

THE MEDIEVAL CITY

Norman Pounds

GREENWOOD PRESS

THE MEDIEVAL CITY

Titles in the Series

Greenwood Guides to Historic Events of the Medieval World

The Black Death

The Crusades

Eleanor of Aquitaine, Courtly Love, and the Troubadours

Joan of Arc and the Hundred Years War

Genghis Khan and Mongol Rule

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The Rise of Islam

The Puebloan Society of Chaco Canyon

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Greenwood Guides to Historic Events of the Medieval World
Jane Chance, Series Editor



GREENWOOD PRESS
Westport, Connecticut • London

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Pounds, Norman John Greville.

The medieval city / Norman Pounds.

p. cm.—(Greenwood guides to historic events of the medieval world)

Includes bibliographical references and index.

ISBN 0-313-32498-0 (alk. paper)

1. Cities and towns, Medieval—Europe. I. Title. II. Series.

HT115.P68 2005

307.76'094'0902—dc22 2004028021

British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data is available.

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Library of Congress Catalog Card Number: 2004028021

ISBN: 0-313-32498-0

First published in 2005

Greenwood Press, 88 Post Road West, Westport, CT 06881

An imprint of Greenwood Publishing Group, Inc.

www.greenwood.com

Printed in the United States of America



The paper used in this book complies with the Permanent Paper Standard issued by the National Information Standards Organization (Z39.48-1984).

10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

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SERIES FOREWORD

The Middle Ages are no longer considered the “Dark Ages” (as Petrarch termed them), sandwiched between the two enlightened periods of classical antiquity and the Renaissance. Often defined as a historical period lasting, roughly, from 500 to 1500 c.e., the Middle Ages span an enormous amount of time (if we consider the way other time periods have been constructed by historians) as well as an astonishing range of countries and regions very different from one another. That is, we call the “Middle” Ages the period beginning with the fall of the Roman Empire as a result of raids by northern European tribes of “barbarians” in the late antiquity of the fifth and sixth centuries and continuing until the advent of the so-called Italian and English renaissances, or rebirths of classical learning, in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. How this age could be termed either “Middle” or “Dark” is a mystery to those who study it. Certainly it is no longer understood as embracing merely the classical inheritance in the west or excluding eastern Europe, the Middle East, Asia, or even, as I would argue, North and Central America.

Whatever the arbitrary, archaic, and hegemonic limitations of these temporal parameters—the old-fashioned approach to them was that they were mainly not classical antiquity, and therefore not important—the Middle Ages represent a time when certain events occurred that have continued to affect modern cultures and that also, inevitably, catalyzed other medieval events. Among other important events, the Middle Ages saw the birth of Muhammad (c. 570–632) and his foundation of Islam in the seventh century as a rejection of Christianity which led to the imperial conflict between East and West in the eleventh and twelfth centuries. In western Europe in the Middle Ages the foundations for modern

nationalism and modern law were laid and the concept of romantic love arose in the Middle Ages, this latter event partly one of the indirect consequences of the Crusades. With the shaping of national identity came the need to defend boundaries against invasion; so the castle emerged as a military outpost—whether in northern Africa, during the Crusades, or in Wales, in the eleventh century, to defend William of Normandy's newly acquired provinces—to satisfy that need. From Asia the invasions of Genghis Khan changed the literal and cultural shape of eastern and southern Europe.

In addition to triggering the development of the concept of chivalry and the knight, the Crusades influenced the European concepts of the lyric, music, and musical instruments; introduced to Europe an appetite for spices like cinnamon, coriander, and saffron and for dried fruits like prunes and figs as well as a desire for fabrics such as silk; and brought Aristotle to the European university through Arabic and then Latin translations. As a result of study of the “new” Aristotle, science and philosophy dramatically changed direction—and their emphasis on this material world helped to undermine the power of the Catholic Church as a monolithic institution in the thirteenth century.

By the twelfth century, with the centralization of the one (Catholic) Church, came a new architecture for the cathedral—the Gothic—to replace the older Romanesque architecture and thereby to manifest the Church's role in the community in a material way as well as in spiritual and political ways. Also from the cathedral as an institution and its need to dramatize the symbolic events of the liturgy came medieval drama—the mystery and the morality play, from which modern drama derives in large part. Out of the cathedral and its schools to train new priests (formerly handled by monasteries) emerged the medieval institution of the university. Around the same time, the community known as a town rose up in eastern and western Europe as a consequence of trade and the necessity for a new economic center to accompany the development of a bourgeoisie, or middle class. Because of the town's existence, the need for an itinerant mendicancy that could preach the teachings of the Church and beg for alms in urban centers sprang up.

Elsewhere in the world, in North America the eleventh-century settlement of Chaco Canyon by the Pueblo peoples created a social model like no other, one centered on ritual and ceremony in which the “priests”

were key, but one that lasted barely two hundred years before it collapsed and its central structures were abandoned.

In addition to their influence on the development of central features of modern culture, the Middle Ages have long fascinated the modern age because of parallels that exist between the two periods. In both, terrible wars devastated whole nations and peoples; in both, incurable diseases plagued cities and killed large percentages of the world's population. In both periods, dramatic social and cultural changes took place as a result of these events: marginalized and overtaxed groups in societies rebelled against imperious governments; trade and a burgeoning middle class came to the fore; outside the privacy of the family, women began to have a greater role in Western societies and their cultures.

How different cultures of that age grappled with such historical change is the subject of the Greenwood Guides to Historic Events of the Medieval World. This series features individual volumes that illuminate key events in medieval world history. In some cases, an "event" occurred during a relatively limited time period. The troubadour lyric as a phenomenon, for example, flowered and died in the courts of Aquitaine in the twelfth century, as did the courtly romance in northern Europe a few decades later. The Hundred Years War between France and England generally took place during a precise time period, from the fourteenth to mid-fifteenth centuries.

In other cases, the event may have lasted for centuries before it played itself out: the medieval Gothic cathedral, for example, may have been first built in the twelfth century at Saint-Denis in Paris (c. 1140), but cathedrals, often of a slightly different style of Gothic architecture, were still being built in the fifteenth century all over Europe and, again, as the symbolic representation of a bishop's seat, or chair, are still being built today. And the medieval city, whatever its incarnation in the early Middle Ages, basically blossomed between the eleventh and thirteenth centuries as a result of social, economic, and cultural changes. Events—beyond a single dramatic historically limited happening—took longer to affect societies in the Middle Ages because of the lack of political and social centralization, the primarily agricultural and rural nature of most countries, difficulties in communication, and the distances between important cultural centers.

Each volume includes necessary tools for understanding such key events in the Middle Ages. Because of the postmodern critique of au-

thority that modern societies underwent at the end of the twentieth century, students and scholars as well as general readers have come to mistrust the commentary and expertise of any one individual scholar or commentator and to identify the text as an arbiter of “history.” For this reason, each book in the series can be described as a “library in a book.” The intent of the series is to provide a quick, in-depth examination and current perspectives on the event to stimulate critical thinking as well as ready-reference materials, including primary documents and biographies of key individuals, for additional research.

Specifically, in addition to a narrative historical overview that places the specific event within the larger context of a contemporary perspective, five to seven developmental chapters explore related focused aspects of the event. In addition, each volume begins with a brief chronology and ends with a conclusion that discusses the consequences and impact of the event. There are also brief biographies of twelve to twenty key individuals (or places or buildings, in the book on the cathedral); primary documents from the period (for example, letters, chronicles, memoirs, diaries, and other writings) that illustrate states of mind or the turn of events at the time, whether historical, literary, scientific, or philosophical; illustrations (maps, diagrams, manuscript illuminations, portraits); a glossary of terms; and an annotated bibliography of important books, articles, films, and CD-ROMs available for additional research. An index concludes each volume.

No particular theoretical approach or historical perspective characterizes the series; authors developed their topics as they chose, generally taking into account the latest thinking on any particular event. The editors selected final topics from a list provided by an advisory board of high school teachers and public and school librarians. On the basis of nominations of scholars made by distinguished writers, the series editor also tapped internationally known scholars, both those with lifelong expertise and others with fresh new perspectives on a topic, to author the twelve books in the series. Finally, the series editor selected distinguished medievalists, art historians, and archaeologists to complete an advisory board: Gwinn Vivian, retired professor of archaeology at the University of Arizona Museum; Sharon Kinoshita, associate professor of French literature, world literature, and cultural studies at the University of California–Santa Cruz; Nancy Wu, associate museum educator at the Metropolitan Museum of Art, The Cloisters, New York City; and Christo-

twelfth century that jihād was revived in the wars with the Latin Christian Crusaders. Most of the Crusades did not result in victory for the Latin Christians, although Nicholson concedes they slowed the advance of Islam. After Jerusalem was destroyed in 1291, Muslim rulers did permit Christian pilgrims to travel to holy sites. In the Iberian Peninsula, Christian rulers replaced Muslim rulers, but Muslims, Jews, and dissident Christians were compelled to convert to Catholicism. In northeastern Europe, the Teutonic Order's campaigns allowed German colonization that later encouraged twentieth-century German claims to land and led to two world wars. The Albigensian Crusade wiped out thirteenth-century aristocratic families in southern France who held to the Cathar heresy, but the Hussite crusades in the 1420s failed to eliminate the Hussite heresy. As a result of the wars, however, many positive changes occurred: Arab learning founded on Greek scholarship entered western Europe through the acquisition of an extensive library in Toledo, Spain, in 1085; works of western European literature were inspired by the holy wars; trade was encouraged and with it the demand for certain products; and a more favorable image of Muslim men and women was fostered by the crusaders' contact with the Middle East. Nicholson also notes that America may have been discovered because Christopher Columbus avoided a route that had been closed by Muslim conquests and that the Reformation may have been advanced because Martin Luther protested against the crusader indulgence in his Ninety-five Theses (1517).

Eleanor of Aquitaine, Courtly Love, and the Troubadours, by Effiona Swabey, singles out the twelfth century as the age of the individual, in which a queen like Eleanor of Aquitaine could influence the development of a new social and artistic culture. The wife of King Louis VII of France and later the wife of his enemy Henry of Anjou, who became king of England, she patronized some of the troubadours, whose vernacular lyrics celebrated the personal expression of emotion and a passionate declaration of service to women. Love, marriage, and the pursuit of women were also the subject of the new romance literature, which flourished in northern Europe and was the inspiration behind concepts of courtly love. However, as Swabey points out, historians in the past have misjudged Eleanor, whose independent spirit fueled their misogynist attitudes. Similarly, Eleanor's divorce and subsequent stormy marriage have colored ideas about medieval "love courts" and courtly love, interpretations of which have now been challenged by scholars. The twelfth century is set

in context, with commentaries on feudalism, the tenets of Christianity, and the position of women, as well as summaries of the cultural and philosophical background, the cathedral schools and universities, the influence of Islam, the revival of classical learning, vernacular literature, and Gothic architecture. Swabey provides two biographical chapters on Eleanor and two on the emergence of the troubadours and the origin of courtly love through verse romances. Within this latter subject Swabey also details the story of Abelard and Heloise, the treatise of Andreas Capellanus (André the Chaplain) on courtly love, and Arthurian legend as a subject of courtly love.

Genghis Khan and Mongol Rule, by George Lane, identifies the rise to power of Genghis Khan and his unification of the Mongol tribes in the thirteenth century as a kind of globalization with political, cultural, economic, mercantile, and spiritual effects akin to those of modern globalization. Normally viewed as synonymous with barbarian destruction, the rise to power of Genghis Khan and the Mongol hordes is here understood as a more positive event that initiated two centuries of regeneration and creativity. Lane discusses the nature of the society of the Eurasian steppes in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries into which Genghis Khan was born; his success at reshaping the relationship between the northern pastoral and nomadic society with the southern urban, agriculturalist society; and his unification of all the Turco-Mongol tribes in 1206 before his move to conquer Tanquit Xixia, the Chin of northern China, and the lands of Islam. Conquered thereafter were the Caucasus, the Ukraine, the Crimea, Russia, Siberia, Central Asia, Afghanistan, Pakistan, and Kashmir. After his death his sons and grandsons continued, conquering Korea, Persia, Armenia, Mesopotamia, Azerbaijan, and eastern Europe—chiefly Kiev, Poland, Moravia, Silesia, and Hungary—until 1259, the end of the Mongol Empire as a unified whole. Mongol rule created a golden age in the succeeding split of the Empire into two, the Yuan dynasty of greater China and the Il-Khanate dynasty of greater Iran. Lane adds biographies of important political figures, famous names such as Marco Polo, and artists and scientists. Documents derive from universal histories, chronicles, local histories and travel accounts, official government documents, and poetry, in French, Armenian, Georgian, Chinese, Persian, Arabic, Chaghatai Turkish, Russian, and Latin.

Joan of Arc and the Hundred Years War, by Deborah Fraioli, presents the Hundred Years War between France and England in the fourteenth

and fifteenth centuries within contexts whose importance has sometimes been blurred or ignored in past studies. An episode of apparently only moderate significance, a feudal lord's seizure of his vassal's land for harboring his mortal enemy, sparked the Hundred Years War, yet on the face of it the event should not have led inevitably to war. But the lord was the king of France and the vassal the king of England, who resented losing his claim to the French throne to his Valois cousin. The land in dispute, extending roughly from Bordeaux to the Pyrenees mountains, was crucial coastline for the economic interests of both kingdoms. The series of skirmishes, pitched battles, truces, stalemates, and diplomatic wrangling that resulted from the confiscation of English Aquitaine by the French form the narrative of this Anglo-French conflict, which was in fact not given the name Hundred Years War until the nineteenth century.

Fraioli emphasizes how dismissing women's inheritance and succession rights came at the high price of unleashing discontent in their male heirs, including Edward III, Robert of Artois, and Charles of Navarre. Fraioli also demonstrates the centrality of side issues, such as Flemish involvement in the war, the peasants' revolts that resulted from the costs of the war, and Joan of Arc's unusually clear understanding of French "sacred kingship." Among the primary sources provided are letters from key players such as Edward III, Etienne Marcel, and Joan of Arc; a supply list for towns about to be besieged; and a contemporary poem by the celebrated scholar and court poet Christine de Pizan in praise of Joan of Arc.

Magna Carta, by Katherine Drew, is a detailed study of the importance of the Magna Carta in comprehending England's legal and constitutional history. Providing a model for the rights of citizens found in the United States Declaration of Independence and Constitution's first ten amendments, the Magna Carta has had a role in the legal and parliamentary history of all modern states bearing some colonial or government connection with the British Empire. Constructed at a time when modern nations began to appear, in the early thirteenth century, the Magna Carta (signed in 1215) presented a formula for balancing the liberties of the people with the power of modern governmental institutions. This unique English document influenced the growth of a form of law (the English common law) and provided a vehicle for the evolution of representative (parliamentary) government. Drew demonstrates how the Magna Carta came to be—the roles of the Church, the English towns, barons, com-

mon law, and the parliament in its making—as well as how myths concerning its provisions were established. Also provided are biographies of Thomas Becket, Charlemagne, Frederick II, Henry II and his sons, Innocent III, and many other key figures, and primary documents—among them, the Magna Cartas of 1215 and 1225, and the Coronation Oath of Henry I.

Medieval Castles, by Marilyn Stokstad, traces the historical, political, and social function of the castle from the late eleventh century to the sixteenth by means of a typology of castles. This typology ranges from the early “motte and bailey”—military fortification, and government and economic center—to the palace as an expression of the castle owners’ needs and purposes. An introduction defines the various contexts—military, political, economic, and social—in which the castle appeared in the Middle Ages. A concluding interpretive essay suggests the impact of the castle and its symbolic role as an idealized construct lasting until the modern day.

Medieval Cathedrals, by William Clark, examines one of the chief contributions of the Middle Ages, at least from an elitist perspective—that is, the religious architecture found in the cathedral (“chair” of the bishop) or great church, studied in terms of its architecture, sculpture, and stained glass. Clark begins with a brief contextual history of the concept of the bishop and his role within the church hierarchy, the growth of the church in the early Christian era and its affiliation with the bishop (deriving from that of the bishop of Rome), and the social history of cathedrals. Because of economic and political conflicts among the three authorities who held power in medieval towns—the king, the bishop, and the cathedral clergy—cathedral construction and maintenance always remained a vexed issue, even though the owners—the cathedral clergy—usually held the civic responsibility for the cathedral. In an interpretive essay, Clark then focuses on Reims Cathedral in France, because both it and the bishop’s palace survive, as well as on contemporary information about surrounding buildings. Clark also supplies a historical overview on the social, political, and religious history of the cathedral in the Middle Ages: an essay on patrons, builders, and artists; aspects of cathedral construction (which was not always successful); and then a chapter on Romanesque and Gothic cathedrals and a “gazetteer” of twenty-five important examples.

The Medieval City, by Norman J. G. Pounds, documents the origin of

the medieval city in the flight from the dangers or difficulties found in the country, whether economic, physically threatening, or cultural. Identifying the attraction of the city in its urbanitas, its “urbanity,” or the way of living in a city, Pounds discusses first its origins in prehistoric and classical Greek urban revolutions. During the Middle Ages, the city grew primarily between the eleventh and thirteenth centuries, remaining essentially the same until the Industrial Revolution. Pounds provides chapters on the medieval city’s planning, in terms of streets and structures; life in the medieval city; the roles of the Church and the city government in its operation; the development of crafts and trade in the city; and the issues of urban health, wealth, and welfare. Concluding with the role of the city in history, Pounds suggests that the value of the city depended upon its balance of social classes, its need for trade and profit to satisfy personal desires through the accumulation of wealth and its consequent economic power, its political power as a representative body within the kingdom, and its social role in the rise of literacy and education and in nationalism. Indeed, the concept of a middle class, a bourgeoisie, derives from the city—from the bourg, or “borough.” According to Pounds, the rise of modern civilization would not have taken place without the growth of the city in the Middle Ages and its concomitant artistic and cultural contribution.

Medieval Science and Technology, by Elspeth Whitney, examines science and technology from the early Middle Ages to 1500 within the context of the classical learning that so influenced it. She looks at institutional history, both early and late, and what was taught in the medieval schools and, later, the universities (both of which were overseen by the Catholic Church). Her discussion of Aristotelian natural philosophy illustrates its impact on the medieval scientific worldview. She presents chapters on the exact sciences, meaning mathematics, astronomy, cosmology, astrology, statics, kinematics, dynamics, and optics; the biological and earth sciences, meaning chemistry and alchemy, medicine, zoology, botany, geology and meteorology, and geography; and technology. In an interpretive conclusion, Whitney demonstrates the impact of medieval science on the preconditions and structure that permitted the emergence of the modern world. Most especially, technology transformed an agricultural society into a more commercial and engine-driven society: waterpower and inventions like the blast furnace and horizontal loom turned iron working and cloth making into manufacturing operations. The invention

of the mechanical clock helped to organize human activities through timetables rather than through experiential perception and thus facilitated the advent of modern life. Also influential in the establishment of a middle class were the inventions of the musket and pistol and the printing press. Technology, according to Whitney, helped advance the habits of mechanization and precise methodology. Her biographies introduce major medieval Latin and Arabic and classical natural philosophers and scientists. Extracts from various kinds of scientific treatises allow a window into the medieval concept of knowledge.

The Puebloan Society of Chaco Canyon, by Paul Reed, is unlike other volumes in this series, whose historic events boast a long-established historical record. Reed's study offers instead an original reconstruction of the Puebloan Indian society of Chaco, in what is now New Mexico, but originally extending into Colorado, Utah, and Arizona. He is primarily interested in its leaders, ritual and craft specialists, and commoners during the time of its chief flourishing, in the eleventh and twelfth centuries, as understood from archaeological data alone. To this new material he adds biographies of key Euro-American archaeologists and other individuals from the nineteenth and twentieth centuries who have made important discoveries about Chaco Canyon. Also provided are documents of archaeological description and narrative from early explorers' journals and archaeological reports, narratives, and monographs. In his overview chapters, Reed discusses the cultural and environmental setting of Chaco Canyon; its history (in terms of exploration and research); the Puebloan society and how it emerged chronologically; the Chaco society and how it appeared in 1100 c.e.; the "Outliers," or outlying communities of Chaco; Chaco as a ritual center of the eleventh-century Pueblo world; and, finally, what is and is not known about Chaco society. Reed concludes that ritual and ceremony played an important role in Chacoan society and that ritual specialists, or priests, conducted ceremonies, maintained ritual artifacts, and charted the ritual calendar. Its social organization matches no known social pattern or type: it was complicated, multiethnic, centered around ritual and ceremony, and without any overtly hierarchical political system. The Chacoans were ancestors to the later Pueblo people, part of a society that rose, fell, and evolved within a very short time period.

The Rise of Islam, by Matthew Gordon, introduces the early history of the Islamic world, beginning in the late sixth century with the career of

the Prophet Muhammad (c. 570–c. 632) on the Arabian Peninsula. From Muhammad's birth in an environment of religious plurality—Christianity, Judaism, and Zoroastrianism, along with paganism, were joined by Islam—to the collapse of the Islamic empire in the early tenth century, Gordon traces the history of the Islamic community. The book covers topics that include the life of the Prophet and divine revelation (the Qur'an) to the formation of the Islamic state, urbanization in the Islamic Near East, and the extraordinary culture of Islamic letters and scholarship. In addition to a historical overview, Gordon examines the Caliphate and early Islamic Empire, urban society and economy, and the emergence, under the Abbasid Caliphs, of a “world religious tradition” up to the year 925 C.E.

As editor of this series I am grateful to have had the help of Benjamin Burford, an undergraduate Century Scholar at Rice University assigned to me in 2002–2004 for this project; Gina Weaver, a third-year graduate student in English; and Cynthia Duffy, a second-year graduate student in English, who assisted me in target-reading select chapters from some of these books in an attempt to define an audience. For this purpose I would also like to thank Gale Stokes, former dean of humanities at Rice University, for the 2003 summer research grant and portions of the 2003–2004 annual research grant from Rice University that served that end.

This series, in its mixture of traditional and new approaches to medieval history and cultures, will ensure opportunities for dialogue in the classroom in its offerings of twelve different “libraries in books.” It should also propel discussion among graduate students and scholars by means of the gentle insistence throughout on the text as primal. Most especially, it invites response and further study. Given its mixture of East and West, North and South, the series symbolizes the necessity for global understanding, both of the Middle Ages and in the postmodern age.

Jane Chance, Series Editor
Houston, Texas
February 19, 2004

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PREFACE

This book is about the city, not a specific city, nor about the city throughout the several millennia of its existence. It is about that kind of city which emerged in Europe from the ruins of the Roman Empire and was transformed out of all recognition by the coming of manufacturing industries in modern times. This was the medieval city. It possessed qualities that distinguished it from those cities that had gone before it and that were to come after it. It was distinct also from contemporary cities in other parts of the world, such as those of the Middle East and south and east Asia.

One can debate endlessly the extent of the debt—unquestionably great—the medieval city owed to the classical cities of Greece and Rome and also the extent—probably small—of borrowings from the Middle East and the rest of Asia. By and large the medieval city was *sui generis*: it belonged to a type that was peculiarly its own. It was a response to conditions—social, economic, technological—that existed at the time and were radically changed during the following centuries.

Briefly defined, a city is a nucleated settlement that must engage in manufacturing and service occupations for the simple reason that agriculture could neither support nor employ all of its population. Before the city emerged, people lived in smaller settlement units—villages, hamlets, even isolated homesteads—and had subsisted almost wholly by cultivating their surrounding soil. Why, then, did the change occur from small agricultural settlements to large communities in which craft industries, the exchange of goods, and the performance of services played an increasingly important role?

This transition was no simple process. An increase in population and

the need for protection unquestionably played a part. The classical Greeks rationalized the process, claiming that, because the growth of the city improved the quality of life, this must have been why rural settlements joined together to create an urban settlement. They even created a name, *synoicisim*, to define the process. But this is to confuse cause with consequence. The creation of cities was a stage in the long progress of humanity from its hunting and collecting ancestry to the present. Like most such giant steps in the ladder of human progress, however, the creation of cities owed more to accident than to premeditation.

Cities emerged in Europe, the Middle East, and south India as early as the second millennium B.C.E., if not earlier. We recognize their remains today by their defenses and the scraps of buildings that have survived all the way from the hillforts of England to the walls of Jericho and the walled towns that once graced the plains of the rivers Tigris and Euphrates. The prehistoric town merged into the classical town with important changes in plan and composition but serving the same basic functions. There was often a change from a site whose chief recommendation was that it could be defended with relative ease to one more suited to the strictly urban functions of manufacturing and trade.

In the fifth century C.E. the urban civilization of Europe—that of the Middle East and beyond was less affected—came almost to an end. It is difficult to say how many Roman cities there may have been. Their definition is obscure; small towns merged into large villages. In Roman Britain there could have been as many as fifty or sixty towns, and they were far more numerous in Italy and southern France. The boundary of Roman authority lay along the rivers Rhine and Danube, and the sophisticated Roman town was never to be found beyond that line. Even within the bounds of the empire there were very few towns in the Balkans. Perhaps as many as a thousand places within the European provinces of the empire could have claimed the title of *urbs* (city), *civitas* (tribal capital), or *oppidum* (fort).

At intervals in the biological history of life on earth there has occurred a great dying off, when most species disappeared, leaving only enough to initiate a general renewal and a fresh evolutionary process. The same has happened to the cities of the Roman Empire. Most succumbed to invasion or to the economic forces that invasion set in motion, and those that did not wholly disappear were very much depleted. The decline and “fall” of the Roman Empire consisted essentially of the decay of towns

and the disappearance of their urban functions. In extreme cases the former towns ceased even to be inhabited places, and they are marked today, if marked at all, only by banks and ditches and a few scraps of masonry.

During the following centuries the urban cycle began anew. Slowly, haltingly, small rural settlements adopted craft industries and became centers of exchange in a growing pattern of trade. This renewed growth sometimes took place on sites which, until recently, the Romans had once occupied and where they had left an infrastructure in the shape of roads and bridges. Most, however, were on virgin sites more suited to their newly developing economy.

This new urban pattern began to take shape in the seventh, eighth, and ninth centuries. There were many false starts, but the process was well under way during the eleventh and twelfth centuries, and was in full flood during the thirteenth. By the fourteenth the urban pattern was complete. There was neither space nor need for more cities, and the pattern which had been established by then was to remain little changed until the eighteenth or even the nineteenth century. The Industrial Revolution, the use of mechanical power, and the creation of the factory system—only vaguely hinted at toward the end of the Middle Ages—not only transformed many of the existing cities, but also brought about the creation of a new and, as far as Europe was concerned, final wave of urbanization.

It is with this intermediate phase in urban history, from the centuries following the decline of Rome until the completion of the urban pattern by the end of the Middle Ages, that we are primarily concerned in this book. Enough remains of these cities in the physical sense to allow us to construct a fairly complete picture of what they were like. Literary sources—narrative, legal, administrative—are abundant and give insight into the ways in which people lived within them.

It is no easier to estimate the number of cities that may have existed in medieval Europe at the height of their development in the fourteenth century than it is for the classical period. Their number fluctuated, as new towns were founded to meet new demands and older towns fell out of contention as, with changing economic circumstances, there ceased to be a need for them. And again, as in classical times it is often difficult to draw a line between small towns and large villages. They merge into one another, and if we say that the distinction is a legal one, lying in the possession, or the lack, of a charter of incorporation, this is as close

as we are likely to come. If we say that, during the closing centuries of the Middle Ages, there were from four to five thousand cities and towns, we should probably be not too wide of the mark. There would, furthermore, have been relatively few large cities and a very great number of small towns. There is a tendency to use the terms *city* and *town* indiscriminately. In Great Britain the difference between them is technical, even legal. In the common use of these terms, however, *city* usually denotes a large settlement and *town* a small.

Whatever their size, each city or town was unique in plan, in function, and in social structure. Yet they all had enough in common for generalization to be possible, and it is a generalized picture of the medieval urban settlement that this book seeks to portray. Each was by definition distinct and cut off from its surrounding country not only in the functions it fulfilled but also in its legal and administrative standing. This is what F. W. Maitland meant when he claimed that the definition of the town was a legal matter (see p. 99). The city or town had acquired a charter or is presumed to have done so, and this charter conferred on it certain legal and economic rights. The city or town was cut off in these respects from the surrounding countryside. It was subject to the authority of a council, usually elected, whose jurisdiction was precisely defined and was separate from and independent of the feudal jurisdiction of the several lords of the rural manors and estates that surrounded and enclosed it. But there were various levels of independence, ranging from the city-state, which was in most respects sovereign and independent, to the very restricted independence enjoyed by most small towns. The possession of a limited degree of local autonomy is only one of the defining features of the town, but it is precise. The settlement either does or does not possess a degree of autonomy that to some extent removes it from the system of landholding we know as feudalism.

The second essential feature of the city, which distinguished it from the rural settlement or village, was the possession of certain economic functions. Its population was engaged to a variable extent in nonagricultural activities, though here there is less precision. Many villages possessed craftsmen; it is all a matter of degree. No city was ever completely divorced from the land and agriculture, but, except in a very few specialized cases, its population was greater than could be profitably employed in the fields within a reasonable distance of it. If fields were very distant, travel time would have consumed too great a part of the work-

ing day for their cultivation to have been profitable. Every city had thus to import and to pay for some part of its total food consumption, and this it could do only by making and selling goods or by performing services for which it received a monetary reward. It can be argued that there were cities, among them some of the largest and most important, which solved their problem of the balance of payments by levying taxes or exacting tribute. Foremost among them was medieval Rome, where a very high level of consumption was maintained by the contributions of the faithful throughout Catholic Europe. But Rome was not altogether an exception; it can be argued that the city maintained itself by performing a spiritual service for which it was paid, somewhat generously, by the Church at large.

Every city and town had a range of activities we can define as “basic” in the sense that they provided the export commodities and earned the revenues without which the city could not continue to import foodstuffs and industrial materials and thus preserve itself. At the same time, every city had nonbasic industries and services, which the city provided for the convenience of its own citizens. The baker and the butcher thus served almost exclusively the needs of their neighbors, while the armorer or the silversmith sold most of his wares beyond the city limits.

At the opposite end of the urban spectrum were the countless small towns, few of them with more than a thousand inhabitants, which proliferated in England and throughout central Europe. Here the food deficit was supplied by the villagers of the surrounding countryside, whose carts brought produce to their weekly markets. The town reciprocated by selling them the common articles of everyday life that could not readily be produced in their native villages.

This is the urban model that this book seeks to examine and exemplify. Examples are cited of basic products and activities, since these differed from one town to another. Their production or performance, however, called for a complex infrastructure. Goods had to be transported, some of them over very great distances, by a combination of ships, wheeled vehicles, and pack animals. Warehouses were needed for their storage and cranes for loading and unloading goods onto and off of boats. There were contracts and bills of exchange to be drawn up, and notaries and scribes to prepare them. The multiplicity of currencies and the varying rates of exchange among them raised problems and called for expert handling. The fourteenth-century Italian merchant Francisco Bal-

ducci Pegolotti compiled a handbook—the *Pratica della mercatoria*—to guide merchants and others through these intricacies. But such commercial refinements were found mainly in the larger cities, rarely occurring in the small towns, where peasants and townsfolk engaged in a noisy barter or at most passed a few coins from hand to hand. These matters are discussed more fully in the following pages.

