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WORK AND FAMILY IN A LUCCHESE PAPER-MAKING VILLAGE AT THE BEGINNING OF THE NINETEENTH CENTURY

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WORK AND FAMILY IN A LUCCHESE PAPER-MAKING VILLAGE AT
THE BEGINNING OF THE NINETEENTH CENTURY

The art of paper-making was already known at Villa Basilica (near Lucca) in the first half of the fourteenth century, but there is no evidence of continuing activity in the subsequent centuries. Until 1680 only one paper-mill remained active, the one founded in the sixteenth century by the publisher Busdraghi. A first phase of rapid development took place in the late years of the seventeenth and the early eighteenth century. There were then four paper-mills at Villa, which increased to five in the following decades. The eighteenth century, a golden age in Lucchese publishing, was also a favourable period for paper-mills. The paper made at Villa reached Spain and Portugal, whence it was exported to America, yielding an income of about twelve thousand scudi a year.

After decades of prosperous stability, the situation turned around towards the end of the eighteenth century: some paper-mills, the smallest and most old-fashioned ones, closed completely; others stopped their activity for a few years in order to restructure and enlarge their premises and renew their machinery (but still without introducing the Dutch calander, by then widespread outside Italy). New factories were built anew or restructured from old mills. The land register of 1802-03 shows nine paper-mills at Villa, three of which were equipped with two vats. In the small Lucchese state there were in this period ten more paper-mills scattered over the territory in small groups of two or three.

By the 1830s there were sixteen paper-mills at Villa Basilica; in 1871 as many as 47 paper-mill owners joined the trading society of straw paper; at the end of the 1870s most of the seventy Lucchese paper-mills were situated along the stream Pescia Minore, which runs through Villa.

Unlike what happened in many paper-making centres of long-established traditions, such as Colle di Val d'Elsa, Amalfi and to some extent Voltri, the paper-mills of Villa Basilica managed to overcome the difficulties of the first decades of the nineteenth century, when, with great delay compared to the rest of Europe, technical innovations were introduced, with the use of chlorine and the substitution of rags, changing paper-making from a craft into an industry. It was the outcome of a historical process which over two centuries had changed the village from an agricultural community, as it was in the middle of the seventeenth century, into an important paper manufacturing centre, as it had become by the period of Italian Unity. The population increased, even if not exaggeratedly, rising from the thousand inhabitants of 1750 to 1700 in 1850 and 1900 in the 1860s. What were the consequences of this process on the organization of the community, on the household structures and on their social-economic and demographic behaviour? What was the relationship between agricultural work, textile activity and employment in paper-mills? Before replying to such questions, we need to make some remarks about peculiarities of the paper manufacturing process and the employment of labour.

At the beginning of the nineteenth century the Lucchese mills still employed the same equipment as they had three or four centuries earlier. The hydraulic wheels moved the very noisy nailed hammers which in the miles minced and ground the rags to reduce them into a mush in order to make the pulp. Then the craftsman's expert hand dipped the mould into the vat and made the sheet; other men performed the most tiring and qualified jobs around the vat and the sizing. The women and children, earlier engaged in the preparation of rags, took the sheets to dry in the so-called spanditoio and they were in charge of the finishing and packing. Until the time when the "Hollander" and above all the continuous machine were introduced, the production of a paper-mill was in direct proportion to the distribution of work and the number of workers; that is, it was directly related to

the continuity of the process, whether the various phases were performed at the same time by different workers, or whether instead they were performed in succession by a lower number of workers. These different methods allowed a remarkable elasticity in the use of labour: the number of workers could vary from a minimum of six to a maximum of fifteen-twenty per vat.

At an optimal level, each vat could produce about two thousand paper reams a year; but the manufacturing process was hardly ever continuous, partly because of the constraints of outside conditions, and in particular of climate affecting the regularity of the waterflow. As paper making was an industry situated in small agricultural centres, it was also constrained by the availability of temporary labour and of women and children, according to the changes and needs of the seasons and crops. Finally there were the problems of the supply of the raw material, rags, and the irregular flow of orders, which could cause enforced cessation of activities.

