David Sabean:
“Genealogy and Social History”

in: Eric Hounshell, Ruth Amstutz (eds.):

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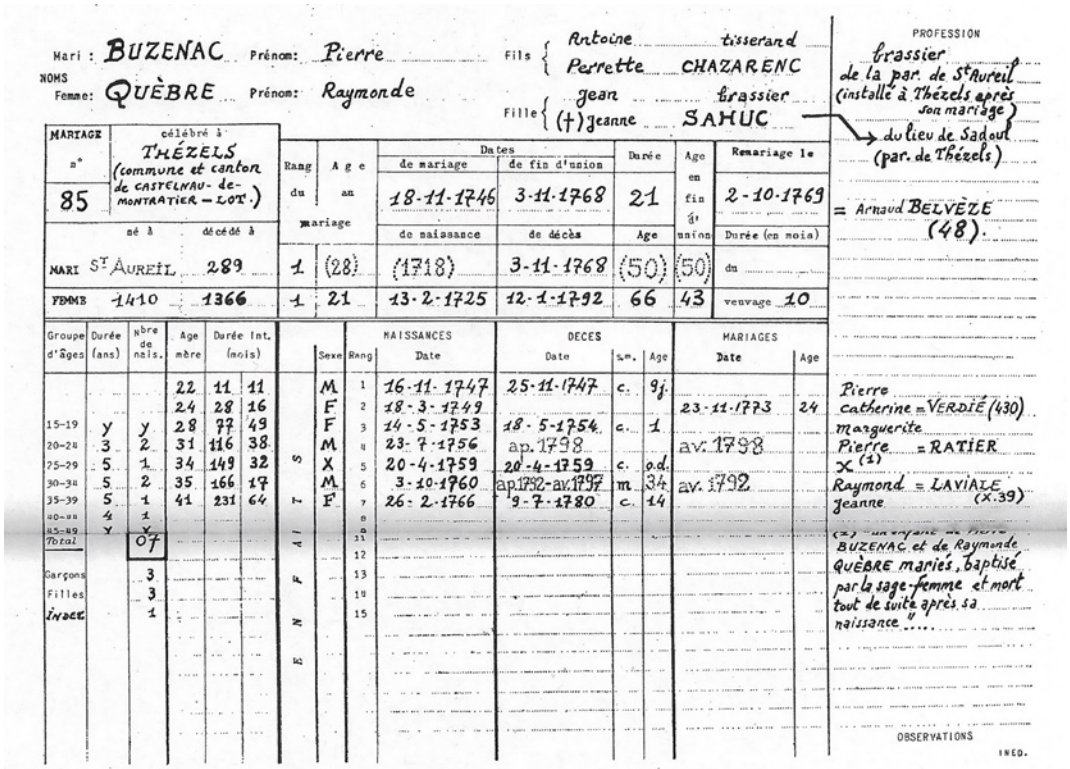
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GENEALOGY AND SOCIAL HISTORY Roots of a Method

Are research practices destined to reproduce the cultural biases of their wielders, or can they also be tools for overcoming biases such as Eurocentrism and historical anachronism?[1] When techniques wander from one scientific field to another, do their presuppositions and biases travel with them? Especially after the critique of genealogical practices in social anthropology, these are questions we can pose to the corpus of social history built in part on those methods.[2]

Genealogical practices in the field of social history have several roots. One crucial source came from the French Institute for the Study of Demography (INED) and especially Louis Henry (1911-1991), who pioneered what came to be known as "family reconstitution." Henry popularized the "richness" of archived parish registers through a series of essays, some aimed at historians associated with the Annales school, and a handbook, written together with Michel Fleury, *Des registres paroissiaux à l'histoire de la population: Manuel de dépouillement et d'exploitation de l'état civil ancien* (1956).[3] While Henry found some genealogical research useful for historical demographic research – notably in his 1956 study of Genevan families – he was interested in them as sources of data for the reconstitution of families and demographic analysis, not as insight into kinship structures or practices.[4] But the genealogical method – in its classic statement by W.H.R Rivers from 1910, the second source for social historians – aimed at linking data between and among families and households and redacting all kinds of relational information to reconstruct the social fields in which families developed.[5] Social history developed both of these methods in a fruitful effort to exploit both published and archival materials in innovative ways.



Fiche de famille remplie. Format 21 × 27

COMMENTAIRE : *Cette fiche, en partie imaginaire, rassemble divers cas. Y figurent, les inscriptions faites lors de l'établissement de la fiche et les résultats des calculs préliminaires à l'exploitation (Ch. IV). Les renseignements provisoires et les résultats approximatifs sont au crayon (traits pointillés).*

La mention YY dans les colonnes de gauche indique que la femme est hors observation dans tout le groupe d'âges considéré (mariage postérieur, fin d'union antérieure).

