REVIEW ARTICLE

Microhistory as Universal History

Marion W. Gray

Power in the Blood: Popular Culture and Village Discourse in Early Modern Germany. By David Warren Sabean. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. 1984. Pp. x + 250. $19.95. ISBN 0–521–34778–5.

Property, Production, and Family in Neckarhausen, 1700–1870. By David Warren Sabean. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. 1990. Pp. xxv + 511. Cloth $95.00. ISBN 0–521–38538–5. Paper $25.95. ISBN 0–521–38692–6.

Kinship in Neckarhausen, 1700–1870. By David Warren Sabean. Cambridge University Press. 1998. Pp. xxviii + 628. Cloth $80.00. ISBN 0–521–58381–0. Paper $28.95. ISBN 0–521–58657–7.

A student in one of my reading seminars questioned whether it was an efficient use of the class's time to read and discuss an entire book devoted to "a mere single village," given that the seminar dealt with broad themes in European history. The book in question was David Warren Sabean's *Property, Production, and Family in Neckarhausen*, a study of a Württemberg village that is now incorporated into the city of Nürtingen. Hopefully the student is wiser today, understanding that Sabean's analysis of one village contains implications that could lead historians to new understandings of Europe's transformation from agrarian communalism to a modern, class-based society. Sabean's three decades of research on the changing lives and culture of Neckarhausen's inhabitants reveal patterns that by far transcend the village. He does not let the reader forget, however, that this village, like any other, had unique qualities that belonged to it alone.

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Sabean is one of a growing number of historians who have been engaged in a reinterpretation of rural society of German-speaking Europe. Researchers have been at work since the 1970s to rewrite the history of Germany's rural population, applying techniques that place the historical actors — peasants, halfholders, cottagers, artisans, day laborers, servants and maids — at the center of the stage. This has led to intensive microhistorical analysis and to the adoption of methodologies employed in diverse disciplines, especially anthropology.[1]

Scholars conducting the new rural historical research have rejected emphatically the normative sources on which agricultural historians of earlier generations based their conclusions, insisting instead on the worth of empirical evidence. Where they have been unable to find written records penned by the villagers, they have deconstructed the documents of political, judicial, and religious authorities, analyzing them as products of discourse between actors who held power (*Herrschaft*) and those who stood below them but possessed strength through their own traditions, institutions, and initiatives. Recent research has emphasized the dialectical environments of community and authority. The new rural social history affirms that peasants and other village inhabitants had much greater roles than previously understood in shaping their own worlds, both through conscious strategies and through unconscious reactions to changing conditions.

Two extensive projects in this endeavor each involved multiple researchers working with the support of the Max-Planck-Gesellschaft. In the 1970s, Peter Kriedte, Hans Medick, and Jürgen Schlumbohm of the Max-Planck-Institut für Geschichte in Göttingen set out as a team to redefine the changes in rural life brought about by "protoindustrialization," preindustrial manufacture in the countryside. After a quarter of a century, they have documented wide-ranging transformations in individual, household, village, and small-town culture in areas where preindustrial production profoundly changed the material conditions of life.[2] While this research is sometimes seen as a reinterpretation of the origins of the Industrial Revolution, it is indeed a history of rural life in a profoundly changing context.

1. Examples of the rich interdisciplinary research in rural history can be found in the journal *Historische Anthropologie: Kultur, Gesellschaft, Alltag* founded in 1992 and edited by Ludolf Kuchenbuch and Regina Schulte.

2. Their well-known exploratory study that provided the intellectual framework for their empirical research is Peter Kriedte, Hans Medick, and Jürgen Schlumbohm, *Industrialisierung vor der Industrialisierung: Gewerbliche Warenproduktion auf dem Land in der Formationsperiode des Kapitalismus* Veröffentlichung des Max-Planck-Instituts für Geschichte, vol. 53 (Göttingen, 1977). Translated by Beate Schempp under the title of *Industrialization Before Industrialization: Rural Industry in the Genesis of Capitalism* (Cambridge, 1981). The team's empirical studies include Peter Kriedte, *Eine Stadt am seidenen Faden: Haushalt, Hausindustrie und soziale Bewegung in Krefeld in der Mitte des 19. Jahrhunderts,* Veröffentlichungen des Max-Planck-Instituts für Geschichte, vol. 97 (Göttingen, 1991); Jürgen Schlumbohm, *Lebensläufe, Familien, Höfe: Die Bauern und Heuerleute des Osnabrückischen Kirchspiels*

