

On Interpreting Peasant Diaries: Material Life and Collective Consciousness

In the middle of the 19th century, over half the population of Denmark still lived from agriculture. Throughout all the previous centuries, too, peasants constituted by far the greatest majority of the Danish population. However, they are the group about whom we have the least knowledge. The descriptions of their way of life are practically all written at the end of the 19th century, and many of them are marked by a certain nostalgia for by-gone days.

Our chance of learning details of the lives of these peasants is minimal. Our museums preserve some of their tools, their best pieces of furniture and examples of the houses they lived in, more or less reconstructed. We can look up their names and some of their main data in the archives: in church registers and census lists, in court rolls and probate registers, and similar documents. When the farmers signed the documents themselves, it was as a rule with guided hand or limited to some unsteadily printed initials. The hand used to guiding the plough was as a rule ill-adapted to the pen.

The standard of literacy among the Danish peasantry was low until the mid-19th century, but there is no rule without exceptions. Now and then a peasant left behind him some handwritten notes: the names of his children and the dates of their birth inscribed on the flyleaf of a Bible or prayer-book, or perhaps in a worn and spotted little book with notes on matters of some importance to the owner: cures for cattle diseases, unusual incidents, the dates of sowings and harvesting in different years, etc. In some cases when these notebooks assume the character of regularly kept journals, the modern reader comes very close to the writing peasant and receives an insight into his way of life and daily routine.

It is evident that peasant diaries of this nature represent historical source material of the utmost importance and interest to both ethnologists and anthropologists, as well as social historians. We decided, therefore, some years ago at the Institute of European Ethnology at the University of Copenhagen, to carry out a registration of peasant diaries and account books in public and private possession in order to have a record of this kind of source material, and to stimulate scholars to draw upon these sources for their research. The preliminary result of the registration was published in 1980 in a volume containing an annotated bibliography of about 270 diaries and account books from the time before 1920. The volume also includes an introduction with a survey of the material, and a discussion of the research possibilities represented by this specific type of source (Schousboe 1980).

DANISH PEASANT DIARIES

The majority of peasant notebooks recorded by the Institute of European Ethnology are written in the 19th century. There are, however, quite a number from the 1700's, most of them from the end of the century although a few go as far back as to about 1700. The majority of these older notebooks do not have the character of systematically and chronologically kept journals. Some of them are only scattered notes of mixed contents. Others have rather the character of account books, consisting of records of farm produce and the disposal of the surplus. These notebooks originate mainly from those parts of the country where buying and selling was an important part of a farmer's activities. This was especially the case in the western part of the former duchy of Schleswig, where wealthy farmers of the marshlands were cattle breeders and cattle dealers.

Some of the 18th century notebooks contain a more or less detailed autobiography of the owner. The most comprehensive records of this kind were made by Søren Pedersen in Havrebjerg, who started his writings as the young son of a Zealand tenant before the Agrarian Reforms. They include his own autobiography, biographies of other family members, and surveys of the annual farm production in the period between 1805 and 1838. These records are being prepared for publication by the Society for Agrarian History (*Landbohistorisk Selskab*). This society has earlier published two of the older peasant diaries, one written by a farmer in the neighbourhood of Copenhagen 1770-1794 (Dickmann Rasmussen 1978), and one kept by a trading farmer in the middle of Jutland 1786-1797 (Holmgaard 1969). A third notebook from West Funen is being prepared for publication.

However, for the majority of the Danish peasantry in the 18th century the basic prerequisite for keeping such diaries was still lacking: the skill of writing. It was not until the Education Act of 1814 that all country children were given the opportunity of learning to read and write. That many peasant diaries from the following decades are to be found all over the country is partly a result of this law.

Yet the newly acquired skill, and the inclination to practise it, is not an entirely satisfactory explanation for the many diaries written. What inspired the peasants to keep these diaries, the contents of which are so similar? The principal subjects are the weather and the day to day work in the yearly round, and the influence of one upon the other. It is not surprising that these things should occupy the peasant's thoughts, but why does he record them?