Trois enfants se sont mariés : Catherine dans la paroisse — une fiche, nº 430, a été établie pour la famille du premier type formée par ce mariage — Pierre et Raymond hors de la paroisse.

L'existence du mariage de Pierre n'est connue que par le décès de sa femme; il n'y a pas eu, de ce mariage, d'enfant baptisé dans la paroisse; on n'a pas établi de fiche de famille.

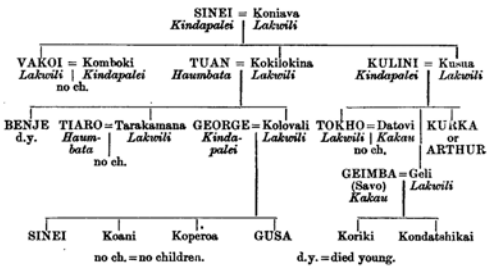
Raymond a eu un enfant baptisé dans la paroisse en 1792; on a établi pour la famille du second type formée par le mariage de Raymond une fiche, nº X 39. La femme, décédée en 1797, était déjà veuve. Raymond est donc mort entre 1792 et 1797. On a inscrit, au crayon, son âge au milieu de la période, considéré comme âge approximatif au décès.

"Completed family form", in: Michael Fleury, Louis Henry: *Des registres paroissiaux à l'histoire de la population: Manuel de dépouillement et d'exploitation de l'état civil ancien,* Paris: Institut national d'études démographiques (1956), pp. 68-69.

"This form, which is partly imaginary, brings together various cases." Fleury and Henry provided examples of forms to use for noting down the data extracted from parish records in a standardized way suitable to compilation: baptism, marriage, burial, and here the offspring of marital pairs. Social facts such as occupation were included only to identify individuals in parish or civil registers.

The genealogical method consolidated by Rivers aimed to standardize the collection of genealogical data in a way that would allow anthropologists to figure out how natives actually constructed relationships and would offer a schema to compare societies with each other. Aside from collecting data on relatedness, Rivers called for the collection of all social facts about individuals – occupation, place of origin, territorial attachment, clans, and any other "facts" of social significance. In this way, genealogical research would reveal not only the system of relationships and the regulation of marriage in a given society but also other

aspects interesting to social historians such as the inheritance of property, demographic patterns, and, further, the function of relatives in ceremony, magic, and religion and more generally the duties and privileges of kin. Also of relevance eventually to historians: Rivers thought the genealogical method could add time depth, allowing the researcher to get back before "the effects of European influence" and to chronicle change. And finally, Rivers thought the genealogy should always be ready at hand when investigating any social transaction, exchange, drama, or dispute: did the event map out onto the genealogical diagram?



W.H.R. Rivers: "The Genealogical Method of Anthropological Inquiry", in: *The Sociological Review* 3/1 (1910), pp. 1-12, p. 1.

"[S]mall pedigree [...] given as a sample" by Rivers, collected in Guadalcanar in the East Solomon Islands from a single informant, "Kurka or Arthur." Rivers emphasized that "A most important feature of the method is to record as far as possible the social conditions of each person included in the pedigree."

W.H.R. Rivers: "The Genealogical Method of Anthropological Inquiry", in: *The Sociological Review* 3/1 (1910), pp. 1-12, pp. 1-2.

The following list of terms of relationship should be obtained:

Father	\ son
Mother	∫ daughter
Elder brother (m.s.)	younger brother (m.s.)
Elder brother (w.s.)	younger sister (m.s.)
Elder sister (m.s.)	younger brother (w.s.)
Elder sister (w.s.)	younger sister (w.s.)
Father's brother	brother's child (m.s.)
Father's brother's wife	husband's brother's child
Father's brother's child	
Father's sister	brother's child (w.s.)
Father's sister's husband	wife's brother's child
Father's sister's child	
Mother's brother	sister's child (m.s.)
Mother's brother's wife	husband's sister's child
Mother's brother's child	
Mother's sister	sister's child (w.s.)
Mother's sister's husband	wife's sister's child
Mother's sister's child	
Father's father	son's child (m.s.)
Father's mother	son's child (w.s.)
Mother's father	daughter's child (m.s.)
Mother's mother	daughter's child (w.s.)
Husband	wife
Wife's father	daughter's husband (m.s.)

