

Databases and Prosopographies: *The Prosopography of Anglo-Saxon England (PASE) a Case Study*

Hafed Walda (hafed.walda@kcl.ac.uk)

King's College London

Alex Burghart (alex.burghart@kcl.ac.uk)

King's College London

Summary

Dr Hafed Walda

Definition

David Pelteret, of the *Prosopography of Anglo-Saxon England*, wrote that: "in essence prosopography can be interpreted as the study of identifiable persons and their connections with others for the purpose of enabling the modern student to discern patterns of relationships." (Pelteret 13).

The *Prosopography of Anglo-Saxon England Project (PASE)* is based in the department of History, the Centre for Computing in the Humanities at King's College London and in the Department of Anglo-Saxon, Norse, and Celtic at the University of Cambridge. The aim of the *PASE Project* is to record everything that is known about all Anglo-Saxon individuals mentioned in any source written between 597 and 1042. This will create a comprehensive register of the recorded inhabitants of the period. *PASE* will be accessible in the form of a freely available, searchable on-line database.

The past two decades have witnessed enormous growth in the number and importance of Prosopographies such as *PASE*. Following this period of rapid growth will the academic community find a common technological ground for all these Prosopographies? This paper explores the issues surrounding the search for this common ground.

Historical overview

The father of prosopographies is the *Corpus Inscriptionem Latinarum (CIL)* edited by Christian Matthias in 1858. After

the publication of the *CIL*, Mommsen worked on the original *Prosopographicum Inscriptionem Romanorum (PIR)* until 1877. In that he made use of his considerable experience with *CIL*, hence his first work mimicked the *Inscriptions* but was supplemented by literary sources and papyrology. After a long delay Professor A.H.M. Jones continued Mommsen's work with the help of his two pupils John Morris and John Martindale in the 1950s. The continuation of Mommsen's work became an international affair. The huge task was divided between the French (under the direction of H.-I. Marrou) and the British (under A.H.M. Jones).

A.H.M. Jones died before the first volume of the *Prosopography of the Later Roman Empire (PLRE)*, covering the years AD 260-395, was published in 1971. He did however manage to read through and edit the final draft. The British Academy ensured the survival of the project by providing financial aid from 1970. John Morris and John Martindale continued to work on the project, volume two (covering the years AD 395-527) being published just after the death of John Morris in 1980. John Martindale was left to edit the third volume, eventually published in 1992 in two volumes covering AD 527-64, before he retired in 2000.

The French *Prosopographie Chrétienne* was divided on a regional as well as chronological basis. Marrou and Mandouze produced the volumes for Africa (AD 303-533) in 1982. Another two volumes covering Italy (AD 313-604) were published in 1999, under the direction of Charles and Luce Pietri.

Data and development issues

With the development of scholarship through the increased availability of written sources, the publication of new editions, and through the publication of *Inscriptions*, coins and seals, the research materials have also increased. New methods using searchable databases were developed to deal with the sheer quantity of material available in various formats.

In the past two decades, computer based methods of recording and manipulating data have offered historians in a variety of fields new opportunities of data manipulation that go beyond what was formerly feasible for scholars using traditional research methods geared for paper publication. This was hailed as an ideal way of converting data into information by processing and presenting them for human interpretation.

The database approach to the development of Prosopographies has been found attractive to scholars in Anglo-Saxon studies (*PASE*), *Clergy of the Church of England (CCE)* and *Prosopography of the Byzantine World (PBW)*. All these Prosopographies are based in King's College London and developed in collaboration with the Centre for Computing in the Humanities (CCH). The role of CCH involves a whole range of activities, including data analysis, system design, the

application of computing tools, and technical advice and long-term support.

These Prosopographies have benefited hugely from the technical and academic knowledge that has been accumulated at King's College London.

In this paper I will draw a comparison between the various methods of collecting and displaying prosopographical data in different formats from the earlier book-based to electronic editions, and will analyze the advantages of each method. The comparison will involve using actual historical records.