I think that part of the explanation lies with the almanac. This little book was sold at fairs and by itinerant salesmen and it circulated widely among

common folk. The almanac contains a calendar for the year with information about the places and dates of fairs, for example, as well as different astronomical and astrological phenomena. Until 1832 the Danish almanac even contained a weather forecast for the whole year, a point which of course was of tremendous interest to the farmer. And the next step, to note down the actual weather in a given month or week, was not a long one. From there it was only a short step to record such things in the almanac that the owner wanted to keep in mind: when the cow had gone to the bull, when the seed was sown, when the harvest had begun, etc. Some of this might be written in the margin of the almanac, but some almanacs were designed as "writing calendars" with blank pages for notes. Blank pages could also be sewn into the book, which allowed for more detailed notes day by day. Some of our peasant diaries are written on these blank pages in almanacs, and in fact they represent a very old practise. Much older diaries kept by members of the upper classes are also written in almanacs, e.g. a famous one kept by a nobleman in the circle round King Christian IV about 1600 (Vedel Simonsen 1842-43).

Other peasant diaries are written in notebooks but the influence of the almanac is still evident in the choice of what is recorded, the short concise form, and the schematic method of notation. The abbreviations used in quite a few of the diaries may also be inspired by the symbols in the almanac. The following lines from a "journal of weather and work" kept in Ramløse in North Zealand 1838-58 are an example of journals of this type:

Date	March 1841	Wind	Work
Mon. 1st.	sunshine all day, a little frost and very mild	southeast	took care of the cattle, Anders and Father in Lyngby with the carter.
Tues. 2nd.	Mostly sunny all day, frost and a little mild	southeast	cut chaff. Father bought two pigs.
Wed. 3nd.	Grey all day, some frost and cold	northeast	Anders and I threshed grain.
Thurs. 4th.	Grey all day, a little frost, a little cold.	east	measured grain and moved the oats.

Other journals have more detailed records of everyday life. For example, the diary kept between 1801 and 1854 by Rasmus Stæhr, sailor and farmer on the small island of Farø south of Zealand which is being studied by Klavs Espen Gruno. It is one of the most extensive journals from that period, covering more than 2000 pages bound in seven folio volumes from which some quotations are given on page XX.

The 19th century peasant diaries represent all parts of the country and the writers belong to many different groups and levels. There are big farmers

but also many smallholders. We even find diaries by fishermen, by rural craftsmen of different kinds, and some written by farm labourers.

A common feature of all the diaries from the first half of the 19th century — and even of some of the later ones — is that although their main theme is “weather and work” they also report all the other activities of the keeper of the diary: his journeys, his visits, his participation in social events such as christenings, weddings and burials, or village meetings. With notes on purchases and sales they are diaries and account books at one and the same time. These diaries thus have an all-round character; they depict daily life as a whole and are not divided up into sections or separate spheres.

Another characteristic of these journals is that they record but do not reflect. The entries in the diaries note the happenings and daily routines, but the writer does not ponder over what has happened; his thoughts and feelings very seldom come to the surface. In that sense the peasant diary differs from what might be called the “bourgeois diary” — the type of book which serves as a medium of expression and to which confessions are made.

Diaries of this kind even turn up in the countryside after the mid-19th century, especially in circles which were in touch with religious movements and the folk high schools. An early example is Morten Nielsen, who had encountered the religious movements in Funen in the 1850s. A single quotation will show how the style changed: “Thanks and praise be to God! Another blessed and happy day has passed by. Indeed, one of my very best days has followed the hard and dark week. I am jumping for joy tonight, and I feel as if I had become quite a new man. In short: once again I am happy and well at ease!”