As far as this paper is concerned, it is important to note that even more than for other manufactured products, diffusion of techniques was spread through the migrations of master craftsmen. Paper craftsmen from Colle and Fabriano rented the sixteenth century paper-mill founded by Busdraghi; and paper makers from Genova were to be the protagonists of the development at the end of the seventeenth century. Strong mobility between one paper manufacturing centre and another also continued in the nineteenth century, when the Villa paper craftsmen can be identified in other Tuscan centres.

These migrations took place over a long period of time, but probably they were concentrated in those phases of rapid development we have mentioned above, thus increasing the diffusion effect. By the end of the eighteenth century, during the second period of development, some Genoese families who had arrived a hundred years before had become paper-mill owners, having climbed all the steps of the social ladder: they had started as mere workers employed by a gentleman owner, later had subrented a mill with an intermediary who acted as

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a trader, and finally had rented the mill. But if some families managed to rise and others merged wholly into the structure of the community, many others, particularly those of late immigration, remained outsiders. The chief obstacle to integration lay in the very organization of the productive process, because it absorbed the labour force of the whole family and limited their outside contacts. It is within this context that we must frame our first question: how did social organization, household structure, and the relationship with work and ownership change over the century-long process which led to the transformation of Villa Basilica into a paper manufacturing centre?

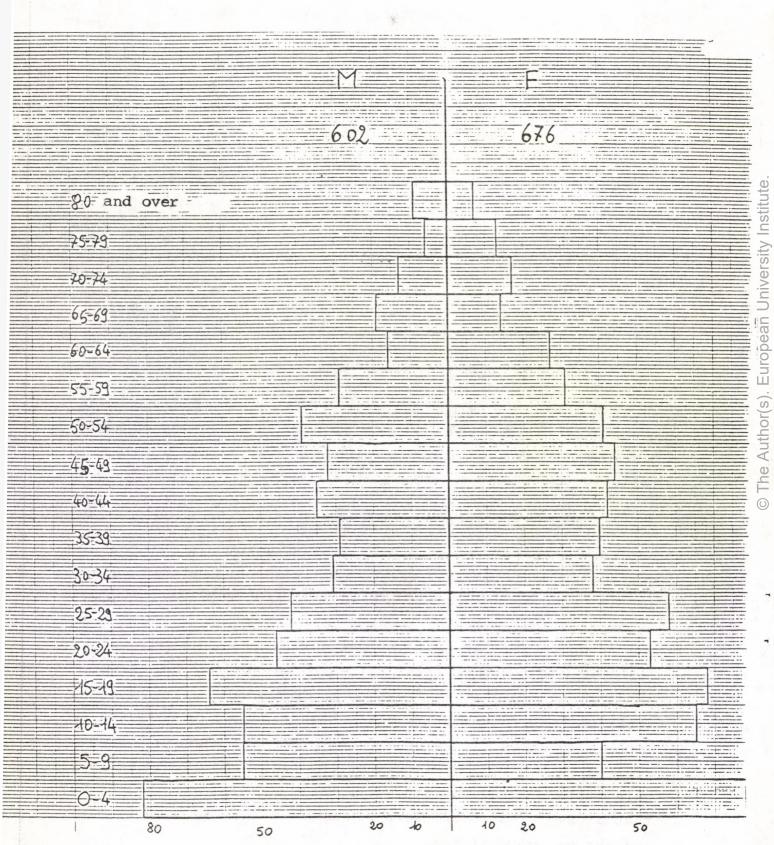
My research, still in its early phase, can provide some tentative answers through the use of demographic, cadastral and notarial sources and the private papers of some traditional families of paper manufacturers. This paper proposes to offer only some first and very limited results out of the much longer-term and broader research. The period I have chosen covers the first two decades of the nineteenth century and particularly the period of the Napoleonic princedom of Lucca. Over the long span of the research, this period holds a central position, if not chronologically, certainly as far as the development of Lucchese paper-mills is concerned. At the beginning of the nineteenth century the mills reached the maximum development possible, given old fashioned techniques, small dimensions and the conditions of an international market which, even before the Napoleonic blockade, was no longer receptive to the products of the factories of the Italian states. For all these reasons, and particularly because of the prevalence of French interests in the economic choices of Elisa Bonaparte's government, the Baciocchi period (1805-14) was not marked by prosperity, but represented rather a prolonged and by no means painless transition towards the new phase of expansion of the middle of the nineteenth century, characterized by the great boom of straw paper. The main source on which I base the following considerations is the 1809 census, integrated partly by the impressions one can draw from the less accurate census of 1823 and from the first results of examination of notarial acts. Hence some problems are barely touched; in particular we shall only hint at the fundamental problem of the migrations of paper manufacturers; for other problems we shall only be able to suggest possible solutions, which will need further analysis in later studies.

