CHAPTER 3

From Modernity to Tradition: Households on Kythera in the Early Nineteenth Century

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1 Introduction

Greece, in Hajnal’s seminal paper where Eastern and Western European marriage patterns were distinguished, was put clearly within the former.1 Almost two decades later Laslett, in his map of European households, located Greece within the ‘Mediterranean tendency’. Though a final picture of Greek nuptiality and household formation patterns is still not in sight, the existing cases from Greece and the clear examples of Italy, Spain and Portugal suggest that we may eventually find a wide variety of patterns, both geographically and temporally.2

Most existing studies – just like those of Hajnal and Laslett – compare and contrast virtually contemporaneous populations or, more rarely, the same population over a few decades, attempting to explain the observed differences. In seeking to account for such differences, Ruggles, for example, following a thorough discussion of the current debates suggests that, at least for stem families, such differences in historical Northwest Europe and North America can be explained through variations in demographic characteristics and levels of agricultural employment.3 Therefore, according to Ruggles, culture is not

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significant in creating the differences. Similarly Berkner, referring to changes over
time, argued that, in a stem family situation, the diminution of complex house-
holds and concomitant prevalence of nuclear households may be explained by
structural changes such as the declining numbers of the farming population.\footnote{Lutz K. Berkner, “The Stem Family and the Developmental Cycle of the Peasant Household: An Eighteenth-Century Austrian Example”, \textit{The American Historical Review}, 77: 2 (1972), 398–418 (410).} In
contrast, Laslett as early as 1983 underlined the significance of culture in deter-
mining the household formation patterns of a region, an idea reinforced by many

Assessing temporal changes, as early as 1872 Le Play suggested (or more
correctly lamented) that modernisation was transforming the strong, com-
plex household unit into a weak, nuclear unit. Laslett, in contrast, argued that
modernisation had very little impact on English households in the past few
centuries. In line with Laslett’s argument, subsequent studies reveal a variety
of situations where modernisation and its equivalents, industrialisation and
urbanisation, at times had no effect on household formation.\footnote{See for example David I. Kertzer, \textit{Family Life in Central Italy, 1880–1910: Sharecropping, Wage Labor, and Coresidence} (New Brunswick, N.J., 1984); Angelique Janssens, \textit{Family and Social Change. The Household as a Process in an Industrializing Community} (Cambridge, 1993), 216–218. Janssens, who examined two occupational groups over time, the ‘industrialised’ fac-
tory workers and the ‘traditional’ domestic weavers, found no discernible differences in their
propensity to form complex households. Interestingly, if the observation period had been
shorter than the complete family cycle that Janssens used, the conclusions would have been
different.} Thus social and
economic change, it has been argued, does not necessarily bring changes in
households.\footnote{Mikołaj Szotysek, Siegfried Gruber, Barbara Zuber-Goldstein and Rembrandt Scholz, \textit{Living Arrangements and Household Formation in the Crucible of Social Change: Rostock 1867–1900}, MPIfDR Working paper WP 2010-036, December 2010, 27.} Still, the suggestion that the changes may appear following a ‘lag’
has also been put forward.\footnote{Janssens strongly argued against an easy and immediate change of family behaviour and atti-