Perhaps what happened in the latter half of the 19th century was that the old homogeneity of the peasant diary broke: there are now different diaries for different purposes. The “reflective diary” is only one type. Another is the journal which the young farmer was taught to write at agricultural training school. A modern farmer had to keep a series of notebooks about the work and production of his farm. Like his ancestor he recorded the daily work of the farm, but his journal was kept only for that purpose, and not mixed up with notes about matters irrelevant to the agricultural production.

PEASANT DIARIES AS SOURCES

Alan Macfarlane, who is a pioneer in the field of exploitation of diaries and other kinds of historical sources through the use of anthropological methods, opens his book on “The Family Life of Ralph Josselin” with the

words: "The search for answers to new questions usually coincides with the discovery of new sources of information" (Macfarlane 1970). It would hardly be correct to call the Danish peasant diaries a new discovery, for some of them have been used by writers on cultural and agrarian history as far back as the 1880s. We have, however, discovered new possibilities in these sources, and we have new questions to put to them.

Historians have used peasant journals as sources of information about the specific material and social conditions of a given period, or they were interested in the picture it might give of the economy of a particular farm. The ethnological or anthropological approach to these sources has a wider scope. It concerns the whole way of life of the diarist, not a single aspect of it but the interrelationship between all spheres of activity. The diary is a sort of substitute for fieldwork. To the ethnologist the diarist is a representative of a lost community. His daily routines can be followed through his entries as well as his interaction with people inside and outside his own community. He even allows the reader to catch glimpses of his views and values.

This leads us, however, to the inevitable question of representativeness. Who are these people who reveal part of their life to us through their writings? How far is it possible to generalize from these notes? Can they be judged as representatives of the peasantry of a bygone period, or are they simply unique personalities?

The easiest and most obvious answer is that the diarists are untypical solely because they keep diaries. If we consider the phenomenon of diary-writing in a wider historical perspective, it will be obvious that it coincides with the modernization of agriculture. To write a diary is one of the expressions of changing working conditions which brought about a new "capitalistic spirit", and it is characteristic of the transition from peasant to farmer. Some of the oldest agrarian diaries are good examples of this, e.g. the Frisian farmer Rienck Hennema (1569-1573) and the English farmer Robert Loder (1610-1629) (Slicher v. Bath 1962).

This is also the case with most of the 18th century Danish notebooks. With a few exceptions they are written by individuals who also distinguish themselves in other respects from their fellow peasants.

Nevertheless, they are useful sources of information on many aspects of the agrarian society. Karen Schousboe has used these sources as the point of departure for an inquiry into "seed/yield ratio and peasant economy", in which she comes to the conclusion that the average farm of the 18th century had a seed/yield ratio of 1:5, and that most of them had hardly any corn surplus to sell (Schousboe 1979). They may even be used to segregate

an upper stratum of peasants. These peasants have been termed "peasant-traders" (*handelsbønder*) by Karen Schousboe because they based their relative wealth on non-agrarian activities as traders and entrepreneurs (Schousboe 1979a).

If we move to the following century, however, we will find a changed source situation. After the Education Act of 1814, literacy was no longer the privilege of a small group, consequently down through the 19th century the circle of diarists becomes wider, now including even smallholders and rural artisans.

These people were of course remarkable in a way, otherwise they would not have written their daily notes. But they were still subjected to the same conditions as the people they lived among, and whose values and norms they must to a great extent have shared. It emerges, for example, from the detailed analysis of a diary written by Peder Knudsen, Staulund, a farmer in mid-Jutland 1829-1857 (Gormsen 1976). His particular interest and skill in reading and writing leads him into local political and administrative work, but his daily life as a farmer seems to have been very much like that of other "peasants of the moor" in the first half of the 19th century. Ellen Damgaard, who is working on an edition of the records left by a day labourer and later smallholder, Peder Lykke of Nees in north-west Jutland, has found a similar pattern. She is impressed by the degree to which the individual life of Peder Lykke reflects the general features of his class in the 1880s.