The city or town in which these activities were carried on was compactly built and, at least in continental Europe, was contained for its own security within an enclosing wall with towers and fortified gates. The walls had the symbolic effect of cutting off the city from its encircling countryside. The walls emphasized the contrast between town and country and gave to the city an almost personal quality. The citizens saw their city as something with which they could identify; it had a personality, represented by the heraldic display which decorated its entrance and sealed the documents drawn up on its behalf. Its walls also exercised a physical constraint on its expansion. It was, of course, always possible to build a later line of walls, enclosing a greater area. This happened in several of the largest cities in Europe. Before this could happen, however, it was usual to occupy all the open spaces: the courts, gardens, and yards which lay behind the existing rows of houses. Most towns became increasingly densely built up, until the only way to accommodate an increasing population was to build upward—to add second, third, and even more stories to the existing buildings. Village houses generally had only a single story; town houses were similar at first, and when additional floors were added it was often without first strengthening the ground floor. Town houses, and especially the larger among them, were notoriously unstable. Walls were thrown out of the vertical, and floors were uneven, partly as a result of the use of unseasoned timber, partly because too great a burden had been placed on their lower members. Only when there was no more space available within the walls did its citizens begin to build suburban—“below the city”—quarters and thus to risk living unprotected outside its walls.

The hazards of urban life were greater than those in the countryside, however. The medieval town was, more often than not, congested in the extreme, so that the supply of water and the disposal of sewage became matters of the greatest importance. Most urban structures were timber-framed, and the wood, in the absence of any kind of preservative, rotted quickly, leading to the collapse of the buildings themselves. Heating and

cooking were done over an open fire; thus, domestic fires were frequent, sometimes leading to widespread conflagrations. Disease also spread rapidly through the congested urban homes. Mortality was great, higher by far than that normally experienced in rural areas. One is left asking why people were so ready to desert the country for the town. The answer must lie in the greater rewards the latter had to offer. There was wealth to be had from trade. Not all who migrated to a town made a fortune or even a modest living, but there was always the chance of doing so, and most people are by nature gamblers.

The city was a continent-wide institution, and this book seeks to give some attention to most parts of Europe. The writer claims some firsthand knowledge of most of the significant towns in almost every country and has explored their streets and alleys, their public and private buildings during well over half a century. But his deepest familiarity is with the cities and towns of England. The documentary sources he has used over this long period have been English. This is reflected in the choice of illustrative examples and documentary sources. If it is complained that there is no mention of medieval towns in Slovakia or Norway or Portugal, it can only be replied that the towns found in those parts generally conformed with the model presented in the preceding text and that lack of space prevents any particular examination of them.

These paragraphs have sketched a model of the medieval city, one to which all in a greater or lesser degree conformed. The following eight chapters explore this model and conclude with a discussion of the place of the medieval city in the history of western culture and its contribution to the society of the present.

This book has been written between bouts of illness, and the writer is deeply grateful to Professor Jane Chance, editor of this series, for her kindness and forbearance. He is also indebted to Liz Wetton who has read much of it with the hawk-like eye of an experienced editor and has corrected many blemishes in style and judgment. He is also grateful to Cambridge University Library, not only for the use over a long lifetime of its superb collections, but also for making copies of the engravings by Schedel and Braun and Hogenberg, copies of which it holds. All artwork has been prepared by the author.

CHAPTER 1

ORIGINS

When several villages are united in a single complete community, large enough to nearly or quite self-sufficing, the [city-]state comes into existence, originating in the bare needs of life, and continuing in existence for the sake of a good life.

—Aristotle¹

The town or city—the words are almost synonymous²—is a human settlement, larger than a village and not primarily dependent on agriculture for the employment and support of its inhabitants. Indeed, the multiplicity of its functions—manufacturing, commerce, services, even agriculture itself—is one of its distinguishing features. Another feature of the town, at least of the medieval town, is that its fields, cultivated by its own citizens, could not possibly have produced enough food for their subsistence. It always had to import foodstuffs from areas beyond its direct control. And, because these had to be requited or paid for, the citizens necessarily had to produce goods or perform services for outsiders. Every successful town established over the course of time a complex of relationships not only with its surrounding areas, but also with distant places which in turn supplied it with both food and the materials needed for its crafts. This was its hinterland.

All towns before modern times were to some extent engaged in agriculture, but a strict limit was set to the extent of this agriculture's development. Each morning citizen-farmers would lead their wagons and carry their tools to the surrounding fields, returning each evening to the security of their urban homes. But how far would they be prepared to

travel? The answer must be no greater distance than they could travel in an hour or little more; the farthest cultivated field could be no more than what a citizen could walk in an hour or so, whether the town covered only a few acres and had less than a thousand inhabitants or was by medieval standards a giant city of 50,000. Renaissance engravings of towns show them surrounded by the cultivated fields of their citizens.

In the course of European history, there have been four periods or phases when the foundation and development of towns was a major preoccupation of European peoples. The first was during the prehistoric period, from the Bronze Age to the Iron, when the so-called hillforts were constructed. These were large areas, enclosed by bank, ditch, and palisade. For the inhabitants of nearby farms and hamlets, the hillforts were places of refuge to which they could retreat in time of war. They served also for the storage of food and the practice of simple craft industries, which may have included tanning, weaving, and metalworking.

Such a hillfort was Danebury, lying amid the rolling hills of southern England. It is a rounded site with multiple banks and ditches and a highly sophisticated entrance that an attacker would have found very difficult to penetrate (Figure 1).

The enclosed area was about twelve acres, closely similar to that of many medieval towns. The dating of Danebury fort is difficult. The carbon-14 method was used with fragments of wood found in the foundations of huts within the banked perimeter. This showed that the site was occupied, perhaps not continuously, from the seventh century B.C.E. until the period of the Roman invasion in 43 C.E. Excavation revealed huts in which stores of food might have been kept and people might have lived during an emergency. There was also evidence for crafting within the enclosure, especially potting, weaving, the manufacture of wooden articles such as plows and even wheeled vehicles, and the fabrication of tools and weapons of iron. Most of the raw materials used came from the local agricultural activities, but iron ore was not among the local resources. It was probably obtained by the Danebury people from as far away as the Weald of Kent—some forty miles—in southeastern England, a region important for its ironworking from prehistoric times until the eighteenth century. In this and in other ways, Danebury had become a center of long-distance trade. We know from the finds retrieved in the course of excavation that a variety of goods was imported by the Danebury people.

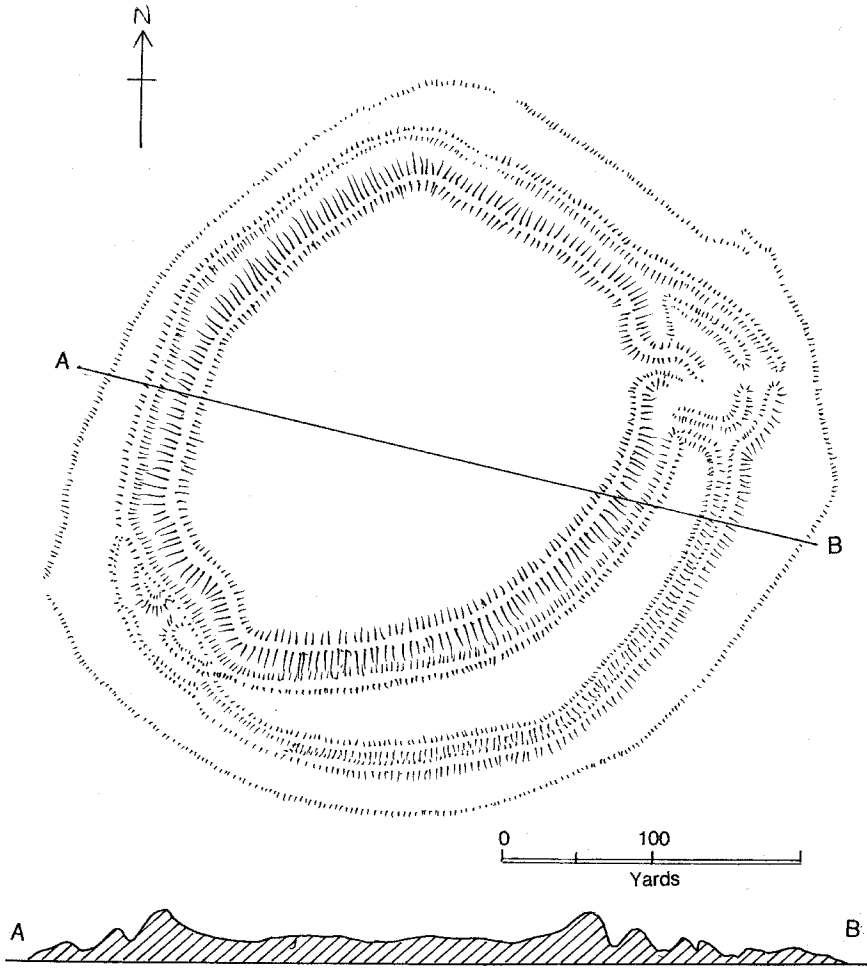


Figure 1. Danebury, an Iron Age (c. 800 to 400 B.C.E.) hillfort in southern England. It can be seen as a proto-urban town, serving as a place of safety for the inhabitants of the surrounding area. Based on Barry H. Cunliffe, *Danebury: Anatomy of an Iron Age Hillfort*, London: Batsford, 1983.

Hillforts like Danebury were proto-urban towns, and they continued to be used in many parts of northern and central Europe until, in both form and function, they were superseded by the classical city of the Greeks and Romans. In Gaul (France), Julius Caesar was obliged to overcome the resistance of the hillforts of Alesia, Bibracte, and Gergovia, which he succeeded in capturing only after prolonged sieges. The Ro-

mans replaced them with towns of classical type on nearby but less defensible sites. In England the stupendous Iron Age fort Maiden Castle was replaced, though without a siege, by the low-lying city of Durnovaria, the modern Dorchester in the county of Dorset.

The second phase in the history of European urbanization began in classical Greece, though it owed much to earlier developments in the Middle East, and was continued in Roman Italy, Spain, Gaul, and even Britain. In the view of Aristotle the city or *polis* was created when those who inhabited the villages within a small, discrete area agreed to pool their resources and come together to form an urban community. This process they called *synoecism*. In reality, however, it was probably less simple than Aristotle's model suggests. The need for protection played an important part, as it was also to do in most subsequent urban developments. The configuration of Greece, with its many small coastal plains, each of them suited for a city-state, also contributed to the growth of towns. There were hundreds of *poleis* in the Greek world, reaching from the western Mediterranean to Anatolia and Cyprus. Some, like Athens and Corinth in Greece and Syracuse in Sicily, grew to be too large to be supported by their own small territories and developed overseas trade to supply their populations, but hundreds remained, even during the period of high Greek civilization, small and self-sufficient. Most fell under the control of the Athenian or Delian League after the Persian wars of the early fifth century B.C.E. They paid tribute to the league for their common defense against the Persians. These payments were recorded on marble tablets set up in the *agora* or central square of Athens and show both how numerous these cities were and how small. It was, however, characteristic of all of them that citizens took an immense pride in their respective cities and adorned them with temples, theaters, and public places. Aristotle claimed that urban living was the natural way of life for civilized human beings, a view of the city reaffirmed many times from that age to this.

Urbanization spread from Greece to Sicily and from Sicily up the Italian peninsula to Rome and beyond. The Roman legions carried the idea of the city to most of western Europe until Roman civilization had become as much a matter of living in and beautifying the city as Greek civilization had been. The Roman city was generally larger than the Greek city. The Romans saw the city as an instrument of civilization, as a means of taming the wild barbarians whom they had incorporated into their em-

pire. The city replaced the hillfort. It was, as a general rule, carefully planned with straight streets intersecting at right-angles. Generous space was allowed for temples and basilicas or large halls, which served as public meeting places, for the *forum*, or central square, around which these buildings were grouped, and for the theater, where dramatic shows were performed, and the amphitheater or arena, where more brutal games were staged.

The peace, which the might of Rome had ensured, made it unnecessary at first to build defensive walls around cities. But late in the third century this began to change. Groups of barbarians broke across the Roman frontier along the rivers Rhine and Danube and threatened cities in the west and south of Europe. Walls were hastily built. Archaeology has shown how temples and similar buildings were raided for stone, so urgent was the need for protection. All towns of any importance came to be walled; nevertheless, most continued for a century and more to be centers of social and economic activity. Few were actually deserted, if only because their walls, towers, and fortified gates offered some protection against invaders. But their days were numbered. Their wealth, which had allowed and encouraged the construction of their monumental structures, was dependent on the peaceful exchange of goods and services between town and country, province and province. This interchange was the first victim of insecurity and war, and the decline of the Roman Empire was marked by the contraction, even the abandonment, of cities.

The North African Moors, a Berber people under Arab leadership, perpetuated urban life in those parts of Spain they invaded and settled. The Moors also preserved elements of Greek and Roman civilization and maintained and even enlarged some of the cities the Romans had established, such as Cordoba and Seville. This was not the norm, however; other invaders were Germans from central Europe, Vikings and Varangians from northern Europe, Slavs from eastern Europe, and Turkic peoples from Asia. Most of these invading peoples had been accustomed to living in small village communities and to packing up their possessions at intervals and moving to new sites, where they cultivated virgin land for a period before moving on again. They showed little inclination to settle in towns which the Romans had built, and, if they did not destroy them, they at least allowed them to fall to ruin. Crafts, which had been prosperous in an urban environment, decayed after their urban settings had fallen to ruin. Some former Roman towns disappeared, and

in others the high quality of workmanship which had once prevailed was sadly diminished.

It is doubtful whether any towns in Roman Britain, with the exception of Londinium (London) and perhaps Eboracum (York), survived as functioning urban settlements. An Anglo-Saxon poem, probably written about the eighth century, described the crumbling remains of a once prosperous Roman city—probably *Aquae Sulis*, or Bath (see Document 1, “The Ruin”). The invaders could only marvel at the civilization of Rome and the structures it had created. It was beyond their capacity to copy them, even to keep them in good order. The decay and sometimes the disappearance of cities was a dominant feature of the decline and fall of the Roman Empire in the West.³

Yet this decay was not uniform over the whole territory of the Roman Empire. A few cities in both the East and the West survived and redeveloped into thriving centers of manufacturing and trade. This was most marked around the shores of the Mediterranean Sea. The Belgian historian Henri Pirenne once argued that sea-borne trade in the Mediterranean basin survived when overland trade had declined or disappeared, because in the nature of things the ship was safe from the depredations of land-based invaders. Both Rome and Byzantium survived and even prospered during the “dark” ages that followed the end of the western Roman Empire. Venice was founded by refugees from the destruction of the Roman city *Aquileia* by the invading Huns. Indeed, most cities that were to dominate Italy during the late Middle Ages had survived in some diminished form from the Roman period. In France also most of the provincial capitals of Roman Gaul, though pillaged by the invaders and ruinous, nevertheless survived as inhabited places. Only in Britain and in parts of Spain were Roman cities in large measure abandoned. In the Balkan peninsula most cities—there were in fact very few—were neglected, though their ruined sites may have continued to provide some degree of protection for small agricultural communities. In the midst of modern *Sofia* in Bulgaria lie the scanty remains of *Serdica*, the Roman capital of the province *Thrace*. The citizens of *Salona* in Croatia fled to the Adriatic coast on the appearance of invaders, and there they established a more secure settlement within the walls of the huge palace the Emperor *Diocletian* had built for himself at *Split*. But most of the small towns of the Balkans merely fell to ruin and disappeared. *Stobi* in Mace-

donia is today known only through excavations carried out in modern times.⁴

A few towns of the Graeco-Roman world continued to perform some attenuated urban functions. They had been during the later years of the empire the seats of authority, and as such had an appeal to the Germanic invaders who established their petty kings within their ruined walls. When Augustine brought Christianity to England in the year 597 c.E. he made his way to Canterbury, where the remains of the Roman town Durovernum had become the seat of Ethelberht, king of the minor Saxon tribe the Cantii.

Christianity became an accepted faith within the Roman Empire about 313 and was recognized as the only religion several decades later. Wherever Christianity had been accepted, its local representative, the bishop, established himself in one of the more important towns, and his diocese conformed more or less with the service area of the preceding Roman city. Where towns lay close together, as they did in southern Italy, bishops became numerous and their dioceses extremely small. The bishop's cathedral replaced the temple or basilica, and the activities of the church attracted a small population of traders and craftsmen. When the economic depression of the early Middle Ages began to lift in the ninth or tenth century, this urban nucleus became once again a populous and many-sided settlement.

Foremost among the cities that began to grow again and to flourish in this way were Rome and Byzantium. Rome had been the chief seat of the Caesars and continues still today to be adorned with their monumental architecture. The Bishop of Rome established a preeminence among other bishops just as the emperors had themselves ruled over the provinces of the empire. The Pope as Bishop of Rome was seen in some sense to be the heir to the Caesars. In the seventeenth century, Thomas Hobbes said that one "will easily perceive, that the Papacy, is no other than the *ghost* of the deceased *Roman Empire*, sitting crowned upon the grave thereof."⁵ The empire of Rome was divided by Diocletian about 285 c.E. into an eastern and a western part. The western part was overrun by Germanic invaders, and ultimately succumbed in 476, leaving the Pope or Bishop of Rome as symbol of what unity there was in the Christian West. The eastern empire continued for another thousand years; its capital city, Byzantium, was perched above the cliffs bordering the

Bosporus, the waterway linking the Black Sea with the Mediterranean and separating Europe from Asia, and was impregnable to invaders whether by land or by sea. Byzantium continued to be the seat of authority within the eastern empire, providing a home for both secular and spiritual leaders. But in most of the eastern empire in Europe, urbanism declined or even disappeared. Only in its Asiatic provinces, in Syria and Egypt, Galatia and Cappadocia, did urbanism retain some vitality. And much of the small volume of trade that continued to circulate in the Mediterranean Sea and western Europe emanated from these regions.

The third urban revolution occupied much of the Middle Ages and is the primary subject of this book. Urbanism had not wholly disappeared during the centuries following the decline of the empire in the West. Some cities survived as human settlements, and a few became the tribal seats of government for the invading peoples. But their commercial and industrial life had been drained, and they had to be rebuilt slowly. By the end of the Middle Ages a vast number of cities and towns had emerged, varying greatly in size, in mode of origin, and degree of specialization. Counting them is an impossible task because the boundary between town and village was often vague and uncertain. In central Europe alone their number must have run into the thousands.

This was an age when society was organized feudally. Land was held by territorial lords in return for service—in government or in war—to their king. Under them were subtenants who held smaller units of land again in return for service to their masters. There may have been more separate, social layers before the servile underclass, which lived by actually cultivating the soil, was reached. The social structure was in reality very much more complex than this short definition suggests. There were classes that were neither wholly slave nor wholly free. Beside those who were *adscripti glebae*—“bound to the soil”—were others who were free in respect of all except their masters. There were what have been called “degrees of unfreedom.” But the general social trend was upward; more and more of the underclass became free. By the end of the Middle Ages there were, in effect, no more unfree peasants in the land of England, but they survived in central Europe; in Rumania and Russia there remained serfs until the 1860s. It was from these peoples that, in one way or another, the earliest medieval towns were populated. Once the bonds of serfdom were relaxed the peasant might move to the city hoping to become lost in its anonymity. There was a saying that *Stadt Luft macht frei*—“the air

of the town makes you free.” It was also said that an unfree peasant who had escaped and lived in a town for a year and a day could not be dragged back again to semi-slavery on the land. In one way or another, legally or illegally, country folk made their way to the towns, established their right to live there, and became the citizen body.

The town was a paradoxical institution. It was an exception to the feudal order of things. Its citizens were free. They could not be hauled before the court of a feudal lord. They had law courts of their own, which could hear cases that arose between them. When a lord granted a charter to a body of townspeople, he gave away his right of jurisdiction over them or at least the greater part of it. Henceforward they lay outside the sphere of feudal law and custom. Feudal custom barely recognized the town, and yet feudal lords saw profit in promoting new towns. It is probably true to say that more than half the towns of late medieval Europe had been established by feudal lords and that the feudal lords engaged in this process because they gained financially from it. The feudal lords thus connived in the creation of institutions that lay outside the feudal order and in the rise of a bourgeois class, which was destined finally to overthrow them.

Yet there is no simple explanation for the origin and development of towns and cities. The following pages represent an attempt to classify the ways in which the institution took root and flourished. We have in the first place those cities which had survived as inhabited places, with some semblance of urban functions, from the Roman period. They were not numerous, but they included some—Rome, London, Paris, Cologne—which later grew to be among the largest in late medieval Europe. To these must be added those that emerged during the centuries immediately following the end of the western empire in response to the slowly developing trade of both western and northern Europe. They included places in Scandinavia where the Vikings exchanged the loot, which they had acquired in their raids, for the more refined products of the eastern empire and the Middle East. Such were Birka, Jumne, and Haithabu, all lying around the shores of the Baltic Sea, and Ipswich and Norwich (“wich” in Anglo-Saxon denoted a trading place) in England. Not all survived, because they were dependent upon a particular pattern of trade that might not long endure. Those established in Scandinavia have long since disappeared, and even their sites are in some instances uncertain. Other towns arose at this time in response to the needs of defense. Such

were the “burghs” founded in England by the Anglo-Saxon kings of the ninth and tenth centuries. These were built for defense against the invading Scandinavian peoples. Some completely disappeared after their usefulness had ended, but others succeeded in attracting craftsmen and traders by the protection they could offer and in consequence grew to be important towns. In central Europe the eastward spread of German settlement was accompanied by the foundation of urban settlements that combined commercial and defensive functions. The foundation of monasteries, most of them of the Benedictine Order, also provided nuclei around which traders and craftsmen settled. The monasteries themselves, together with those who visited them as pilgrims, created a demand for goods and services that were provided by small urban communities.

These towns—Roman survivals, trading and monastic communities, and defensive settlements—all had this in common. They were prefeudal in the sense that they had their origins before the feudal occupation of the land and at a time when there was, in effect, some freedom of movement and the social restrictions of the feudal system had not yet been imposed. They did not need authorization from secular or ecclesiastical authority in order to establish a town, though this may later have been requested and was granted in their retrospective charters. Such towns are here defined as “prescriptive,” meaning that their authority derived from long-standing usage. In few instances can one say when these towns began, and when they first appear in the records, they were usually already well established. As feudalism developed from the tenth century onward, these towns were seen as anomalies, as institutions that lay outside the feudal concept of society, almost as a threat to its well-being. How then to reconcile the prescriptive city with the feudal view of society?

This quandary was resolved in two contrasting ways, both admirably demonstrated in England. In the first, feudal authority might impose a castle on the urban foundation, as if to keep the radical urban population under control. In England and France almost every significant city that had survived from the Roman and Anglo-Saxon periods had a castle, built usually in a corner of its walled perimeter. London may be the best example, with the Tower of London within its southeastern angle and bordering the river Thames, but the list would also include Canterbury, Exeter, York, Chester, Winchester, and Norwich as well as numer-

ous cities throughout France and Italy. The Domesday Book of 1086 records how many houses were destroyed in order to make way for these castles. Furthermore, the king, as a general rule, retained these castles in his own hands. They became the seat of his chief local official—the sheriff, or “shire-reeve.” The urban castle remained until late in the Middle Ages a bastion of both feudal and royal power against the radical population of the towns.⁶

The second method was to absorb the town into the feudal order: to restrict its powers and to make it a source of profit. This was achieved by the grant of a charter of liberties. This was not, in these instances, a foundation charter, since the town already had been in existence, perhaps for centuries. The charter of liberties was an attempt to define and also to limit the rights and privileges of the town and to prescribe its mode of government. The charter usually provided for the election of a mayor or chief executive together with a body of councilors; it defined its commercial rights, authorizing them to have, in addition to shops, a weekly market and an annual fair. It defined the legal standing of the town, which ceased in large measure to be amenable to the civil and criminal jurisdiction of the surrounding region. The charter was a kind of contract between the feudal order and the new mercantile order, the bourgeoisie, which was eventually to replace it.

In some parts of Europe, however, the assimilation of the preexisting city to the system of feudal law and custom that prevailed was generally never fully accomplished. The city retained its earlier practice of self-regulation. It remained politically and juridically cut off from the feudalized countryside, and its citizens sometimes referred to it as a “commune.” This raised problems of food supply, access to water, and means of transportation. These problems could be solved in part by the extension of urban control and the jurisdiction of urban courts for a mile or two into the surrounding countryside. Thus was formed the medieval “city-state.” In some respects it replicated the *polis* of the ancient Greeks. It usually recognized the shadowy authority of a distant emperor or king, but for all practical purposes it was self-regulating and self-governing. There were numerous rebellions, especially in Italy, as citizens tried, often unsuccessfully, to establish themselves as a commune. Even London attempted—and failed—to do just this.

Italy, a land in which centralized political authority had dissolved in the years following the collapse of the western empire, was characterized

for much of the Middle Ages by its city-states. The same tended to happen in Germany, where urban independence, in the absence of a strong central authority, came to be emphasized at the expense of feudal control. There was a tendency, especially in Italy, for the city's control of its immediate hinterland to be extended until the city-state had become a far more extensive territorial state. In this way the duchies of Florence, Ferrara, Mantua, and others were formed, as well as the urban republics of Genoa and Venice, which both displayed a ravenous appetite for neighboring territory.

PLANTED TOWNS

The great majority of medieval towns originated in none of these ways. They were the conscious and deliberate creations of territorial lords, always for their own profit. The lords might fear the pretensions of an urban population, but they nonetheless envied the towns' wealth and were eager to acquire the goods they traded or produced. How then to create a town and to harness its productive capacity for their own profit? The answer was to create a new wave of urban foundations as territorial lords strove to profit from urban institutions and from the urban way of life. Their method was to grant a charter, to proclaim that future citizens were wanted, and to declare that the conditions under which they would live would be generous and their privileges extensive. Sufficient land would be set aside for a town, and in some instances streets were even planned and "burgage" or building plots delimited for the anticipated settlers. There were always footloose people. Many had made good their escape from manorial villages, and others had never known the constraints of the manorial economy. Such were attracted by the prospect of urban living and the relative freedom this offered. And so plots were taken up and an urban community gradually took shape. No incipient town could have prospered without a market, to which peasants of the neighborhood could bring their surplus products for sale and where they might obtain the few goods ranging from salt to cooking pots which they could not make themselves. A fair might also be allowed, held less frequently than the market but attracting traders from very much farther afield and dealing in more unusual goods. These towns are sometimes termed *planted* towns to distinguish them from the *organic* towns, which had grown up spontaneously.

But what if settlers did not come and the market and fair generated little business? The town was then still-born, its charter a hollow pretense and quickly forgotten, and as an inhabited place the would-be town reverted to a small agricultural settlement. There were many such *villes manquees*, or “failed towns,” throughout western and central Europe. What the territorial lords, who had hoped to earn a revenue from burgage rents and market tolls, had failed to realize was that the number of urban settlers, the demand for urban products, and the volume of urban trade were all strictly limited. If chartered towns increased in number, then the volume of trade that could be carried on in each inevitably grew smaller. There were many ways to cut the cake, but its size nevertheless remained the same.

In the thirteenth century, Totnes was a prosperous town on the west bank of the river Dart in the English county of Devon (see Figure 2). It had been founded about 1100 by Judhael of Totnes, lord of the castle whose ruins still dominate the town. Across the river the land belonged

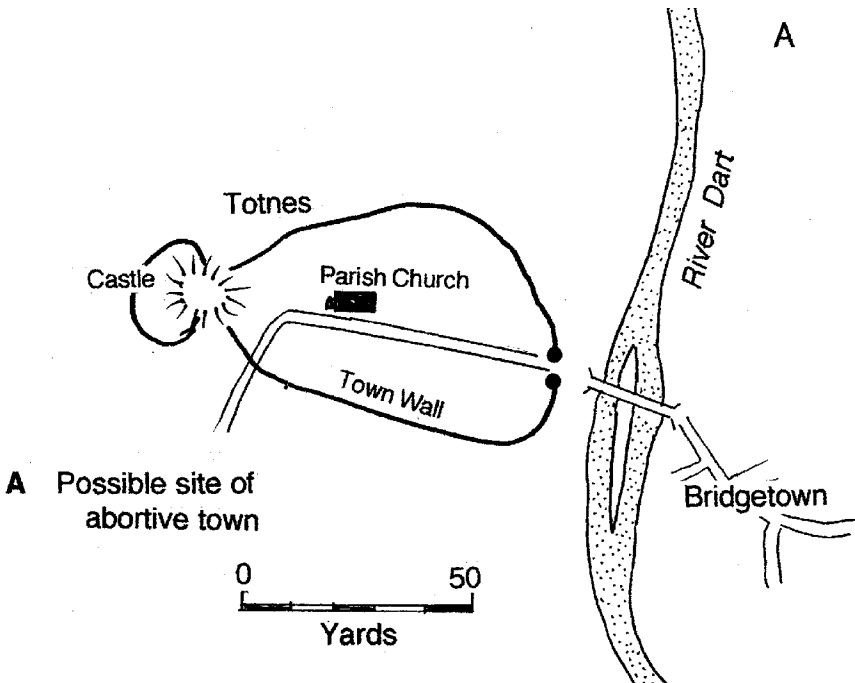


Figure 2. Totnes (Devon) and its abortive or unsuccessful satellites.

to other lords who supposed that if they also granted charters and laid out the streets of a new town they too would reap a steady income just as the lord of Totnes was doing. First came the borough of Bridgetown, at the distant end of the bridge across the river Dart. It achieved a very modest success at first, but then decayed and is today represented only by a small cluster of houses. Another attempt at town foundation was located a mile or so to the north. It was entirely unsuccessful, and no town ever materialized. The amount of business available in this part of Devon was not adequate for two incorporated boroughs, let alone for three.

In England, where government was more centralized and more effective than in almost any other part of Europe, it became the practice for the king to authorize the establishment of a town or market and fair. Before he did so, however, the king usually instituted an inquiry known as *ad quod damnum*. It asked the simple question: what harm might the proposed market do to the trade and profitability of markets already in existence? Only if there would be none was the proposed market, in theory at least, allowed to proceed. In continental Europe the same practice broadly prevailed. Market and fairs were established and given protection by territorial lords who profited from their activities. It became the general rule that no town could be founded closer to another existing town than a day's market journey (see p. 71).

Those who granted charters of foundation to medieval towns can have had little knowledge of the theoretical basis of their distribution. Only by a prolonged process of trial and error did they learn that some towns would fail if they were too closely spaced or if located in unproductive areas incapable of generating any significant trade. Yet hope springs eternal, and the tally of unsuccessful and failed towns runs to hundreds. Nor did they understand the institutions and infrastructure that made for a successful town. In this they looked to those that had—fortuitously perhaps—achieved a measure of success and imitated their practices or “laws.” Many towns in England adopted the “Laws” of Breteuil, a small town in upper Normandy, which seemed to the Norman invaders of England to have achieved a certain degree of success. (See “Biographies and Places,” pp. 174–75.)