I will be looking closely at the advantages, costs and risks of using the Relational Database model to drive the data and the use of web browsers as interfaces to display the information. The Prosopography of Anglo-Saxon England database will be used as an example of a database driven prosopography.

The Prosopography of Anglo-Saxon England, 597-1042

Alex Burghart

This section will demonstrate the research possibilities made available by *PASE*. It will give a live presentation of how data from sources has been entered, collated and reconciled.

A wide range of source types survive from Anglo-Saxon England, these include chronicles, letters, biographies, and legal texts. Sources such as Bede's *Ecclesiastical History* and the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* have generated a prodigious amount of secondary literature and probably an uncountable number of editions in a wide variety of vernacular languages. Yet these editions could not, on their own, answer such basic questions as, how many Anglo-Saxons held a certain office; or establish the links between people and overall groupings with systematic and accessible structure.

Perhaps the most substantial advance that *PASE* has made on standard prosopography is that it records not only data concerning individuals (their status, what they owned, to whom they were related, what they ate for breakfast &c.) but also information about how individuals were connected with each other. This has been embodied in the database by the creation of *EVENT* in which is recorded all meetings / relations between one or more people. This is a significant step in understanding Anglo-Saxon history because for the first time historians will be able to search the whole corpus of Anglo-Saxon sources for associations between people. This lies at the heart of what prosopography should be.

The major source of associations in Anglo-Saxon history is that of the charters. The term 'Anglo-Saxon charter' covers a multitude of documents ranging in kind from the royal diplomas issued in the names of Anglo-Saxon kings between the last quarter of the seventh century and the Norman Conquest, which are generally in Latin, to the wills of prominent churchmen, laymen, and women, which are generally in the vernacular. A large proportion of the surviving corpus of about 1500 charters is made up of records of grants of land or privileges by a king to a religious house, or to a lay beneficiary. The corpus also includes records of settlements of disputes over land or privileges, leases of episcopal property, and records of bequests of land and other property. Its importance for *PASE* lies in what they tell us about individuals. Most charters include invaluable information about ownership and status, but, as legal documents, they also frequently include lists of people who gave their agreement to the settlement described in the charter. These names give us an insight into the workings of royal and local courts and communities which we would have otherwise been denied. In collating these names and relating them to other source material, *PASE* grants the researcher the ability to reveal something of the lives which hide behind them.

Anglo-Saxon charters are the best represented corpus of medieval documents on the internet. The completion of *PASE* will confirm and bolster this position.

Bibliography

Bradley, John, and Harold Short. "Texts into databases: The Evolving Field of New-style Prosopography." Paper delivered at the ACH/ALLC Conference, University of Georgia, Athens Georgia. Summer 2003.

Cameron, Averill, ed. *Fifty Years Of Prosopography: The Later Roman Empire, Byzantium and Beyond*. Proceedings of the British Academy, number 118. New York: Oxford University Press, for the British Academy, 2003.

Clergy of the Church of England. King's College London. Accessed 2005-03-21. <<http://maple.cc.kcl.ac.uk:8080/cce/rochester/index.html>> (Not yet launched.)

Jones, A.H.M., J. R. Martindale, and J. Morris. *The Prosopography of the Later Roman Empire*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1971.

Klebs, E., P. von Rohden, and H. Dessau. *Prosopographia Imperii Romani*. 3 vols. Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1956. A new second edition was published in 1998.

Martindale, John Robert, ed. *Prosopography of the Byzantine Empire I (641-867): The CD of the First Period*. King's College London, 2002.

Peltert, David. "[Title not provided]." *History and Computing* 12.1 (2002): 13.

Prosopography Centre. Modern History Research Unit, University of Oxford. Accessed 2005-03-21. <<http://users.ox.ac.uk/~prosop/>>

The Prosopography of Anglo-Saxon England. King's College London. Accessed 2005-03-21. <<http://www.kcl.ac.uk/humanities/cch/pase/>>; database site <<http://maple.cc.kcl.ac.uk:8080/pase/index.jsp>> (not publicly launched).