From an ethnological point of view the 19th century diaries are the most valuable. They represent a comprehensive selection of people in the countryside, and most of them are a day by day record of the lives of the diarists. On the basis of diaries such as these it is possible to make studies at micro-level, which can give us a new insight into agrarian society and put us on the track of new connections and correlations. We may even use the diaries for testing some of the prevalent hypotheses and generalizations about the Danish peasantry, as will be seen from the following examples.

PEASANT ECOLOGY AND ECONOMY

Many accounts of agrarian conditions in Denmark in the 19th century are not sufficiently differentiated, and they tend to treat all farms alike. The diaries help to give a more varied picture. They convey some impression of how great the regional differences still were in the period from the first agrarian reform at the end of the 18th century to the second agrarian reform at the end of the 19th century (the change-over from corn production to

dairy farming, and the introduction of the cooperatives). Farms were to a great extent still subjected to local ecological conditions, and in many places we find an economy linked to the exploitation of different resources.

Widely differing ecological environments are represented by the diaries from this period. We have earlier referred to the comprehensive journals of Rasmus Stæhr from the little island of Farø. He is an example of the peasant whose activity is divided between his land, and offshore waters. A similar complex pattern emerges from the diary of a farmer on the peninsula of Hannæs in the western reaches of the Limfjord, who in his earlier years

Farm in Kondrup, East Jutland, 1840

	jan	feb	mar	apr	may	jun	jul	aug	sep	oct	nov	dec
Preparation of the soil												
Hay mowing												
Grain harvest												
Threshing												
Peat and turf work												
Tours to Randers												

Farm on Karup Moor, Mid-Jutland, 1830

Preparation of the soil												
Hay mowing												
Grain harvest												
Threshing												
Heather work												
Peat and turf work												
Mixing dung												

Farm on Holmsland Klit, West Jutland, 1876

Preparation of the soil												
Hay mowing												
Grain harvest												
Threshing												
Peat and turf work												
Reed work												
Fjord fishing												
Sea fishing												
Repair of fishing equipment												
Work with wreckage												

Fig.1 Diagram of the yearly round on three Jutland farms in the 19th century.

(in the 1820s and 1830s) even exploited some of the fjord's maritime resources (Rasmussen 1968: 293-95).

Further south in Jutland a few diaries allow us to make some sort of cross-section through the Jutland peninsula, as visualized in the diagram showing the yearly round on three different farms. In East Jutland, Jens Pedersen,