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During the 1990s the Arbeitsgruppe Ostelbische Gutsherrschaft als sozialhistorisches Phänomen at the University of Potsdam, consisting of a team of scholars under the directorship of Jan Peters, reexamined the social practice and meaning of *Gutsherrschaft*. The Max-Planck-Geselschaft also supported this energetic endeavor to bring together research traditions in rural history as practiced in the former German Democratic Republic with those of the Federal Republic. Through individual and collective efforts, the researchers of the Arbeitsgruppe have produced anthropological-historical studies reassessing, among other things, the meaning of *Herrschaft* in the old regime. They have found, as William Hagen did in the eighties,[3] that even the society of large estates east of the Elbe was shaped by dynamic, changing relationships between villagers and authorities. Indeed under the harsh conditions of *Gutsherrschaft*, the peasants controlled their own destinies far more than previously assumed.[4]

In addition, a generation of scholars working more or less independently of one another has also been reassessing the rural history of early modern Germany from microhistorical-anthropological perspectives.[5] As early as the

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Belm in proto-industrieller Zeit, 1650–1860, Veröffentlichungen des Max-Planck-Instituts für Geschichte, vol. 110 (Göttingen, 1994); and Hans Medick, *Weben und Überleben in Laichingen 1650–1900: Lokalgeschichte als allgemeine Geschichte*, Veröffentlichungen des Max-Planck-Instituts für Geschichte, vol. 126 (Göttingen, 1996).

3. William W. Hagen, "Working for the Junker: The Standard of Living of Manorial Laborers in Brandenburg," *Journal of Modern History* 58 (1986): 143–58; William W. Hagen, "The Junker's Faithless Servants: Peasant Insubordination and the Breakdown of Serfdom in Brandenburg-Prussia," in *The German Peasantry: Conflict and Community in Rural Society from the Eighteenth to the Twentieth Centuries*, ed. Richard J. Evans and W. R. Lee (New York, 1986), 71–101.

4. Jan Peters, ed., *Gutsherrschaft als soziales Modell: Vergleichende Betrachtungen zur Funktionsweise frühneuzeitlicher Agrargesellschaften, Historische Zeitschrift*, Beiheft Neue Folge 18 (Munich, 1995); Jan Peters, ed., *Gutsherrschaften im europäischen Vergleich* (Berlin, 1997); Jan Peters and Barbara Krug-Richter, eds., *Konflikt und Kontrolle in Gutsherrschaftsgesellschaften: Über Resistenz und Herrschaftsverhalten in ländlichen Sozialgebilden der Frühen Neuzeit*, Veröffentlichungen des Max-Planck-Instituts für Geschichte, vol. 120 (Göttingen, 1995). Several studies arising from this endeavor will be published in the near future. Look for works by Martina Schattkowsky, Axel Lubinski, Thomas Rudert, Silke Lesemann, Heinrich Kaak, Jan Klussmann, and Hartmut Zückert. The group itself, intended as a means of academic transition following German reunification, was formally disbanded in 2000, although its members are completing their projects. For useful perspectives on microhistorical scholarship see Heinrich Kaak, "Brandenburgische Bauern im 18. Jahrhundert: Sozialgeschichtliche Untersuchungen in mikrohistorischer Perspektive," in *Leben und Arbeiten auf märkischem Sand: Wege in die Gesellschaftsgeschichte Brandenburgs 1700–1914*, ed. Ralf Pröve and Bernd Kölling (Bielefeld, 1999), 120–48.