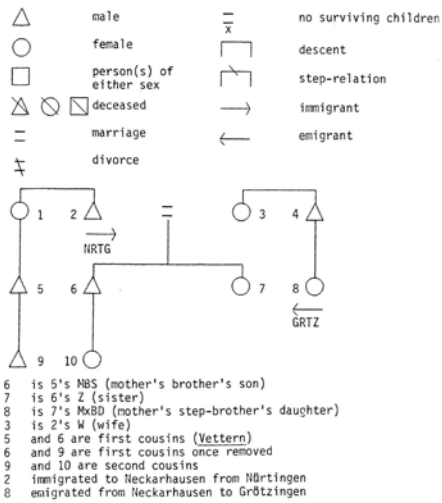
W.H.R. Rivers: "The Genealogical Method of Anthropological Inquiry", in: *The Sociological Review* 3/1 (1910), pp. 1-12, p. 4.

Excerpt from list of terms of relationship to be obtained.

GENEALOGY AND SOCIAL HISTORY
A Method Redeployed

In the early post-WWII decades, social historians explored ways that demography could reshape our understanding of the past. With an archive of sufficient depth for the village of Neckarhausen in Württemberg, Germany, my own approach, in short, was to synthesize the practices of Louis Henry for extracting and organizing data from historical records with the "genealogical method" of W.H.R. Rivers. Here, genealogical diagrams played a crucial role as instruments not only for organizing data but for revealing patterns that were otherwise not visible to either the "naked eye" of the historian or even, perhaps, to the actors themselves.

On reading kinship diagrams



David Warren Sabean: *Kinship in Neckarhausen, 1700–1870,* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press (1997), p. xvii.

The kinship diagram, ubiquitous in anthropology, required a guide for the target audience of historians for *Kinship in Neckarhausen* in the 1990s. Ironically, the user guide contained an error: there should be a cross on the line connecting 3 and 4 to designate a step-relation, so that in the explanation below the diagram, 8 is 7's mother's step-brother's daughter.

Initially, I reconstructed five ten-year cohorts forty years apart. For each cohort, I began with ten marriages and added all their siblings and all previous and subsequent marriages. Each expanded cohort offered 35–40 couples who had at least one child to study. For each couple, I generated a genealogy back three generations to great grandparents and then downwards through all of their children to the generation following the initial couple (five generations altogether). In order to take in relatives by marriage, I went out to siblings of marital partners of "ego's" siblings, their marital partners, and their siblings and marital partners. Generating a long and wide kinship universe for selected couples meant that the complete set of genealogies included marriages for twenty years or more before and after an initial decade.

Following Rivers's lead, I could then refer to a set of genealogies in hand whenever anyone in my sample showed up in court or property records: cursed someone out, offered testimony, sold a field, mortgaged a house, worked for a wage, lent money, stood as a godparent. My basic question was whether kinship ties – by blood or by marriage – were used in any way. Deployed in this way and to answer this question, a genealogy was an instrument to map how people act. It in no way implied a particular meaning or recognized relation for any connection on the genealogical grid. Indeed, I operated with the "null hypothesis" that any two people on the diagram did not understand themselves to be related or acted in any particular way because they were related. Information gathered in this manner could be used to probe personal histories or complex events or form the basis for statistical correlations or marking repeated patterns of behavior.

Genealogical diagrams provided a tool for exploring kinship behaviors in Neckarhausen,

without the assumption in the first instance that there were any or that they took any particular shape. Take, for example, the question of whether people sought out kin to marry, and if so, what kind. Around 1700, spouses never brought equal property to a marriage: one spouse was usually much wealthier than the other, either the husband or the wife. Around 1800, spouses brought almost exactly the same amounts of property. And, as it turns out, in these two different models of property distribution, there were two quite different kinds of marriage structures.

Between 1700 and 1740, there were no marriages with anyone connected by blood – no first, second, or third cousins; and no marriages in which the couple had the same surname. But there were repeated alliances of two types. One type to be found repeatedly was marriage between two people who were first cousins to each other (only through fathers) with two siblings. The other type involved a circle of three or four households: a marriage took place between two households, A and B, and then between B and C, with a further one between C and A. This systematic alliance system only became visible through genealogical diagrams. My assumption has been that the patterns and forms that I elicited resulted from a myriad of practical decisions and that the actors themselves may not have been able to give an account of the structures.

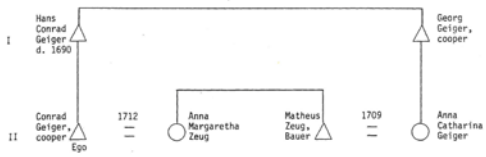


Figure 5.4

David Warren Sabean: *Kinship in Neckarhausen, 1700–1870,* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press (1997), p. 111.