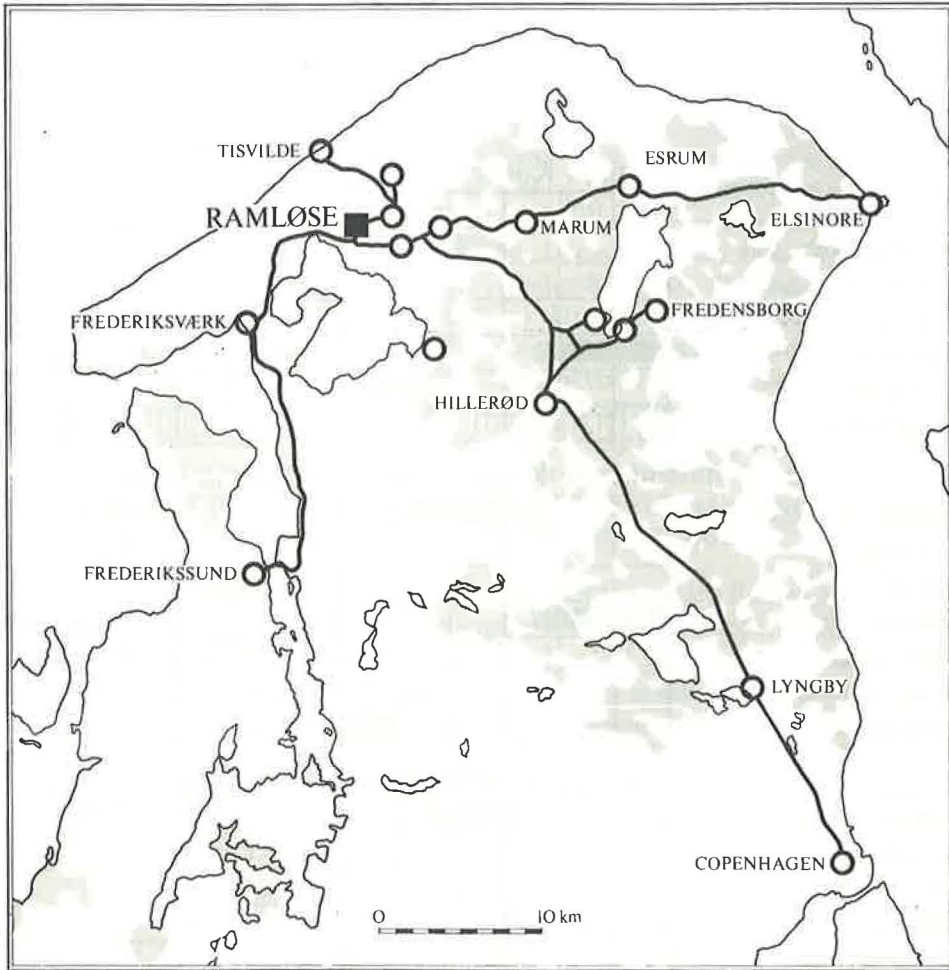


Fig. 2 The travel activities from the farm "Føllegården" in Ramløse, North Zealand 1845, according to the diary of Hans Larsen. Most of the journeys were made to sell small quantities of the agricultural surplus in towns or at fairs. The majority of customers were at Frederiksværk, Hillerød, Elsinore (where geese were sold before Christmas) and Copenhagen and Lyngby (where pork was sold). Journeys to the latter destinations took 2-3 days. Trips were also made for purposes other than business. Visits were paid to people in the neighbouring villages. At Maarum timber and fuel were bought at auctions; at Esrum rent was paid for the farm. And finally there was the traditional annual excursion to the Helene Spring in Tisvilde.

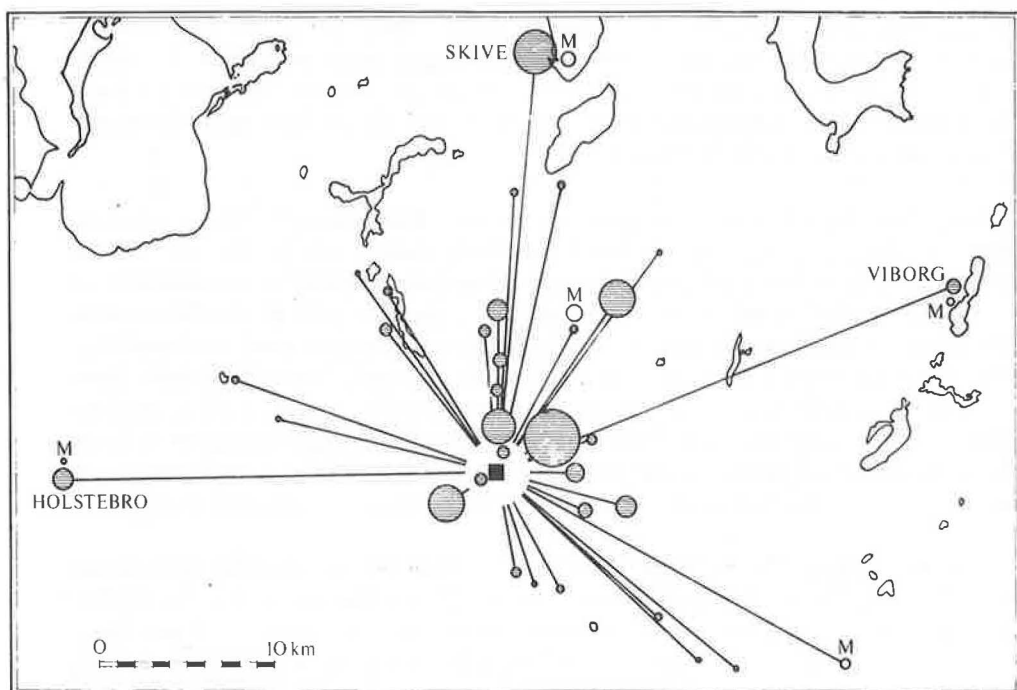


Fig. 3 Map showing the economic field of activity of the moorland peasant Peder Knudsen in Staulund.