5. The titles I mention here are mere examples. Those wishing an up-to-date substantive English-language introduction to the early modern history of German peasantry may profitably consult the following three articles: Thomas Robisheaux, "The Peasantries of Western Germany, 1300–1750," in *The Peasantries of Europe from the Fourteenth to the Eighteenth Centuries*, ed. Tom Scott (London, 1998), 111–44; William W. Hagen, "Village Life in East-Elbian Germany and Poland, 1400–1800," in ibid., 145–90; Hermann Rebel, "Peasantries under the Austrian Empire, 1300–1800," in ibid., 191–226. See the comprehensive review article with discussion of several hundred examples of the new scholarship in German rural history: Peter Blickle, "Deutsche Agrargeschichte in der zweiten Hälfte des 20. Jahrhunderts," in *Agrargeschichte: Positionen und Perspektiven*, ed. Werner Trossbach and Clemens Zimmermann, Quellen und Forschungen zur

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1970s Arthur Imhof's application of modern statistical methodologies to rural historical demography demonstrated peasants' strategies for coping with processes like war and disease.[6] Many practitioners of the new scholarship of rural society, following the lead of Peter Blickle, stress the viability and self-determining character of the village as a communal institution.[7] Heide Wunder and others have depicted early modern rural gender systems as complex social relations based on power differentials, which nevertheless allocated strong roles to women within the household economy.[8] Analyzing patrimonial court records, Ulrike Gleixner has demonstrated that both authorities and villagers — male and female — participated in the early modern construction of masculinity and femininity.[9] Among the historians who have examined village institutions under the stress of statebuilding and warfare in the sixteenth through the eighteenth centuries, Hermann Rebel argues that governments transformed personal village relationships into institutions that served the bureaucratic state, while Thomas Robisheaux emphasizes that peasants and authorities often devised common strategies in order to achieve stability.[10] There is now an extensive new literature on peasant revolt, rebellion, and resistance, and some historians believe there was a stronger tradition of these phenomena in German-speaking Europe than elsewhere on the continent. As Winfried Schulze has shown, villagers used a variety of means, often including the legal system, to defend their own interests, and the new scholarship emphasizes that the common people who engaged in resistance did so with discernable social

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Agrargeschichte, vol. 44 (Stuttgart, 1998), 7–32. See also Werner Rösner, *Einführung in die Agrargeschichte* (Darmstadt, 1997); John Theibault, "Toward a New Sociocultural History of the Rural World of Early Modern Germany?" *Central European History* 24, no. 3 (1991): 304–24; Christoph Dipper, "Landwirtschaft im Wandel: Neue Perspektiven der preussisch-deutschen Agrargeschichte im 19. Jahrhundert," *Neue politische Literatur* 38 (1993): 29–42. Mark Finlay, "New Sources, New Theses, and New Organizations in the New Germany: Recent Research on the History of German Agriculture" is scheduled to appear in *Agricultural History* in the near future.

6. Arthur Erwin Imhof, *Einführung in die Historische Demographie*, Beck'sche Elementarbücher (Munich, 1977).

7. Among his many works on this theme see the newest: Peter Blickle, *Kommunalismus: Skizzen einer gesellschaftlichen Organisationsform*, vol. 1, *Oberdeutschland* (Munich, 2000). On the village as community see also Heide Wunder, *Die bäuerliche Gemeinde in Deutschland*, Kleine Vandenhoeck Reihe, vol. 1483 (Göttingen, 1986). Blickle and David Sabean perform an invaluable service to the new agricultural history as editors of the series, Quellen und Forschungen zur Agrargeschichte.

8. Heide Wunder, *"Er ist die Sonn', sie ist der Mond": Frauen in der frühen Neuzeit* (Munich, 1992). Translated by Thomas Dunlap under the title of *He is the Sun, She is the Moon: Women in Early Modern Germany* (Cambridge, 1998).

9. Ulrike Gleixner, *"Das Mensch" und "der Kerl": Die Konstruktion von Geschlecht in Unzuchtsverfahren in der Frühen Neuzeit (1700–1760)*, *Geschichte und Geschlechter* 8 (Frankfurt, 1994).

10. Hermann Rebel, *Peasant Classes: The Bureaucratization of Property and Family Relations under Early Habsburg Absolutism 1511–1636* (Princeton, 1983); Thomas Willard Robisheaux, *Rural Society and the Search for Order in Early Modern Germany* (Cambridge, 1989); Peter K. Taylor, *Indentured to Liberty: Peasant Life and the Hessian Military State 1688–1815* (Ithaca, N.Y., 1994); John C. Theibault, *German Villages in Crisis: Rural Life in Hesse-Kassel and the Thirty Years War, 1580–1720* (Atlantic Highlands, 1995).