The biggest wave of town foundations during the Middle Ages was in central and eastern Europe. Here it was part of the eastward progression of German-speaking peoples from the Elbe Valley to that of the Oder,

and from the Oder to the Vistula, beyond which it petered out in the forests and steppe of eastern Poland and Russia. Certain well-established and successful towns in Germany served as models. Towns close to the Baltic coast derived their laws from those of the port city off Lubeck. Farther inland, Magdeburg was the most popular prototype, while others followed the customs of Nuremberg, Vienna, or Goslar. The practices followed in the Bohemian mining town of Jihlava (Ger. Iglau) were copied in the mining centers of upper Hungary and Transylvania.

There was a distinct periodization in the creation of medieval towns. Most organic towns had their origin during the early Middle Ages. One can rarely point to a date when they had their beginnings, but most were in existence by the year 1100. Far more is known of the origins of planted towns because they had their beginnings in a charter that bore a date. This is as true of southern France, Germany, and Poland as it is of England.

In England the first clear evidence for planted towns occurs in the Domesday Book itself (1086 c.E.). At Tutbury in Staffordshire, a borough had grown up *circa castellum*, "around the castle," and, since the castle had been a Norman innovation, the borough itself must have been at that time only a few years old. At several places along the Welsh border small boroughs were springing up close to the castles of the Norman invaders who almost certainly had founded them. Planted towns were least numerous, though far from unknown, in areas where there were already a number of older, organic towns as was the case in France and Italy.

Town foundation continued in England through the twelfth century and then peaked during the years 1190–1230. By this time, it might be said a sufficient network of towns had already been established to satisfy the needs of manufacturing and commerce. Few towns were founded between 1250 and the end of the century, by which time a number of those that had already been founded failed to survive. By 1300 the movement had for practical purposes run its course.⁷

Other areas where planted towns were especially numerous were southwestern France and Germany. In southwestern France, some ninety small, walled towns were founded in the period 1270–1350. They owed their origin chiefly to the English king Edward I (1272–1307) and his immediate successors in their roles as dukes of Aquitaine or rulers of

southwestern France. Their motives were at least as political as they were economic, and the security of the English-held territory against other feudal lords was probably foremost in their minds. These towns, or "bastides," as they were called, resembled the Anglo-Saxon "burhs" of the ninth and tenth centuries in that their purpose was largely defensive and that some never succeeded in developing a significant commercial role and so reverted to fortified villages.

The most significant area of town foundation was central and eastern Europe north of the river Danube. Here there had never been any Roman towns to focus later urban growth, and few settlements had emerged in response to the needs of defense and commerce. The region was thinly peopled, and its development awaited settlers. These came from the tenth century onward in the form of immigrants mainly from the German lands between the rivers Rhine and Elbe. German lords from the west had conquered the land, but land without people was valueless. The lords therefore conducted a campaign to recruit settlers. It was like the populating of the American West during the middle years of the nineteenth century. According to Helmold, a twelfth-century chronicler, Adolf, count of Schauenburg, had acquired wide lands in what is today the north German province of Mecklenburg, and "[a]s the land was without inhabitants, he sent messengers into all parts, namely, to Flanders and Holland, to Utrecht, Westphalia, and Frisia, proclaiming that whosoever were in straits for lack of fields should come with their families, and receive a very good land,—a spacious land, rich in crops. . . . An innumerable multitude of different peoples rose up at this call and they came with their families and their goods into the land of Wagria [Holstein and Mecklenburg]."⁸

The newcomers laid out fields and planted towns which focused the business of their respective districts. The dates of rural settlement may be obscure, but the towns can be securely dated from their foundation charters. We can thus trace this wave of urban settlement as it spread from western Germany, where towns first appeared, to the basin of the Vistula, and from the Vistula into the wastes of Lithuania, Belorus, and Ukraine. Most of these towns were small and served only to exchange the products of urban crafts for the surplus grain and animals of the countryside. A few stood out as the centers of a long-distance trade, visited by merchants from much of Europe. They handled the animals driven

westward from the steppe and gathered the grain that the merchants of the Hanse (see pp. 171–74) shipped to the large consuming centers of central and western Europe. This trade was for climatic reasons seasonal, and much of it was carried on by means of fairs that were held for only short periods at the appropriate times of the year.

This eastward movement for which the Germans use the overly dramatic name of *Drang nach Osten*—“the Drive to the East”—began during the eleventh century, if not before. By 1300 it was spreading across Poland, Bohemia, and Moravia, and by 1400 it had reached east Prussia and the Vistula. The following century took it to the borders of Lithuania. But its force was still not spent until in early modern times it reached Ukraine. Those who had been attracted mainly by mineral wealth penetrated the mountains of Slovakia and Transylvania and founded a number of towns that prospered with the mining boom of the Renaissance. This spread of urbanization, however, had little effect on the Hungarian Plain and almost none in the Balkans. Its failure here is explained by the incessant warfare that characterized the region, particularly after the coming of the Ottoman Turks in the fourteenth century. It was not that the Balkans lacked agricultural and mineral resources, but that these resources were being developed by local peoples and were handled by traders based on the coasts of the Adriatic and Black seas, where Venice, Zadar, Dubrovnik, and Varna grew rich on their profits.

Such was the progress of this, the third urban revolution in Europe. The fourth and last, which occupied much of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, was characterized not so much by the foundation of new towns, though these were in fact numerous, as, under the influence of the Industrial Revolution, by the selective growth of towns that had originated in the Roman or medieval periods. This was the origin of the industrial cities that reached their fullest development in the late nineteenth century, but that subject is beyond the scope of this book.

The medieval town assumed many forms and served a variety of functions, and its contribution to the development of western civilization is incalculable. At the same time the medieval town created problems that in many cases it proved unable to solve. The size of towns sometimes outgrew their ability to organize adequate supplies of water, food, and fuel. Large numbers of people living in close contact with one another contributed to the spread of epidemic disease. The disposal of sewage was

managed only by sending it downriver to the next town. Congestion led to the building of multistoried houses of wood that were both highly unstable and very flammable (see pp. 39–40). Towns, last, never solved the problems of street crime and maintaining adequate policing. All these matters are examined in greater detail in later chapters of this book.

How many cities and towns were there in the continent of Europe when, about 1500, the Middle Ages drew to a close? It will be argued in Chapter 3 that they must have numbered two to three thousand or more. Each was unique, differing from all the others in its physical qualities, economic development, and institutions of government. All the larger cities have been the subjects of major books, and a history could be written for each of them. A short book about the medieval city can look only at those features that were common to most if not all of them. It is impossible in so short a space to delve into their peculiarities and idiosyncrasies. It is not possible even to mention by name all those of greater size and importance. What follows is necessarily a model showing what it was like to live and do business in a medieval city.

NOTES

1. Aristotle, *The Politics*, ed. Stephen Everson, Cambridge Texts in the History of Political Thought (Cambridge, UK, and New York: Cambridge University Press, 1988), p. 3.

2. In England the term *city* originally denoted a town that was also the seat of a bishop, that is, a “cathedral town.” It is now an honorific title conferred by the government. A common convention is to reserve the term *city* for the largest and most important settlements.

3. The dividing line between the empire in the West and that in the East ran from the river Danube upstream from Beograd southward through Bosnia to the Adriatic Sea. The Eastern or Byzantine Empire claimed authority over all lands lying to the east of this line.

4. Ernst Kitzinger, “A Survey of the Early Christian Town of Stobi,” *Dumbarton Oaks Papers*, no. 3 (1946): 81–162.

5. Thomas Hobbes, *Leviathan*, ed. J.C.A. Gaskin (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1998), p. 463.

6. Norman John Greville Pounds, *The Medieval Castle in England and Wales: A Social and Political History* (Cambridge, UK, and New York: Cambridge University Press, 1990), pp. 207–15.

7. Maurice Warwick Beresford, *New Towns of the Middle Ages: Town Plantation in England, Wales, and Gascony* (New York: Praeger, 1967).

8. Helmold, *The Chronicle of the Slavs*, ed. and trans. Francis Joseph Tschan, *Records of Civilizations, Sources and Studies*, no. 21 (New York: Columbia University Press, 1935), p. 168.

THE URBAN PLAN: STREETS AND STRUCTURES

[T]he most excellent proporcion therof: being devyded
in to xxxix quarters the most part square, with streets
very large and broad, all strayght as the same wear
layd with a line.

Report to the privy council on New Winchelsea¹

It was claimed in the last chapter that medieval towns each conformed to one of two distinct plans, which in turn derived from the ways in which the towns themselves had originated. One was the planned town, the other the unplanned. This is, of course, a gross simplification of a very complex reality. The best planned town became in the course of time distorted in the absence of any effective regulatory authority. Contrariwise, there was more design in the unplanned town than is sometimes recognized. Nevertheless, this distinction has value and forms the basis of this chapter.

THE PLANNED TOWN

The earliest human settlements were unplanned in the sense that the layout of streets, houses, and public buildings was not controlled by a local authority in accordance with an overall plan. Urban settlements had grown by slow, unordered accretions from villages just as the latter had grown from hamlets. But change was on its way. According to Aristotle (384–322 B.C.E.), Hippodamus of Miletus introduced “the art of planning cities” and applied it to the construction of Piraeus, the port

city that served Athens.² This is usually taken to mean that Hippodamus laid out straight streets, intersecting at right angles, and thus enclosing rectangular blocks. This is, indeed, the street plan demonstrated in Piraeus even today. Such a planned town implies the existence not only of an overall authority, but also the need to create a relatively large center of population. In 443 B.C.E. the Athenians founded the city of Thurioi in southern Italy, divided by four streets lengthways and by three street crossways, as well as other cities similarly planned in Italy and Asia Minor. In fact the Hellenistic period of the fourth and third centuries B.C.E. was characterized by an active program of founding cities—all of them, so it appears, characterized by their planned layout.

The Greeks had not, in all probability, invented the regularly planned city. It had appeared much earlier in the cities of the Middle East, in the Tigris and Euphrates valleys. Nor did it end with the Greeks. The tradition was continued by the Etruscans in central and northern Italy. Indeed, the Etruscans may have discovered the planned city before the Greeks did. Rome itself was created by the *synoecism* or “coming together” of the villages that had previously crowned the seven hills, the *Septimontium*, of ancient Rome, but the towns the Romans established throughout their empire for the primary purpose of bringing civilization to their subject peoples were mostly built according to a regular plan of streets intersecting to enclose rectangular blocks. The best preserved of these cities—and by far the most familiar—are Pompeii (It. Pompei) and Herculaneum (It. Ercolano), preserved only because they were buried beneath the mud and ash spewed out by Vesuvius in 79 C.E. Throughout the empire, from the Rhineland to North Africa, there were planned towns. Many, perhaps the majority, fell to ruin and either were abandoned or survived only as villages after the collapse of the empire itself. In Italy, however, a large number continued as functioning towns. But even where they had been largely abandoned as inhabited places, their street plan survived in some form and imposed itself on the settlements that grew again on their sites during the Middle Ages.

In every such town, the plan became distorted. Buildings intruded into the streets, forcing the streets to make small detours. Whole blocks were cleared and became markets or were occupied by ecclesiastical foundations. Nevertheless, the ghostly plan of a Roman city shows through even today in the street plan of a Winchester, Trier, or Modena.

The planned European city was not restricted to those that derived

from the Greeks or the Romans. Similar conditions during the Middle Ages contributed to similar developments. The medieval king or baron might found a city on an empty tract of land. It might be nothing more than an open-ended street, its houses aligned along each side with their “burgage” plots reaching back behind them. It might consist of streets intersecting at right angles. The one pattern would be straggling, the other compact. It might be that agriculture was more important in the one than in the other, or, more likely, that the need for security in a hostile environment dictated a more compact plan around which a wall could be built. Such towns could be found in all parts of medieval Europe.

THE UNPLANNED TOWN

No town was ever wholly unplanned in the sense of being a randomly distributed assemblage of houses and public buildings. Every town once had a nucleus that defined its purpose. This might have been a natural feature such as a river crossing or a physical obstacle that necessitated a break of bulk, the transfer of goods from one mode of transportation to another—from ship to land, from animal transportation to a wheeled cart. The nucleus might also have been a castle or natural place of security or defense, a church or an object of pilgrimage. The streets would probably have originated in the paths by which people approached this nuclear feature and would have formed a radiating pattern, interlinked by cross streets and passageways. Some roads would have derived from the ways by which people walked or drove their animals to the surrounding fields.

Such was the Athens of the *Pseudo-Dichaearchus*, clustered at the foot of the defensive hill we know today as the Acropolis. So also were countless towns in western and central Europe that grew up in response to the needs of travelers and traders or to the need for security in an uncertain age. In a few instances the origins of these towns are enshrined in legend, as is the case in the beginnings of Rome. One cannot point to any particular creative act. Unknown people at a time that can only be guessed came together and formed a settlement. They built in whatever way best suited their needs. If shipping and maritime trade were of primary interest, then their properties would in all likelihood be close to the water's edge. If security was foremost in their minds, then a naturally defensible site would be chosen. If they saw profit in serving the needs

of a religious foundation such as a monastery and the pilgrims and others who would be likely to visit it, then they would settle and build as close as possible to its main entrance.

Soon after the Battle of Hastings in 1066, the new king of England, William the Conqueror, founded a monastery on the site of the battle. A small town took shape around it. A charter was granted and a market established. Today there is a large, triangular open space, dominated by the large and impressive gateway that leads to the former monastic precinct. This was the town's marketplace, though today no market is held there and the business that was once transacted has been transferred to the shops, which line the streets radiating from it. The town of Battle was an unplanned growth. It responded to the needs of the monks and of the traders who did business there. It is unique in that the pattern of its streets and buildings is not precisely replicated elsewhere. The unplanned town usually has an individuality that is the source of its interest and charm.

Superimposed on the pattern of streets, whatever their origin, were institutions of another kind: public buildings, both secular and religious, and open spaces needed for economic or ceremonial purposes. In the case of planned towns these needs had usually been anticipated when the towns were founded. A block may have been left clear to serve as a marketplace or for the construction of a town- or guild-hall. Local pride required that it should be centrally placed, ornate, and conspicuous. It was the focus of local authority, the seat of local government, and the expression of the independence guaranteed when the town was granted its charter.

Nearby, and also occupying at least the larger part of a block, was the central church. In a planned town the church is likely to have been established at the time of the foundation of the town itself. In an unplanned or organic town the church may have been even older, part of the nucleus around which the town itself gradually took shape. In a large town other churches—parochial, monastic, mendicant (that is, belonging to the orders of friars), together with the private chapels of the elite members of the community—intruded among the houses and shops wherever there was the need for them and wealth with which to build them. One must never underestimate the importance of the church in the urban landscape of the Middle Ages. For this reason a whole chapter is given in this book to the subject of the urban church.

THE WALLED TOWN

Security was a major factor in the creation and growth of most towns. The Middle Ages were a lawless time, and most citizens had much to lose not only from the activities of the common thief, but also from the depredations of ill-disciplined armies who made it a practice to live off the country. There was, therefore, some safety in numbers, and, added to this, the medieval town usually took steps to defend itself against these evils.

This necessity was not new. Classical Athens had protected itself against its enemies and had built the “Long Walls,” a sort of fortified corridor linking it with its port, Piraeus. Throughout the Hellenistic world, towns were walled, towers were built, and their gateways—always the weakest point in their perimeter—were fortified. The art of fortification spread to the Greeks of southern Italy, the Etruscans, and the Romans themselves. Not all towns established within the jurisdiction of Rome were protected by walls, however. The empire was, for much of its history, relatively peaceful. But from late in the third century conditions deteriorated, and there is good evidence in the reuse of masonry, torn from temples and public buildings, that walls were hastily built in anticipation of invasion. During the closing years of the western empire, towns were in economic decline but were at the same time becoming increasingly strongly fortified.

During the “dark” centuries that followed, urban housing and public buildings decayed, but walls survived, though doubtless increasingly ruinous. When urban life began to revive, their walls were still there, an object lesson in fortification and urban security. In town after town in western Europe the walls that had given their citizens protection under the empire were patched and repaired and, here and there extended to take in a newly developed suburb, again made to serve. Take London, for example. Short segments of London’s medieval walls still survive, but if their foundations are examined carefully today they are found to be of Roman workmanship.³ The walls of imperial Rome, built under the Emperor Aurelian (215–275 C.E.), remained in use through the Middle Ages, and fragments of them are still to be seen today.

Most towns that had survived from the late Roman period retained not only their walls but also some semblance of their former street pattern. When urban life revived, only a part of the former Roman enclo-

sure was occupied by houses and other buildings. There were open spaces between the new town and the old walls. Gradually the settled area expanded to fill out the area of the Roman town. Take, for example, the city of Winchester, the *Venta Belgarum* of the Romans. It had for practical purposes been abandoned when the Roman legions left Britain in 410 c.e. It became an inhabited place again a century or two later. But throughout the intervening years it had retained an aura of authority. It became the capital, if such a term can be used at so early a date, of an Anglo-Saxon kingdom. The Roman walls were again made to serve; their gates and protective towers served as fixed points on which the newly developing street pattern converged. It is not surprising, then, that the medieval streets (and also their present-day successors) replicated with only minor distortions the regular plan the Roman surveyors had laid out. Throughout western and also much of southern Europe, towns of Roman origin continue today to show a regular pattern of rectangular or subrectangular blocks, little disturbed by the passage of time and the operations of unregulated builders (Figure 3).

The population of some towns increased greatly during the Middle Ages, filling out the space within their walls and even spreading beyond

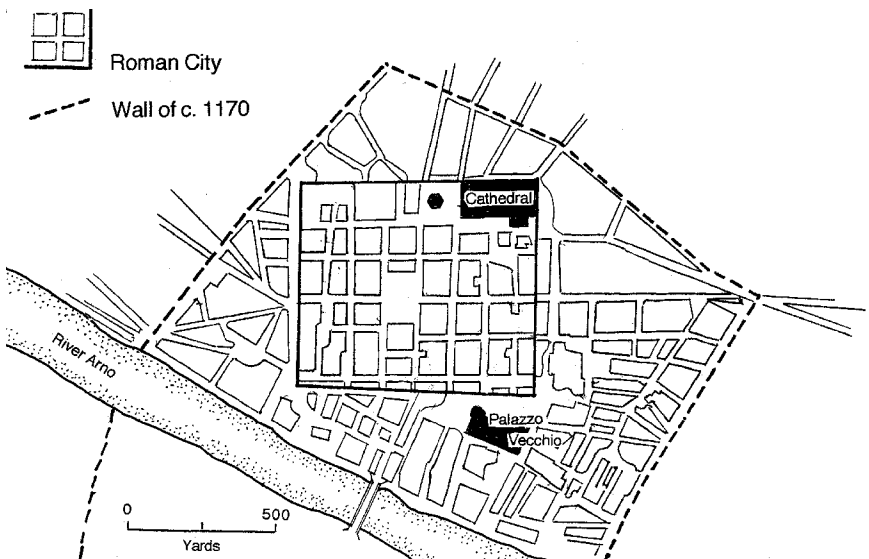


Figure 3. The expansion of Florence, showing extensions beyond the Roman walls.

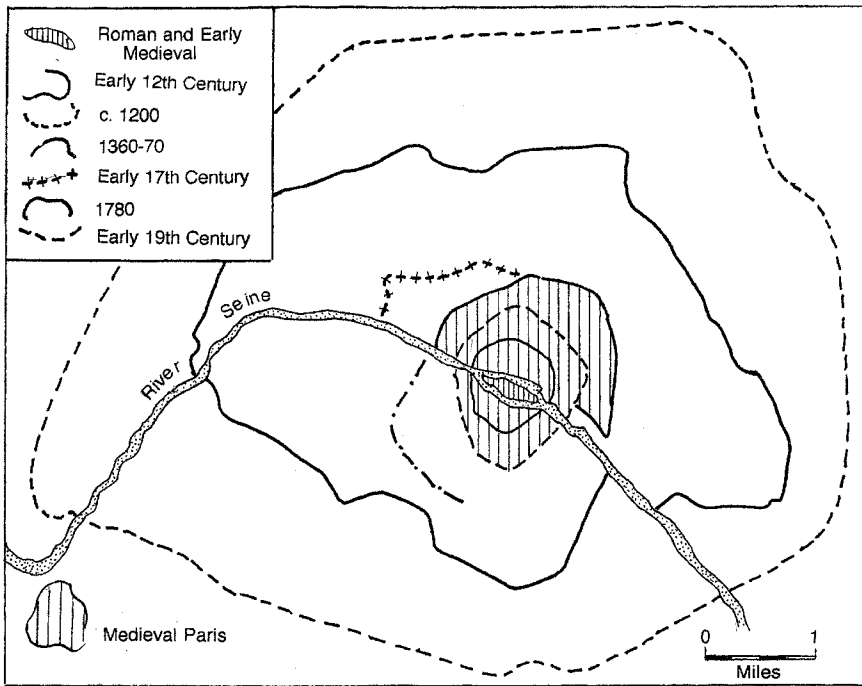


Figure 4. The expansion of Paris, showing the successive lines of the city walls.

them to form suburbs. In these cases it became necessary to build a fresh line of walls enclosing or partially enclosing that which had been inherited from the Romans. We thus have three kinds of walled towns. The first consisted of those in which the growth of population had necessitated the extension and rebuilding, wholly or in part, of their original line of protective walls. Among them were Paris, the largest city in western Europe (Figure 4), and Cologne (Köln) (Figure 5). In each of them, successive lines of walls embraced an ever-expanding area.

Second, there are those towns in which the extension of urban space was overgenerous. Their walls enclosed a greater area than could be populated, and the towns did not grow as had been anticipated. Such was Winchelsea, near the coast of southern England. The town and port of Old Winchelsea had been overwhelmed by the sea and destroyed during a storm in 1297. It was replanned on higher ground and on too lavish a scale, and here we can see today the vacant or only partially occupied blocks that resulted from the failure of reality to match the hopes and

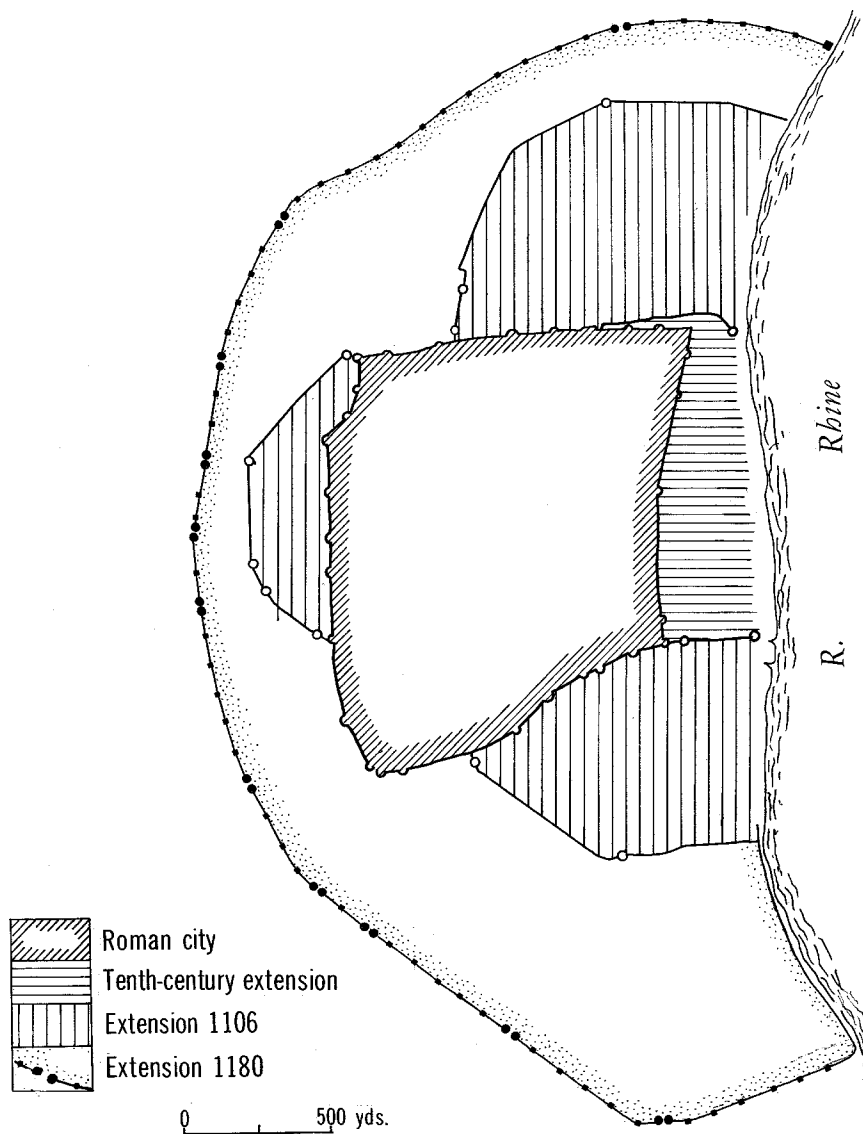


Figure 5. Cologne (Köln), showing successive extensions of the enclosed area beyond the subrectangular Roman room.

expectations of the city founders. Last, we have the great majority of Roman towns whose fortunes revived until their buildings, streets, and markets just about filled out the space that the Romans had occupied. Here the Roman walls, or what was left of them, continued to do service throughout the Middle Ages.

The effect of a wall was to set a limit—temporary in some cases—to urban expansion. If there was any threat to urban security, and there was throughout most of continental Europe, few citizens would venture to live outside the line of the town's protective walls if they could avoid it. Even the smallest of towns had walls, and there was an assumption that if a place was not surrounded by a ring of masonry, it could not then be considered a town. During the sixteenth century it became a common practice for engravers and mapmakers to produce panoramic views of cities. Most were drawn with great care and attention to detail. The biggest market for such drawings, it is said, was among the artillery masters who might be called upon to besiege the towns thus pictured and who required to know how the walls were arranged and the locations of important buildings. A series of these engravings was produced in the fifteenth century by Hartmann Schedel as illustrations to a history of the known world.⁴ Another and very much more accurate series was produced in the sixteenth century by Georg Braun and Franz Hogenberg.⁵ Others came from the Dutch cartographers Hondius, Ortelius, and Mercator. During the following century the brothers Merian did the same for even very small towns in central Europe. These collections, totaling hundreds of engravings, have two things in common: first, they all show in great detail the encircling walls with their towers and well-defended gatehouses, and second, they all show a broad, open space in front of the walls. This gave a clear field of fire to the defenders without at the same time offering any protection to the attackers.

Walls were functional. People were prepared to live in the utmost congestion within the walls rather than face the dangers of life in the open country beyond them. When unprotected suburbs began to take shape outside the walls, we may be sure that the need for protection had ceased to be uppermost in the minds of their citizens. And yet, even though siege craft was a well-developed branch of the art of war, there is little evidence that most walled towns were ever subjected to attack. It was the castle, the fortified home of an individual, that was most likely to be

besieged. The siege of a town might be prolonged, difficult, and costly, and in feudal warfare, which was almost by definition carried on by the barons and their retainers, the castle was more important than the town, whose citizens did not readily involve themselves in feudal disputes. Furthermore, to lay siege to a town with perhaps as much as a mile of defended walls called for very large forces, which few medieval kings or barons could command. An urban siege was likely to be a long, drawn-out affair, and feudal armies were, by the conventions of the age, in the field for only a short period in each year. This is illustrated by one of the very few well-documented urban sieges of medieval Europe: that of Byzantium by the Ottoman Turks. The Turks had occupied the hinterland of Byzantium (Istanbul) for almost a century before they dared to make a direct assault on the city, and even then the siege lasted for many months.

If urban sieges were so few, why then did the towns' citizens go to the immense cost and inconvenience of constructing walls? The answer must be in order to provide effective defenses against their potential attackers. Walls were a very significant form of insurance. They served another purpose also—giving protection from lesser evils, from the small bands that occasionally terrorized the countryside. Then, too, there was the small matter of local pride. The town walls were pictured in a town's heraldry, and were replicated each time the town seal was used to authenticate a document. Last, walls were a matter of convenience. They set a limit to urban sprawl, and the walkway behind the ramparts served as a means of getting across the town without having to negotiate its busy streets. The citizens of Coventry once complained that the wall-walk was so decayed that people were obliged to resort to the unpaved streets deep in mud.

THE MULTI-FOCAL TOWN

According to legend, which may not have been so very far from the truth, the city of Rome grew from the merger of a small number of villages that had previously crowned its hills. The space between them was gradually drained, the *Cloaca Maxima* (the Great Drain) taking the water that lay on the lower ground, where the Forum was later to be established, down to the river Tiber. An enclosing wall, the Servian Wall of some six miles, then converted the seven hills into a single city. The Au-

relian Wall, constructed under the empire, was, at over ten miles, even longer. This pattern was to be replicated in many other European towns. Most often their constituent quarters or wards derived from differing institutional nuclei—a castle, cathedral, monastery, or market—which in time came to complement one another. At Hildesheim in northwest Germany, one can detect no less than four independent quarters, each having had a distinctive origin, plan, and function. First came a cathedral settlement, the *Domburg*, followed half a mile away by the monastic settlement of St. Michael's. Then came an unplanned medieval settlement, the Altstadt, or "Old Town," and finally the planned Neustadt, or "New Town." Each was distinct in plan and function, but all came to be enclosed by a single perimeter wall, until they all disappeared with the destruction of Hildesheim during the Second World War.

In many of the larger cities of continental Europe a "new" town was established alongside the "old," which had had its origin under very different social and economic conditions. Krakow, in Poland, illustrates this sequence to perfection (Figure 6). Its nucleus was the Slav fortress, or *grod*, known as the Wawel. It crowns a bluff above the river Vistula (Wisla) and was eminently defensible. Below it to the north there developed an unplanned urban settlement, characterized today by its narrow, twisting streets. Then, even farther to the north, the planned town according to German "law" was laid out, consisting of regular blocks, four of them omitted in order to give space for one of the most spectacular marketplaces in all of central Europe.

Similar double towns are to be found in France. Here the Roman city had been the focus of local government; here also, after Christianity had become the recognized religion in the fourth century, the head of the local church, the bishop, also established his seat. His cathedral faced across the central square to another basilica in which secular affairs were carried on. Then came the earliest monastic orders. They rarely established themselves inside the crowded city; there may not have been room for them, and in any case they may have wanted some degree of privacy. Instead, they established their church and community just outside the town walls, and there they surrounded themselves with walls of their own. In the course of time their monastery attracted a body of merchants and craftsmen, which in some instances came to exceed that of the original city in size and importance.

Arras, in northern France, typifies this double development (Figure 7).