Signs: Square = the farm of Peder Knudsen, Circles = localities with which he has economic contacts, the area of each circle being directly proportional to the number of contacts. M = fairs, which he visits. (From an unpublished paper by Gudrun Gormsen)

who worked a large farm in Kondrup, north-west of Randers, kept a journal from 1837 to 1873. The yield of cereal crops on his rich moraine land was plentiful in those years and fetched good prices from corn merchants in the neighbouring town. Practically every Saturday Jens Pedersen drove to Randers which, on that day, was crowded with farm wagons; he often had a couple of barrels of grain in the back of his cart. Most of the villages of the region were large and the local farms employed many hands. This made for a richly developed village life, with many traditional celebrations which are referred to in the journal.

The farmer, Peder Knudsen, kept a journal from 1829 to 1857 as mentioned earlier; he lived on the wide infertile moor called Karup Hede in mid-Jutland. His world is contemporary with, but utterly different from, that of Jens Pedersen. There were no big villages and the characteristic dwelling was an isolated farmstead. Farms on the moors might be extensive — Peder Knudsen owned about 750 acres of land — but only a small part of this was cultivated. The rest was moorland, and the great amount of time devoted to

However, the major role not only in everyday relations but also on special occasions was played by relatives and close neighbours. The farm formed part of a neighbourhood of moved-out farms and houses within a radius of 1 km. The same close contact was established with relatives living at a distance of as much as 5 km from the farm. From the diary we receive the impression that it was in many respects the relatives who played the major role.

This combination of a narrow neighbourhood and a somewhat wider kinship field reappears in a number of other diaries, irrespective of ecological or chronological differences. In a comparison between the earlier mentioned mid-19th century diaries from Staulund (moorland) and Kondrup (fertile East Jutland) with an older diary from Nørre Tulstrup in the borderland between East Jutland and the moors, Gudrun Gormsen comes to the conclusion that it seems as if "the social and economic interaction to a high degree took place between relatively few neighbours and the relatives. They were the categories, that were most often visited, and from these groups came the necessary help in the daily work" (Gormsen 1976).

A recurring feature in the diaries is that kinship often appears to be a prerequisite for the establishment of economic relations of different kinds. Altogether this material seems to indicate that a revision must be made to the generally accepted view that the neighbourhood played the dominant role in the social organisation of the village community.

LIFE CYCLES

When a peasant diary has been kept for a number of years or perhaps even decades, it presents a unique opportunity for a detailed study of different stages in the cycle of an individual or a household. Such cycles are often amazingly similar and tell us much about the societies to which the different diarists belong.

In a great many diaries the adaptation of the household to different stages in the family cycle can be followed year by year. In some of them an insight is given into the changing situation of the farmer, for example after he retires and leaves the farm to his successor. This is the case of the journal kept by Rasmus Stæhr on Farø island between 1801 and 1854 referred to earlier. Other diaries are initiated by young farmhands and give valuable information about the changes from boyhood to manhood.

The latter category has a special claim on our attention. Karen Schousboe is interested in such diaries from an economical point of view: some of the

older peasant diaries give an insight into the wide range of different activities that a young, unmarried peasant might engage upon to collect the necessary money for entering into the possession of a farm (Schousboe 1979a, 1980).