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and economic causes and often with visions of a new social order.[11] One far-reaching form of self-assertion was emigration, as Axel Lubinski documented in a study depicting the concrete living conditions of about 16,000 Mecklenburg peasants who chose to leave German soil altogether.[12] In reassessing the process of enclosure in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, Stefan Brakensiek and Reiner Prass demonstrated that peasants themselves were central actors in this process.[13] They were not the passive subjects or mere victims depicted in earlier historical writing. Rainer Beck focused on the human and natural ecology of a Bavarian village, arguing that peasants' arrangements and use of their resources was determined by the need to maintain an environmental balance.[14]

Although David Sabean conducted his research independently rather than as a member of a team, his three volumes under review have characteristics in common with the two large team efforts. Sabean's work represents an intense commitment to a single project that spans much of a career (though this is by no means the only scholarship he has produced). Like both the protoindustrialization project and the East-Elbian project, Sabean's research was largely supported by the Max-Planck-Gesellschaft. He went to the Max-Planck-Institut in Göttingen as recipient of a research fellowship in 1976, remained the next year as a guest scholar, and worked between 1978 and 1983 as a full-time researcher, having given up a tenured academic position in the U.S. to pursue his project. After returning to the U.S. in 1983, he made numerous research trips to Germany during the next decade and a half to carry forward his project on Neckarhausen. Sabean's three volumes, comprising a total of over 1,300 pages, involve interpretations that seem only possible in such an extended project. In

11. Winfried Schulze, *Bäuerlicher Widerstand und feudale Herrschaft in der frühen Neuzeit*, Neuzeit im Aufbau, vol. 6 (Stuttgart, 1980); Winfried Schulze, ed., *Aufstände, Revolten, Prozesse: Beiträge zur bäuerlichen Widerstandsbewegung im frühneuzeitlichen Europa, Geschichte und Gesellschaft* 27 (Stuttgart, 1983); Werner Trossbach, *Soziale Bewegung und politische Erfahrung: Bäuerlicher Protest in hessischen Territorien 1648–1806*, Sozialgeschichtliche Bibliothek (Weingarten, 1987); Andreas Wuergler, *Unruhen und Öffentlichkeit: Städtische und ländliche Protestbewegungen im 18. Jahrhundert*, Fruehneuzeit-Forschungen 1 (Tübingen, 1995); David Luebke, *His Majesty's Rebels: Communities, Factions, and Rural Revolt in the Black Forest, 1725–1745* (Ithaca, NY, 1997); Robert von Friedeburg, *Ländliche Gesellschaft und Obrigkeit: Gemeindeprotest und politische Mobilisierung im 18. und 19. Jahrhundert*, Kritische Studien zur Geschichtswissenschaft, vol. 117 (Göttingen, 1997).

12. Axel Lubinski, *Entlassen aus dem Untertanenverband: Die Amerika-Auswanderung aus Mecklenburg-Strelitz im 19. Jahrhundert*, Studien zur Historischen Migrationsforschung, vol. 3 (Osnabrück, 1997).

13. Stefan Brakensiek, *Agrarreform und ländliche Gesellschaft: Die Privatisierung der Marken in Nordwestdeutschland, 1750–1850* (Paderborn, 1991); Reiner Prass, *Reformprogramm und bäuerliche Interessen: die Auflösung der traditionellen Gemeindeökonomie im südlichen Niedersachsen, 1750–1883* (Göttingen, 1997).

14. Rainer Beck, *Naturale Ökonomie: Unterfinning: Bäuerliche Wirtschaft in einem oberbayerischen Dorf des frühen 18. Jahrhunderts*, Forschungshefte Bayerisches Nationalmuseum München 11 (Munich, 1986).

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contrast to the team efforts, which involve microhistory at multiple locations, Sabean's research became more and more intensively focused on a single village, Neckarhausen. What he produced was perhaps only possible with the material support and intellectual stimulation provided by the Max-Planck-Institute for History. Just as important to the project's success was a combination of perseverant intellectual curiosity and a personality willing — or driven — to explore deeper and deeper into the personal life decisions of thousands of Neckarhausen peasants.