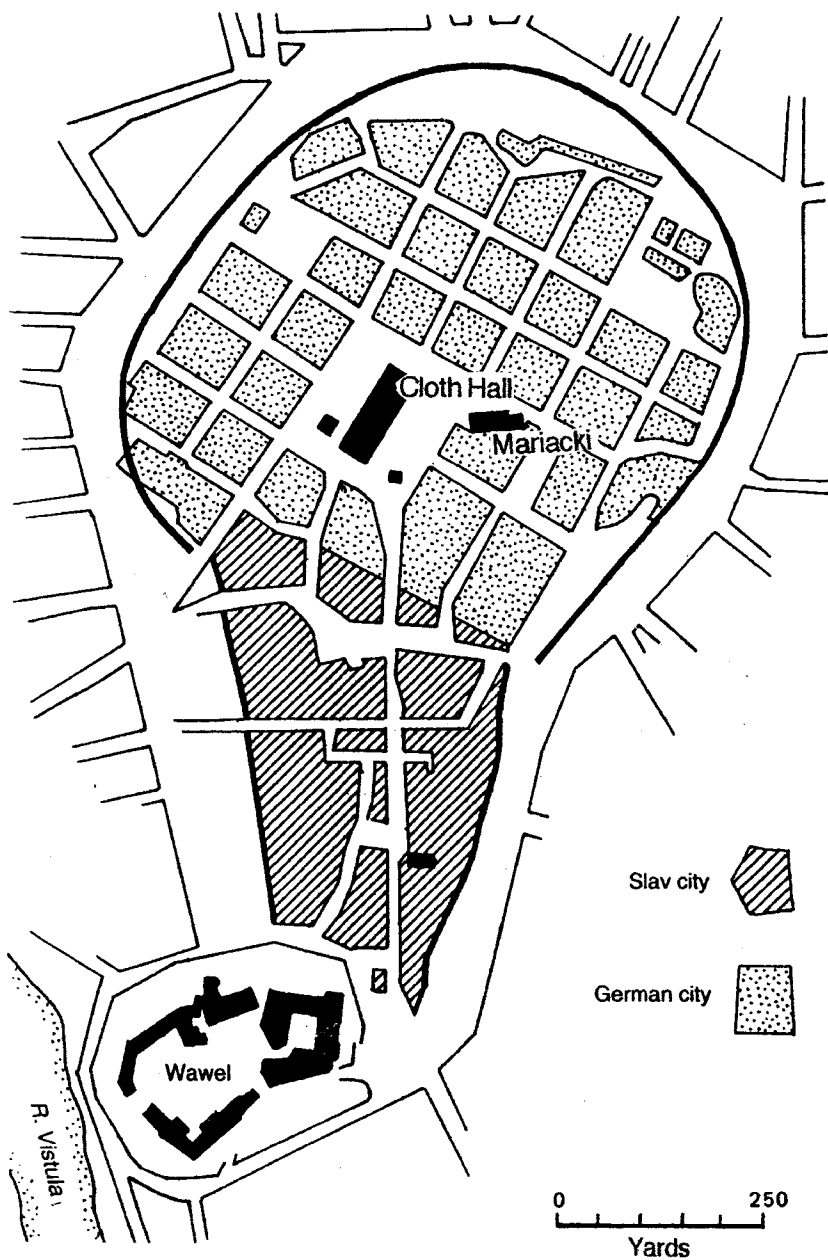


Figure 6. Krakow in the late Middle Ages. The plan shows the three stages in the development of the city beside its castle nucleus, the Wawel: the unplanned Slav town, the planned town according to German "law," and modern suburban development.

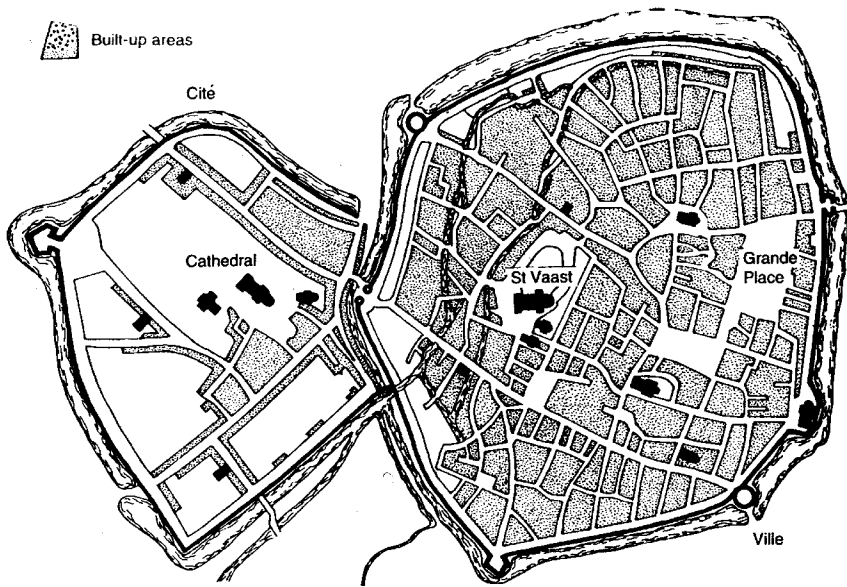


Figure 7. Arras, a binary town. The Cité derived from the Roman *civitas* and came to include the cathedral. The medieval town to the east of it grew up around the monastery of Saint-Vaast and became the commercial quarter. Based on a plan of c. 1435 in J. Lestocquoy, *Les Dynasties bourgeoises d'Arras*, Mem. Comm. Dept.-pas-de-Calais.

The more westerly Cité derives from the Roman *civitas*, and has retained something of the quiet contemplative atmosphere of the cathedral city.⁶ The monastic town, known as *la ville*, grew faster and became a large and thriving commercial and industrial town, clustered around the former monastery of Saint-Vaast.

A similar pattern of development can be traced in other French cities, such as Reims and Troyes, in each of which a commercial town, sometimes with a monastic nucleus, grew up beside the earlier administrative and episcopal city. In England there was a similar situation at Canterbury, where the Cathedral of Christ Church was established by St. Augustine within the former Roman city of Durovernum, while a monastic suburb to the east housed St. Augustine's Abbey, one of the most important monastic foundations in England. There was, however, an important difference. In the continental examples already mentioned, the

monastic suburb became the commercial hub; in Canterbury it was the former Roman *civitas capital* that became the commercial hub.

Two more prominent examples of multifocal development are London and St. Albans. London emerged from the Londinium of the Romans. It had probably never been completely abandoned, and when Augustine came on his Christianizing mission in 597, he had been instructed by Pope Gregory I to establish bishoprics in other towns that had once been Roman cities. Augustine stopped off, however, at Canterbury, and only many years later was a cathedral established in London. London grew, but still within the line of its former Roman walls, to become the capital of England and then of Great Britain. When a Benedictine monastery was established in the early eleventh century, it was not in the close proximity of the city, but two miles away to the west, at Westminster; it was the “western” minster. The same distant suburb also became the chief palace of the English kings, the “Palace of Westminster,” which as their primary residence eventually replaced the cramped and uncomfortable Tower of London. The kings have left, and the site has been since the Middle Ages the place where the English (later British) Parliament has met because it was originally summoned there to confer with the king. In this case it would be many centuries before the open country with its fields and meadows, which separated the city with its cathedral (St. Paul’s) from the monastic and governmental center at Westminster, became filled with palaces, domestic houses, and shops.

The second example, St. Albans, is 20 miles northwest of London. Here the city of Verulamium, one of the largest in Roman Britain, spread over the valley floor of the small river Ver. The city had decayed during the late Roman period and had been abandoned. Today only its scanty ruins survive. Then in the eighth century a monastery was founded on the hilltop to the north, where allegedly St. Alban had been martyred in the third century C.E. In this instance, the Roman city vanished as a human settlement, while the monastic suburb, helped by the miracle-working relics of its saint, grew to become a commercial town of some importance.

RIVER AND BRIDGE TOWNS

Most towns in western and central Europe grew up on the banks of a river. In southern Europe, towns were more likely to have been located

on a hilltop, or at least on higher ground. This may have been because of the need for a naturally defensible site, but just as likely it was to escape the malaria-carrying mosquito, which bred in the lakes and marshes of the valley floor.

A riverside location offered great advantages. The river itself served both as a source of water and as a sewer. River navigation was in much of Europe the cheapest, the easiest, and the safest form of transportation, and, furthermore, simply being on the banks of a river gave the town some protection on at least one side. There were even towns that had their origin on an island encircled and protected by the branches of a river. Paris, which developed first on the Ile de la Cite, may be the best known, but there are others, such as Amsterdam in the Netherlands and Wroclaw (Breslau) in Poland.

Few towns that had grown up on one bank of a river failed to spread to the opposite bank. A bridge became a necessity, and the land on the far side of the river quickly became part of the urban hinterland or service area of the town. Indeed, there are instances where the bridge itself was the focal point around which the town grew. Many a town today displays this fact in its name: Bridgetown, Newbridge, Bridgend, the many place-names in France incorporating the element *pont*, and those in Germany incorporating *bruch*, both terms meaning "bridge." Always, however, there was a social and sometimes also an economic difference between the two or more parts of a city that was divided by a river. Sometimes the difference extended also to city government. London, for example, inherited the site, the walls, and in part the street-pattern of Roman Londinium. It lay at a crossing point of the river Thames. Julius Caesar's legions had forded the river at this point. A dangerous ford was soon replaced by a bridge, and there has been a London Bridge for much of the time from that day to this. At the south end of the bridge there grew up the "southern ward" or Southwark. The river is wide, and until modern times there has been only a single bridge. This contributed to a large social distance between the city on the northern bank and its suburb across the river. London Bridge was the only crossing of the river before the nineteenth century. Southwark thus distanced itself from London, and was for many centuries quite distinct for administrative purposes.

A comparable divided city is Budapest in Hungary. Buda grew up on a hill west of the river Danube and became the seat of the Hungarian

kings. The steep topography of the site hindered the development of markets and the infrastructure of a commercial town. These grew up on the east bank of the river, where the level plain of the Alfold stretched away to the horizon. This was the town of Pest, differing in form, function, and every other respect from the aristocratic Buda. The Danube's fierce current held the two cities apart. They became one, it was said, only in the depth of winter, when the river was frozen and people could walk—or skate—from one bank to the other. Attempts to build a bridge across the Danube had been defeated by the engineering difficulties until the 1860s, when success was achieved and the first bridge was opened. Intercourse between the two towns at once became more intense, so that in 1872 they merged, together with their names, to give us Budapest.

The history of Prague (Přaha) is, superficially regarded, not very different from that of Budapest (Figure 8). West of the river Vltava the land rises steeply to a plateau on the edge of which the kings of Bohemia had built their castle and palace, the Hradčany, which embraced also the cathedral of Prague. The town, the Mala Strana, straggled down the hill to the river, but the commercial center of Prague was established on the bank of the river opposite, where the land is relatively flat. Here was the Staré Město or "Old Town," enclosed by its walls. The river Vltava never presented a serious obstacle, and a bridge, the Kaluv Most or "Charles Bridge," was built in the fourteenth century. The Old Town was subsequently enlarged by the addition of the Nové Město or "New Town," with its formidable walls and gates that still survive in part. Unlike Budapest, the four units that comprised the city of Prague were always treated as a single administrative unit.

There was scarcely a limit to the patterns of relationship that might develop between double towns such as those that have been discussed. Each represents a permutation on a common theme—how to bring together diverse human settlements and to weld them into a single, functional unit. In most instances subtle differences in atmosphere today still distinguish the former quarters of these cities. They differed not only in their street plans but also in their styles of architecture, in the quality of housing and shops and commercial outlets, and in the ways in which their inhabitants see themselves and are perceived by outsiders.

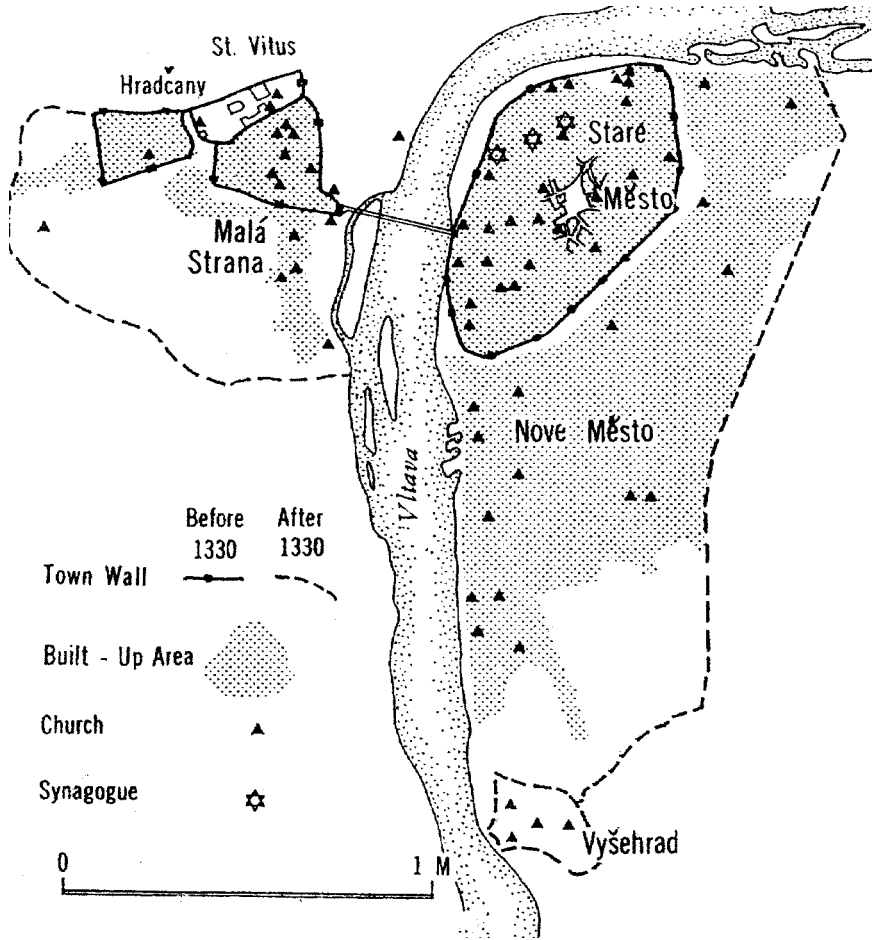


Figure 8. Prague in the late Middle Ages. Its nucleus had been the hilltop castle of the Hradčany. This attracted the small walled settlement to its south, followed in turn by the Staré Město (Old Town) farther to the south and by the Staré Město across the river Vltava and, toward the end of the Middle Ages, by the Malá Strana (Small Side) and the Nové Město (New Town). Vyšehrad, at the southern edge of the New Town, was a defended prehistoric site, which had preceded the Hradčany.

STRUCTURES OF THE MEDIEVAL TOWN

As the medieval town grew in population and assumed ever more diversified functions, so it became more congested. The area confined within its walls was limited; it came to be fully built-up with housing and other structures, but not until the danger of war and siege had diminished did most of its citizens venture to live in the open country beyond its walls.

Immigrants from the countryside who peopled the earliest European towns brought with them rural styles of building and continued to use the materials to which they had become accustomed and to handle them in traditional ways. Well might the town have looked like the village writ large. In the course of time, however, urban building began to grow apart from what was normal in the countryside. The town imposed its own constraints, the most important of which was space, or the lack of it. Urban population and urban housing became ever more dense. More houses were crowded onto each acre of urban land. Spaces between houses were gradually filled up, and the yards behind them were built over until there ceased to be space for more construction. People then began to build upward. An extra floor was added to the single-story house and then a second and a third and even more. In many an urban house the lower stages were not strong enough to bear the added weight that was imposed on them. The result was the collapse of the whole building with the consequent loss of life and property.

BUILDING MATERIALS

The growing congestion of the city necessitated a change in the materials used. The Roman cities in most parts of the empire had used a combination of stone, brick, and timber, but stone and brick were always the preferred materials. Such urban buildings that have survived from the Roman period are of stone. The towns of Pompeii, Herculaneum, and Ostia in Italy and the ruins that remain today of the Roman Forum or that crown the Palatine hill are all of masonry. Provincial towns also showed masonry construction not only in their public buildings but also in townhouses and urban villas. Stone may often have been supplemented with brick, whose use was in large measure a function of local geology, since it had to be molded from clay.

The impression derived from Roman remains may be deceptive, because only stone and brick could have survived for close to two thousand years. Timber was unquestionably used, not only to support the roofs of buildings of all kinds, but also for walls. Fragments of woodwork may have survived in the drier conditions of southern Italy and of North Africa, but timber has rotted and disappeared from northern and western Europe. Clay tiles of varied shapes and sizes were used for roofing, or, in their absence, wooden shingles and even thatch. The medieval town, following the example of the village, made the greatest use of wood, usually, but by no means always, on stone foundations. The timber was all too often green and became distorted, leading to the twisted walls and floors, which are so conspicuous a feature of surviving timber-framed buildings. The town houses of the Middle Ages were frequently rebuilt, following their collapse, their destruction by fire, or the simple desire of their occupants for a more ambitious home. Only in a few instances—Scandinavian settlements around the Baltic Sea, for example, and in the lowest strata excavated in surviving towns—can one find post-holes and traces of the decayed timber of the homes of their earliest inhabitants.

Timber construction was quick, easy, and convenient, and, in terms of cost, relatively cheap. But it had its inherent disadvantages: it had to be protected from the damp soil; it rotted quickly in the absence of any preservative—and there were no preservatives before modern times—and, above all, it burned. The most important enemy of the town was not the hostile army or the robber band; it was fire. There can be scarcely a town in northern, wood-using Europe that does not remember a devastating fire. Medieval people took it for granted that their town might some day be consumed in this way. Arson was rarely, if ever, suspected. Fires usually arose from accident:

And we've all seen sometime through some brewer
Many tenements burnt down with bodies inside,
And how a candle guttered in an evil place
Falls down and totally torches a block.⁷

Little could be done to insure against fire, except to keep a few buckets on hand filled with water and, of course, to build in materials that would not easily burn. Ordinance after ordinance in town after town prescribed the thickness of party walls and the use of stone and tile and forbade the

butting of one structure against a preexisting building. As early as the twelfth century, London enacted the law that buildings should be of masonry. All of this was to little avail, however. Medieval cities—and not only London—legislated wisely, but failed completely to institute any mechanism of inspection and control. Only when one citizen brought suit against another did the courts take cognizance of a breach of the town's ordinances. Even the Great Fire of 1666, which destroyed the greater part of the city of London and demonstrated how its building ordinances had been violated, failed to bring home to everyone the need for the most elementary precautions against fire and the collapse of buildings.

Medieval growth in urban population brought about not only an increasing density of housing but also a need to build higher. Floor was added to floor, the upper floors being superimposed on the lower, which had never been intended to support their weight. Medieval builders pressed the strength of materials and structures to their limit. They lacked the mathematical skills to calculate the stresses generated. Sometimes they overcompensated, as in the three-foot party walls, which were at one time required in London; more often they failed to allow for the weakness of some of their materials, with the result that floors collapsed. Timber-framed buildings—and most urban housing was of wood on masonry foundations—crumpled as their timbers decayed, and those which had been built of masonry disintegrated from the weakness of the mortar used to bond the stonework. Nevertheless, structures grew ever taller as their builders tried to combine under one roof both shop and warehouse as well as family home. Cellars under a house, combined with four or even five stories aboveground, were in many instances a prescription for disaster.

During the late Middle Ages, building stone must have been one of the most abundant commodities in long-distance transportation. In parts of Europe, however, building stone was almost totally lacking and could be obtained for building only if a relatively cheap means of transportation, as by river barge, was available. Fortunately most areas that lacked stone possessed clay in abundance. Brick and tile thus replaced stone and slate. In the cities of northern Europe, especially those of the Hanseatic League, the raw material of brick was present in abundance in the boulder clay, which covered much of the region. In consequence many towns such as Amsterdam, Lubeck, and Gdansk (Danzig) became cities of red

brick and have remained so until the present. Even the churches were of brick, with molded bricks used to give the illusion of Gothic tracery.

THE CITIZEN'S HOME

In the medieval town, streets generally came before housing, and the first houses were aligned along them. They were like those of the village, single-storied and consisting of two basic elements: the living space and the sleeping space. Chaucer knew this well. Of his poor widow's "narwe cottage" he could write:

Ful sooty was hire bour and eek [also] hir halle,
In which she eet ful many a sklendre meel.⁸

Whatever may have been added during the Middle Ages and after, these two elements remained the dominant features of the home. The hall was where its inhabitants lived and cooked; the bower was where they slept. This remained true of every social class.

Urban society was structured with a wide gulf between rich and poor, but their respective homes each embraced these two elements, however large they may have become and however fanciful their decoration. In the course of time the house became more complex, but it did not abandon its basic units of hall and chamber. Broadly speaking, these units assumed one of two forms according to their relationship to the street. In their earliest form the two elements lay end to end and parallel with the street. This was often wasteful of space, though, and, except in the upper-class houses, was abandoned in favor of a house plan at right-angles to the street. The house then had a narrow frontage, but extended a variable but considerable distance toward the rear. This was to become the typical town house plan in most of the larger and more congested cities, but the earlier plan survived in the smaller towns in which there was less pressure on space and was retained as upper-class housing even in the larger.

In the "parallel" house plan, the great hall, open to the roof and with tall windows along each side, stood parallel with the street (Figure 9). At one end was the kitchen; at the other, the solar, parlor, or chamber. Wings might protrude from the ends to serve as additional bedroom accommodation, as stables, or, in the case of a merchant, as storage space.

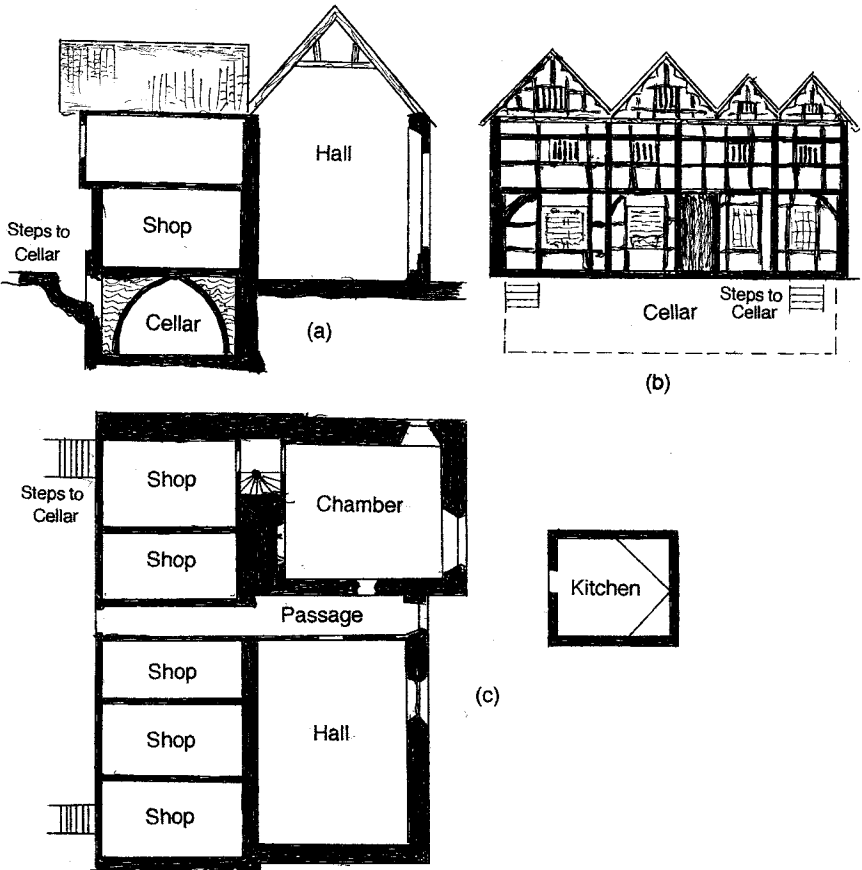


Figure 9. A row of townhouses, based on the surviving evidence of Tackley's Inn, Oxford. Primary Documents, p. 199, is a contract for building such a structure. Windows and roofs are entirely presumptive.

These might partially enclose a courtyard or even a garden. Much depended on the width of the plot. Whatever its size, every attempt was made to make the house as similar as possible to the aristocratic manor house of the countryside.

Houses of this type may have been most common in northern Europe, but they were once to be found over much of the continent. The plan was also used for gild halls and town halls in which the councils of gild and town met and held their deliberations regarding urban and gild affairs, but it was always associated with the prosperous local elite of mer-

chants and businessmen. They were not averse to using part of their ample space as a warehouse for the goods in which they traded or to building a row of shops, cutting off their courtyard from the street, as, indeed, had happened at Norwich.

At the uppermost level of these parallel houses, and only in the larger and more important cities, stood the urban palaces of the aristocracy and ruling classes. They differed from the parallel houses chiefly in their greater size, their higher level of refinement, and their provision for large numbers of retainers. They were in particular a feature of capital cities, especially of Paris and London, of Rome and Florence and, at a much later date, of Warsaw and Prague, where they became the town houses of the landed aristocracy and the princes of the Church.

The alternative house plan to evolve during the Middle Ages was the so-called right-angled type. It was adapted to the narrow urban lot or burgage plot, and became by far the most common urban house plan. It owed nothing to any rural progenitor, deriving wholly from urban crowding and congestion. The lords who controlled or influenced urban development divided up their territory into elongated plots, which were leased to the citizens at an accepted rental. There was competition for as broad a frontage on the street as was practicable, since this was where the shop or business quarters were established. A wide frontage cost more and was taxed more heavily than a narrow one, but in very few instances was the frontage of a burgage plot wide enough to build a parallel house. Each house butted against its neighbor on each side and extended back as far as was practicable. It was, indeed, the predecessor of the rows of conjoined houses of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. There might be generous window space fronting on the street, but little light penetrated beyond the front room, and there could be no windows in the thick party walls, which formed the sides of the house. If more space was needed—and it usually was—the house could be extended room behind room, into the space or yard behind the house. But this only intensified the darkness of the interior. The only alternative, if more floor space was needed, was to pile floor upon floor, until houses of four, five, or even more stories had been built, very often on foundations designed for only two or three.

Such houses raised serious structural problems. Party walls were usually of masonry, as was necessary to provide a rigid framework and to reduce the risk of fire spreading uncontrollably. But all internal fittings—including stairs, floor-joists, and floors—were mainly, if not wholly, of



Figure 10. Arnhem, a late medieval walled town, relatively lightly built up within its walled perimeter. Note the single line of walling facing the river Rhine which gave some protection, but the double line, together with water defenses on the landward side.

wood. The construction of the roof always taxed the skills of the builder. Since the house was long and narrow, a ridge roof running its entire length and terminating at each extremity in a triangular gable was the easiest and cheapest to construct. In consequence, drawings of medieval towns display a mass of pointed gables like a forest of conifers (Figure 10). During a storm, water accumulated in the gully between each pair of ridge roofs. It overflowed at the ends onto the heads of people in the street below. Water spouts were sometimes fitted to project the water farther into the street below, but the discharge of water was nevertheless a nuisance and was prominent among the complaints addressed to the city courts.⁹ The gully between adjoining ridges was also a serious weakness. Water seeped through the gully into the rooms below, and in winter it gathered as snow, which was very difficult to remove.

The merchant was often compelled to adopt the narrow, right-angled house for lack of anything better and was obliged to cope with the problem of finding sufficient storage space for his wares. It thus became a common practice to add a cellar or basement beneath the house, sometimes even digging the basement *after* the house had been built. The cellar or basement necessarily had to be of masonry. It was sometimes reached by a small stairway located in the sidewalk or road in front of the house. It clearly presented a hazard to the unobservant pedestrian, as the *Coroners' Rolls* testify. Where it survives today, it still constitutes a minor hazard against which its owner has to protect the public with some form of railings.¹⁰

The practice developed, probably by the thirteenth century, of allowing the upper stories to overhang those below or, in the jargon of vernacular architecture, to "jetty." Why? This practice made extravagant use of timber and shut out the light from lower windows, but it added to total floor space and, as contemporary building contracts demonstrate, was a mark of good building practice and an object of personal pride. There can be no doubt that a timber-framed, jettied house is considered today, and probably always has been, a thing of great beauty.

Arrangements within the narrow, right-angled house varied with economic needs and personal preference. The space on the ground floor adjacent to the street was commonly a shop, which, according to the type of goods handled, might have served also as a workshop. Alternatively, a workshop may have been placed behind the shop, though the lack of natural lighting often made this undesirable. Instead, there might have been a "hall," where the family lived. The need for business premises may, on the other hand, have forced the family to make their living quarters above the shop. A third and even more floors would have given ample space for chambers in which the family, not to mention journeymen and apprentices, were accustomed to sleep. The uses to which the rooms of a medieval house were put must have varied greatly, and doubtless changed with personal preferences and needs.

A high proportion of urban houses must have embraced shops, since buying and selling were the dominant functions of every town. It is clear that the medieval shop was not a space that the customer could enter and look around in order to appraise the goods on display. There was probably little range of choice within any particular type of goods. The

shop was rather an arched opening, closed by a wooden shutter, which was hinged at either the top or the bottom so that it could be lowered to serve as a display area or raised to give some protection from the weather. At night it would have been closed and bolted into place, while the owner slept above in relative security. If more space was needed a wooden stall was added, protruding into the street and further obstructing the passage of people and vehicles. The records of the *London Assize of Nuisance* are filled with complaints of such intrusions onto the public space of the street. Some streets were permanently narrowed by the unauthorized extension of shops in this age of poorly regulated private activity.

Every house in the medieval town required two particular offices: a kitchen, or at least a place in which to cook, and a toilet. In a rural home, food would have been prepared over a fire placed either in the middle of the floor of the hall or in a niche in a side wall. In some parts of Europe it was the practice to build a dome-shaped oven of stone, brick, and clay, which had to be preheated. In other words, wood was burned within it and then, when the oven was hot, the ashes would have been scraped out and the food, principally bread, inserted. In the case of the central hearth the smoke was allowed to circulate and escape through a lantern in the roof or through the manifold cracks and crannies of the structure. The fireplace built against a side wall required a chimney for the evacuation of smoke. This was so in the right-angled town house, which clearly demanded a fireplace against a side wall with a chimney running the height of the building. A development that first became apparent in the twelfth century was to build a separate kitchen projecting from the back of the house or even freestanding in the yard behind. The latter plan was always favored because it reduced the ever-present danger of fire, but it was a luxury for which there was frequently too little space.

The other necessity was what a Renaissance writer termed a "house of convenience."¹¹ The public toilet, discharging into a large cesspit or even built out over a river, was far from unknown in the medieval town. There are references to their maintenance in the urban documentation. Heavy reliance on a public or communal toilet seems not to have been a feature of the industrial housing until the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, however. Thus, reliance was placed mainly on the private,

domestic toilet, and every home had to have its own facility. A contract for constructing such a convenience in London in 1405 required that the latrine pit be dug before the building of the house had begun. It was to be sixteen feet by ten feet. It was in fact a cesspit. Holes would have been left for fluids to drain into the soil, and periodically its wooden cover would have been lifted and the contents shoveled into a cart that would have conveyed them to the cultivated land around the city or to the nearby river. Here it would have been sent downstream to the next settlement, which probably used the river as its source of water. There was no attempt before modern times to construct a masonry sewer for the discharge of human waste. Occasionally a toilet was constructed as a protrusion from the wall of a house or other building, so that the excrement merely accumulated on the ground below. Not all houses were able to accommodate a masonry-built cesspit. Many used only a basket-like container, woven of withies, which permitted its contents to drain into the ground. Figure 11 was drawn from a photograph of such a woven cesspit, which was preserved by the damp soil and revealed when the house site was excavated.