The diary from Staulund in the moors of Jutland, treated by Gudrun Gormsen, was embarked upon just in the years when the young Peder Knudsen had taken over the farm after the death of his father, and it gives an account more detailed than any other sources of the problems he was facing, and the strategy he had to follow, to fulfil his duties towards, for example, his unmarried brothers and sisters (Gormsen 1976).

A vivid picture of the world of a young man can be drawn on the basis of a diary kept by Hans Nielsen, Gærup in South Funen from 1813 to 1833, which is being studied by Lisbet Holtse. Hans Nielsen was only 18 years old when he started to write, and many of his notes are about the feasts and other activities among the young people in the village community. He seems to have loved parties and often played for them as a musician. Among unmarried men the tobacco pipe and the pocket watch with a chain seem to have been important status symbols. Much trade with pipes is reported, and it is a trade which seems to have played a role as a means of communication between the young people.

In the diary of Hans Nielsen it is even possible to see how he gradually withdrew from the activities of the young people's guild while taking over more and more of the duties of his father, who was a wheelwright and smallholder (cf. the diagram in Schousboe 1980). In the diary this change is even reflected by the words with which he refers to his father.

SOCIAL AND CULTURAL CHANGE

We have already mentioned that some of the diaries have been kept through decades, and a few for more than half a century. It is obvious that such diaries not only reflect the change in the single family or household, but also the transformation taking place in society during the period in question. This is especially the case with the many diaries from the middle and end of the 19th century, a period marked by changes in many fields.

This aspect is particularly dealt with by Palle Christiansen in a paper with the title "Peasant Adaptation to Bourgeois Culture?" (Christiansen 1978) in which he discusses the radical economic and social transformations of the Danish peasantry in the 19th century and the attendant cultural redefinition. Among other sources in his investigation he draws upon a diary by a Zealand

farmer 1854-1873, and an account book by another farmer in the years 1872-1892. Both books are from rather large farms, and they cannot be taken as really representative of all farmers in the region. "Nevertheless", says Palle Christiansen, "both books contain so many stereotypical features of the general change in peasant society and culture, and the sources are of such unique and informative nature, that the issue of representativeness takes a back seat. It is not so much the precise dating of the new effects in farm households that we are interested in (in all probability these two farmers were early innovators), but, rather, their mutual chronology and nature."

To survey the material he has systematized the most relevant entries from the diary and the account book in two timetables (Christiansen 1978, fig. 1 a-b). In these it is possible to follow the chronological correspondence between traditional features and new phenomena in three different spheres: farm technology, domestic life, and external adaptation/integration. With this as a point of departure, he leads a detailed discussion of the complicated process of change, which cannot be summarized here.

In his paper Palle Christiansen has shown one way to deal with sources of this kind if we want to study socio-cultural transformations at the micro-level. A lot of other diaries might be analyzed in a similar way. One example is the diary from Møn, mentioned in the section on social relations, which is an excellent source for a study of the process of change in the countryside in the 1870s and 1880s.

CULTURE AND CONSCIOUSNESS

It has been mentioned above that one of the features characteristic of nearly all the peasant diaries is that they record but do not reflect. Consequently they are excellent sources for an examination of economic and social patterns of activity, as shown in the preceding pages. It is far more difficult to penetrate behind the acting man, to uncover what he is thinking and feeling. Does that mean that we are cut off from studying the diarist from a cognitive point of view? From charting his attitudes, norms and values? Not totally, for these things will always be reflected indirectly in the diaries: through the selection of what is written down, through the words and concepts that are used, and through the acts recorded.

Let me illustrate this with a few examples chosen from different spheres of life. As already mentioned, most of the peasant diaries contain notes about the weather. The same weather, however, may be perceived and

described in different ways. The farmer Rasmus Stæhr on Farø, who was a former sailor and still had a lot of maritime activities, makes notes about the weather; short and precise like a ship's log, always with three principal points: the wind direction, the wind force, and the visibility. The information given, as well as the words used, reveal his maritime background. There are other farmers who like Rasmus Stæhr, make daily notes about the weather, but they pay attention to other aspects of the weather and use other words.