Power in the Blood (1984) is not limited to the study of Neckarhausen per se but is based on historical occurrences over several centuries in Württemberg towns and villages in the surrounding region. Written while Sabean was "piecing together all the material I [could] find on the village of Neckarhausen" (p. ix), *Power in the Blood* can be regarded as a preface to the two subsequent volumes, establishing a cultural context for the more focused studies. Sabean calls the book a series of "exercises in the use of sources generated by state authorities to study peasants' view" of village authority and of their changing relationship to it. The sources of *Power in the Blood* consist of "symbols, metaphors and the language of concrete experience" (p. 3).

Sabean employs six different village incidents from between the sixteenth and late eighteenth centuries to analyze the dynamic relationship between community and *Herrschaft*, both secular and religious. The protagonists come alive in each of his six studies. Some of the village episodes are about peasants challenging traditional lines of authority, for example by refusing to participate in communion service or by claiming that an angel was performing miracles in a hillside vineyard. Others explore overlapping and competing relationships within villages, especially kinship networks, which included two distinct groups, "friends" and "relatives." Using the example of a thirteen-year-old girl who claimed to possess powers of witchcraft, Sabean argues that the community's rejection of her was due more to her place as an "outsider" than to her association with the supernatural.

Power in the Blood represents a picture of the Württemberg villagers plagued by conflicting notions of power, authority, respect, and community. Stressing that community was a cultural construct that changed over time, Sabean shows through the six different episodes spanning more than two centuries that lines of authority and bonds of kinship and community were never static. Community itself was a "historical process" (p. 29). He depicts a situation of increasing governmental interest in community and household affairs, as authorities strove to ensure viable productivity. At the same time he documents what he sees as an emerging sense of the "individual" in the minds of secular authorities. However, the social and cultural change he portrays was less a linear development than an uneven discourse carried on over time in which the initiative shifted from one side to the other depending on the context.

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In *Property, Production, and Family* (1990), Sabean moves from individual narratives as sources to a remarkable variety and number of records to construct a structural account that connects marriage and household relationships with strategies of economic survival. His sources include village tribunal transcripts, church registers of births, baptisms, marriages, and burials, family property inventories, iconographic evidence, law codes of Württemberg, and communal financial data. Refusing to take his documents at face value, he employs an eclectic array of analytical methods, weaving a complex fabric whose threads consist of the histories of agricultural prices, village demography, and life courses. He devotes careful attention to different and changing expressions of village violence. Employing his own style of *Begriffsgeschichte*, Sabean often discusses context-specific definitions of words to extract meaning from his sources. For example, he explains in a fifteen-page passage various denotations and connotations of the verb, *hausen*, all of which were related to marriage and work, and which demonstrated the inseparability of economic survival and the bonds of the household (pp. 101–16). He maintains that the meanings of *hausen* he found in Neckarhausen were context-specific and "could not be carried over to a much wider area than I have done" (p. 8).

Sabean puts all of his material on the table, including his discussions of methodological processes, and guides the reader through an inductive process. He does not mind admitting at points that he himself is challenged to make sense of some of his data, for example, when he says of a couple who did not eat meals together or even procured their food together, "the relationships in this household are a little difficult to figure out" (p. 172). The data are as complex as life, and although Sabean is highly interpretive, he does not simplify the information for the sake of presentation. Extensive passages of *Property, Production, and Family* consist of summary narratives of individual or collective case studies of peasant behavior, derived from the original sources. These are typeset in italics to set them apart from his analysis, contextual discussions, and conclusions. At times Sabean reminds one of a theologian seeking meaning from biblical texts.

Expanding on a theme that he had explored years earlier with Max-Planck-Institute historian Hans Medick,[15] Sabean demonstrates that a primary purpose of the exchange of labor and property in Neckarhausen was to acquire respect and honor. He also shows, not unsurprisingly, that parties entered into relationships with one another, especially through marriage, in order to ensure their economic well-being. "People expected that a marriage alliance would create a

15. Hans Medick and David Warren Sabean, *Interest and Emotion: Essays on the Study of Family and Kinship* (Cambridge, 1984); Hans Medick and David Sabean, *Emotionen und materielle Interessen: Sozialanthropologische und historische Beiträge zur Familienforschung*, Veröffentlichung des Max-Planck-Instituts für Geschichte, vol. 75 (Göttingen, 1984).