Not every craftsman was able to pursue his craft within the narrow confines of his home. Some crafts required a quite extensive space. The potter's kiln and the metalworker's furnace and forge could not possibly be confined within a burgage plot, even if it was not prohibited by the fire hazard they posed. Others, such as the craft of the tanner, were antisocial, and yet others, like milling and fulling, had to be practiced close to the flowing water that supplied their power. These were all squeezed toward the periphery of the settled area of the town, where space was likely to be both cheaper and more abundant. But most handicrafts called for little space. They could be pursued in the front room or in the yard of the traditional house. The butcher and baker, the cordwainer or fine leatherworker, the weaver, the dyer, and even the more esoteric craftsmen such as the furrier and the goldsmith pursued their respective crafts under the public eye and interrupted their work to chat to a passer-by. The butcher often slaughtered his beasts in the street in front of his shop and under the scrutiny of his customers. In all these instances the shop was also the workshop.

Such was the crowded, congested town in which most of the manufactured goods were made and almost all of them were sold. It was into

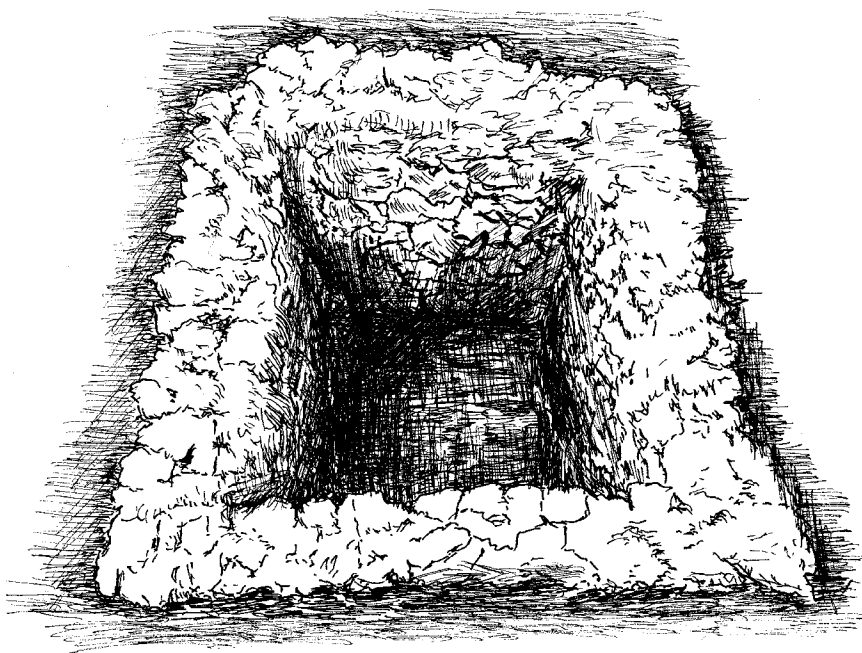


Figure 11. A domestic cesspit, excavated within a house in Basing Lane in the City of London. It was built of rough stones, without mortar, so that fluids might drain into the soil.

this confusion of living, working, and storage space that the patrician class intruded. How the patrician acquired his land we do not know—probably by purchase. He often succeeded in putting together space enough to build the kind of home that matched his station in life. Such a house, developed from one of humble beginnings, was the Strangers' Hall in Norwich, mentioned earlier (see p. 43). It was the late medieval rural manor house translated, very little altered, to the urban setting. Another such a house is the Old Hall in the midst of the town of Gainsborough, Lincolnshire, now a splendid survival, encroached upon on all sides by modern, squalid, urban, and industrial buildings. All large cities once had such houses, most of them timber framed on masonry foundations, with elaborate facilities for every aspect of medieval life. The kitchen at Gainsborough Hall must be one of the largest and finest of its kind surviving today. The practice of building luxurious town houses continued through the following centuries, though their styles changed from

Gothic to Classical and their material from a timber studding or framework infilled with lath and plaster, to stone and brick. Warsaw and Prague, Paris and London, Florence and Venice still contain relics of this medieval past. Not until the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries did the aristocracy begin to abandon the city and return to their homes in the countryside where their roots had been.

PUBLIC STRUCTURES

In addition to the domestic and commercial structures, there were two other categories of building in the late medieval town: the ecclesiastical, and the secular and administrative. Domestic architecture has already been discussed (see pp. 41–49). Chapter 4 will be given over to the ecclesiastical, and it remains here to discuss the miscellaneous secular buildings that punctuated the medieval skyline. Most conspicuous were the walls, gates, and mural towers, built as much to impress the visitor from other parts as to protect the citizenry and to give it a sense of security. As has already been seen, town walls in western and southern Europe derived in many instances from the example of the Romans. In central and eastern Europe they were the creation of medieval people, and here they had a serious military intent. Sieges were a feature of most wars from the early Middle Ages to the Thirty Years' War of the seventeenth century. In England, though not necessarily in the rest of the British Isles, town walls were built for show rather than for any serious military purpose. One cannot point to an important urban siege later than the twelfth century, and there is little evidence for one before that date. Urban sieges were more numerous in continental Europe, but even here there were very few. Walls were allowed to fall to ruin long before the end of the Middle Ages, and in most instances modern urban growth has obliterated all trace of them. In town after town, however, the line of the vanished walls can be traced because a road had once run inside but very close to them. Similarly, as suburbs grew up outside the walls, another space was left. These spaces, both within and immediately outside the line of the walls, have often survived as boulevards, with trees growing where once there had been massive walls. Outside the line of the vanished walls, where there was less pressure on space, streets are commonly found to be wider and development more spacious than within, where there often survives a kind of medieval congestion. Nevertheless, the walls survive, almost complete, at

Chester and York, and, in more fragmentary fashion, at Norwich, Exeter, London, Winchester, Chichester, and elsewhere. In continental Europe there are many examples of a more or less complete circuit of walls: in France at Aigues Mortes and Avignon, in Spain at Avila, and in Germany at Nuremberg and many small towns in Swabia. Fortified gates have survived more frequently, perhaps because they could offer some kind of accommodation and serve also for the control of admission to the town and the collection of market tolls. Many of the smaller towns of continental Europe still retain traces of their walls, and they survive almost intact in some of the hill-towns of Italy.

Streets may not have been structures, but they were an essential feature of the urban scene. Streets of former Roman towns had once been paved with stone sets, slabs, and cobbles, and, where they have in recent times been excavated, they are often seen to have been worn into grooves by the wheels of carts and wagons. The streets of medieval towns sadly fell far short of the standards set by the Romans. They were not always paved, though occasionally one finds in medieval records a note of the payment for some kind of stone surface. Most of them, however, were at best given an occasional dressing of sand or ash. They were usually made to slope, not, as is the practice today, toward a gutter on each side, but toward the middle. Water was thus kept away from the buildings which lined the streets on each side. In this way, after heavy rain a street might be turned into a miniature watercourse. Nor was there any sidewalk; pedestrians could only keep as far as possible from the middle of the road, but were always liable to be splashed by the passage of animals and vehicles. Conditions were made worse by the widespread practice of disposing of household waste by throwing it into the street, where it was collected at irregular intervals by so-called rakers and disposed of in that receptacle for all waste materials—the river.

Except in southern Europe and the Mediterranean region, most towns had been built on the banks of a river. Whether the towns had originated at crossing points, where merchants and travelers gathered, or whether the crossing was established for the convenience of the town may remain uncertain. In any case, few towns did not possess a river bridge, which was usually built and maintained by the city authorities. Some river crossings had earned an almost legendary fame, as, for instance, London Bridge, now dismembered and re-erected across a dry river-bed in Arizona, and that built across the Tiber during the early days of Rome. A

few bridges were fortified and made to serve as part of the town's defenses. The Pont Valentre at Cahors in southwestern France is a particularly impressive example of a fortified bridge, with three massive towers barring its narrow road.

Other secular buildings within a town were largely concerned with its trade and other economic activities. The guilds, whose role will be discussed in Chapter 5, possessed in many cases a building that served as a kind of clubhouse, where members met to conduct the business of their guild and, on a less formal basis, to celebrate their feasts and to initiate new members. Guild halls usually took the form of large town houses, with hall and kitchen and a number of smaller rooms. London, for example, still has several, which continue to serve their traditional purposes, though the guilds that use them are no longer associations of craftsmen and have become honorific societies of well-heeled London businesspeople.

More directly linked with the economic activities of the guilds were the warehouses in which merchants stored the raw materials and finished articles in which they traded. Even today small hoisting devices are seen to protrude from the gables of the tall brick-built houses lining the canals of Amsterdam. In many other cities one can discover the warehouses of medieval merchants, now converted to other uses.

Since most towns lay on the banks of a river, which provided the easiest and cheapest mode of transport, they are likely to have had a quay, revetted or covered with stone, at which river boats could tie up and load or unload their cargoes. Many would have been equipped with a crane, a curious contraption of wood, its windlass operated by a "man-engine," for lifting the heavier items. Such a primitive crane survives in some of the small towns along the Rhine.

Another mechanical device that formed part of every medieval town was the mill. Every grain, whether wheat, barley, or rye, had to be milled before it could be baked into bread. In the countryside this had once been done by means of a quern or large stone mortar, which called for no power beyond that of the baker's strong right arm. This was gradually displaced by the water- and windmill. Milled flour was difficult both to transport and to store, and it became necessary for townfolk to mill their grain shortly before baking it into bread, which was the most common item in their diet. Windmills were sometimes mounted on the town walls, where the breeze blew more strongly, but more often the town relied upon

a water-mill, either built on the bank of the river or mounted on a boat moored in midstream, where the speed of the current turned its massive wheel.

The only other secular structures likely to stand out amid the huddle of roofs and gables filling the late medieval town were those associated with the market. The market, as has been seen, was an open space, sometimes rectangular, more often irregular in shape, where stalls for the display of goods were erected on market day. Above them there often stood a market cross, a monument with religious connotations, which, as it were, extended its benediction to the activities carried on around it. There might also have been a market hall, where market officials met and where tolls were collected and debts settled. It might also have given shelter to at least some of those who did business in its shadow. Many towns had been authorized to hold an annual fair, when stalls and benches would have been set up in the streets and surrounding fields. Few fairs continued to be held in the late Middle Ages. They had been associated with the itinerant merchant, but he was now doing his business more and more from his urban counting house rather than by traveling the roads and facing the tumult of the fair. Specialist fairs did continue to serve special interests, as, indeed, they continue to do today, but everywhere they were becoming more convivial than commercial, more fun-fairs than centers of continent-wide trade. Where they continued to be held, they filled the urban streets for a short period in each year with their stalls and their merchandise and their turmoil.

NOTES

1. Qtd. in Maurice Warwick Beresford, *New Towns of the Middle Ages: Town Plantation in England, Wales, and Gascony* (New York: Praeger, 1967), p. 16.

2. Aristotle, *The Politics*, ed. Stephen Everson, Cambridge Texts in the History of Political Thought (Cambridge, UK, and New York: Cambridge University Press, 1988), p. 36.

3. On English walled towns see: Hilary L. Turner, *Town Defences in England and Wales: An Architectural and Documentary Study, AD 900–1500* (Hamden, CT: Archon Books, 1971); Alfred Harvey, *The Castles and Walled Towns of England* (London: Methuen and Company, 1911).

4. Hartmann Schedel, *Liber Chronicarum* (Nuremberg, 1493).

5. Georg Braun and Franz Hogenberg, *Civitates Orbis Terrarum*, 6 vols., 1572–1618. Twenty-four illustrations were republished as *Old European Cities: Thirty-two Sixteenth-Century City Maps and Texts from the “Civitates Orbis Terrarum” of Georg Braun and Franz Hogenberg*, ed. Ruthardt Oehme (London: Thames and Hudson, 1965), and there is a modern facsimile edition of the whole work, published as *Civitates Orbis Terrarum: “The Towns of the World,” 1572–1618*, ed. R. A. Skelton (Cleveland, OH: World Pub. Co., 1966).

6. Jean Lestocquoy, *Études d’Histoire Urbaine: Villes et Abbayes, Arras au Moyen Âge*, Mémoires de la Commission Départementale des Monuments Historiques du Pas-de-Calais (Arras: Impr. Centrale de l’Artois, 1966).

7. William Langland, *William Langland’s “Piers Plowman”: The C Version: A Verse Translation*, ed. George Economou, Middle Ages Series (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1996), p. 25, lines 104–7.

8. Geoffrey Chaucer, “The Nun’s Priest’s Tale,” in *“The Canterbury Tales” Complete*, ed. Larry D. Benson (Boston and New York: Houghton Mifflin Company, 2000), p. 235, lines 2, 12–13.

9. Robert Ricart, *The Maire of Bristowe Is Kalendar*, ed. Lucy Toulmin Smith. Camden Society Publications, n.s., vol. 5 (Westminster: Camden Society, 1872), p. 43.

10. *London Assize of Nuisance, 1301–1431: A Calendar*, ed. Helena M. Chew and William Kellaway, London Record Society Publications, vol. 10 (Leicester: London Record Society, 1973), pp. xxi–xxx.

11. Such openings, each with a few steps leading down into the basement, are still to be seen (and fallen into by the unwary) in the small coastal town of Winchelsea in Sussex, England.

THE URBAN WAY OF LIFE

Towns came late in the long span of human history. They were imposed on a landscape of small settlements, from which they drew their earliest inhabitants. The town has been throughout its history a pole of attraction to the rural population. It was their “promised land,” tempting the country dweller with its range of employment and experience, far beyond anything that the countryside could offer. But the attraction of the town was deceptive. Beneath its glossy facade lay crowding, disease, high mortality, and a shorter lifespan. All too often the peasant who had migrated to the town came to look back ruefully to the rural bliss which he had left. This was as true of Aristophanes’ Attic peasant as of Wladislaw Reymont’s nineteenth-century Polish peasants in his aptly named *The Promised Land*.¹ In modern demographic terminology, its net reproduction rate—the average number of female children born to each woman—was less than unity. This means that women each had on average less than a single female child. In other words the population was not fully reproducing itself. The reasons for this—both social and environmental—are complex. Among the former, in all probability, was the greater age at which people married in the town than in the countryside. The nature of urban employment and the restrictive influence of the guilds led to the postponement of marriage—at least for young men. Then, too, it may have been difficult for the journeyman who had just completed his apprenticeship to establish himself in society and to accumulate enough resources to acquire a home. Environmental factors were probably more important than social, but also more difficult to evaluate. The town was densely settled; people lived closely packed in their crowded quarters. In contrast with the rural environment, any infectious disease that might

take hold would be likely to spread quickly with disastrous consequences. Of no medical catastrophe was this more true than of the Great Plague, the Black Death of 1348–1350. Once it had taken root in a congested town, it spread rapidly, giving rise to a disastrous mortality.

The Black Death, otherwise known as the Great or Bubonic Plague, deserves more than a cursory mention. It was spread by the symbiotic relationships between the black rat, the flea, and their human victim. It has been argued—implausibly, it appears—that the great plague of Athens late in the fifth century B.C.E. was the bubonic plague. It is far more likely that the disease that decimated Byzantium under the Emperor Justinian (527–565) was the bubonic plague. It raged in the city, but seems not to have spread into its Balkan hinterland. There may have been other occurrences before 1348, but they were contained, not by the science of medicine, which was at this time almost nonexistent, but by the vast, unpopulated distances that its vectors, the rat and the flea, were unable to traverse.

We have fairly reliable statistics relating to mortality in a few cities, especially those in Italy and southern France (Figures 12 and 13), and they demonstrate without question how great was the urban death toll. It is sometimes said that a third or half the population perished. This is no exaggeration for the cities, but such figures must not be extrapolated for the countryside. Here the Plague's spread depended on the movement of people from town to village and from village to village, and such movements were severely reduced as the rumor of plague spread. In consequence, some villages and regions were scarcely touched by the disease.

The Plague was brought to Europe in the trading ships of the Genoese, who did business with the caravan traders from Asia in Caffa and other ports of the Black Sea. They brought their goods to Italy, dropping them off at ports all the way from Sicily to Genoa itself. Infected rats and fleas harbored in the clothing of sailors also went ashore with them, and so the Plague spread up through the Italian peninsula to France and was then borne overland by traders to the Rhineland, central Europe, and the British Isles. At last this wave of infection died away in Scandinavia and the Baltic region where the population was so sparse that the Plague could spread no more.² But the disease was only dormant. It reasserted itself at intervals throughout the late Middle Ages and early modern times in bouts of frenetic activity, mostly in the larger cities. Each re-

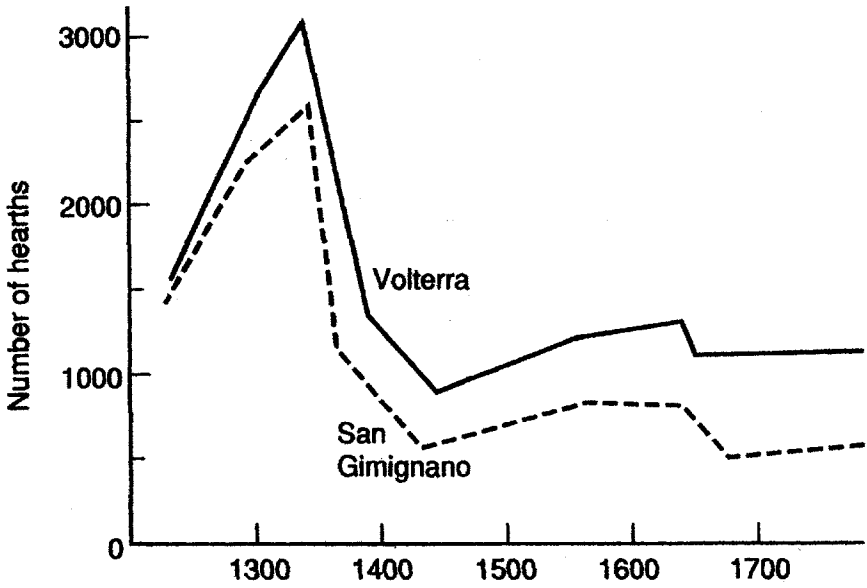


Figure 12. At both Volterra and San Gimignano in central Italy the number of hearths (or households) increased until c. 1340. The Plague then cut their number to a third or even less.

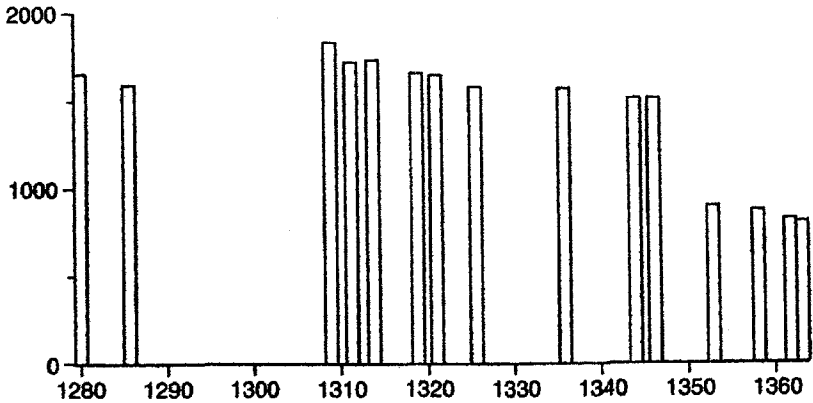


Figure 13. The number of hearths in the town of Millau in southern France at various dates. Note that their number was very nearly halved between 1326 and 1353—the period of the Black Death. Based on a table in Philippe Wolff, “Trois études de démographie médiévale en France méridionale,” in *Studi in Onore di Amando Sapori*, Milan, 1947, v. 1, 493–503.

currence decimated the urban population afresh and offered renewed opportunities in the shape of empty homes and opportunities for employment for more immigrants from the countryside. The last major outbreak in England, in 1665, was largely—though not completely—confined to the city of London, and the last outbreak in France was at Marseilles in 1720. Thereafter, the Plague disappeared from western Europe but remained endemic in the Balkans into the nineteenth century. The urban population recovered after each outbreak—in part through the birth of larger families, in part by increased immigration from the countryside.

Other urban diseases derived from congestion and the lack of cleanliness. Foremost among them were typhus and tuberculosis, the former transmitted from person to person by the microscopic body louse, the latter endemic in dark, damp, and crowded tenements. In addition there were diseases transmitted by the polluted water supply that was normal in most towns and especially in the larger and more crowded ones. Cholera, which was to become the most dangerous of all water-borne diseases, had not yet reached Europe in the Middle Ages, but it was endemic in the far East, waiting only for a fast boat from China in order for it to reach the West. Gastric and pulmonary diseases were also rife and without doubt caused a high mortality among all age groups. Not until the eighteenth century did the scientific and environmental revolution begin to bring these demographic catastrophes to an end.

There were many other infectious diseases in medieval Europe, but their relationship with the environment was not recognized before modern times and no refuge from them was found. Typhus was spread among unwashed humanity, especially during the winter months when people were crowded more closely together for warmth. There were diseases of the bronchial and digestive tracts that became more virulent during the hot, polluted summer months, when pathogens multiplied in cesspits and stagnant water and when food deteriorated quickly. Tuberculosis was rampant in damp houses with rotting timbers, and smallpox was spread “on the breath” when people were crowded together for warmth or shelter. We know now how these diseases were communicated and the defenses that can be erected against them. But to medieval people they were the inevitable lot of sinful humanity; at the most they were seen as discharges from the planets. It never occurred to anyone that their own physical environment was to blame or that they were themselves capable of preventing or curing many of them. These revelations remained unknown

until Louis Pasteur and the discovery of pathogens late in the nineteenth century.

THE SOURCES OF URBAN POPULATION

In the face of this variable but generally high mortality, the towns had always to recruit population from their surrounding countryside. How extensive, one may ask, was the sphere from which the town drew its immigrants? The only certain measure is the possession of a locative personal name. Town dwellers before the twelfth or thirteenth century had no last or surname. They were known by some physical trait or, more often, by the craft they practiced: William the Short, John the Smith, Peter the Porter, and Thomas the Tailor. Alternatively they might be known by the name of the village or even of the country from which they came: William from Wickham or Ralph from Repton. In the course of time the preposition was omitted, and their names became William Wickham and Ralph Repton. There is at least a high probability that such individuals (or their ancestors) had come from the village whose name they bore. There are, however, pitfalls in this line of argument. The person named, or his or her forebears, may have migrated more than once, and women, who participated in this movement no less than men, lost their locative names on marriage. This method may be rough, but it nevertheless defines an area from which a significant part of the urban population is likely to have come. The names of townspeople can be found in tax records, in the proceedings of borough courts, and, at least for the late Middle Ages, in wills, contracts, and churchwardens' accounts. It was from such sources that the raw material of Figures 14 and 15 was obtained. These maps show the places from which locative family names had been derived for Toulouse in southern France and for Beauvais, which was not far from Paris. The maps show how far these families or their forebears had traveled in order to reach their respective "promised lands."

These maps suggest that most immigrants to the growing towns came relatively short distances and that the farther one went from the city, the fewer were the place-names commemorated in the names of migrants. The pattern of movement, in other words, conforms to the so-called gravity model, which suggests that larger cities have greater attraction as do closer ones. This, however, leaves unanswered questions: who were the people who first made the journey to the site of the future town, why did

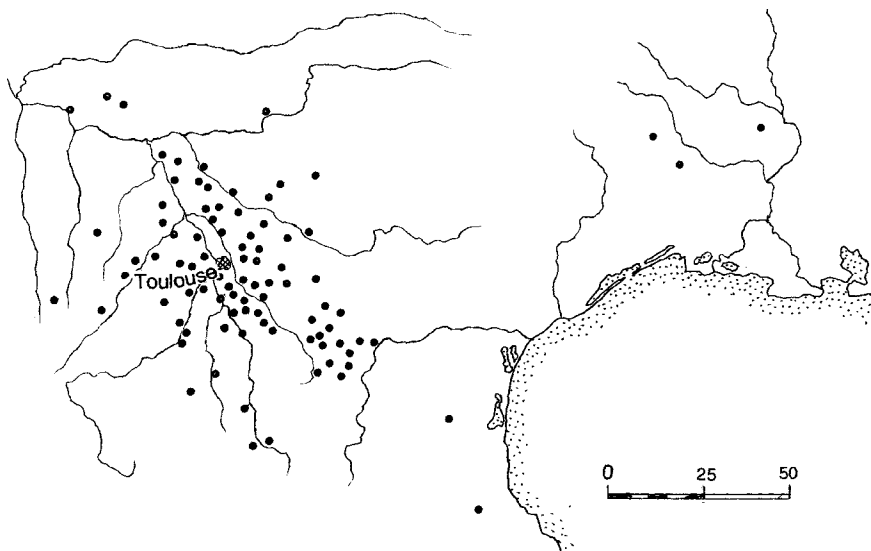


Figure 14. The source of the population of Toulouse, France, based on locative personal names.

they gather there, and what fraction of the immigrant population continued to bear the name of their ancestral village? There are no satisfactory answers. There was no one to leave a record of events and to ask why they had left the relative security of their rural homes for the uncertainties of urban life. We do, however, know very roughly what happened in the planted towns. We have seen how some of the planted towns were populated. Their lords advertised for settlers, just as the early railroads did in the settlement of the American West. But what of the countless towns that emerged during the early Middle Ages, some of them among the largest in Europe today? We must see their origins in the gatherings—which were perhaps only irregular—of merchants who had come together to buy and sell their wares. Gradually the temporary and periodic became the permanent and regular, and a merchants' settlement was born. Many of the port towns around the North Sea and the Baltic Sea almost certainly originated in this way. Many of them still bear in their names the place-name element "wich," meaning a trading place. Norwich, Ipswich, and Woolwich are today large and populous places, but their origins lay in small clusters of houses where merchants agreed to meet at intervals and do business. Not all the "wiches" prospered. Ford-

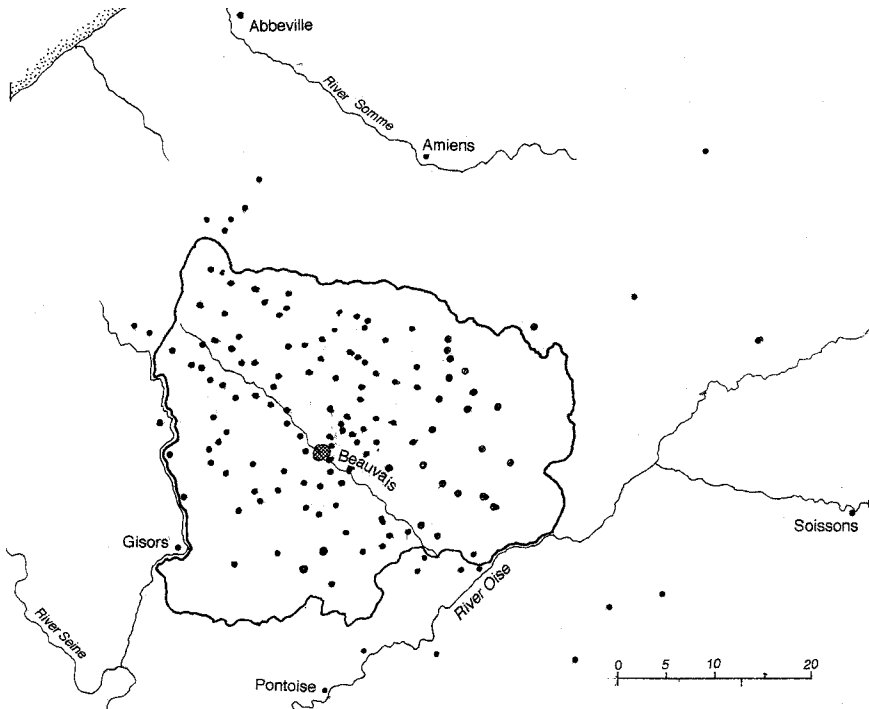


Figure 15. The known sources of migrants to Beauvais, France, based on locative personal names. The heavy line indicates the boundary of Dépt. Oise, which in turn repeat those of medieval feudal units.

wich was once the port serving the city of Canterbury but has since declined to a very small village, and ships no longer sail up its silting creek and tie up at its long-abandoned quays.

Some towns were once villages where a small population tilled the soil and benefited from some local advantage, such as a river crossing or a local resource, which could be exploited. Whatever may have been the spark igniting the growth of a town, merchants were there almost from the start, and the market became the focus of urban activities. There developed a demand for labor, both male and female, in building homes, transporting merchandise, preparing food, and practicing craft industries. And so medieval towns began their unchronicled growth—some to reach populations numbered in their tens of thousands, others to reach barely a few hundred. Each town is unique, the product of local opportunities and the initiative some possessed to exploit them.

THE SUPPLY AND PREPARATION OF FOOD

The medieval village community derived most of its food from its surrounding fields. It was a farinaceous diet, rich in bread-grains and low in protein. The chief grains were wheat, barley, and rye, varying in their relative importance with the soil and climate. Corn did not make its appearance in Europe before the sixteenth century. Animals were the chief—indeed the only—source of protein, though it must be remembered that cattle were bred not for meat, but primarily to pull the plough or the wagon, and the chief role of sheep was to provide wool. Only the pig was reared exclusively for the food it could supply, and then it was raised chiefly in northern Europe. The horse, the donkey, and the mule were not, under normal conditions, seen as sources of food. They were draft animals, and the horse—most aristocratic of animals—served, first and foremost, to carry its master into battle. Honey was the only source of sweetening, and spices, rarely seen in the rural community but imported and sold by the urban merchant, were used to give some piquancy to the otherwise bland diet. Under normal conditions of weather the village community was able to satisfy its needs and still have a small surplus, which it passed into the local market where it was sold to help feed the urban population. The town had no such advantage. If even a small town were called upon to feed itself, its cultivated lands, meadow, pasture, and woodland would have stretched so far beyond its walls that its farming population could not have made the daily journey to its most distant fields. It was of necessity a food importer.

The mechanism of food supply grew in complexity with the increasing size of the town, until in the largest the problem of feeding its people was one of the most difficult facing its authorities. Small towns could usually draw on the food-producing capacity of its surrounding villages. That was the purpose of the weekly market. Peasants brought what food-stuffs they could spare from their total production and sold them directly to the urban consumer. Where it became necessary to obtain supplies from a greater distance, the middleman had to intervene, buying in the villages, transporting supplies to the town, holding them in store for a while, and eventually selling them to the consumer. In an extreme case the merchants of the German Hanse transported Baltic rye for sale in the clothing towns of Flanders, and Italian merchants brought spices from the Middle East for sale throughout the West.