The population of Villa Basilica on 31 December 1809 amounted to 1278 inhabitants, including the 26 nuns of the convent of the Annunziata. The pyramid of age and the percentage distribution in age groups (Tables 1 and 2) show the typical line of population with high birthrate and high deathrate. The graphs point out some remarkable irregularities, such as the low number of children between five and nine years, which was the result of a temporarily lower birthrate and a deathrate so high as to determine a negative balance.

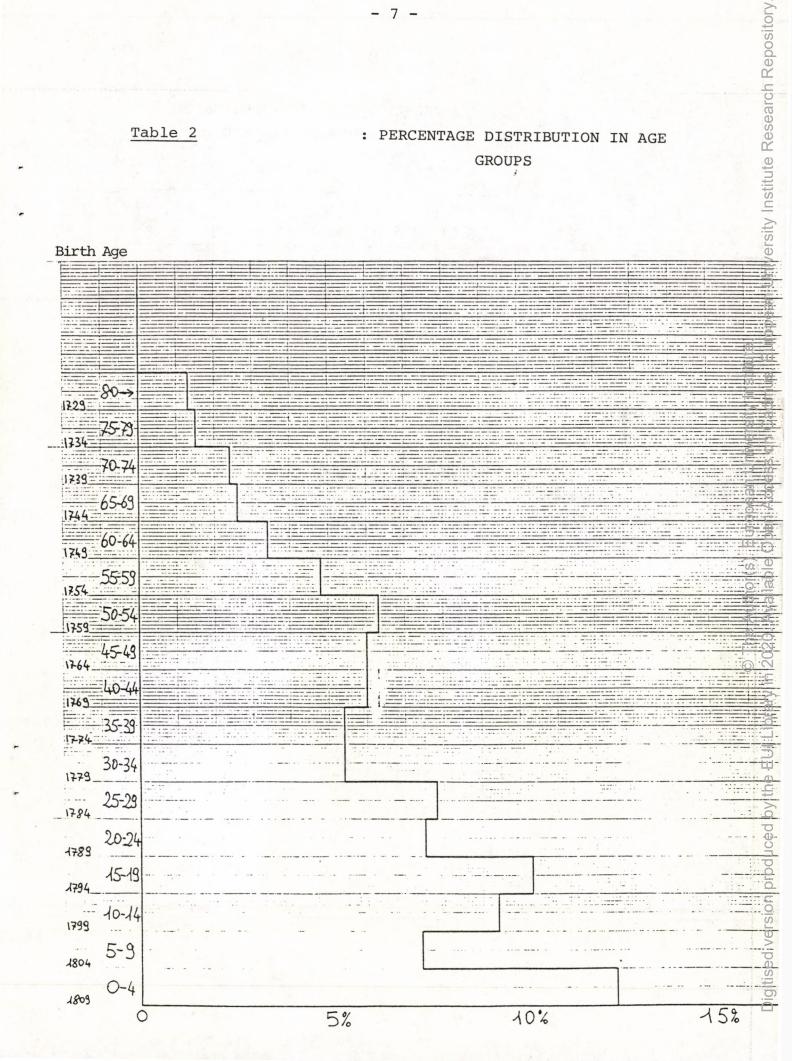
The number of families registered in the census was 265; among them 57, over 21%, were involved either totally or partially in paper manufacturing. The active population amounted to 938 individuals, with a dependency ratio of 33.47% (only those without any recorded profession have been counted among the dependent population, irrespective of age; hence it includes children not yet employed in any working activity, generally aged less than eight to ten, as well as disabled people). According to the professional distribution of the active population (Table 3) the 158 paper makers comprised the third largest group, with 17%. In 1823 the families working in paper mills were 78, nearly 30% of the total population, and the number of workers had risen to 215; in terms of their distribution by sex and age, there was an equal number of males and females, whereas the children (aged less than fourteen) of both sexes together amounted to 12% of the total. The census of 1823 showed an increase of male labour (56%) working in the mills and a higher number of children, especially males. If we assume that the nine paper-mills described in the land registers of the beginning of the century were still working in 1809, with their twelve vats, we can say that at every vat there were six adult males, as many females and one or two children.