Through diagrammatic representation of the 1700-1709 cohort, two patterns of marital alliance emerged. Figure 5.4, type 1, offers an instance where the Zeug siblings married the Geiger cousins. In the eighteenth century, whenever cousins entered into such an alliance, they were always "agnatic" cousins (patrilateral parallel first cousins). This offered unexpected hints of patrilineal elements in a totally bi-lateral, partible system of property devolution, which posed significantly new questions to be followed up.

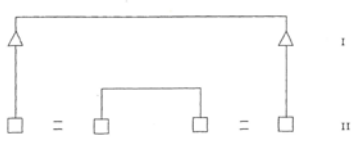


Figure 5.19

David Warren Sabean: *Kinship in Neckarhausen, 1700–1870,* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press (1997), p. 123.

With one exception, all of the examples considered for the cohort 1700–09 conformed to a small set of variations. Figure 5.19 demonstrates both the descent of the cousins from brothers and the possibility of positioning genders in different permutations in generation II. Depending on whether parents in generation I were alive, the marriage which concluded the link could network three or four houses together. This pattern doubled consanguineal ties (brothers in generation I) with affinal ties in generation II.

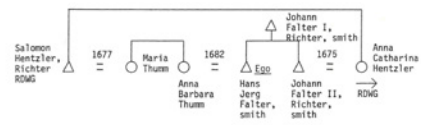


Figure 5.14

David Warren Sabean: *Kinship in Neckarhausen, 1700–1870,* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press (1997), p. 119.

Another diagram from the 1700–1709 cohort, Figure 5.14, describes a second type of marital alliance, one between three houses: Hentzler (in the village Neckarhausen and the hamlet Raidwangen, both in the Neckarhausen parish), Falter, and Thumm. Usually, such networks were ordered hierarchically, with one male relatively rich or powerful – in this instance, father and son (successor) Johann Falter were lifetime members of the village court (*Richter*).



Figure 5.20

David Warren Sabean: *Kinship in Neckarhausen, 1700–1870,* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press (1997), p. 123.

Figure 5.20 illustrates linkages between three households through affinal ties (wife's brother, sister's husband, brother's wife's brother, sister's husband's brother, wife's sister's husband). Here also the gender possibilities are open. The marriage that forges the last link reinforces an earlier exchange between two sibling groups with a third sibling group already allied to the original set. These forms allowed houses or families to ally with each other through marital ties, avoiding forbidden consanguineal marriages. Although the diagrams abstract from time, they initiate research into strategies for constructing networks over several years.

From the period 1800–1840 (expanded from the cohort 1820–29), we find a completely different structure to alliance with the emergence of consanguineal ties and the disappearance of affinal ties of the older type. Now, emerging through the genealogical diagrams, were "brother-sister exchanges," whereby two siblings married two siblings, rather than linkages through three or more households. And there were a significant number of marriages with the deceased spouse's consanguineal kin, particularly with the deceased wife's sister – legally impossible a hundred years earlier. But the big innovation was with first and second and even third cousin marriage. And such alliances bringing two lines together were frequently repeated over several generations, reflecting strategies for exercising influence, consolidating networks, and managing wealth.

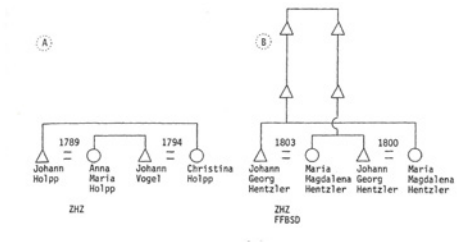


Figure 15.4

David Warren Sabean: *Kinship in Neckarhausen, 1700–1870,* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press (1997), p. 277.

Figure 15.4 offers two instances of brother-sister exchange in the 1820–1829 cohort. In the left-hand example Johann Holpp married Anna Maria, née Vogel in 1789, and that marriage was followed five years later with the marriage of their siblings. In the right-hand example we find two characteristic forms combined: second cousins and brother-sister exchange.



Figure 15.5

David Warren Sabean: *Kinship in Neckarhausen, 1700–1870,* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press (1997), p. 277.

Figure 15.5, also from the 1820–1829 cohort, illustrates the marriage of a man with his deceased wife's sister, a marriage possibility only legal in Württemberg from 1797. Beginning in the late eighteenth century and proliferating in the nineteenth century, new forms of endogamy among kin together with class endogamy came to mark marriage strategies in Neckarhausen.