Bread-grains had a long shelf-life; it would have been very unfortunate if this were not the case, for there would have been no store of food during the months before harvest. As it was, the grains—wheat, barley, and rye—were running low when spring came, and so the joys of spring were always tempered by some degree of belt-tightening. Once baked into bread or boiled in a rather thin gruel or soup, which was a basic item of diet, the food grains could be stored for only a short time. In the village, if not also in the town, bread was commonly baked in the home, usually in a dome-shaped, preheated oven, often constructed out of doors. In the town, however, this was a dangerous process owing to the ever-present risk of fire. And so the task of baking was transferred to the professional baker. The size of the bakers' guild in all except the smallest towns suggests that baking was carried on by a professional class and that bread was sold in public from shops or market stalls. The problem facing the butcher was less tractable. Meat did not keep for more than a few days. Animals had to be kept alive and fed until they were slaughtered, butchered, and sold, and then their meat had to be cooked and eaten within a relatively short period. Both the rural and the urban domestic kitchens were adjusted to the roasting of meat and the boiling of a kind of stew made from grain, vegetables, and a little meat or animal fat, together with whatever "companage"—the term used for anything added, such as onions, to give flavor to what was, in fact, a very bland diet—might be available and seasoned with salt and whatever spices and herbs could be obtained. "Wel loved he garleek, oynons, and eek lekes,"³ wrote Chaucer of his Summoner, and the old man's daughter in the "Clerk's Tale,"

And whan she homward cam, she wolde brynge
Wortes [roots] or othere herbes tymes ofte,
The whiche she shredde and seeth [boiled] for hir lvyng.⁴

The diet of the upper classes differed from that of the masses only in having a greater quantity of meat together with more exotic spices. The Grocers' Guild of London had in its heraldry nine cloves, one of the spices favored by the well-to-do and imported by its members. The diet of the town dweller was broadly similar to that of the rural peasant, but may have contained more exotic foods such as spices, while the country dweller had a more ready access, whether legally or by poaching, to a supply of edible wildlife, such as the rabbit.

Most foodstuffs were seasonal. The basic food grains were always abundant in the late summer and fall. They had then to be stored in granaries and protected from the depredations of rats, mice, and other vermin until the next harvest. Late spring and early summer were always a period of increasing scarcity and rising prices, when there was not always enough food, at least for the poor. Even the supply of meat was seasonal, conditioned by the supply of fodder, of which hay was the most conspicuous part. There was a gigantic slaughter of animals at the beginning of winter, as the peasant calculated how many beasts he could keep alive until the grass again began to grow in early spring.

It was, as a general rule, unsafe to drink water; thus, the process of fermentation not only rendered a drink more palatable, but also a great deal safer. The alcoholic drinks favored over most of Europe were wine and beer (or ale). The grape-vine had a restricted range, dictated by soil and climate, but within its range it was almost an urban crop. Engravings of towns of the Renaissance period often show vineyards close to the town walls. Brewing was more widespread because it could use whatever grain was available. During times of scarcity there was a competition for the grain crop between the baker and the brewer. Both brewing and wine-making could be carried on domestically, but the equipment needed—vats and a good water supply—tended to limit urban brewing to the professional brewer. Many of the larger towns had a brewers' guild.

The food supply of both village and town was always at the mercy of two factors over which the consumer had no control. In the first place, marauding armies—of which there were many in continental Europe—were accustomed to living off the land and to destroying whatever they could not themselves consume. The urban censuses, taken so frequently in many Italian cities, did not arise from any curiosity regarding the size of the population, but from the harsh necessity that each person represented a “mouth” to be fed. They did not enumerate people but *bocca*—“mouths.” The urban granaries had to be well stocked if the city was to be sure of surviving periods of warfare and even the occasional siege.

The second cause for concern lay in the uncertainty of the harvest. There were bad years as well as good; years when the crop was diminished by drought, washed out by floods, or blighted by insect pest or plant disease. Against these visitations of nature there could be no protection other than a well-stocked granary. This was made all the more difficult

by the irregularity and the uncertainty of the weather. Medieval people fully recognized this, as *Piers the Plowman* noted:

And before a few years finish famine shall arise,
.....
Through floods and foul weather fruits shall fail;
Pride and pestilence shall take out many people.⁵

Prices would rise; those who had money would purchase foodstuffs, usually grain, and store it, thus driving prices yet higher. It was for good reason that engrossing—the hoarding of more foodstuffs than was necessary—was accounted one of the deadly sins. The countryman rarely suffered from extreme privation, because there was always some food to be obtained from the land, but the townsman knew what it was to face starvation. The descriptions of feasts, whether given by guild members or by merchant families, betoken not a superfluity of food, but its scarcity and the desire to enjoy it to the full whenever it was available. The spring or Eastertide feasts and foods were the last occasion to enjoy them to the full before the next harvest replenished granaries and larders, and early summer was a time of increasing scarcity.

WATER AND SANITATION

A supply of water was an absolute necessity in every town. Many crafts—tanning, dyeing, brewing—required an abundant supply of water, and food could not be prepared without it. The Romans had developed hydraulic engineering into a science. Even in the small towns of provincial Britain, a supply of water was brought by a combination of pipe and aqueduct from whatever distant source there may have been. When the Roman Empire in the West collapsed, its elaborate systems of water supply were abandoned. The works that supplied the city of Rome aroused the excited admiration of medieval visitors who nevertheless proved to be incapable of emulating them back in their own homes. The new masters of Europe lacked either the skills to maintain them or the vision to realize how important they were. Medieval people relied overwhelmingly on natural springs, artificial wells, and whatever streams and rivers lay

within reach. The water carrier was part of the urban scene, and leather water bottles sometimes formed the charge in a medieval coat-of-arms.

Springs and wells were rarely adequate to supply the needs even of a small town. In the fourteenth century the inhabitants of the very small English town of Penrith, in Cumberland, complained that they had “no water save a little rivulet,” in which the tanners were accustomed to soak their hides.⁶ Such instances could be multiplied endlessly from medieval sources. Andrew Boorde, an English writer of the early sixteenth century, advised his readers not to drink water at all. “Ale,” he wrote, “for an Englysshe man is a naturall drynke.” And if water must be drunk, Boorde explained that “[t]he best . . . is rayne-water, so be it that it be clene and purely taken.”⁷ But capturing the rainwater from the roofs of town houses and conducting it to a cistern was not easy and seems rarely to have been attempted except in Mediterranean regions. Furthermore, water from the roofs was no less polluted than that from other sources. And so towns struggled on from one crisis to the next, from one epidemic to another until in the mid-nineteenth century the sources of infections were tracked down to a polluted water supply. The classic case was the identification of the source of the cholera epidemic of mid-nineteenth-century London. It was a street pump in the populous district of Soho, which had become contaminated. A similar outbreak at the very end of the nineteenth century in the German city of Hamburg ended in exactly the same way.

The urban water supply was always of doubtful quality but was made incomparably worse by medieval methods of sanitation and waste disposal. This has been a perennial human problem, of small consequence in a rural environment but desperately important in the town. The bigger the town, the more important it became. In a congested urban environment, it was not unusual to dig a domestic cesspit and to cover it with wooden boards through which a small hole had been pierced. Such devices were endlessly described in the *Assize of Nuisances* of the City of London.⁸ Such contrivances gave rise to countless problems, many of them described in graphic and horrifying detail, as far as London was concerned, in the records of the Coroners’ Courts and the *Assize of Nuisances*. The London coroner, for example, heard the case of a man who had fallen through the boards covering his cesspit, which had rotted with the damp, and was drowned in the cess beneath. Such stories appealed to the crude medieval sense of humor, and a similar incident occurs in one of Boccaccio’s stories in the *Decameron*.

There was abundant space in the countryside for the digging of cesspits, but within the walls of a town building, plots were becoming ever smaller as the density of housing increased. Unless they were periodically cleared, cesspits quickly filled up and had to be replaced. Soon there was room for no more, and, as the records of the City of London show, they were even dug beneath the floors of houses and were reached by a small hole in the floor. It is difficult for us to conceive of the inconvenience—quite apart from the smell—such facilities created.

The cesspit, little more than three or four feet deep, was often lined with wickerwork like a basket and sometimes with masonry. Many such pits have been excavated and their contents analyzed by today's archaeologists. Even after five or six centuries their contents have much to tell us about the diet of medieval people, as well as yielding domestic articles such as cutlery and broken pottery which had been thrown into them. Where there was no regular refuse collection, there was every temptation to toss unwanted articles into the cesspit, which lay so conveniently beneath the kitchen floor. In a well-managed town the cesspits were regularly cleared and their contents carted away—sometimes to be dumped into the nearest river, sometimes to be spread over the suburban fields which yielded produce for the urban market. In Paris and London this traffic in "cess" was well organized to the great benefit of the gardens and of horticulture outside the cities, as well as to that of the health of the town.

In matters of water supply, sanitation, and hygiene the Church, especially the monasteries, provided an object lesson few seemed able to follow. It is possible that churchmen had been able to profit from the example of classical Rome, which some of them must have seen in the course of their visits to the Holy City. Where possible, a piped water supply was established, a siphon being used to circumvent such obstacles as a river. In Cambridge, England, the Franciscan friars drew their water supply from a spring well outside the city limits, taking it across the river Cam by means of a siphon. Unfortunately, the friars found that it was all too easy for others to tap into their supply, and not all of it ever reached their friary house.

Personal hygiene was not rated highly. Water was scarce, and the coarse soap, made by boiling wood ash with animal fat, had an unpleasant smell and was little used. There was, at least among the upper classes, a perfunctory washing of hands before a meal, and in monasteries there

was usually a *lavatorium*, or wash-place, located close to the refectory, thus demonstrating the association of cleanliness with food. Here the monks at most dipped their hands into a shallow stream of water in a perfunctory fashion. Thomas Coryat, a Europe-wide traveler of the sixteenth century, urged diners not to touch the dish in which their food was served because he said that all men's fingers were not clean.⁹ As cutlery came to be more widely used during the Renaissance there ceased to be any need to touch either the dish or the food.

It was customary to dispose of domestic waste merely by throwing it into the street, from which it was recovered by "rakers" who usually disposed of it in the nearest river. Even the expression "Gardez l'eau" (beware of the water), usually contracted to "loo," relates to the practice of disposing of liquid from an upper room by emptying it onto the passersby in the street below. The casual attitude of medieval people to matters of cleanliness and sanitation can be excused by their ignorance of the nature of infection and the reality of pathogens. Yet their failure to associate morbidity with filth is indeed surprising. They were quick to associate "bad air"—malaria—with the exhalations from swamps and marshes, but failed to recognize in the stench of cesspits the source of something a great deal worse. The worst of water-borne infections—cholera—was endemic in Asia, and probably had been for very many centuries, but its pathogens were unable to survive the long voyage to Europe before the early years of the nineteenth century, when the speed of ocean transport became fast enough for the pathogens to survive the journey.

ACCIDENT AND MISFORTUNE

Not only were morbidity and mortality more severe in the town than in the countryside, the ordinary hazards of life were greater. In England any unexpected death had to be examined by the coroner—the Keeper of the Pleas of the Crown (Corona) in order to ensure that the king received whatever dues and compensation might be due to him.¹⁰ The resulting records show how precarious life was in the Middle Ages. Scores of building workers fell from their flimsy scaffolding, brewers were drowned in their own vats, and countless people, both young and old, lost their lives in the frequent fires which arose from carelessness in the kitchen or the forge and spread with the greatest rapidity from house to house. There were doctors, physicians, bone-setters, and pharmacists,

whose activities, in the absence of precise diagnoses, were at best neutral and at worst lethal.

Many towns had rudimentary building regulations governing the thickness of walls and the distance by which upper floors might be allowed to “jetty” over the lower. But enforcement was never easy. Frequently we find that walls, built of unbaked clay, could not support the structures imposed upon them or were undermined and weakened by the effluent of nearby cesspits. The gables that frequently fronted onto the streets were frequently found to be crumbling and about to collapse. Streets were narrowed by the unauthorized extension of existing buildings and obstructed by accumulations of wood and of other materials. There was never any sidewalk, but the surface of the street sloped downward toward the middle, where refuse was allowed to accumulate until at irregular intervals it was swept up by the rakers.

Any serious illness was likely to be fatal. Wills, the preparation of which became common in the late Middle Ages, were rarely made until the individual in question felt himself or herself to be close to death. There was a superstition against making a last will and testament while in good health. The writer once examined a large bundle of early wills, comparing the dates when they were drawn up, signed, and witnessed with the dates when they were presented to the Church court to be “proved” (i.e., “approved”). The interval was sometimes as little as four weeks, and the average was only seven. One can only conclude that there were few illnesses from which one could recover and that most were fatal.

The disposal of the dead presented little problem in the countryside. Each parish had its cemetery, usually surrounding the parish church, where every parishioner in good standing with the Church had a legal right to be buried without charge beyond that of digging a hole and filling it in afterward. In towns, burial was more difficult. The pressure on space meant that cemeteries were small, that burials were superimposed one above another, and that the digging of one grave was likely to disturb the long-deceased occupant of another. How well we recognize this in the graveyard scene in Shakespeare’s *Hamlet*. Urban cemeteries thus became intensely crowded, raising the ground level to a considerable height above that of the church floor or even of the surrounding streets. In many a medieval church one has now to step down into it from the level of the churchyard. Shallow and superimposed burials meant that dogs could scrape away the soil to reach the bones buried beneath. Even

more disastrous were the activities of the pigs that roamed the streets of at least the smaller towns and invaded the cemeteries. All too often a cemetery was strewn with the bones of the anonymous dead. For this reason it became the practice to build a "charnel house" in which the bones of the ancestors of the community could be more reverently deposited. It is impossible to quantify the dangers to health that arose from the ways in which cemeteries were managed, but in all probability they were significant.

Most towns, including also many of the smallest, possessed "hospitals." Some were of great size, like that at Beaune and Tonnere in Burgundy, France. Hospitals were not, as their name suggests, places where the sick were sent in order to recover under the solicitous care of devoted "sisters." The sick rarely recovered. Hospitals were, rather, places where the aged could spend their last days in relative peace and comfort. The typical hospital resembled a church. In the body of the building the "sick" lay on their beds, while at the east end a priest said mass day after day, not for their recovery, but for the salvation of their souls after death. Such hospitals had usually been founded and endowed by the wealthy and well disposed, but were quite inadequate for the needs even of a small town. How then were those too old or too disabled to work, or even to tend to their own bodily needs, supported in a medieval society? Some were cared for by members of their own families. It was expected that most would have children who could perform this service, but not all were so fortunate. Not infrequently a son accepted a contractual obligation to share a house with an elderly parent, allowing the latter the privacy of a room and the produce of a small tract of garden. Others lived by begging and the charity of others; the Church continually enjoined on the faithful the duty of charitable giving. They quickly became part of that dark underworld that was present in every town. But their problem was short-lived. They quickly succumbed to starvation and disease.

ECONOMIC RELATIONS

The area controlled by a city and thus subject to its laws and liable to its taxation varied greatly. Nuremberg probably spanned an area of more than 400 square miles, while Augsburg, scarcely less important as a commercial city, embraced only a small area of meadow and gardens outside the line of its walls. In France and in England it mattered little how ex-

tensive the area under the control of any one town was. The central governments were relatively strong and were able to ensure that the market area of each was as extensive as was necessary to maintain a regular supply of foodstuffs and other commodities. Their "city limits" were effectively of little or no importance. In central Europe, where, in the absence of a strong central authority, there could have been a deep hostility between a town and its surrounding territories, the possession of a large *contado* was highly desirable. Augsburg, for example, had to maintain good relations with the lords of surrounding lands. It might otherwise have quite literally been starved into surrender.

Every town was the focal point of a region, as it had been since urban history began. The extent of this region was a function of the city's size and the range of its economic activities. It would also have been influenced by the terrain, by transportation facilities, and by obstacles to movement such as mountains and rivers. It would also have been affected by political considerations: relations with surrounding territories and treaty privileges and obligations. But let us assume that the area in question was homogeneous, that the quality of the land and ease of movement over it did not vary in any direction. No area on this earth could have satisfied these conditions. Perhaps the nearest approach would have been the plains of eastern England and of northern France. In these areas every small town, which, by definition, was unable to supply its own needs in foodstuffs and at the same time required a market for its own products, was surrounded by its market region. The extent of this market region would have been determined primarily by the distance peasant farmers were prepared to travel to their nearest urban market. The medieval English jurist, Bracton (d. 1268), enunciated a simple rule. A man could walk twenty miles in a day (at least, he was able to do so then). He would be required to spend at least a third of a day at the market, thus leaving him with two-thirds of the day for his outward and homeward journeys. During this period he could cover at most two-thirds of the twenty miles that made up the hypothetical day's journey. He would thus have to live not more than six and two-thirds miles from a market. Our hypothetical, homogenous land would thus be divided up into market areas, all of them of the same size and within each of which the peasant was guaranteed access to a market within the limits just described. Since, however, the land surface cannot be divided into circular areas without their overlapping, it is assumed that they must be hexagonal, as in Figure 16.

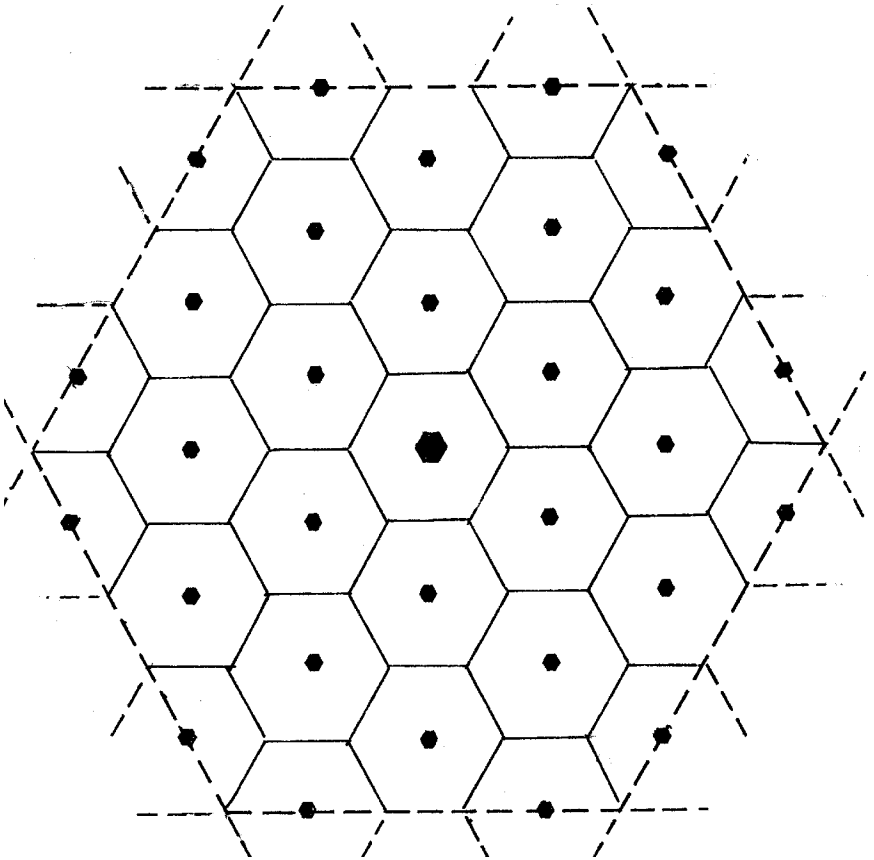


Figure 16. Theory: The theoretical distribution of market centers in a homogeneous landscape.

An examination of the urban pattern in any moderately uniform region is likely to show a scatter of market towns not inconsistent with this theory, whether we base it on contemporary evidence or on that of the Middle Ages (Figure 17).

Many urban functions, however, were not required in every small town. There might be so little demand for a goldsmith or a silversmith, for a dealer in expensive fabrics or imported spices, that none had established themselves. It might have been sufficient if only one town in a dozen or twenty possessed these crafts. The same would have been true of merchants who engaged in long-distance trade or of service occupations, such as those of the scrivener who inscribed deeds and inedited ac-

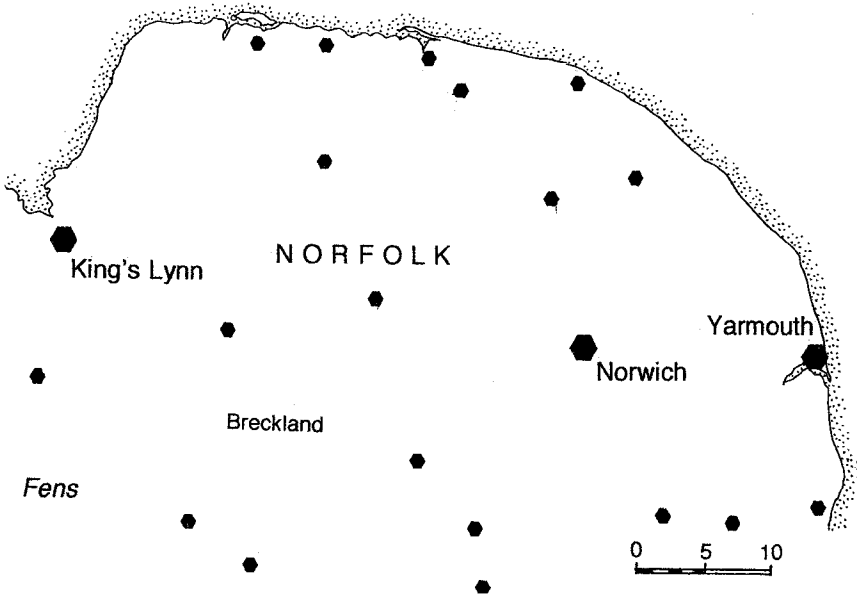


Figure 17. Reality: The actual distribution in the English county of Norfolk.

counts and letters for a predominantly illiterate populace. And so we find a higher order of towns, each with a larger service area and a greater range of functions, occupations, and professions than simple market towns. One can go further and postulate an even higher order. These might include the seats of government, the major ports, and the centers of highly specialized manufactures. The higher the order of a town the greater the range of its activities, the larger its population, and the wider its effective region.

This is theory—commonly called central place theory—and theory is distorted, first and foremost, by physical circumstances and, second, by political considerations. But when allowance is made for these factors it is surprising how close reality comes to what can theoretically be expected. Let us consider two towns at opposite extremes of this urban hierarchy.

Rheinfelden was, during the late Middle Ages, a small walled town lying on the river Rhine some ten miles upstream, that is, to the east of the Swiss city of Basel. Rheinfelden had belonged to the Dukes of Zähringen, to whom it owed its charter. Its walls, built during the thirteenth cen-

ture, enclosed an area of about twenty-five acres, and its population could not have been much more than 220 households or a thousand people. The crafts were well represented and probably supported almost two-thirds of the families. There were weavers, tanners, leather- and metalworkers, and a number of carpenters and builders. There was, of course, a market that was frequented by peasants from the surrounding countryside. Fortunately, a list has survived of the places from which the peasants traveled each week to the Rheinfelden market.¹¹ Its market region appears as a rounded area extending almost ten miles from the town into the Jura Mountains to the south, but a shorter distance northward into the Black Forest (Figure 18). The town lay on the south bank of the

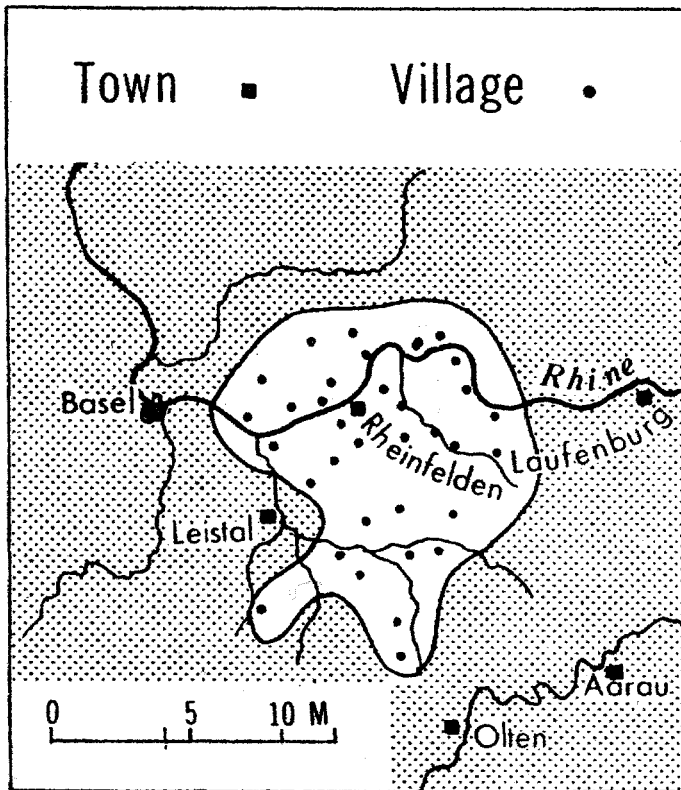


Figure 18. The service area of the small Swiss town of Rheinfelden.

river Rhine. There was a bridge at this point, but the perceived obstacle the river presented, together with the fact that a toll had to be paid to cross it, restricted the service area of the town on the northern side of the river.

At the opposite end of the hierarchy of cities lay Nuremberg.¹² It was an imperial city, subject only to the emperor, whose remote and ineffective authority the city's fathers could afford to ignore. Nuremberg had succeeded in extending its authority over a far greater area than was necessary to satisfy its needs. The Reichswald, which lay close to the city, supplied timber for its domestic building, and no less than thirty quarries contributed masonry for the ambitious building projects that included several miles of city wall with a large number of towers and gates. Bricks and tiles were made from a clay that occurred to the north at the foot of the Swabian Jura. Wine was brought from farther afield along the several rivers that joined the Pegnitz. Supplementary supplies of grain, made necessary by the city's population, which grew to some 40,000–50,000 at the end of the Middle Ages, came from Bohemia and Saxony, and meat came from animals reared on the plains of Poland and Hungary.

By the late Middle Ages Nuremberg had far outgrown its local supplies of food, large as these were, and had come to depend on merchants who bought in distant markets and transported their goods by whatever means were available to the markets of the city. Similarly the crafts located in Nuremberg satisfied not only the local demand for manufactured goods, but also a market, which was as large as southern Germany, with the more esoteric products of its craftsmen. Nuremberg was one of the highest orders of cities in Europe, embracing as it did not only the functions of the lower- and middle-order towns, but also those of the highest. We do not, unfortunately, have a list of the guilds or of the crafts practiced in the city, but there could have been no commodities that were unavailable in its shops and few merchants in the whole of Europe who did not do business with those of Nuremberg.

Between Rheinfelden and Nuremberg lay hundreds, even thousands, of towns organized in the map illustrated in Figure 19. It is easy in theory to allocate particular towns to their appropriate level in this hierarchy, but reality is more complex. There was an urban spectrum ranging without clear demarcation lines from the largest and most varied down to the smallest and most narrowly based.

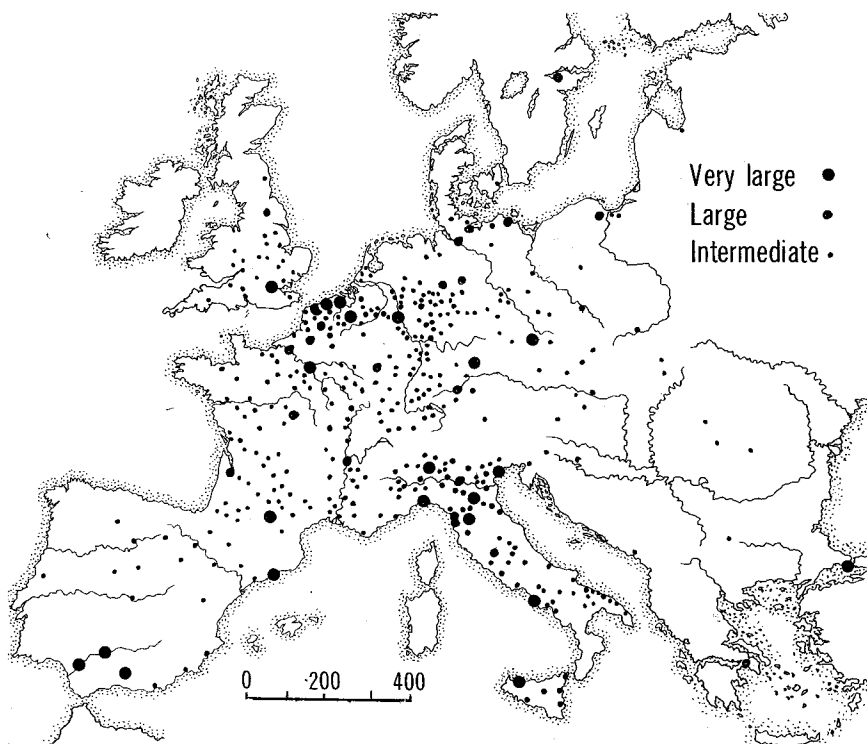


Figure 19. The distribution of large and intermediate cities in late medieval Europe. Note their concentration in the Low Countries and in northern and central Italy.

HOW BIG AND HOW MANY

In this section we address three important questions: how many towns there were in medieval Europe, how large they were, and what fraction of Europe's population lived in cities and towns and what was its social structure. On the question of size we are very ill-informed. No country instituted a true census before the eighteenth century, with one important exception. Many Italian cities depended heavily on imported grain and were frequently at war with one another. Attempts to count the population were therefore made in order to determine how many "mouths" there were to feed and how large a store of bread-grains should be kept to feed them.¹³ Indeed, the word *bocca* came to be used for "people." For the rest of Europe, however, we are dependent for estimating population

on a surrogate, most often the number of taxpayers, sometimes of communicants or of men of military age. Each such person must be regarded as the head of a household and supposed to have had a family. What we need to know in order to obtain a rough estimate of the size of the population is thus the average size of the household or family, and this is very difficult to determine. Tax rolls often listed the "hearths," which must be assumed to have been the groups of people living in a single home. This may have been more than a single family, especially in the crowded conditions of the larger cities. What we have in such cases is not a household or family, but what has been called a "houseful," a kind of tenement for which the average population cannot possibly be determined. The results are highly unreliable, and, as in all medieval statistics, we must allow for a wide margin of error.

The population of medieval towns was in a constant state of flux, increasing with immigration from the countryside in times of uncertainty, depleted by disease in times of major epidemics. If it is difficult to generalize regarding rural population, it is almost impossible for urban. But it can be said with some certainty that urban population increased overall until about 1300. Its growth then flattened off and may even have begun to decline before it was in 1348 hit by the Great Plague. The extent of losses from this cause is uncertain, but was far greater in most towns than in the countryside. Italian evidence suggests that some towns may have lost up to a half of their population. In eastern and northern Europe, however, where towns were more widely spaced and their conditions less congested, the ravages of the Plague were less severe, and there were large areas where it does not appear to have been experienced at all.