Table 1

: PYRAMID OF AGE



: PERCENTAGE DISTRIBUTION IN AGE GROUPS



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Table 3

: PROFESSIONAL DISTRIBUTION OF THE ACTIVE POPULATION

		Select .				
	М		F		TOT.	્ર
	< 1.4	>14	€14	>14		
PEASANTS (a)	27	248	12	104	 391	41.68
TEXTILE WORKERS (b)			34	234	268	28.57
PAPER-MAKERS	6	72	13	67	158	16.84
TAILORS	1	6	1	20	28	2.98
SHOEMAKERS	2	15		!	17	1.81
CARPENTERS		15			15	1.60
PRIESTS (C)		11		!	11	1.17
SERVANTS		3		9	12	1.28
OTHERS	1	32		5	38	4.05
TOTAL	37	402	60	439	938	

Notes: (a) Including shepherds.

- (b) Consisting of winders (119), spinners (106), tessandori, weavers, hose-makers and carders.
- (c) Including one cleric.

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Among the active population the most numerous groups were those of peasants and of women employed in textile works, particularly at winding and spinning. The intermittent character of such activities leads us to believe that in the census this particular figure is overestimated, particularly if compared to women's work in the fields, which by contrast appears too low. That the parish priest, who was responsible for the census, should have considered such textile activity as more important than agricultural work may also have been affected by the fact that the census was made in winter, the season of maximum employment in home activities.

A detailed analysis allows us to identify some peculiarities about the families involved in one way or another in paper-mill work. The distribution of the heads of the families by age and profession (Table 5) shows some interesting features. First, the families employed in paper-mill work were generally younger than those of peasants' ones: almost 60% of the heads of the families engaged in paper--mill work were less than 50 years old, against just over 40% of the peasant heads. But the most meaningful figure that there were only very few paper-mill workers over sixty years of age, compared to 30% of peasants and people with other activities. This leads us to hypothesise that many young families employed in paper-mills may have moved to Villa during the development phase of the late eighteenth century, or that young craftsmen coming from the nearby centres may have been attracted by the possibility of work and may have got married there. The two hypotheses are not mutually exclusive, but they differ in their implications about the integration of paper-mill workers in the village community; only by looking through the parish sources will we be able to conclude which of the two hypotheses is a more accurate interpretation.

Another consideration concerns the heads of the families under thirty years of age: the difference between paper--mill workers and peasants is so striking as to make us presume that paper craftsmen used to get married at a younger

Table 4

: HOUSEHOLDS ACCORDING TO KINSHIP STRUCTURE

	No. of households	00	No. of persons	O,	Average members per household
SOLITARY H.	22	8.30	22	1.77	1
H.WITHOUT KIN STRUCTURE	17	6.41	56	4.51	3.3
SIMPLE H.	176	66.41	829	66.69	4.7
LARGE H.	39	14.71	261	21.00	6.7
MULTIPLE H.	11	4.15	75	6.03	6.8
TOTAL	265		1243		4.7

NOTE. 26 nuns and 9 servants are not included. Servants were present in eight households: of these, four heads of household were paper-makers, three were priests, one was a notary.