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set of social relationships which would structure and make possible a lifetime of fruitful exchanges. It was not that anyone had a *particular* claim on an in-law, but one expected a good deal of consideration and cooperation" (pp. 418–19). One is reminded of aristocratic unions from the same period. Relatives, including those connected by marriage, sold arable land to one another at special "relatives' prices." Tension arose when individuals ignored these customs.

Examining cases of marital conflict brought before village authorities, Sabean argues that Neckarhausen's women often had both economic resources and kinship ties that made them "far more independent than the legal codes suggested" (pp. 170–71). This was true in spite of the fact that husbands were involved in most income-producing activities of the household, while wives were not. Sabean argues, furthermore, that wives' economic powers in the household and community increased in the second half of the eighteenth century. This happened as the economy became increasingly market-oriented and innovative agricultural practices developed, due to the introduction of new crops such as flax and hemp and innovative methods of animal husbandry, especially stall feeding. Many of the new agricultural products required intensive female labor, "hoe agriculture." Women thus produced an ever-increasing percentage of the crops that were exchanged for cash, hence "they began to demand considerable say in the disposal of both the products and the proceeds." Even though their work remained gender-specific, "husbands and wives met on a more equal footing" (p. 174).

The effects of these changes were complex and can by no means be viewed as a simple empowerment of women. Shifting female economic power gave rise to new strains in marriages, as spouses had to devise ways to share what each produced. This dynamic in gender systems was a significant factor in the changing relationships of power within the household and community as well as between *Herrschaft* and community. Alongside this there developed a "new ideology of *Häuslichkeit*" including greater emphasis on household cleanliness, washed clothes, appropriate meal preparation, and "a new sense of smell among villagers" (p. 179), all of which added to women's domestic responsibilities while they were increasingly involved in income-producing activities. Sabean finds many more complaints on the part of men in the nineteenth century than in the eighteenth "about the housekeeping and orderliness of their wives" (p. 180). Intensified marital conflict may have been related to the added burden of work on women. "Families were apt to break apart or find themselves adjusting with great difficulty" (p. 182).

Given the themes established earlier in *Power in the Blood*, in which angels, prophets, priests, sacraments, and religious authorities played definitive roles in village identities, one would expect to find the church as a major theme in *Property, Production, and Family.* This is not the case. Sabean does acknowledge that there was a "lively religious discourse" in Neckarhausen during his years

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of investigation, and that pietism was a significant factor in village life. But the church and religion are virtually invisible in the book. He attributes this to "silences in the Neckarhausen texts." The church had only a "shadowy existence in the records" (p. 427). The fact that this insatiable researcher did not seek out sources on religious life indicates, I believe, that his interests shifted between the writing of the two books. *Property, Production, and Family* is about structural changes in the material conditions of life.

One of Sabean's central arguments — obviously the most important one to him in this book — is that changing demography, agricultural techniques, and economic systems fundamentally transformed the way in which family networks functioned as a means of property exchange and reciprocal economic support. In the early eighteenth century family alliances were formed without great regard for the social status of the parties. Sabean believes that peasants sought partners for their relatives who would in one way or another contribute to the viability of linear families. He calls the associations thus formed "vertical alliances." In the course of the century, external pressures caused villagers to develop the new strategy of "endogamous marriages" — alliances between families of relatively equal wealth. A significant turning point in this process occurred around 1740, coinciding with the beginning of the long-term intensification of agricultural production and a simultaneous rise in population pressure in the village. By the beginning of the nineteenth century, the traditional vertical alliances, often connecting prosperous and poor peasant families, had been replaced by "horizontal networks," which kept wealth separated by social strata. Families employed reciprocal practices in managing their agricultural property to coordinate the sale of real estate among themselves, weaving ever-tighter nets of mutual obligation. These kinship networks "became the mechanism through which 'class' relations were managed and reproduced" (p. 425).