In one of the older diaries, written by Lars Nielsen of Staunsholt in the neighbourhood of Copenhagen, 1770-1974, the meteorological observations are not daily, but he writes about the weather in periods which are critical in the agrarian yearly cycle and certain days which, according to folk tradition, are fit occasions for auguries. He is eagerly occupied by testing the rules and auguries about which he knows from local tradition or the popular "weather book" (Dickmann Rasmussen 1978).

Quite another attitude towards meteorological phenomena is to be found in a diary from 1863, kept by a North Zealand peasant girl but representing the new kind of "bourgeois" diary. To her, the weather is something that is experienced sensuously, and described in an artistic way (the light, the heaven, the shape of clouds, etc.), using emotional adjectives like violent, beautiful, charming, marvellous and dismal.

The consciousness of a farmer will always be strongly influenced by the material framework of his existence, and his attention will be directed towards the maintenance of his means of subsistence. Cattle and sheep were the most important elements in the farming of the moorland peasant, Peder Knudsen in Staulund, and a main problem for him was to get fodder enough to keep as much livestock as possible alive during the winter. He himself took care of the feeding, and many of his entries show his preoccupation with this problem. One example to illustrate this: "3rd March 1830: Today the sheep were again on pasture or on the moor. I intended to go out to see them, but I slipped on some ice and hurt my shoulder badly — worse luck. Now feeding the animals gives a lot of trouble. I can't give fodder without spilling because my shoulder prevents me from moving my hands properly and collecting the fodder, which is brittle and short because of the wet weather we had while harvesting. As the quantity is small compared with the size of the herd, we owe it to the Almighty who let it grow, to avoid all waste."

A passage like this brings us very close to the daily troubles of our moorland peasant, and at the same time gives us an impression of his religious thoughts — which seem to be more rational than pious.

Some of the diaries even tell us about the attitude of peasants to life and death. In the early 19th century death was a much more usual element in daily life than it is today. Child mortality was still especially extensive, and through the entries in the diaries a totally different attitude is noticeable to bereavements of this kind. On the 23rd January 1814, young Hans Nielsen in Gærup writes: "I went over to my mother's brother Peder Hansen for the funeral, and carried his little son to his last resting-place. The same day in the evening we had quick little soldiers' get-together at which I played."

Eleven children were born to Rasmus Stæhr and his wife on Farø between 1798 and 1812, and five of them died before they were fourteen. In 1814 they lost their only son, who died of galloping consumption at the age of twelve. The diary reveals very little about the illness of the boy and the troubles of his parents, until the end at the entry of 12th May: "The same morning about 6 o'clock our son Jens Cornillius died, just turned twelve this spring. For this reason I let the boy drive to Bågø to collect my wife's sister, Maren, to help lay Cornillius out. Henrik had begun the harrowing and finished the north field the same day. I mended fencing round the fallow field. Peder dug ditches. Towards the evening, the boy and I rowed to Zealand with 1/2 a barrel of rye and 1/2 of wheat to have it bolted for Cornillius's funeral. The same afternoon I sold 4 barrels of barley to Søren Peder-sen and Jakob Munk from Bakkebølle . . .".

Work like this continued in the days which followed, with ploughing, harrowing and fencing as if nothing had happened. The carpenter is fetched from Bågø and stays on the farm for two days working on the coffin for the dead boy. Then finally, on Thursday 19th May, "We accompanied our son Jens Cornillius to his resting-place, on the same occasion we had our friends over here to have dinner."

With these few examples I hope that I have managed to convey some impression of the possibilities which diaries provide for grasping the culture and consciousness of a bygone peasantry. Little has been done till now in this field or in other aspects of these diaries. The rich source material which the Danish peasant diaries represent is still largely virgin soil waiting for cultivation.

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- VEDEL SIMONSEN, L.S.
 1842-43 Eske Brocks Levnetsbeskrivelse I-II.