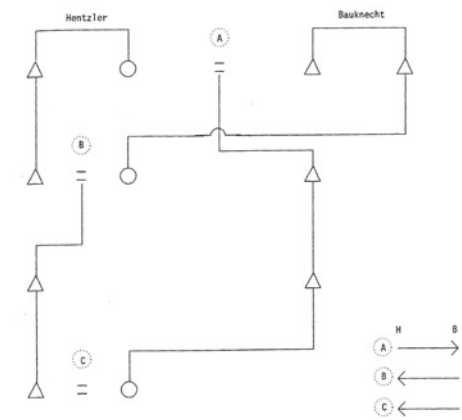


Figure 12.5

David Warren Sabean: *Kinship in Neckarhausen, 1700–1870,* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press (1997), p. 225.

Figure 12.5 follows marriages between two substantial farm families, the Hentzlers and Bauknechts, over four generations. This extracts one set of marriages from a much more complicated diagram of many marriages between the two patrilines. The discussion in the book explains the use of "patrilines" in this context. In this example, the first union took place in 1724 (A) and was followed by a second in 1758 (B). Daniel Hentzler married the daughter of his paternal aunt's brother-in-law. This allowed the two lines to ally a second time without violating still considerable resistance against cousin marriage. Two generations later in 1827 (C) Johann David Hentzler married Anna Maria Bauknecht, related to him as a second cousin and twice over as a fourth cousin (both illustrated here).

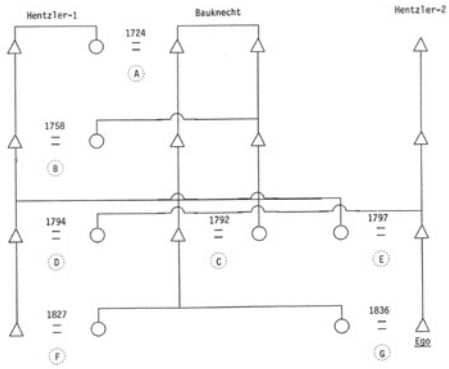


Figure 12.6

David Warren Sabean: *Kinship in Neckarhausen, 1700–1870,* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press (1997), p. 225.

Figure 12.6 offers another extract from the more complex set of exchanges between the two lines over several generations, showing various permutations of affinal and consanguineal unions from 1724 to 1836.

For me, when interpreting these diagrams, it was important not to read any particular marriage union as a single sentence but to take the whole set of marriages from a sibling set or a lineage as a paragraph, so to speak. It is then that one can open up the broader strategies and the characteristic mechanisms for constructing alliances among families over many generations. Marriage unions are only part of the picture, the framework of the system, or to take another metaphor, the hard-wiring. Such genealogies allow the researcher to study property devolution, land sales, political alliances, patronage, many forms of dependence, class dynamics, legal services, and all the other reciprocities that cement social relations.
One of the ironies in working with genealogies and with the notion of "kinship" derives from the fact that such analysis was developed for working with "primitive" societies or colonized subjects. The toolkit anthropologists developed to differentiate the West from the Rest turns out to offer supple instruments for reversing the gaze and discovering new things about ourselves. All along we were living kinship.

Notes

1 This text is based on a paper given by David Sabean at The Social History Seminar in Siggen, Germany, July 14, 2016 and has been adapted for this publication with the assistance of Eric Hounshell.
2 For the critique, see David Schneider: *A Critique of the Study of Kinship,* Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press (1984); Mary Bouquet: *Reclaiming English Kinship: Portuguese Refractions of British Kinship Theory,* Manchester: Manchester University Press (1993); Mary Bouquet: "Family Trees and Their Affinities: The Visual Imperative of the Genealogical Diagram", in: *The Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute* 2/1 (1996), pp. 43-66.
3 Michael Fleury, Louis Henry: *Des registres paroissiaux à l'histoire de la population: Manuel de dépouillement et d'exploitation de l'état civil ancien,* Paris: Institut national d'études démographiques (1956).
4 Louis Henry: *Anciennes Familles Genevoises: Étude démographique: XVIe-XXe siècle,* Paris: Presses universitaires de France (1956) (= Travaux et Documents 26), pp. 13-24.
5 W.H.R. Rivers: "The Genealogical Method of Anthropological Inquiry", in: *The Sociological Review* 3/1 (1910), pp. 1-12.

Further Readings

Gérard Delille: *Famille et propriété dans le royaume de Naples (XVe-XIXe siècle),* Rome: Ecole française de Rome (1985).

Sandro Guzzi-Heeb: *Passions alpines: sexualité et pouvoirs dans les montagnes suisses (1700-1900),* Rennes: Presses universitaires de Rennes (2014).

Michel Nassiet: *Parenté, noblesse et Etats dynastiques: XVe-XVIe siècles,* Paris: Editions de l'Ecole des hautes études en sciences sociales (2000).