This primary point of interpretation portends Sabean's third book, *Kinship in Neckarhausen* (1998), an extended argument "for a reconceptualization of gender and class in terms of sharply focused attention on kinship as a modern construction" (p. xxv). Much more than lines of inheritance and marriage exchange, kinship in Sabean's analysis involved memory, tradition, and perceived relationships. It included above all the "ritual" institution of godparentage. *Kinship in Neckarhausen* is more than a history of village relationships over time. It is a proposal for a new lens for understanding the emergence of modern social institutions in Europe, based on the study of one village.

Predictably, Sabean invites the reader to join him in "patient attention to small details" as he painstakingly analyzes five cohorts of Neckarhausen's inhabitants, those stemming from the decades of the 1700s, 1740s, 1780s, 1820s, and 1860s. The raw material of *Kinship in Neckarhausen* consists of intricate kinship data, from which Sabean has constructed genealogical diagrams, laid out in the

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text so that the reader can follow his line of analysis by schematically picturing the family relationships. One example is a diagram showing eleven generations of a single family between the sixteenth and nineteenth centuries. He takes the reader step-by-step through the generations, emphasizing the crucial transition in the eighteenth century when cousin marriages became a common pattern. There are well over 100 such genealogies in the book, each derived through a labor-intensive process explained by Sabean in an appendix. In addition, the book contains over 150 tables of other complex structural data.

It comes as no surprise that Sabean's findings confirm those articulated in *Property, Production, and Family*, but they are more pronounced in *Kinship*. In his earliest cohort from the decade of the 1700s, villagers formed kinship alliances that had little to do with bringing together families of equal wealth. The pattern that Sabean sees is one of unequal wealth in marriage arrangements. One could conclude that the intent of marriage was to create workable households that could sustain themselves during the extant generation and reproduce themselves in the future, and that choices were made largely without regard for economic or social status. Families, once formed, became clan-like structures that engaged in patterns of reciprocal support and obligations.

Sabean's demographic data reveal significant changes beginning with the cohort of the 1740s. At this time, families began to limit marriage and godparent relationships to other families of almost equal wealth. In the latter half of the eighteenth century, this pattern intensified significantly, when marriages between second cousins became increasingly common. By the nineteenth century first cousins were marrying one another. And by the end of that century, it had become normal to name either siblings or cousins as godparents. All of this contrasted starkly with early eighteenth-century practices and resulted in the "horizontal alliances" that Sabean earlier identified in *Property, Production, and Family*. It apparently became more and more important to Neckarhausen's inhabitants to maintain these extensive interlocking sets of cousins and siblings, which included women's relatives and their offspring.

Under this arrangement, "kinship in Neckarhausen came to be governed by women" (p. 490). This central theme in Sabean's analysis deserves close examination by historians of gender. His argument adds a new dimension to the interpretations of those researchers who represent nineteenth-century female domesticity as a disenfranchisement of women on the grounds that it excluded them from the productive economic sphere of life.[16] Sabean maintains that while men retained their gender monopoly in public capacities such as office holding, "women came to find a parallel field for political and social activity in

16. I have made this argument myself: Marion W. Gray, *Productive Men, Reproductive Women: The Agrarian Household and the Emergence of Separate Spheres during the German Enlightenment* (New York, 2000).

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caring for kin, negotiating networks, brokering alliances, and maintaining the viability of agriculture and flax production" (p. 490). Through their roles in the private sphere and their economic strengths, women enhanced their status. In the nineteenth century widows increasingly remained unmarried and held power by retaining control of their agricultural properties. But largely it was "kinship" that "provided a vast — and today largely unexplored — area of political activity for women" (p. 490).

Although *Property, Production, and Familly* and *Kinship* contain parallel and mutually confirming interpretations, the latter's new dimension is Sabean's emphasis on the construction of kinship as the root of modern social classes. The old patriarchal household gave way to wider groups who sought to protect their property and status through complex alliances. All of this happened in the context of the changing economy — the opening of the village to outside markets — and of new agricultural techniques, themes laid out in detail in *Property, Production, and Family*. Sabean maintains that this was not coincidental; the transformation of material life brought about changes in human behavior that resulted in modern class formation. Within his emphasis on personal life decisions as an interpretive factor there is woven a thread of materialist analysis.