There were few very large cities in medieval Europe, perhaps no more than a dozen or fifteen, each with populations of more than 50,000, and some of these may have fallen below this level in times of plague. The reasons are clear. It was difficult to feed cities of great size, and the craft industries were not able to employ so great an urban population. Byzantium was a probable exception. Byzantium could be provisioned by ship from the wheat-growing lands around the Black Sea; similarly, the cities of Flanders relied on grain brought from the region of the Baltic Sea. The Italian cities had greater difficulty, as is apparent from their frequent head counts. Much of their grain supply came from the plains along Italy's east coast and from Sicily.

An intermediate category of towns had, let us say, from 5,000 to 25,000 inhabitants before the time of the Black Death. Thereafter, if we may judge from the few well-documented examples, the population fluctuated greatly, as did the number of cities and towns which fell into this intermediate group.

Last, there were towns of less than 5,000. Some were prosperous and important; a few narrowly failed to qualify as cities of intermediate size. Others, with less than a thousand inhabitants, were barely distinguishable from large villages in either function or social structure. Some even failed completely to maintain their urban status. The writer well remembers stumbling quite by accident on the minute German town of Mainbernheim in the province of Bavaria. Mainbernheim lay within a ring of high walls with tall, slender towers spaced at intervals and a single defended entrance. Within, there seemed to be nothing more than a very few farmhouses with their barns and animal shelters. This had once been a town. There was room for a resident population of considerably less than a hundred, and the "town" had probably never held more. One is left wondering how so small a community was able to build fortifications of such magnitude. South and central Germany and also Switzerland were notable for their number of "dwarf" towns or *Zwergstadte*, all of which had elaborately constructed walls and towers.

Putting this information together allows us to compile a rough table that answers two of the questions which were posed earlier, how many and how large. But this must be seen for the greater part as nothing better than an intelligent guess. It relates to the years before the Great Plague. Totals would have been very much lower during the years following 1350, though some towns might have regained their earlier size before the end of the century.

On this precarious basis the following table (Table 1) has been compiled and the map (Figure 19) drawn. Cities and towns are for convenience grouped into five categories. In reality they form a continuum reaching from the largest with a population of over 50,000 to the smallest with less than a thousand. Byzantium, before its siege by the Turks in 1453, may once have been the largest city in Europe, with perhaps close to 100,000 inhabitants, but this population was greatly diminished, first after it was besieged and looted by the Crusaders in 1204 and then after its conquest by the Ottoman Turks in 1453.

Table 1
The Size of Towns in Northern Europe

Town Size	Number	Total Population
Giant (over 50,000)		
Very Large (25–50,000)	15	400,000
Large (10–25,000)	45	570,000
Intermediate (2–10,000)	350	1,100,000
Small (under 2,000)	3–4,000	2,250,000

For two countries—England and Italy—we have sources of unequalled importance. The Domesday Book of 1086 and the Poll-Tax of 1381 both covered most of England. Neither is a census in the strict sense; both were compiled primarily for taxation purposes and give the numbers of either adult males or of households. Nevertheless, it is possible to multiply the figures given by the estimated size of an average family in order to obtain a total population. Domesday Book is far from consistent in its terminology. In some towns it enumerated *mansurae*, or houses; in others, *burgenses*, or citizens. In most of the towns for which these data are given there were different categories of townspeople. The smallest town was credited with only seven *burgenses*—perhaps about 30 inhabitants; the largest—Norwich—with 665 *burgenses* and 480 *bordarii pauperes* (meaning perhaps “poor husbandmen”), thus suggesting a total population of between 5,000 and 6,000. The two most important cities in twelfth-century England—London and Winchester—were, for reasons which we do not know, omitted from the Domesday survey.

Another important source is a tax roll of 1334. This gives not the size, but the aggregate wealth of communities. Furthermore, boroughs were taxed at a different rate from rural settlements, and their definition is very arbitrary. The resulting list of towns is useful for purposes of comparison, but tells us nothing about their size.

Poll taxes were levied in 1377, 1379, and 1381. Of these the records for 1377 are the most complete and are used here. Even so, there are many omissions, and many small towns were accounted only as parts of the parishes in which they lay. The tax was payable only by adults—those over 14—and only by laymen. Clerics and the very poor were exempt,

Table 2
Urban Population of England as Percentage of Total

Year	National Total	Urban Total	Percentage Urban
1086	1–1.5 million	66–82,000	5.5–6.5
1377	1.2–2 million	c. 90,000	8.5–10

and no one can say what proportion of the total population these comprised. After the Great Plague, it appears that the population of those towns, which had survived the three centuries since the compilation of Domesday Book, had increased by from 2 to 3 percent, a very slow rate of growth.

The last question—what proportion of the total population lived in towns—is almost impossible to answer, except for a few, small, well-documented areas. The answer calls for a reliable estimate of the population both of every country and of the towns within each of them. The English sources discussed earlier allow acceptable estimates to be made for that country, but for other countries we have no certain knowledge. Table 2 lists the estimated urban population in England in the years 1086 and 1377 as a percentage of the total population.

These figures, based on Domesday Book and the Poll Tax returns of 1377, are estimates only, and may contain a wide margin of error. Apart from the uncertainties of the records, it is impossible to arrive at an agreed figure for the average size of the household. The 1377 figures are, of course, post-Plague. The extent of the losses in 1348–1350 and of the recovery by 1377 are equally indeterminate. It seems evident that the urban population increased considerably more rapidly than the rural during the period 1086–1377.

Despite the evident shortcomings in the sources, the medievalist J. K. Russell has made a brave attempt to estimate the population of Europe as a whole.¹⁴ Table 3 lists the total European population during the Middle Ages according to Russell's estimate and the estimated urban percentage of that total. The proportion would have varied greatly over the continent and would without question have been largest in Flanders and Italy.

The map (Figure 19) shows all towns that have been placed in the in-

Table 3
European Urban Population

Year	Total Population	Urban Percentage
1000	52,200,000	1–3%
1340 (pre-Plague)	85,900,000	5–10%
1400	52,000,000	5–8%
1500	70,000,000	9–12%

intermediate and higher categories. It shows a kind of urban axis reaching from London to Naples and passing through Flanders, the Rhineland, and northern and central Italy. It also shows lesser branches that extended respectively down the Rhone valley to the Mediterranean coast and eastward across central Germany to Magdeburg and Prague. By contrast, central France (basically the Auvergne) and much of Spain except the extreme south, which was then ruled by the Moors, and eastern Europe from the Baltic Sea to Greece were almost devoid of towns. Urban growth was inhibited in central Spain by the wars between the Christian states of the north and the Moors, and did not revive until after the expulsion of the Moors from Spain in 1492. The data for the three large, Moorish towns in southern Spain (Cordova, Seville, and Granada) are very uncertain.

This distribution of large towns was closely related to that of the chief manufacturing industries. The most highly urbanized parts of Europe, Flanders, and northern and central Italy, were outstanding for their cloth manufacture. Cities and towns were numerous, and some were very large. Urban population formed overall only a small proportion of the total population, however. Precise estimates of the actual figures are impossible; the population of both town and country was liable to very considerable fluctuations. Urban population constituted the highest proportion in the manufacturing regions of Flanders and Italy. Here it may have approached a quarter of the total. In France, England, and central Europe it would have been a great deal less, perhaps 10 to 15 percent at most, while over the vast extent of northern and eastern Europe it was probably less than 5 percent.

NOTES

1. Wladyslaw Reymont, *The Promised Land (Ziemia obiecana)*, trans. M. H. Dziewicki (New York: A. A. Knopf, 1927).
2. There is a very large literature on the subject of the Black Death and of plague in general. Particularly important are John Findlay Drew Shrewsbury, *A History of the Bubonic Plague in the British Isles* (London: Cambridge University Press, 1971) and Philip Ziegler, *The Black Death* (New York: John Day Company, 1969).
3. Geoffrey Chaucer, "Prologue," in *"The Canterbury Tales" Complete*, ed. Larry D. Benson (Boston and New York: Houghton Mifflin Company, 2000), p. 15, line 634.
4. Chaucer, "Clerk's Tale," in *"The Canterbury Tales" Complete*, ed. Larry D. Benson (Boston and New York: Houghton Mifflin Company, 2000), p. 122, lines 225–27.
5. William Langland, *William Langland's "Piers Plowman": The C Version: A Verse Translation*, ed. George Economou, Middle Age Series (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1996), p. 79, lines 346–49.
6. "Northern Petitions Illustrative of Life in Berwick, Cumbria, and Durham in the Fourteenth Century," ed. Constance Marie Fraser, *Publications of the Surtees Society*, vol. 194 (Gateshead: Surtees Society, 1981), p. 107.
7. Andrew Boorde, *The Fyrst Boke of the Introduction of Knowledge Made by Andrew Borde, of Physycke Doctor. A Compendyous Regyment; or, A Dyetary of Helth Made in Mountpyllier, Compyled by Andrewe Boorde, of Physycke Doctour. Barnes in the Defence of the Berde: A Treatyse Made, Answerynge the Treatyse of Doctor Borde upon Berdes*, ed. F. J. Furnivall (London: N. T. Trubner & Company, 1907), pp. 253, 256.
8. *London Assize of Nuisance, 1301–1431: A Calendar*, ed. Helena M. Chew and William Kellaway, London Record Society Publications, vol. 10 (Leicester: London Record Society, 1973), pp. 5, 38.
9. Thomas Coryat, *Coryat's Crudities*, ed. William M. Schutte (London: Scolar Press, 1978).
10. The coroner was an officer of the crown (corona) charged with the task of seeing that, on the unexplained death of any of his subjects, the king received all that was due to him. In the case of an accident the instrument of death was due to the king.
11. Hektor Ammann, *Wirtschaft und Lebensraum der Mittelalterlichen Kleinstadt: I. Rheinfelden* (Frick: A. Fricker, 1948).
12. Based mainly on Fritz Schnellbogl, "Die wirtschaftliche Bedeutung ihre Landesgebiet fur die Reichstadt Nurnberg," *Beiträge zur Wirtschaftsgeschichte Nürnbergs*, 2 vols. (Nürnberg: Stadtrat, 1967), 1:261–31.

13. On the population of the Italian cities see Julius Beloch, *Bevölkerungsgeschichte Italiens*, 2 vols. (Berlin: De Gruyter, 1965).

14. Josiah Cox Russell, *Late Ancient and Medieval Population*, Transactions of the American Philosophical Society, n.s., vol. 48, pt. 3 (Philadelphia: American Philosophical Society, 1958).

THE CHURCH IN THE CITY

And I'll have your church roofed and build you a cloister,
Have your walls washed and your windows glazed
And pay those that paint and make pictures for you
So that all men will say I'm one of your order.

—Piers Plowman¹

Some towns grew up around a church; others had churches thrust upon them. Whatever the relationship between them, the Church has played a very important role, both physical and cultural, in the development of urban life. In its origin Christianity was an urban faith. It was borne by its earliest missionaries from city to city. The epistles of St. Paul were addressed to townsmen, and the first Christian cells were in the greater cities of the Roman Empire. Only slowly did the faith penetrate the countryside, which long remained the sphere of the *pagani*, countryfolk or “pagans,” and it came even later to mountainous and thinly peopled regions. These remained dark corners of the land until late in the Middle Ages. And yet Christianity always had a certain affinity with wastelands and solitary places. The wilderness was where Christians went for contemplation and spiritual refreshment. It was the resort of the “desert fathers” and the first home of certain religious orders. There were thus two strands in the evolution of the Christian Church: that which attracted people to the company of others and carried on its activities in crowded cities and, by contrast, that which sought the solitary life—monastic in the strict meaning of that term. The latter is not important in the present context except insofar as here and there it contributed to the settlement

and development of such wasteland areas and thus stimulated urban growth. Places of pilgrimage became the nuclei of some towns, and remote monasteries sometimes became centers of commercial, even of industrial, activity. One thinks of Santiago, the reputed burial place of St. James of Compostela in northwestern Spain; of Bobbio in the Italian Apennines; of Sankt Gallen, which even became the capital of a Swiss canton; of Maria Lach in the German Eifel, and, in Great Britain, of Ely on its island amid the Cambridgeshire Fenland and of Glastonbury similarly placed in the Somerset marshes.

But such instances were few. Far more important in the development of the Church were the regional capitals, the *civitates*, of the Roman Empire. These became the administrative centers of the Church, just as they had been of Roman governors. In them bishops established their sees, or seats. Here they built their cathedrals and, at a later date, their palaces. Foremost among such cathedral cities was Rome itself, ruled after the departure of the emperors by the bishop of Rome, the Pope. Few Roman imperial *civitates* did not become episcopal dioceses, and, during the centuries of invasion and turmoil following the eclipse of the Roman Empire in the West, it was the bishops who provided some kind of institutional continuity and preserved much of what was left of Roman culture.

The cathedral, as became a great public building, was centrally placed. It was, like the Roman basilicas and temples that preceded it, open to the public and graced with whatever art and decoration were available. In that part of Europe that became subject to the Catholic Church—which eventually was all of Europe with the exception only of Russia and the Balkans—cathedrals were of two kinds: secular and monastic. The former were staffed by secular priests who lived in the world and rubbed shoulders with ordinary people; the latter were houses of monks who led cloistered lives of prayer and study despite their location in the heart of crowded cities. By their very nature monastic cathedrals were in large part cut off from whatever settlements lay around them. The focus of their lives was the cloister. Secular cathedrals, on the other hand, may have had cloisters, but life was focused more on the people outside their walls. In fact, monastic cathedrals became significant only in Sicily (Palermo and Cefalu) and curiously in England, where about half the medieval cathedrals were monastic. It is difficult not to attribute this fact

to the influence of the Norman conquerors who in the eleventh century overran both areas.

A cathedral city was dominated physically by its cathedral, as, indeed, many of them remain today. Its towers and spires dignified its skyline as much as the tall buildings do in any modern city, and the cathedral now attracts tourists as it once drew pilgrims to its shrine and sacred relics. It is impossible to exaggerate the economic importance of the medieval pilgrims. They brought their contributions to the building of the church just as their presence filled the inns and hostelries. Chaucer's jovial band, which gathered at the Sign of the Tabard in London's southbank suburb of Southwark and wound its loquacious, story-telling way to Canterbury,

The hooly blisful martir² for to seeke,
That hem hath holpen whan that they were seeke³

brought profit to the city. The distance from Southwark to Canterbury is only some sixty miles; they must have traveled very slowly indeed to have been able to spin so many lengthy tales. Canterbury, like Santiago, Reims, St. Albans, and Rome itself, did very well from this medieval form of the tourist business. Canterbury was the foremost English center of pilgrimage, but there were many others scattered throughout Catholic Europe. They passed in and out of fashion, and their importance tended overall to decline toward the end of the Middle Ages. Nevertheless, their importance in urban development cannot be overestimated.

THE URBAN PARISH

The cathedral stood at the peak of an ecclesiastical hierarchy. At its base was the parish, the smallest territorial unit in the administrative system of the medieval church. Every parish, whether rural or urban, had a church that served the spiritual needs of its parishioners.⁴ Parishes varied greatly in area, but there was a certain consistency in the size of their populations. They had to be large enough to support a priest and maintain a church, but at the same time small enough for the priest to attend to the parishioners' spiritual needs and for the parishioners to go to their parish church on those occasions the Church had ordained. The parish had its origin in the establishment of a church. In rural areas the founder

was likely to have been a local lord who built a church, probably at first only a wooden structure, and endowed it with a tract of land, which, for the foreseeable future, would yield an income to support the priest and maintain the church. In very few instances do we know the name of the founder, but in the town of Cambridge, England, a church was built by three named persons who, around 1140, obtained a tract of land from the Abbot of Ramsey Abbey.⁵ The founders probably saw the church as a family possession in which they would worship during their lives and where masses could be said for the repose of their souls after death. The church they built still stands, despite thoughtless restoration. It is round in plan, unlike the pattern of most other city churches, and may have been modeled on the supposed plan of the Holy Sepulchre in Jerusalem. This was the time of the Second Crusade, which aimed to rescue the Holy Places from the Turks, and this event would have been present in the minds of at least the better educated citizens. During the early centuries of Christianity, dozens of churches must have been founded in this way. Most were small. Some churches succumbed, their minuscule congregations unable to bear the cost of maintaining them. Other churches, especially those in the more prosperous quarters of a town, were rebuilt and extended until in scale and elaboration they even rivaled the cathedrals themselves. In any medieval city the scale of its church building is a rough measure of its wealth and prosperity. Medieval churches, with their tall windows, towers, and spires, gave a city a distinctive skyline. Panoramic drawings and engravings, which began to multiply toward the end of the Middle Ages and during the Renaissance, depicted the churches prominently, even exaggerating their scale and allowing them to dominate the urban landscape.

These remarks regarding the proliferation of parochial or communal churches relate only to what we have termed organic towns, those towns that either redeveloped from the ruins of Roman towns or grew up in response to local needs and opportunities during the following centuries. Their population consisted mainly of freemen who could come and go as they wished, and if they desired and could afford the spiritual luxury of a church on the street corner, they were able, like the three burgesses of Cambridge, to have one. These early towns were dotted with churches. It is easy to say that their number greatly outnumbered the needs of the population. London, which at this time could not have had more than 50,000 inhabitants, had acquired about 120 churches, most of which per-

ished in the Great Fire of 1666.⁶ Only a fraction of them were rebuilt. Winchester, with at one time some seventy churches, was even more richly endowed in relation to its population, which could never have been more than 5,000, and Huntingdon, which throughout the Middle Ages consisted of little more than one long, twisting street, had at least four. Those who founded churches in the medieval city did not, like those who organized church developments in the nineteenth century, think in terms of the future growth of population and the amount of church seating that would be needed. The possession of a church was a mark of status. The group of families that collectively owned a church and occasionally visited and used it could hold their heads high within the local community. But many of these urban churches had only a short life. The families that had supported them might die out, or the descendants of the founding families might be unable or unwilling to make the financial sacrifice necessary to continue to support them, or, in an extreme case, the church might no longer be necessary owing to a decline in the local population. The city of Winchester had, by the end of the Middle Ages, thus lost almost half of its original churches.

In most of the large cities, which had boasted many parishes with their individual churches, ecclesiastical functions eventually came to be concentrated in a small number of large and pretentious churches. It is not always easy to determine how many smaller churches were lost in this way. In Winchester, as we have seen, about half had disappeared by the end of the Middle Ages. Cambridge lost only two out of its original fourteen, but York, for instance, lost many more.

In the nonorganic or planted towns, of which there were a far greater number, the way parishes and churches came to be founded was quite different. These lay in the open countryside, which had been Christianized and in which a loose network of rural parishes had already been established. The whole countryside had perhaps previously been divided very roughly into parishes, even if their boundaries had not yet been precisely determined. The newly founded town necessarily lay within a parish, where there was already a parish church. The church might have been incorporated into the town, or the town might have been laid out in its close proximity. There was thus no need to make provision for a new church exclusively for the new town; to have done so would have been to detract from the revenue by way of tithe and glebe (its landed endowment) of the original church. The new town would necessarily have

been within a parish and might even have been shared between two neighboring parishes, but its church did not necessarily lie within the town. The church may have been situated on land across the fields, and its parishioners may have been faced with a long journey on Sundays and other feast days in order to fulfill their spiritual obligations.

This situation was especially common in England, where many planted towns owed their spiritual obligations to churches that sometimes lay at a considerable distance across muddy fields and along ill-made roads. Their inhabitants might appeal to their bishop for some redress. They protested that the journey was long and dangerous; that the aged, to the peril of their souls, sometimes failed to make the journey; and that newborn infants taken to the church for baptism might succumb to the dangers and difficulties of the journey. Townsfolk became adept at inventing reasons for establishing a church right in their midst whether the local priest and his bishop approved or not. Sometimes the bishop's heart was touched; sometimes he resisted the most powerful persuasions. The problem was financial. Parishioners contributed, or at least were presumed to do so, a tithe (one-tenth) of their income to their parish church, whether it be close by or distant. To create a new parish would be to diminish the income of the rural church, and bishops were very protective of the rights of parishes and of their parish priests. At most the bishops would allow the town to have a chapel-of-ease, the financial burden of which would fall upon the community that used it, while at the same time the citizens continued to pay their tithe and other spiritual obligations to their distant parish church.

There are in England many towns, some of them large and commercially important, in which the only church was of this lowly status right up to the reforms of the nineteenth century. Hull, the large industrial and port town in northeastern England, was one of them. The town was itself founded by King Edward I in 1296 to aid in the war against the Scots. It lay on both banks of a small river, the Hull, and its original name was Kingstown-on-Hull. But the river Hull had constituted the boundary between the two rural parishes of Ferriby and Hessle, and the new town of Hull lay at some distance from their respective churches. Permission was given by the Archbishop of York, in whose diocese Hull and the rural parishes lay, to establish a chapel-of-ease for the town on each bank of the river. Hull was a prosperous port, and could well afford the cost not only of supporting two churches of its own, but also of build-

ing them on such a lavish scale that they survive today and are among the largest and finest in the country.

Some planted towns had been established before the parochial system was fully established. These towns might then each have a church of its own, independent of the parishes that might be established around it. It was intended to satisfy the needs of a fairly large community and was of necessity larger than the many churches found in one of the older organic towns. The local elite invested in it, adding to its fabric and decorating it elaborately. Although examples have been taken from England, the situation regarding the urban parish church was broadly similar in continental Europe. Here, too, the older cities contain a multiplicity of churches, while those of late medieval origin have as a general rule only a single large and impressive church. As planned towns emerged along Europe's eastern frontier, the planners often left a town block free for the construction of the church, which was thus fully integrated with the rest of the town.

CHURCHES MONASTIC AND MENDICANT

The monastic movement originated very early in the Middle Ages from the desire of some—both women and men—to withdraw from society and to live a life of contemplation and prayer. Their earliest monasteries were in the desert. Although some orders, notably the Cistercian, continued this practice of withdrawing from the society of ordinary people, others, especially the Benedictine, never carried matters to this extreme. They established their houses close to inhabited places, even within or very close to populous cities. We have seen how in western Europe a cathedral might be founded within the walls of a once Roman town, followed by a monastery just outside. Very few of the larger and more important cities of western and southern Europe were without a monastic settlement, and some—London and Paris, for example—had several.

The urban monastery was, unlike most cathedrals, usually enclosed by a perimeter wall, pierced by formidable gatehouses. Within there would be the monastic church, together with its cloister, dormitory, refectory, and other ancillary buildings: chapter house, kitchen, infirmary, store house, and rooms for guests. The whole complex would have occupied a very considerable area. The “close” of Norwich cathedral-priory, for ex-

ample, occupied more than eighty-five acres, about ten percent of the total area of the city.

It was, however, no easy matter to acquire a piece of real estate of this extent, and most monasteries founded in urban areas were a great deal less extensive than that of Norwich and furthermore were obliged to occupy an extramural site, just beyond the protective line of the city's walls. The example of Westminster Abbey, outside the walls of the city of London, has already been mentioned. Other instances would include the Parisian monasteries of Saint-Germain and Saint-Denis, just outside the built-up area of Paris.

Few monasteries, whether urban or rural, were founded after about 1300, except perhaps on Europe's expanding eastern frontier. Society in general had ceased to have a high regard for the totally reclusive monk, and turned to newer orders with a more developed social conscience. Among them were the friars. Their friaries may have resembled monasteries in some respects, but the friars themselves participated in urban activities. They undertook pastoral duties, and their churches were primarily for preaching to large urban congregations. They slept in dormitories, ate in refectories, and usually possessed a diminutive cloister, but much of their time was spent outdoors, in the streets and market-places, where they carried on their spiritual battle for the souls of men and women. The friars of the Dominican Order were noted for their campaign against heresy in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries. Friaries were nevertheless an important element in the urban landscape. Their conventual buildings may have been relatively small and inconspicuous, but their churches were usually large, with a preaching nave capable of holding an audience of many hundreds.

Friaries were not established much before the middle of the thirteenth century and were not numerous before the fourteenth. By this time the larger cities were closely built up, and little space could be found within their walls for new religious foundations. Least of all could a mendicant order secure land near the urban center where most of the people could have been found. Its buildings usually had to be squeezed into whatever vacant space happened to be around the periphery of the town, and some were obliged even to locate outside its walls.

From their very nature the mendicant orders were attracted to the larger towns where they were likely to find an impoverished but susceptible population. The countryside, which could never have furnished

large audiences for their oratory, held little attraction. Their choice of towns in which to locate thus reflected their perception of the need for their services. The French historian Jacques Le Goff has argued persuasively that the number of mendicant orders established in a town was a measure of its social and economic importance.⁷ Le Goff demonstrated this from France, but it is no less applicable to England (Figure 20) and to many other parts of Europe.

There were four major mendicant orders: Dominican (founded 1220–1221), Franciscan (1209), Carmelite (c. 1254), and Augustinian (1256), together with a number of lesser orders that attracted few brothers and little money and were generally short-lived. In England the orders of friars were suppressed during the Reformation, and their buildings were sold and used for whatever purpose seemed profitable at the time. The map (Figure 21) shows the distribution of the houses of the four major mendicant orders on the eve of the Reformation. The possession of a house by each of the major orders can thus be seen as a measure of a town's importance. In England there were no less than fifteen cities with this mark of distinction. London, of course, was one, as were the archiepiscopal cities of Canterbury and York and the university towns of Oxford and Cambridge.

It is not surprising to find Lincoln, Norwich, Winchester, and the port towns of Bristol and Newcastle in the list. What may appear strange is the inclusion of Boston (Lincolnshire), King's Lynn (Norfolk), and Stamford, also in Lincolnshire, which today are all relatively small towns. During the Middle Ages, however, Boston and King's Lynn were the most important ports outside London, carrying on what was for the time a large trade with continental Europe, while Stamford was the site of one of the largest commercial fairs in northwestern Europe. This map also demonstrates the contrast between the developed east of the country and the less developed west.

There were other orders besides the monastic and the mendicant, which established themselves in medieval towns. Foremost among them were the fighting orders, the Knights of the Temple of Jerusalem, or "Templars," and that of the Hospital of St. John of Jerusalem—the Hospitallers. They had been founded during the twelfth century and were dedicated to the recovery of the Holy Places of Jerusalem, which had recently been lost to the conquering Seljuk Turks. When this was seen as a hopeless undertaking, they turned their energies against pagan and other nonconformist Europeans, especially those of eastern Europe. The Templars were sup-

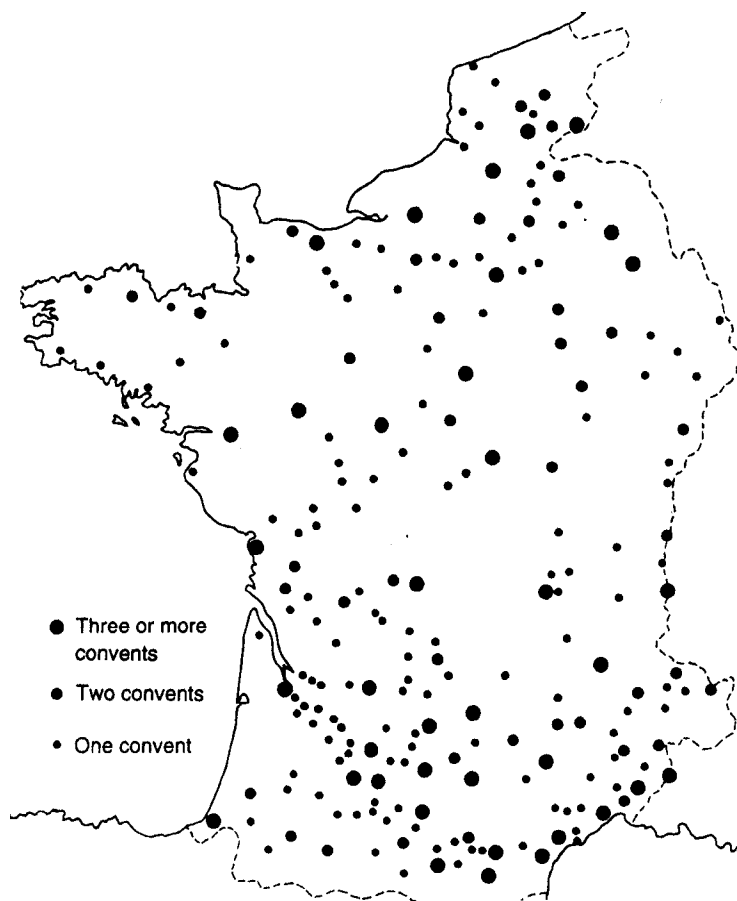


Figure 20. Locations of French friaries. The houses of the mendicant orders (friaries) were almost exclusively urban. There were four major orders, and their representation was a measure of a town's importance. The map of French friaries has been based on Jacques Le Goff, "Ordres mendiants et urbanisation dans la France médiévale," *Annales: Economies—Sociétés—Civilisations*, v. 25 (1970), pp. 924–46.

pressed early in the fourteenth century, and most of their assets were transferred to the Hospitallers. Other orders, such as those of Alcantara and Calatrava, were formed in Spain for the more practical task of resisting the North African Moors, who, since the eighth century, had overrun much of the country. In western Europe these fighting orders established monastic houses or "preceptories" in many of the larger towns as well as

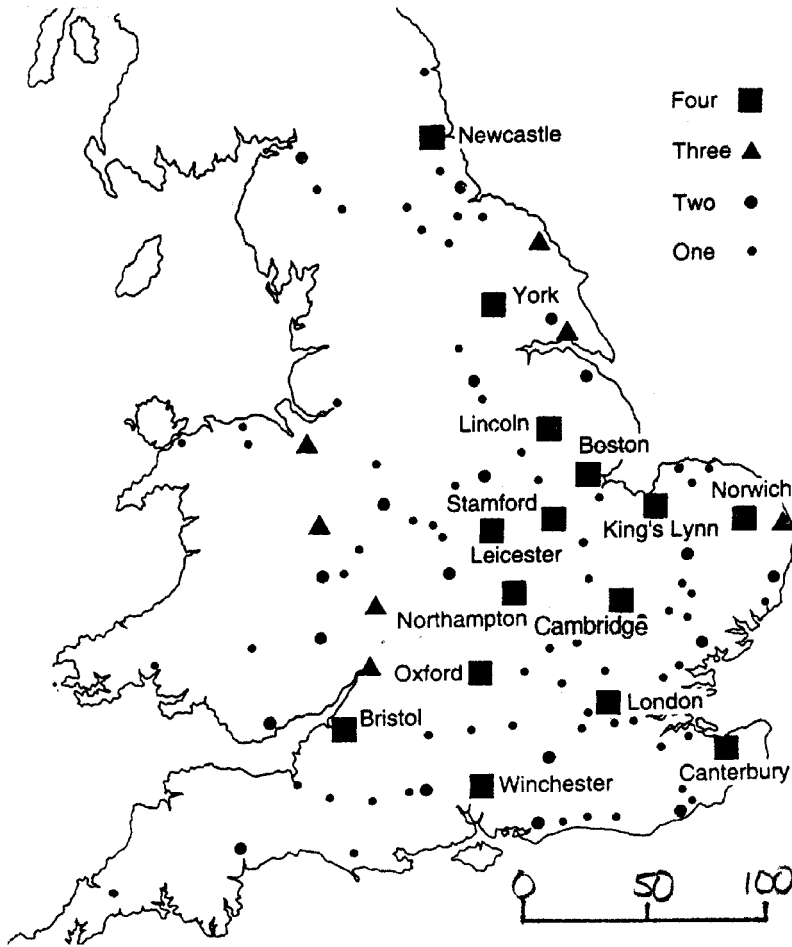


Figure 21. Locations of English friaries.

in the countryside where they had acquired land. Their purpose was to raise money and to stimulate recruitment, but they nevertheless contributed to the religious tapestry of the larger cities. Their churches were both grand and conspicuous, because many—but not all—were circular in plan in imitation of the supposed plan of the Holy Sepulchre church in Jerusalem. Such a church survives intact in the hilltop city of Laon in northern France, but perhaps most famous of all is the Temple Church in London. It was severely damaged by bombing during the Second World War but has now been restored to its former splendor.

