different Italian regions, interprets the nineteenth century increase in marriages between blood relations not only as a consequence of the demographic increase and a reaction of families to the new hereditary law, as Delille maintains, but more generally, as a reaction of local communities to new developments seen as a threat to their chances of survival: "The increase in the number of consanguineous marriages might also have been a reaction to the attempts, implemented throughout Italy, to try to eliminate communal property using different means. This process was largely completed during the nineteenth century, when communal property was divided into individual parcels and sold. The peasant population might have turned to consanguineous marriage in an attempt to recompose, by marriage with consanguineous kin, that patrimony which the authorities split up. It is possible, moreover, that in cases in which this attack on peasants' rights failed, the peasants sought to use increasingly close blood ties to form a common front of kin, and also of political power, in order to oppose the possible effects of the laws undermining local customs." (p. 542 English version, p. 269 Italian version). Angiolina Arru (*The Distinguishing Features of Domestic Service in Italy*) uses qualitative and quantitative sources to throw light on the complex interconnections between migratory, matrimonial and professional careers of servants, studying in depth almost exclusively the city of Rome. The result – although territorially limited – is interesting as it enables us to place individual strategies within the context of a more general social evolution. It should, however, be noted that although studies in this area are on the increase, the construction of the history of domestic service in Italy is still in its initial stages.

The book is completed by the introduction by Marzio Barbagli and David Kertzer and the concluding methodological article by Giovanni Levi (*Family and Kin – a Few Thoughts*). These two articles are highly recommended: in a few pages they clarify the context of historical research into the Italian family and also make an important contribution to international research. In addition, the English version of the introduction – the only part that differs substantially from the Italian version – contains a useful summary of the last 20 years of historical analysis of the Italian family with a compendium of the main results of the articles contained in the book. The Italian version, on the other hand, has evidently been written for those – already familiar with the theme – in search of intellectual stimuli as a guide to future studies: these reflections, together with the final chapter by Levi, which concentrates on outlining future research, deserve comment. Barbagli and Kertzer

believe that after the first phase of building theories and the second phase of “demolition” of the initial theories it is now time to open a third phase in the history of the family in which the bulk of data collected and the numerous attempts at rationalizing variability give way to new interpretations in line with the new empirical findings. Levi indicates the path that – in his opinion – will allow for successful development of this third phase. It takes in all complexities, i.e. constructs the widest picture within which the strategies of the family unit take shape. It is worthwhile to report extensively the conclusions of Levi – the last words of the book: “. . . the little research there is on the relations of the family with its more extended area of kin places family history in a profoundly new perspective. In my view, this entails not simply adding some new elements to family history research, but rather bringing about a radical change of perspective, abandoning a typological analysis which, while providing information on family forms, in fact contributes to taking us further away from explanations of causal mechanisms and away from the real conditions in which choices and strategies arise” (p. 577 English version, p. 321 Italian version). In this perspective, the analysis of matrimonial, professional and migratory strategies becomes undoubtedly more significant and “definitive” even though, if we are to adopt this approach, complex sources must be brought into play such as notaries’ documents and family budgets; moreover, we are dealing with sources that, as Levi himself says, are more rare among lower social class.

The prospect indicated by Levi is certainly stimulating, even though it is difficult to imagine all historical research into the Italian family being orientated in this direction. The large majority of researchers will probably continue to follow more traditional paths also because entire regions are still almost completely undiscovered (for example the Veneto, hardly ever studied or referred to in the whole book) and the trend of combined analysis, with a demographic approach, is far from being exhausted. Moreover, “advanced” research as indicated by Levi, which cannot cover areas that are too wide owing to the laborious preparatory documentation work required, can interact profitably with studies that provide some more general empirical pictures.

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