Sabean represents Neckarhausen as a microcosm of Europe. He believes that Europeans outside of the Württemberg village were similarly rearranging familial relationships, gender systems, and social structures. His "conclusion," consisting of four chapters and over 100 pages, places Neckarhausen's reconfiguration of kinship in the broader context with extended discussions of studies of rural Naples, Gévaudan (in southeastern France), and South Brittany, as well as other examples of kinship, gender, and class. In the end, after three decades of work and three extensive volumes, he calls for further research on these themes. His conclusion is thus at the same time a hypothesis:

> Kinship and the alliance system of the nineteenth century were crucial for concentrating and distributing capital; providing strategic support over the life of individuals; structuring dynasties and recognizable patrilineal groupings; maintaining access points, entrances and exits to social milieus through marriage, godparentage, and guardianship; creating cultural and social boundaries by extensive festive, lucid, competitive, and charitative transactions; configuring and reconfiguring possible alliances between subpopulations; developing a training ground for character formation; shaping desire and offering practice in code and symbol recognition . . .; training rules and practices into bodies; and integrating networks of culturally similar people. (p. 451)

Sabean returns to the theme of gender in his conclusion. In a leap beyond the village of Neckarhausen, and indeed into the realm of the bourgeoisie, he draws upon the work of other historians to illustrate the power he believes

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nineteenth-century women held in the realm of kinship and class. He cites numerous examples of middle-class women who exercised the responsibility of holding together "far-flung connections between near and distant kin" (p. 492) through visits, correspondence, recording of memories, bringing property into family estates, and arbitrating values and respectability. According to his paradigm, kinship was the basis of the new class system, and women were responsible for making kinship work. Hence the female half of the population played a crucial role in modern class formation. This must be seen, I would argue, within the context of the nineteenth-century ideology of female domesticity, which Sabean discusses in *Property, Production, and Family*, but hardly at all in *Kinship*.

The conclusion of *Kinship*, then, consists of a series of bold claims about the applicability of one village's data to Europe as a whole. While Sabean is clearly serious about his assertions, I believe he understands them as a beginning rather than as a definitive conclusion, and he intends them as a challenge to other historians to test his findings. He calls for greater "collective knowledge," not only of rural society but especially of the urban people, including wage earners and upper and middle levels of the population. It is clear that he believes that further research will corroborate his hypothesis that kinship is the key to understanding modern class and gender systems. It remains to be seen whether historians will respond to this stimulus by attempting to replicate his findings in other contexts. The complex and long path that Sabean traveled to reach his conclusions will be difficult to follow. He hints that he himself may take up the task and explore kinship transformation in situations other than the rural village, namely in urban society.

I do not know whether or not Sabean at the onset of his project in the 1970s anticipated that he would end with a claim to a new analytical paradigm that links the early modern period to the twentieth century, through an explanation of the origins of modern class and gender systems. Although he was from the start widely eclectic, drawing for the sake of comparison on studies even from beyond Europe, he introduced *Property, Production, and Family* with an ardent defense of "the local" as a research domain. "In the study of Neckarhausen, the search for singularity, for particular coherence, for the contextual logics of performance suggests that significance does not lie in generalization or the extension of a particular paradigm or a plea for typicality" (p. 12). This could easily convey the impression that Sabean's final work, with its claim of universality, was something entirely different than the earlier volume, indeed a methodological contradiction to it. To draw this conclusion, however, would be to overlook another part of Sabean's original design: he insisted that it was *because* of his emphasis on the local that he could begin to build an assertion of universality. Rejecting the viability of historical "generalization" because it "leads inevitably to objectification," he nevertheless embraced the search for

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"the universal," which "enables one to find the truth for oneself" (p. 10). The universal is built upon myriad singularities, and "the new perspectives" derived from them "offer a loose set of procedures and examples of possibilities for finding coherence or contradictions in any social context" (p. 12). Patterns of marriage, family, property, and especially kinship, in Neckarhausen enables Sabean, then, to discover "coherence" in the changing society of Europe as a whole. It is his unswerving conviction about the power of singularity that led him to be able to draw "universal" conclusions, based on the study of a single village.

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