The European Demographic System, 1500–1820. By Michael W. Flinn. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1981. Pp. 175. $15.00 cloth.

Every lively historical debate deserves a survey volume from time to time. Flinn's European Demographic System is the latest to cover a field that has grown exponentially in the last 25 years, his invaluable bibliography of 703 titles being a telling witness to that. The book's 175 pages are made up of 101 pages of commentary, a statistical appendix (36 pages), bibliography (33 pages), and index (5 pages).

Flinn ranges widely across Europe, though the nature of his sources inevitably drives him to devote most attention to France, England, and Scandinavia. He examines the various parameters of demographic change—fertility, mortality, nuptiality, and migration—and attempts to make some generalizations. His starting point is the "methodological revolution" brought about by Fleury and Henry's reconstitution of families, that is, linking entries from the parish registers of baptisms, marriage, and burials kept by the European clergy (from as early as the sixteenth century in some countries). Usually carried out on a parish-by-parish basis the method permits the production of a number of demographic statistics. Thus, for example, infant mortality rates (the number of deaths occurring within the first year of life per 1,000 live births) can be produced by linking entries from baptism and burial registers. Birth intervals can be calculated once one has linked the births to the marriages that preceded them. Premarital conceptions can likewise be discovered by noting the date of the marriage and of the first birth. Flinn's statistical appendix draws together the findings of the currently published reconstitution studies as to infant mortality, birth intervals, premarital conception, age-specific marital fertility, illegitimate births, mean age of women at first marriage, mean age of women at the birth of last child, and survival rates at various ages.

On more substantive issues, Flinn agrees with those who believe that the rise in the rate of population growth in eighteenth-century Europe owed more to a fall in mortality than to a rise in fertility (p. 91). Even in England, where the "reconstitution" evidence indicates a fall in the age of women at first marriage (the only country where this occurs), he believes the fertility effects of the fall were more than offset by a fall in the mean age of mothers at the birth of the last child (p. 83).

While we must be grateful to Flinn for his painstaking trawl of recent studies in European demographic history, there are one or two aspects of his work which appear to me to be a trifle misleading. These all relate to his handling of the reconstitution studies. Flinn tells us that his intention was "to base generalisations solely on the demographic facts as they have been established by the new processes of measurement" and he talks of the "flood of reconstitution studies in the 1970s" (pp. 2, 5). The fact of the matter is, however, that many of his generalizations are not based on reconstitution studies, which in any case are comparatively few in number (for example, 16 in England). Furthermore, some of the findings of such studies have not stood the test of time. For example, one of the most famous of all reconstitution studies, that of the Devonshire parish of Colyton by E. A. Wrigley (1966) came to the startling suggestion that birth control within marriage was an important feature of late seventeenth-century England. It now appears that the finding was a statistical illusion. It receives no mention in the seminal work by E. A. Wrigley and Roger Schofield, The Population History of England, 1540–1870: A Reconstitution (1981), which given its size (804 pages) can hardly be an oversight. Indeed, the Wrigley and Schofield volume itself is based almost
entirely on the old-fashioned aggregative techniques (admittedly with the help of some sophisticated computer aids) and not the "new processes of measurement," so strongly emphasized by Flinn.

A further point of concern with Flinn's study is that his summary tables (which appear in the text) do not always adequately represent the data from which they are drawn (this appears in the statistical appendix). For instance, Table 3.1 (p. 28) purports to give the mean age of women at first marriage before 1750 in various countries. The table gives the "number of reconstitutions" on which each country's mean age is based. For England this number is 21. An examination of Table 7 in the appendix, however, reveals that there are only 15 genuine parish reconstitution studies. The rest of the information—covering the overwhelming majority of marriages—comes from a variety of other sources. For instance, the entry under "Yorkshire 1662–1714" gives a mean age of 23.8 years, the second youngest in the table. This is hardly surprising since the figures come from an analysis of 7,242 marriage licenses. To marry by license was not the normal method of entering that blessed state, more commonly used by wealthier members of the community, whose brides tended to be younger than average. Furthermore, these marriages were drawn from a large part of the North of England. The notional weighting of ten (that is, ten parishes) given by Flinn in order to put them together with figures from other parishes, and so produce a weighted average, would appear to be a substantial underestimate.

A similarly misleading impression is given in Table 3.3 (p. 31): age-specific marital fertility before 1750. Here the table gives the results of "14 reconstitutions" for England. That number is small enough in all conscience. A glance at Appendix 1 indicates, however, that only five studies are used. Four of these are of individual parishes (Terling, Colyton, Bottesford, and Shepshed); the fifth covers five parishes in the Arden district of Warwickshire. The figure 14 in the summary table is arrived at because all the studies gave age-specific marital fertility for different marriage cohorts. For example, for Terling we are given figures for 1550–1624, 1625–1699, and 1700–1744. Each of these cohorts has been counted as a separate reconstitution.

In defense of Flinn, one must add that he admits that "manifold" errors are likely to emerge from his crude averaging and that aggregative studies have made "valuable contributions." Nonetheless, the study deserves only two cheers: one for bringing together the statistical output of so many studies in such a small compass, and the other for the comprehensive bibliography. The third cheer must, however, be withheld until a satisfactory method of interpreting the findings is found.

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European Textile Printers in the Eighteenth Century: A Study of Peel and Oberkampf.
By S. D. Chapman and S. Chassagne. London: Heinemann Educational Books, The Pasold Fund, 1981. Pp. xii, 257. £15.

Here are two more or less parallel studies of great entrepreneurs and their enterprises in England and France. Chapman, who concerns himself with the Peel family, has done his usual masterful job in extracting the maximum information from the available sources, which in his case were rather sparse. Chassagne, seemingly more fortunate in the quantity and quality of the primary sources, deals with Oberkampf (like Peel, the head of a large cotton-printing enterprise). Whereas Peel came of native Lancashire stock, Oberkampf was an emigré from southern Germany who came to Paris on contract as a skilled operative and made himself independent shortly after arrival. The Oberkampfs are otherwise obscure, but the Peel family became, of course, famous in British politics.

Until 1759 there had been a ban on calico printing in France. In Great Britain, too,