

Witchcraft And Its Transformations, C.1650-c.1750

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conclusions about English population history. The registers track only the Anglican portion of the population, which was a declining percentage of the total population in this era. More troubling is the fact that London and the industrial parishes of northern England are excluded from study, with the exception of one in West Yorkshire, which is weighted at only half of its size to prevent "distortion" of the results. Even if the overall patterns are in agreement, it seems reasonable to assume that significant variations existed between the primarily rural parishes that make up the study and the urban areas that are not included. The authors' continued assertion of the underlying homogeneity of English population trends may reflect the homogeneity of the parishes studied rather than the nation as a whole. In essence, they avoided the central question that could have been addressed if they had stuck to their original intention. While they relied on volunteers to collect the local data, surely they could have included other types of parishes, especially for the later period. If they had done so, I would be more comfortable that they had recreated the demographic patterns of England, especially for the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries.

The path chosen by the authors fits the larger trajectory of the Cambridge Group. Originally motivated by a desire to uncover history from below by studying the structures of family and community life, it has instead become a producer of national studies that rely on ever more sophisticated mathematical techniques and greater computing power. The result has been an increasing abstraction away from social forces in favor of the display of empirical results that are believed to speak for themselves. For example, the authors never address the social and economic forces that lay behind the high mortality, low fertility, and high age at marriage that prevailed in the late seventeenth century, contenting themselves with noting the trends. There is no reason for this to be the case. Other demographers such as Simon Szreter and David Kertzer rely upon anthropology, gender studies, and social history to give life to their quantitative analyses. Yet, in this work the ambition seems to be to reconstruct a quantitative "reality" that can stand the test of time or at least prevent historians from pursuing ideas not in line with "the facts." The result is a lack of explanation and connection that reduces this work to a display of quantitative prowess, with little interest for the ordinary historian of the time period. In recent years, dissatisfaction with "scientific" history has grown and calls for new approaches to historical knowledge have multiplied from post modernism to gender studies. The response of the Cambridge Group appears to be a retreat into a type of rarefied empiricism that rejects any engagement with the larger world. While such an approach can provide us with raw material, as history it is deeply unsatisfying. It may be time for the Cambridge Group to reassess its methods if it cannot provide us with richer answers after twenty-five years of intensive research.

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Stuart Clark. *Thinking with Demons: The Idea of Witchcraft in Early Modern Europe*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1997. Pp. xvii, 827. \$140.00. ISBN 0-19-820001-3.

Ian Bostridge. *Witchcraft and its Transformations, c.1650-c.1750*. (Oxford Historical Monographs.) New York: Oxford University Press, 1997. Pp. xiii, 274. \$75.00. ISBN 0-19-820653-4.

These two important and provocative books deal with the beliefs that members of the educated classes held regarding witchcraft during the early modern period. Stuart Clark's

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