Table 5

: DISTRIBUTION OF HEADS OF HOUSEHOLD BY AGE AND PROFESSION

		20-29	30-39	40-49		60 and over	TOT.	96
PAPER-MAKI	No.	5	6	12	13	4	40	16.33
	8	12.50	15.00	30.00	32.50	10.00		
	No.	10	19	29	39	41	138	56.33
PEASANTS	90	7.25	13.77	21.01	28.26	29.71		
OTHERS	No.	7	9	19	12	20	67	27.34
OTHERS	8	10.45	13.43	28.36	17.91	29.85		
TOTAL	No.	22	34	60	64	65	245	
	8	8.98	13.88	24.49	26.12	26.53	(a)	

Note (a) The profession of two heads of household is not mentioned; 10 heads were priests; eight were invalids.

age. A first partial test is provided by Table 6 giving the average age of parents at their first child's birth: a paper-mill working father was a year and a half younger than a peasant father. But the data is precarious, because of the high possibility of error with such small figures. Nevertheless these results appear likely, especially given the quite low difference of age between husband and wife both working in paper-mills. Peasant women got married younger, and those engaged in textile work younger still. Owing to the quality of the available sources, it is not possible to analyse in depth attitudes to marriage and the régime of dowries of paper making families; nevertheless some information may be drawn from notarial acts. It was unusual for a paper maker to marry a peasant girl; on the other hand, paper makers' daughters frequently got married to peasants, often without giving up their work in the paper mill. The dowries given by paper mill owners ran between 200 and 400 scudi. In 1801 the daughter of a paper-mill worker, the owner of a small property, received as a dowry 50 scudi, not in cash, but "in furniture and equipment". The following year another paper craftsman's daughter was given 60 scudi as a dowry. In 1801 the paper-mill worker Domenico Morganti was satisfied with a dowry of 30 scudi. It seems quite likely that among those families registered not as owners but as paper-mill workers the dowry, when there was one, was just symbolic.

Before analysing the characteristics of the paper-mill working families of Villa Basilica, it is convenient briefly to examine the situation of the other small paper manufacturing centres of the state of Lucca. The most noticeable fact is the almost complete separation of the paper working families from the social structure of their village: they did not own anything, they lived in the mills which provided them with their only source of income, they usually settled for too short periods to be able to form stable relationships and ties with the permanent inhabitants. In some respects, it is a continuation of the tradition of previous centuries of the craftsmen who came from other places. By the early nineteenth

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Table 6

: AVERAGE AGE OF PARENTS AT THEIR FIRST CHILD'S BIRTH BY FATHER'S PROFESSION

	No.	Age M	F	Difference
PAPER-MAKERS	23	29.48	28.87	0.61
PEASANTS	71	30.96	28.08	2.88
OTHERS	30	28.77	26.87	1.90
TOTAL	124	30.15	27.94	2.21

century it was no longer a question of craftsmanship arousing admiration and respect, as in the past, and even leading to the grant of a few privileges; now the most meaningful fact was poverty and the downright misery of these families.

At Villa, a first element that differentiated it from the other paper manufacturing centres in Lucca was the noticeable presence of families with different sources of income, existing together and supplementing each other (Table 7). There were as many as 21 families only partially involved in paper-mill work and they provided 23% of the labour force of the mills. If we consider that only four of them owned nothing, we must infer that the mills of Villa were integrated in the community structure at a different level than elsewhere. This inference is also confirmed by the presence of 13 family groups totally engaged in paper-mill work, but registered as owners and hence quite likely to have had a fixed residence in the village. We shall see later that over time the trend was towards a reduction and annulment of this particularity. If we examine the structure of employment within these 21 families, 37 members worked in paper-mills, 24 were peasants, 21 were employed in textile work and 14 worked in other handicrafts. Such data point to an interesting social cross-section of a proto-industrial type, which will be the object of further research.

From a demographic point of view, the families were above average in size (5 to 6 members) and often without a nuclear structure. This type of family group shows the lowest ratio of dependence, because of the total use of the working capacities of each member. The six families of owners of paper-mills were very large and showed a tendency towards a more complex structure, as the 1823 data confirmed. The presence of a servant in three of them shows their status at the top of the village social ladder: no peasant family could boast of a servant. There were 30 families whose active members all worked in paper-mills: this is a remarkable number, but it becomes even more meaningful if we consider that there

