

Summaries of articles

A differential social demography : keys for a self-regulating system of Ancien Régime rural populations

B. DEROUET

Family reconstitution in four villages of XVIIIth century Thimerais and a confrontation of demographic data with socio-economic information provided by many tallage rolls, have enabled us to attempt a differential social demography. It seems that the essential difference between the demography of the day labourers and that of the husbandmen lies not so much in the specific rate (fertility, mortality, marriage rate) of each social category as in a clear opposition between these demographies with regard to their respective ability to vary according to the socio-economic situation and the population level. It is the day labourers' demography which, from one place to another, changes most and which thus plays the role of regulator of disequilibrium.

The correlation of these demographic variations with the evolution of social structures and the economy in the XVIIIth century ultimately suggests a comprehensive model of a self-regulating system for the rural populations of the Ancien Régime. This model makes it possible to account both for the interaction between demographic and socio-economic phenomena within an overall structure, and for the fact that this structure is necessarily encompassed within a cyclical overall situation.

Alphabetization and school in the XIXth century : a psycho-pedagogical approach to historical documents

J. HÉBRARD

The work of F. Furet and J. Ozouf has definitively established that the history of literacy and the history of education in France are not connected. However psycho-pedagogical approach to the documents of the school from the second half of the XIXth century demonstrate that even though the literacy of the French population was largely achieved, its qualitative extension had, in large measure, yet to be accomplished. Knowing how to read and write implies also knowing how to organize daily knowledge according to the taxonomy which writing makes possible : making tables, lists, organizing a page constitute specific cultural practices in the sphere of writing. Even if the schools, under the Second Empire and the Third republic, continued to maintain a rather clumsy discourse on the social benefits of knowing how to read, it unknowingly prepared the ground — in the notebook and in the blackboard — for the process of acculturation necessary for access to literacy of a modern type over and above the simple culture of a signature or of the familiarity with well known texts.

The art of memory and the limits of oral history

F. RAPHAËL

The task of collecting and interpreting the oral archives of two minority cultures — Jews in rural Alsace and Jews from a southern Algerian oasis resettled in Eastern France — lead the author to consider some of the epistemological problems inherent in this type of research, such as an excessive randomness in the choice of informants, the disorderliness of the data collected and the very nature of the anthropological relationship. Oral history must take into account the “art” of memory, which selects from the past according to the demands of the present, which maintains the myth of a ‘lost’ harmonious and stable society, and which marks landscapes and bodies with attitudes and myths referring to the group’s normative values. An oral history survey can be fully meaningful only when one goes beyond describing what is felt and experienced and one extracts the organising logic and the normative code specific to each culture.

**In search of a collective memory :
the retired metal-workers of Givors**

Y. LEQUIN and J. MÉTRAL

Givors is a small town, just south of Lyon, which grew during the first industrial revolution and is now experiencing an economic crisis. The primary aim of this survey of the memory of the metal-workers of Givors was simply to complement a quantitative approach to geographic and social mobility. The metal-workers’ discourse is centred on their apprenticeship, a crucial period, as well as on a few other important episodes, and proceeds in a series of images prompted by mnemonic props (place-names, nicknames, events, etc.) which play on their sensitivity. The group’s homogeneity appears more clearly in the values which emerge from work-life and which still need to be examined more closely. Above all, it was the very act of the survey itself, which generated a snowball reaction, leading from one person to another, which made it possible to distinguish over and above the specificity of personal memories, a common and a collective memory. If the former can be defined in terms of the frequency of topics (for which it is difficult to assess the exact part played by the social and ideological frameworks), the latter arises from the very approach of the overlapping interviews through which the group emerges by telling its own story in several voices which are not necessarily in agreement.

**Industrial heritage and ethnological heritage :
the northern cultural area (north of France and Belgium)**

M. GILLET

A cross-disciplinary and international group of the Lille Centre Interuniversitaire de recherches en Sciences Humaines is conducting a survey on “Social changes, ways of life and collective representations in northern France and in Belgium”. It places particular emphasis on the analysis of sociability, ie., the network of relationships which are an important aspect of the region’s ethnological heritage, since these bear witness to modes of organisation and ways of functioning of the social groups and of their collective representations. The current survey has so far based itself mainly on the analysis of open-ended interviews undertaken in three areas in France (Gravelines, Halluin, Sallaumines) and three comparable areas in Belgium (Poperinghe, Andrimont and Cuesmes).

SUMMARIES OF ARTICLES

A regional research project on ethno-texts

Ph. JOUTARD

This article is a report of a research project on ethno-texts from south-western France. It consists of a survey of the oral culture of a community and of written documents preserving traces of this oral culture. The group has given precedence to the study of a limited geographical area ; it considered informants primarily as representative of their community ; it made no attempts to collect life histories ; it preferred semi-directed interviews to the constraints of the questionnaire. Confronting these data with the written documents makes it possible to measure the gap between the reality of the past and memories of it, and to note lapses of memory and silences. The primary aim is not to describe the old ways of life of a community, but to bring out the discourse about itself and to understand how its memory works.

From Herodotus to the tape recorder : oral sources and oral archives

D. ARON-SCHNAPPER and D. HANET

As more and more oral surveys are carried out, it is important to distinguish between three undertakings which differ in their scientific status : that of the archivists, who, like American oral historians, collect, classify and preserve oral documents ; that of the historians, sociologists or political scientists, who analyse and interpret the oral accounts collected by themselves or by others ; and lastly, that of the oral-archivists, who prepares oral documents for the historians of the future. This latter task can and should be rigorous and systematic. It must be understood that although oral archives are new documents, valuable for the study of certain populations and aspects of social reality, they do not create a new history.