The 1st century A.D. seems to have brought little change in the pattern, but an intensification of the use of the land is be-
tokened by an increase of sites attributable to the 2d and 3d
centuries. A string of new sites along the older river alluvium
to the east of Interamna is particularly noteworthy. This period
is followed by one for which there is at present no evidence
whatevver: the lack of sites producing pottery attributable to
the 4th to 6th centuries is total. This is perhaps the most
puzzling feature of current results, and efforts must be concen-
trated on deciding whether this gap denotes considerable de-
population of the area (despite the existence of at least one
5th-century inscription from Interamna itself, suggesting the
survival of a local aristocracy somewhere) or testifies to social
changes which rendered the majority of rural inhabitants
incapable of purchasing the finer types of imported pottery
which are most easily recognized.

Present evidence also shows a total lack of recognizable sites
of early medieval date. This is, however, less surprising, since
insecurity might well have driven the valley inhabitants back to
occupy more defensible points even before the phenomenon of
regular "incastellamento," usually dated to the 9th century. Special
efforts next season will be made to visit specific sites mentioned
in documents of the Mt. Cassino archives and to examine areas
which might have attracted settlement in times of insecurity.
Some of the side valleys are known to have served as places of
refuge as late as World War II. Attention will also be given to
the establishment of criteria for the dating of the local types of
coarse pottery, a tradition which unfortunately seems to have
changed little over the centuries.

It has already become clear that this region is one in which
the pattern of rural settlement is particularly susceptible to the
changes brought about by the presence or absence of a central
authority strong enough to create peaceful conditions. At the
same time, the absence of 4th-century evidence suggests that
this was not necessarily the only factor involved. It will be
necessary to extend the survey over a still greater variety of
landform types in order to estimate the role of topography and
soil conditions. Both the recovery and the analysis of the evi-
dence (including the medieval documentary sources) present a
number of challenges, and the results appear likely to offer an
important contribution to our appreciation of regional varia-
tions within the Italian peninsula.

Reconstructing Historical Communities
by Computer

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Recent work by anthropologists on villages in Japan, China,
Switzerland, Sicily, and elsewhere has shown the way in which
series of historical data often enable us to answer questions
previously beyond the reach of anthropology. A current project
financed by the Social Science Research Council (U.K.) and
located in the Department of Social Anthropology at Cambridge
University is attempting similar work. The records consist of
all the surviving documents for a parish in Essex (population
1,000) and one in Cumbria (population approx. 2,500) over the
period 1400–1750. Wills, parish registers, manor court rolls, and
ecclesiastical and civil court records survive in great quantities.
Their quality and nature have been described in a recent work
by Macfarlane, Harrison, and Jardine (1978). This book ex-
plains the method by which these records are broken down into
dates and reassembled manually, making it possible to ask
a large range of questions of the great mass of material. Along-
side the manual analysis, we have been designing a computer-
ized system for dealing with the data. We have developed a
system for putting in uncoded and unstructured complex data in
their original form and word order. The system represents the
semantic structure of the source document as a network
each node of which is associated with source text and repre-
sented by one of a number of categories. The 14 categories we
use have been found to be complete for our purposes and reflect
our interests, but they are not necessarily those that would be
required by others with differing interests. The links in the net-
work have no information associated with them; they represent
only the directions of the relations between nodes. A system
of nested brackets around elements of the text breaks the data
down into this structure. The text within each bracket is
associated with a particular node, while the bracket shape
refers to the direction of the link.

The material in this form is stored within a relational data-
base which has been specifically developed for the project. In
conjunction with this we have a specially designed query
language which provides a procedure-oriented interface. This
system is both powerful and portable and, by use of relational
algebra, will allow complex queries to be asked of the data. We
considered it important to have a language which would allow
the user to write complex and sophisticated queries without
necessarily having a great knowledge of computing. We also
found that the development of this powerful language was a
prerequisite for any attempt to link records within the com-
puter. In the next two years we hope to evaluate and further
refine the language and query the data. We also hope to attempt
at least partial automatic record linkage. Documentation of
this will also be undertaken during this period. Eventually we
hope to interface the system to one of the standard statistical
packages such as SPSS. We hope thus to create a data-proces-
sing package for the social sciences which will enable historians
and anthropologists to avoid the constraints of numerical cod-
ing and fixed format input characteristic of other packages.

It is clear that one cannot wait for the completion of a project
such as this before one starts to ask or answer questions. We
have therefore begun to interrogate what is perhaps the most
complete set of documents ever assembled about two small
places over such a long period. With this material we are in a
position to test many of the general theories concerning the
nature of the supposed transition from feudalism to capitalism
of the first industrial nation. We are able to test Marxist and
other models of social change. The preliminary results have
been very surprising. They suggest that the framework which
has been developed during the last 40 years by sociologists and
historians and, to a certain extent, anthropologists to explain
the transition to the "modern" world is both crude and, in
many respects, mistaken. This suggestion has been developed
at some length in the first substantive product of our research,
Macfarlane's (1978) The Origins of English Individualism,
which challenges the views not only of Marx, Weber, and other
major sociologists, but also of many of the leading contemporary
historians. Not only does it suggest that many of the central
features of sociological thought are incorrect, but it calls into
question a number of the grander speculations of anthropolo-
gists (for example, those of Louis Dumont in Homo hierarchicus
and From Mandeville to Marx) based on inaccurate historical
accounts.

The surprising results come from making a minute analysis
of landowning patterns, rates of social and geographical mobi-

cies between predictions and the results of detailed analysis of the material reinforce and expand recent work in historical demography. This work has challenged many of the largely unexamined assumptions about the past, particularly in relation to the nature of the family and marriage. It appears that Englishmen at least as early as the 15th century were far more mobile, individualistic, and market-oriented than we hitherto supposed. In fact, it is difficult to find any real resemblances to the traditional peasant societies described by anthropologists for other parts of the world as far back as the detailed English records go, that is, to the 13th century. These are conclusions which one cannot base entirely on the local records which are being examined in this project, but without the very detailed analysis of many thousands of interactions and transactions shown by overlapping documents it would have been impossible to arrive at them. It is clear that in order to interpret the material which is currently being computerized, a far better predictive framework will have to be devised. It will also be useful to have other sets of data from other civilizations, held in a similar data structure, with which to compare our material. Only then will it finally be possible to decide how deviant the English case is. At the present all we know is that there is a strong presumption that the English had ceased being a “peasantry” at least 200 years too early for conventional accounts. England’s premature industrialization and “modernization” and the odd effects of English colonization in various parts of the world, including New England, are partly explained by this anomaly.

References Cited


A FIELD GUIDE TO SIGN LANGUAGE RESEARCH

by WILLIAM STOKOE and ROLF KUSCHEL

FOR the field researcher who encounters a sign language used for everyday interaction—

FOR the curious student who wants to supplement vocabulary lists learned in the classroom with the give and take of real language—

This FIELD GUIDE covers basic issues, from elicitation strategies and equipment choice to the often neglected ethical questions, and concludes with suggestions for getting the most from data and reports.

The emphasis is ANTHROPOLOGICAL. The culture as well as the language of the signers is kept in the center of authors’ and readers’ attention.

Kuschel’s field experience in Polynesia ensures that the advice in the GUIDE has been tested in practice. Stokoe’s long connection with U.S. and other Deaf Communities broadens the GUIDE’s base.


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