Table 7

: SIZE AND STRUCTURE OF HOUSEHOLDS ACCORDING TO DIFFERENT SOURCES OF INCOME

		No. of house- holds	Average members per h.	Average active members	Dependen- cy ratio	% of simple h.	No. of servants
Households of owners or tenants of paper-mills	s or	9	7.17	5.17	30.71	66.67	3
Households whose owners active members were of other all paper-makers iproperty	owners of other property	13	3.84	3.15	21.95	69.23	1
	without property	17	4.17	2.88	44.90	82.35	
Households only partially involved in paper-mill work	in	21	5.67	4.57	21.43	57.14	
Households whose active members	owners	27	4.92	3.55	38.54	59.26	
were all peasants	without property	30	4.17	3.33	25.00	60.00	
Households draw- ing their income	lowners	œ	3.25	2.12	52.94	37.50	1
from a single artisan activity	without property	13	3.00	1.31	129.41	46.15	

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were 57 family groups whose income came only from agriculture and only another 21 families which drew their income from a single activity. Seventeen paper-mill families owned nothing, which helps to explain the strong mobility registered at Villa: 24 families present in the 1809 census cannot be found in the 1823 one, which in its turn registers 45 new families. This is also evidence of that phenomenon of impoverishment, a feature of these decades.

The 13 families totally employed in paper-mills and registered as owners were smaller and 70% had a nuclear structure; as we have noted in households with mixed income, in these families too the dependency ratio was very low. Slightly larger, but still below average, were the 17 families who were not owners, whose structure was almost exclusively nuclear; they had a higher number of children under working age, as shown by the higher dependency ratio.

Compared to the family groups whose active members all worked in paper-mills, the families with purely agricultural income were more numerous, with a lower percentage possessing a simple structure. Among them, the families of people who owned nothing were smaller and were of the same size as the family groups of non-owning paper-mill workers, even if they showed a lower dependency ratio.

The data of the 1823 census (Table 8), even with the reservations mentioned above, confirm some trends already present in the previous analysis. The population remained unchanged compared to the 1809 census: 1251 individuals, distributed in 274 family groups, with an average of 4.6 members. The size of the families of paper-mill owners had increased further, and there was also an increase of extended and multiple households. We can notice a clear line between these paper-mill owners and the 38 families drawing their income solely from paper manufacturing: the average size of family decreased to 3.5, the structure was 90% nuclear and the dependency ratio diminished to 14%. The families with mixed forms of income remained much larger (a typical protoindustrial phenomenon); they contained a high number of children and a lower proportion of simply family groups. The families with solely agricultural

Table 8

: SIZE AND STRUCTURE OF PAPER-MAKERS' AND PEASANTS' HOUSEHOLDS 1823 CENSUS

			-		STATE OF THE PERSON NAMED IN COLUMN NAMED IN C			-	
	No. of h.	No. of persons	Average members per h.	Average Paper-makers, age members M F F Per h. <14 >14 <14 >14	cers, ag	e Other activi- ties	Poor Dependence People	Poor Depend. ople ratio	% of simple h.
Households of owner or tenants of paper paper-mills	· · · · · · · · · · · · · · · · · · ·	61	7.62	7 19	5, 20			19.61	50.00
Households totally employed in paper-mills	38	134	3.52	10 1, 49	6 52		21	14.53	89.48
Households only par- tially employed in paper-mills				9 27 1 10	1 10	80	12	12 43.31	75.00
TOTAL	78 377	377	4.83	4.83 26 95 12 82	12 82			33 27.80	79.49
Households with so- lely agricultural income	35	175	2			1		25.00	57.14

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income were slightly larger, compared to 1809, and the percentage of simple family groups had gone down to 57%. It is also worthwhile noting that four peasant families now included servants and farm-hands, whereas in paper-mill working families the number had dropped to two.

Low wages and discontinuity of work, particularly for those employed in the secondary phases of production, made the condition of the paper-mill worker not only an unenvied one, but often one to be pitied by the farmworker. This was a social judgement which remained unchanged in the Villa community until the 1950s. The 1823 census registered as "poor", "miserable" or "beggars" as many as 33 members of families employed in paper-mills, as high as 9% of the total number of individuals, whereas in the wholly agricultural families no member is registered as poor. The early years of the century, characterized by a higher death-rate and a lower number of births, had already been difficult for the paper-mill workers. In May 1804 Franca Caviglia, the wife of a paper-mill worker from Pescia and a paper-mill worker herself, confessed before the public notary that she owed 35 scudi to Giuseppe Calamari, probably her emthis money, she said, "had been used to feed herself and her husband in these unfortunate years". Waiting and hoping to be able to settle her debt, she granted Calamari the use of a room in her house. It was the beginning of a process which usually led to an increasing debt and finally to the sale of the property.

In these early years of the century loans and sales between paper-mill workers in difficulty and paper-mill owners became very frequent and the dependence of the former on the latter total.

This process of impoverishment, which can be verified through analysis of the 1836 land registers, destroyed one of the main features of the Villa family groups employed in paper-mills at the beginning of the nineteenth century: the high level of integration in the structure of the village community. After selling his house, his piece of chestnut wood and his plot of arable land, the paper-mill worker saw himself up-

rooted from the social structure of the village and found himself thoroughly bound, even physically, to the paper-mill premises. Later, in the new phase of development which was to lead to a remarkable increase in the number of mills and a large expansion of the workforce, the paper maker was to find new forms of social integration. But in these early decades of the nineteenth century, in the long transition from traditional paper craftsmanship to industrial production, the families of paper-mill workers paid the high social cost of the process.

NOTE

For the development of the paper industry at Villa Basilica, I refer to my earlier research: 'La cartiera Buonvisi di Villa Basilica XVI-XIX secolo', Archivio storico italiano, CXXXIX (1981); 'Le cartiere lucchesi tra XVII e XVIII secolo', in Studi e ricerche, II, Istituto di Storia, Facoltà di Lettere, Florence 1983; 'Cartiere lucchesi in età moderna: risultati e problemi di una ricerca in corso', Ricerche storiche, XIV (1984); 'Le cartiere lucchesi in età napoleonica: problemi produttivi, organizzazione del lavoro e strutture familiari', forthcoming in Atti del Convegno "Il Principato napoleonico dei Baciocchi. Riforma dello Stato e società, Lucca 1985.

The main source of this paper is the 1809 "Stati della popolazione del Principato" (Archivio di Stato di Lucca, Gran Giudice 433). The tables of the census were filled in by the parish priests; the form was divided into nine columns: parish, progressive number of the family group, name, surname, kinship, age, occupation, whether owner or not, total number of the members of the family. It was an "ideal" census, irrespective of whether the residents were actually present at the time of the census. It is impossible to say whether the priest questioned the parties concerned in defining and describing the households; it is certain, however, that he did not use a mere cohabitation criterion: in fact, according to the 1802 land registers (Archivio di Stato di Lucca, Catasto Vecchio 875), about 50 families cohabited. Since the date of the survey was fixed as the 31st December, the information concerning age is quite accurate (infants' age is given in months); nevertheless, it is not clear whether the priest verified the dates of birth on the baptismal registers. The column concerning property is imprecise in that both those who owned a paper mill or a large farm and those who possessed only the hovel where they lived or a small plot of chestnut wood were all classified as "owners"; so that only negative entries are meaningful.

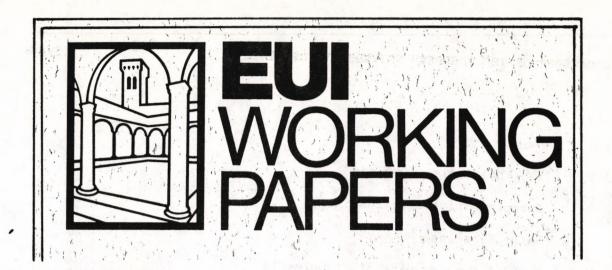
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The 1823 Census (Archivio di Stato di Lucca, Presidenza del Buon Governo 447) was not so accurate. The form sent to parish priests had no special column for kinship (relationship to head of household), which sometimes is not given. Often the age is registered in a very approximate manner through lack of a precise date to which to refer. In many cases the profession is recorded only for the head of the family and sometimes instead of a profession there is the note povero or miserabile. The column reserved for the priests' observations was filled in different ways: some parish priests passed their judgement on the morality of the family, others noted whether the members of the family fulfilled their Easter duties, others wrote nothing at all.

The demographic terms employed are taken from Peter Laslett's works.

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