THE ROLE OF THE CHURCH IN THE TOWN

The Church has, since the early Middle Ages, played an important role in urban history. Its institutions have always been seen as forming a kind of government parallel with the town's secular administration. The relations at a higher level between church and state have not always been cordial, but at the lower level of city and town there was little for them to disagree about. The Church authorities generally supported the secular government of the town, and in return the latter involved the Church in all its ritualized and formal occasions. These included processions through the urban streets, participation in masses within the church, and even financial assistance from the secular authorities in building or rebuilding the foremost church. There were even occasions when the secular authority was charged with nominating the priest to serve the urban church. One reads much about conflicts between the Church authorities and the urban populace. Of course, such conflicts occurred and were often very violent. As a general rule, however, they arose from the excessive zeal of the ecclesiastical—usually monastic—authorities in exacting to the full the feudal obligations that were due them. There were such disturbances in England, notably in the towns of Exeter and St. Albans where the issue was the exaction of labor dues for work on Church land.

More important in many ways were the attitudes and sympathies within a city. Communication was easier and swifter in the city than in the countryside. New ideas—social, political, and religious—could circulate more easily in the city than in the countryside, and most revolutionary movements have had their roots in urban conditions and were first spread through the urban proletariat. To what extent, we may ask in this context, was religious reform motivated by urban activities? Of course, there were explosions of rural discontent, for the condition of the peasant was in many ways worse than that of the townsfolk. Excessive rents and unreasonable demands for peasant labor were sufficient grounds for revolt, but these cannot be said to have had any intellectual basis. But intellectual grounds for revolution was abundantly supplied in the towns, where people could congregate in large numbers, and orators, whether religious or secular, could inflame the minds of crowds. It can be argued that most religious movements—reformist or heretical—had their roots in the towns. The Hussite movement among the Czechs derived from Prague, and the not dissimilar English movement, the Lol-

lards, originated in Oxford and London. If Martin Luther had not affixed his theses to the door of the urban church of Wittenberg in Saxony, but to that of a remote country parish church, would the Reformation have taken the course it did? In Switzerland it was the urban cantons who accepted the Protestant teachings of Luther and Calvin, while the countryside remained predominantly Catholic.

Schools and the pursuit of education were features of the town rather than of the countryside. The printed book originated in the town, and almost all the early printers and publishers were to be found in the larger cities. The first “grammar schools” were urban. Their purpose was to train a class of literate people for the service of business and the state, even though the “grammar” they taught was that of the classical civilizations. Most radical movements originated in the town where there was likely to have been an underclass ready to support revolutionary change and an intellectual class capable of understanding and leading it.

NOTES

1. William Langland, *William Langland's "Piers Plowman": The C Version: A Verse Translation*, ed. George Economou, Middle Age Series (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1996), p. 24, lines 64–67.

2. Thomas à Becket, Archbishop of Canterbury, murdered in his cathedral in 1170 at the behest of King Henry II.

3. Geoffrey Chaucer, “Prologue,” in *“The Canterbury Tales” Complete*, ed. Larry D. Benson (Boston and New York: Houghton Mifflin Company, 2000), p. 5, lines 17–18.

4. Norman John Greville Pounds, *A History of the English Parish: The Culture of Religion from Augustine to Victoria* (Cambridge, UK, and New York: Cambridge University Press, 2000), pp. 3–6.

5. C.N.L. Brooke, “The Churches of Medieval Cambridge,” in *History, Society, and the Churches: Essays in Honour of Owen Chadwick*, ed. Derek Beales and Geoffrey Best (Cambridge, UK, and New York: Cambridge University Press, 1985), pp. 49–76.

6. Mervyn Blatch, *A Guide to London's Churches* (London: Constable and Company, 1978), p. xxii.

7. Jacques LeGoff, “Apostolat Mendicant et Fait Urbain,” *Annales: Economies-Societes-Civilisations* 23 (1968): 335–52.

CITY GOVERNMENT

What is it that makes a borough to be a borough? It is a legal problem.

—F. W. Maitland¹

This yere the said . . . maire, bi assent of al the Counseile of Bristowe, was sende vnto the Kynges gode grace for the confirmacioun of the fraunchises and preuilegis of the saide Towne, whiche Maire spedde ful wele with the kynges gode grace, confermyng and ratefieng al the libertees of the said Towne, with newe speciall addicions for thonour and comen wele of the same.

—Robert Ricart, c. 1462²

The Palazzo Pubblico in the city of Siena in central Italy was built during the thirteenth century as the seat of the city's government. During the 1330s it was decorated with a fine series of frescoes that are among the highest achievements of the Siena School of painting. Foremost among them is an allegory of good and bad government, a theme common in western thought from classical times. Good government is represented by a seated figure, flanked by other figures representing the civic virtues of Peace, Fortitude, Patience, Magnanimity, Temperance, and Justice. Elsewhere are seen the consequences of good government: citizens going about their daily business within the city and in the fields, which reach right up to the city walls. On the opposite side of the hall and facing the representations of orderly government is a picture of bad government. A grim, horned figure is flanked by others that reflect Tyranny,

Treachery, and Vainglory, and below them the representation of the vices: Cruelty, Treachery, Fraud, Wrath, Dissention, and War. This theme is continued in the pictorial depiction of the consequences of bad government: strife and disorder, plunder, massacre, and looting. The lesson these frescoes had for the "Nine" who formed the Council of Siena was clear enough, though it was one neither they nor the governing bodies of other Italian towns found it easy to learn.

The medieval city, as a general rule, lay outside the system of land tenure and political control we know as feudalism. It may not have been the most peaceable of institutions. It had to protect itself in a hostile world, and this all too often led to its involvement in local wars. The central Italy of the Renaissance was far from being the most peaceful of lands. In England, by contrast, the strength of the central government prevented the worst excesses of feudalism and encouraged the emergence of an intermediate order of society—the bourgeoisie. In central Europe, where royal control was least effective, cities had the greatest difficulty in protecting their independence and the welfare of their citizens, and they tended to form leagues or alliances among themselves for their mutual protection. Foremost among these city leagues was the Hanseatic, an extremely important association of trading towns around the Baltic Sea that existed to protect their trade between eastern and northwestern Europe. There were other urban leagues in Germany, which were smaller and less powerful. Most were short-lived. They formed to resist a particular foe and often broke up through their mutual jealousy and distrust. Cities were capable of pursuing a policy aimed at securing their own commercial well-being. This implied the existence of a governing body that made decisions on behalf of the urban community. Where central government was weak or almost nonexistent, as was the case in Germany, cities pursued whatever courses were thought necessary for their own protection, and this in turn necessitated a strong and purposeful urban government.

CITY AND GILD

The citizen was governed in two ways. In the first place, the citizen was a member of the urban community. He was taxed in order to maintain urban services and was subject to urban courts. In the second place, the citizen was a craftsman or tradesman and subject to the officials of a

gild, which supervised his economic activities. There were, of course, many who failed to achieve gild membership, but all had the considerable obligations and doubtful privileges of membership of the urban community. These two—citizenship and gild membership—overlapped. Many of those who comprised the council, the city's governing body, were also the masters and leading members of their respective guilds. What they did as members of the city's governing body was often to the advantage of their craft or gild. Urban disorder may often have been prompted by the exploitative actions of those who controlled the guilds, but it was suppressed by the actions of the council and at the expense of the community. Never were the actions of the one wholly divorced from the interests of the other.

THE INCORPORATED TOWN

The foremost line of defense of a town against the feudal world that enveloped and threatened it was its possession of a charter. The charter had always been granted by the feudal authority that claimed some kind of jurisdiction over the region in question. It might be given to a town that in some rudimentary form already existed, or it might have been granted in anticipation of potential townsmen coming together to establish a town. The effect of a charter was to give the town a personality, to permit it to exist as if it were an exception to the feudal system of land tenure. The primary function of a charter was to allow its citizens to have their own form of government, separate and distinct from that of the surrounding countryside. The charter separated the town from the system of legal jurisdiction prevailing in the countryside. There were also, as a general rule, certain economic—specifically commercial—concessions. But there were degrees in the separateness of the town from the country. Some towns, for example, might have only the lower forms of jurisdiction, not unlike those possessed by a manorial court, while the higher forms were reserved for the agents of the crown or for the greater territorial lords; in others the king's local representative, the sheriff, was excluded and the city even had its own sheriff. This graded system of the administration was especially important in England and, by extension, in Wales and Scotland. At the same time the town assumed some of the privileges of the territorial lord. The territorial lord possessed his heraldry, his coat of arms, made up of the emblems and symbols by which, in this

illiterate age, he chose to be known. In battle they were painted on his shield. The town never had occasion to bear a shield, so they were engraved in the seal by which the town authenticated contracts and other documents. The town developed a ritual of its own, made up of processions and feasts in which its councilors participated; it had its formal occasions and its officers wore, as they continue to do today, the badges and chains of their office. In short, the town was quick to acquire a personality of its own and to attract the loyalty of its citizens.

A village community, at least in most of western and central Europe, was part of a manor, the lowest unit in the system of land tenure. Even though the village community could, in such matters as crop management, run its own affairs, it remained subject to its territorial lord in most other respects. The lord's court had jurisdiction over all the petty disputes regarding land and personal relations that were likely to arise in a peasant society. The grant of a charter severed this link. The village community became a town and was henceforward allowed to manage most, if not all, matters touching its social and economic well-being. In order to do this it was allowed to have an executive officer—a mayor, provost, or portreeve (he bore a variety of titles)—together with a council to advise and assist him. These were normally elected, but by whom and how frequently was not always specified in the charter. We cannot assume that there was a democratic form of government within the town. In almost every town the franchise was very narrow. The council, rarely consisting of more than twenty members, was elected by the local notables from among their own number, and when a vacancy occurred through death or resignation, they were filled by nominees of the remainder of the council members. They formed a self-perpetuating group, and the rest of the urban population could play little or no part in urban government except by the threat, which they always posed, of civil disturbance. In some cities, as in London, for example, the guilds played a very prominent role in government, and their respective leaders or aldermen actually comprised the city council.

And what did the lord gain in return for relinquishing his executive and judicial control over the community? The answer is money. If his community was a newly established or planted town, then the lord received a form of rent, known in England as a “burgage” rent, commonly fixed at a shilling for each building plot. In other cases, the lord received an annual payment, the so-called *firma burgi* or “farm” of the town.³ Even-

tually these payments lapsed, and by the end of the Middle Ages they were rarely demanded. And then there were always tolls and taxes that arose from the economic activities of the town, payments for setting up a market stall or a levy rather like a sales tax on the business done in the market. The self-governing rights enjoyed by towns over much of Europe all derived from those that had been granted in their original charters. In many instances the charters themselves became out of date as the burgesses in one way or another widened their claims and extended their rights and privileges. The burgesses might then petition for a new charter, which would give legal definition to their more extensive claims. Many towns possess more than one charter, though there has been an unfortunate tendency to lose or to destroy the one that had been superseded and had thus become obsolete.

The town, second, was usually authorized by its charter to establish its own courts of law and to exercise a jurisdiction over certain categories of cases and offenses. These rights varied with the seriousness of the case or the nature of the offense. All petty offenses would have been justiciable in the urban courts, and in the larger and more important cities the local courts would also have heard cases of the gravest order. Little distinction was made between criminal and civil jurisdiction; the same courts handled both. A clear distinction was drawn between breaches of the civil code and the ecclesiastical or canon law, however. A range of cases that are today in most countries within the jurisdiction of the secular courts were in medieval Europe subject to the courts of the Church, and the law these courts dispensed was Church or "canon" law. These included all cases relating to matrimony and testamentary matters. The will of a deceased had to be "proved" (i.e., approved) before a Church court before it could be implemented. The Church also claimed, but generally failed, to exercise jurisdiction over matters that involved debts and contracts. It also claimed that lending money at interest was contrary to canon law and subject to the Church courts. But in this respect wily merchants generally succeeded in evading the strict interpretation of Church law, usually by arguing that there was a degree of risk in their undertakings and that they were entitled to payment to cover the possibility of loss.

The charter also commonly facilitated and provided for commercial activities. Buying and selling were the lifeblood of the medieval town, and most urban charters did what they could to protect and encourage

them. The town had, of course, its craftsmen with their shops, in which they sold the products of their crafts. But these were also to be found in the largest of the unincorporated villages, and they called for no particular protection. It was the trade carried on with and between outsiders from beyond the limits of the town that created the largest profit and called for the greatest protection. This was accomplished by two different aspects of the charter. In the first the townsfolk were given permission to organize and hold a weekly market and at the same time a fair—sometimes more than one—each year. At the same time the rights of merchants from elsewhere were restricted, and the local merchants and tradesmen were protected from competition from beyond the limits of the town. No lord could grant the merchants and tradesmen privileges in lands beyond his control, but the lord was able to state in his charter that they were free to trade in all places over which he had jurisdiction. Free trade was not the objective of urban policy in medieval Europe, only freedom within a specified group, namely the citizens of the town in question.

The market was the medium through which the town carried on its business within its own local area. The market was held in almost every instance known to us once a week, the day having been prescribed by the charter or fixed by custom. In all towns there was an open space reserved for it. In planned towns it was usually a rectangular block, or even two or more blocks. In others it was of a more irregular shape, triangular or polygonal. In yet others, usually those in which the market needs had not been fully anticipated in their formative years, there may have been more than one market enclosed within their twisting streets. These were often distinguished by the names of the more important commodities handled in each, as, for example, the “Corn Market” and the “Hay Market,” or by the days of the week on which they were held, like the Friday and the Saturday markets in King’s Lynn in England.

Once in each week, in wintertime as well as summer, the peasant wagons would make their slow progress from village and farm to the town. They were mostly four wheeled, built according to local tradition, and hauled by oxen, which at other times were used to pull the plow. Those to be seen in the small town markets in eastern Europe and the Balkans today differ in no essential respect from what were used by the medieval peasant throughout Europe. They were lined up in the marketplace, and produce was sold directly from them or from adjacent stalls to the local

populace, just as happens today from Poland to the Balkans. As a general rule a charter also authorized a fair at least once a year. This was more important than the grant of a market because it attracted merchants and traders from far and wide and handled a far greater range of commodities. The total volume of long-distance trade was inadequate to support more than a few fairs, however, and most urban fairs failed and were abandoned.

The charter sometimes granted even more favors to especially privileged cities. Its citizens might have freedom to travel and to do business without molestation or the payment of tolls in a number of other places. These places, of course, had to have been within the jurisdiction of the lord who was granting the charter. In England charters granted by the king not infrequently specified that the merchants in question had a similar freedom in all the chartered towns of his realm, a very extensive and valuable concession. The grantor in this way created a kind of free-trade area. Another privilege might be exemption from the tolls payable for navigation on a certain stretch of a river or for crossing it by bridge or ferry. The river Rhine, for example, became so encumbered with toll stations that their effect was to stifle trade. Here, however, no local lord had jurisdiction over the whole region. There was no one who could grant any exemption from the burdensome tolls, which were exacted from the countless castles built by petty lords along the banks of the river.⁴ Here a lord could give the right to use only what was his own, and the lords who controlled the banks of the Rhine were a law unto themselves.

Such were normally the contents of the thousands of urban charters that were granted throughout the Middle Ages. They varied greatly in their detail, in the extent of the privileges they conferred, depending on both the status and the possessions of the lords who granted them and on the needs of the town being incorporated. Periodically they were renewed and their conditions modified in order to accommodate changed political and economic circumstances. Charters were of the greatest value during the early phases of urban growth when towns were a new and fragile institution in an unfriendly and often hostile world. The need for this kind of legal protection declined during the later Middle Ages, and in modern times charters, granted only infrequently and rarely renewed, have had little practical value. The right to trade and to do business became ever more widely extended until it became state-wide. Today political efforts are instead turned toward securing the right to trade without

constraint between nations. This is nothing more than a worldwide extension of the medieval demand for the freedom to trade in neighboring towns.

A charter guaranteed the freedom of the citizens who had received it. They could travel, pursue a craft, and do business without fear of being dragged back to the village from which their ancestors had come. But a charter did not promise the citizens equality. Few societies were less egalitarian than those of a medieval city. The charter it had received was not an urban constitution. It did not prescribe in detail how each city was to be governed. No attempt was ever made to separate the roles of members of the city council from that of the judges in the city court or from the mastership of a guild, to define the ways in which they were to be elected, or to prevent conflicts of interest from tearing the citizen body apart. The practices in medieval cities in these respects was often so ambiguous and so confusing that they seemed to encourage venality and corruption.

PATRICIANS AND CITY GOVERNMENT

Charters usually required that there should be a mayor and council. The charter might specify the number of councilors, but rarely, if ever, did it define the electorate and the basis of the election process. Did the councilmen—councils were exclusively male—each represent a district, a ward, or a parish, or were they each put forward by a guild or craft, or did the council merely co-opt new members from among their friends as vacancies occurred? All these methods were to be found among medieval towns. The extent of the council's authority was never defined with precision before the nineteenth century. The extent of its authority, it might be said, was limited only by what it could get away with. In cities, such as the German Imperial Cities,⁵ the extent of authority was restricted only by the feeble authority of the distant emperor, who was usually too concerned with other matters to take this responsibility seriously.

In the larger cities, their councils wielded immense power, and the leading families schemed and even fought one another to be included among their members. Urban society was dominated by the small number of elite families who rivaled one another and competed for positions in the city's governing body. Their wealth derived from trade—not, as a general rule, the petty trade of the small shopkeeper and craftsman, but that which came from large-scale dealing in wool, cloth, or spices and

other commodities imported from distant or foreign lands or acquired at the great international fairs. They understood the markets. They could buy cheap and sell dear. They dominated, even controlled, those guilds that were relevant to their business, and they manipulated the rules of their guilds so that no simple gildsman could ever compete with them in their most profitable lines of business. They took great risks and inevitably they took great losses, but many also became rich and survived to establish charities for the benefit of their communities. Most cities and towns had their merchant dynasties, which for generation after generation dominated the trade, the guilds, and the councils; they also built churches, established schools, and endowed charities to perpetuate their memory and to relieve the pains of purgatory, which, no doubt, they richly deserved. Many an urban charity, hospital, or school continues to bear even today the name of the late medieval family that founded and endowed it.

One must not be too critical of the urban patriciate. They had no rules and few precedents to guide them. They may have been without scruple, but they took great risks and had no means of insuring their ventures against loss at sea or on land. Shakespeare's representation of the merchant class of Venice, constantly concerned for the security of their ventures and borrowing in order to finance their commercial activities,⁶ could easily have passed for those who managed the trade of Antwerp, of Cologne, of Florence, or of London. Some made great fortunes but had no regular means of investing them except in the next venture. Sometimes they built princely homes or bought up urban real estate and assumed the grave risk that it might be consumed in the next urban fire. There was little else they could do with their money except to purchase the material things of this life and ensure their well-being in the next. The only recourse was to invest in their own future salvation by establishing chantries and endowing them with priests who would for all eternity sing masses for their souls.

As the Middle Ages drew to a close, however, other avenues of investment opened up. There were always the poor to be helped by the foundation of hospitals. There was a growing need for educated men as commerce became more sophisticated and double-entry bookkeeping was adopted. Schools were needed to train them at least in the language, Latin, in which much of the business was carried on. And so grammar schools were helped into existence. Last, there was always the land. A

market in agricultural land came late in the Middle Ages. It was a mark of the decline of feudalism. The old landed families were gradually relinquishing their grip on the land as they ceased to require the service of knights and foot-soldiers which it had been the land's function to provide. The successful merchant might thus become a landholder and abandon the city and the counting house for the rural manor, which yielded perhaps a smaller income, but one which could be relied upon to continue undiminished by the risks and accidents of trade.

From the thirteenth century onward the commercial activity on which the merchants' fortunes had been based called increasingly for servants who could read and write, keep accounts, and dispatch written instructions to agents in other countries. Even the merchants themselves were becoming literate; they were developing a taste for literature, and, whether or not they understood what they were doing, they were contributing to a literary and artistic culture. Fortunately the correspondence of some urban merchants has been preserved. Particularly noteworthy are the letters sent and received by Francesco di Marco Datini, a merchant of the Tuscan town of Prato,⁷ and of the Bonis brothers of Montauban in southern France.⁸

Urban culture was basically secular. Of course, the patricians built churches and funded masses for the welfare of their souls, but they also looked askance at the religious structure, as well as its endowments and activities, which were so conspicuous a part of the urban scene. In some cities, churchmen might have accounted for some 10 percent of the population, yet in a material sense they contributed very little to the urban economy. Indeed, their presence was a negative factor. They benefited from urban services, including the protection afforded by the city's walls, and yet paid few or no taxes to support them. There were towns, especially in central Europe, where this situation contributed to a degree of anticlericalism. It is indicative of this that most cities welcomed Martin Luther and accepted the Lutheran and Calvinist reformations.

The patrician class built town houses that were large, pretentious, and expensively decorated. They lived well, and desired it to be known that they were doing so. Many of their houses have survived from the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries in cities such as Goslar in central Germany, Amsterdam, and Bruges, which happily escaped the bombing and destruction of the Second World War. This social phenomenon was not new, nor did it end with the *nouveaux riches* of the late medieval city. But how

did the rural nobility regard these upstart urban parvenus? It is difficult to generalize, but it would probably be true to say that they were received with a mixture of amusement and contempt. Nevertheless, many urban patricians succeeded in joining the rural aristocracy, helped by the fact that so many of the old aristocracy were killed off during the wars of the late Middle Ages. Some, like the Fuggers, merchants of Augsburg, even acquired titles of nobility. Meanwhile, many of the merchant class had adopted the outward symbols of the aristocracy. They assumed a heraldic device, which they had carved or illustrated on their domestic furnishings and fittings. They might endow a chantry in their local town church, where they would be buried while priests sang masses for the repose of their souls. If they did not rise to a marble recumbent effigy, they at least had themselves commemorated in a monumental brass (Figure 22). Here they were shown in short tunic or long gown, just as the knight had been represented in chain- or plate-mail. Their clothes and those of their wives and children were of the finest fabrics from the Fairs of Champagne or the markets of Flanders, and by the fifteenth century they were paying artists to produce overly flattering portraits of themselves. Albrecht Durer (1471–1528) painted the burghers of Nuremberg, and his portrait of Jakob Fugger, merchant of Augsburg (1459–1523), is witness to this ruthless, hard-headed merchant capitalist.

The patrician class was all the while receiving a procession of new members. Most would have come from the more illustrious guilds, for there was, at least in the larger towns, a clear division between the more elite guilds and those whose members produced the cheaper necessities of life. Contemporaries clearly distinguished between those whose members engaged in such refined crafts as silk weaving, the finishing of expensive fabrics, and gold- and silversmithing and those concerned with commodities of everyday use. The former had to be well-to-do; their capital equipment and their stock-in-trade alone represented a very large investment, and their daily business was with the patrician class and the landed gentry of the surrounding countryside. In town after town we find that such people were socially upwardly mobile, and the least that they would have expected to achieve would have been a place on the common council.

Members of the lower crafts played little part in urban government, and those who made up the ranks of journeymen and unskilled workers played none. There was often a simmering discontent among them. They paid their local taxes, but had little prospect of ever participating in local



1460. J. Browne and wife,
All Saints, Stamford, Lincs.

Figure 22. Memorials of prominent citizens: John Browne and his wife, c. 1460, at All Saints Church, Stamford, Lincolnshire (left). An anonymous notary of c. 1475, Saint Mary-Le-Tower Church, Ipswich, Suffolk (right). A pouch suspended from the notary's waist contains the writing materials that were tools of his trade.

government. Occasionally this tension broke into civil strife, sparked by the attempts of the journeymen and other workers to encroach on the business spheres of their betters or to engage in "foreign" trade, which the patricians regarded as their own preserve. City ordinances, usually inspired by the merchant class, were passed restricting the amount of goods a guild member could take out of the town or sell to a "foreign" merchant. In such disputes the merchant class almost always won. When the Middle Ages drew to a close, most of the larger cities were each firmly in the grip of a small group of merchant capitalists whose wealth was based on trade and whose power derived from their ability to bribe, coerce, or intimidate all who might stand in their way. Urban government was

throughout Europe based upon a narrow oligarchy, and most attempts to overthrow it ended in disaster.

The government of the city of London from late Anglo-Saxon times until long after the Middle Ages had ended provides an insight into the factions, classes, and interests that fought for control within the city. We find at first a fluctuating group of notables—they may have constituted a gild—in charge of the city, supported, if that is an appropriate term, by a periodic folkmoot, or open-air gathering of citizens. From these notables there emerged the aldermen, who each exercised some authority in one of the wards or divisions of the city. They owned property there, and some even possessed a court and exercised a local jurisdiction, known as *sac and soc*.

After the Norman Conquest (1066), royal or feudal control was imposed on the city, and three castles—Bayard's, Muntfichet, and, of course, the Tower of London—were built. Of these three, only the Tower of London survives today. This control was resisted by the citizens, who succeeded in playing off the barons against the king and profiting from each in turn. In 1319 the citizens of London obtained a charter from King Edward II (1307–1327). Government of the city was to be henceforward in the hands of an elected mayor and the aldermen; the urban electorate was to consist only of the “freemen” of the city, a status which could be acquired only through membership in a gild. Doubt has been cast on the validity of this charter. Nevertheless, the guilds remained in complete control of the city government. Even today the titular lord mayor is always the alderman of one of the now honorific city guilds.

GILDS AND FRATERNITIES

Medieval life was dominated by fraternities or brotherhoods. Their purpose was both social and economic, but underlying all of their activities was the urge to protect the interests and to further the ambitions of a group of like-minded people. They admitted women as well as men, though women were never numerous among their membership and were largely absent from the craft guilds. When a gild member died, it was quite common for his widow—if he left one—to continue to manage his business, if not always to practice his craft. Guilds, however, were in general very solicitous of the welfare of their members' families and were often found to have provided for the welfare of widows and dependent chil-

dren. Guilds were to be found in the countryside as well as in the towns, and most were able to combine a religious purpose along with their secular pursuits of supervising conditions of manufacture and trade. But the chief urban guilds were primarily economic. They were associations of producers. They would have claimed that their purpose was to maintain standards of craftsmanship. At the same time, they were monopolistic. They discouraged competition and unquestionably kept prices higher than they might otherwise have been. Their generally restrictive practices led to their widespread suppression in modern times.

It is impossible to separate the government of a medieval city from the organization of the guilds to which most of its patricians belonged. Mastership of an important guild and membership of the governing council were two sides of the same coin. The obvious conflict of interest was never a matter of concern to the urban governing class. They acted in different capacities, but their action in the one always had some relationship to their role in the other, and all too often one finds that the actions of the city authority were those that best served the interests of guild members.

A list of London crafts or guilds was compiled in 1422 for the convenience of one of them. It named no less than ninety-two crafts. Another list, made in 1518, gave the names of forty-seven, but made no claim to be complete.⁹ Other lists exist for the larger English cities and for many in continental Europe. Some guilds were ephemeral, absorbed into the ranks of others, or even lapsing through lack of members. Furthermore, guilds differed greatly in their social and economic importance. A small group of guilds, known as the "greater misteries," contained among their membership men of very great wealth. They dominated the Common Council, and it was from their ranks that the mayor was most often chosen. They included the drapers, mercers, grocers, fishmongers, woolmongers, skinnners, and goldsmiths. These were merchants rather than craftsmen, and their wealth derived in part from foreign trade. Their interests were different from those of the craftsmen, who made goods for sale through the city shops. There was always a degree of tension between the greater and the lesser misteries. In modern and not wholly inapplicable terminology, the greater misteries favored free trade, while the lesser tried to protect their members from outside competition.

A comparable division of guilds was to be found in most of the larger cities in western and southern Europe, with the politically important guilds

in the hands of the merchant class. Only in the smaller towns was the wealthy patrician element small or even absent, and only there was the simple craftsman likely to have a role in the government of his town.

Urban records portray the guilds as fulfilling almost exclusively secular functions. Their purpose was the management of their respective crafts and the protection of the interests of their members. And yet most also had a religious function. Their origin lay far back in the early Middle Ages, in the associations formed by individuals for a special purpose. In some instances all the local notables formed a guild. There is evidence for such guilds even before the Norman Conquest. Cambridge, for example, had its *Cnichtengild*, or guild of knights, and there is some slender evidence for such guilds elsewhere. In many towns for which early evidence survives, a "Guild Merchant" united all engaged in trade or the crafts, whatever their nature. They were, to quote a modern analogy, a very primitive Chamber of Commerce. They broke up, perhaps under the weight of their own increasing membership, into the more specialized guilds that have already been mentioned. Religion pervaded all walks of life in medieval Europe, and even the secular guilds, whose primary interest was the successful prosecution of a craft or trade, had marked religious overtones. Its members often had a patron saint and attended mass in a church, which they came to regard as their own, usually on the dedicatory feast of the saint whom they had adopted.

Guilds were associations of producers. Their actions, they would have claimed, were aimed to secure the "just price" for the commodity in which they dealt and a fair reward for their members' labor. But the effect, whether or not they admitted it, was to keep prices up and to restrict competition. Their further claim that they ensured quality in the product by the proper training of apprentices and the constant regulation of their crafts may also be disputed. Their alleged failure in these respects led in the eighteenth century to their abolition in some countries and their decay in others. There is no basis for the claim sometimes made that the work of the guilds was directly continued in that of the trade union movement. But from the thirteenth to the sixteenth centuries the guilds dominated the urban scene both politically and economically. In most towns they were closely linked with urban government, and the way to political influence and power was all too often by way of the mastership of an important guild. The number and complexity of guilds depended usually on local circumstances. In the larger towns guilds tended to divide

and their number to increase with the growing complexity of the technical processes involved. In small towns there were usually few guilds because there were not enough craftsmen to constitute a separate guild for every profession.

In the 1250s, one Etienne Boileau, chief magistrate of Paris, was called upon by his king, Louis IX, to compile a list of the city's guilds with a tabulation of their respective ordinances. Boileau listed well over a hundred, but unfortunately did not specify the numbers of members in each.¹⁰ We know, however, from other sources that some were very small; that of the blasoniers, men who decorated shields with the heraldry of their owners, had later in the century only two members. Guild ordinances defined minutely the conditions under which guild members might work. Locksmiths, for example, could copy a key only if they had the lock in their own hands. Such a requirement might well have been dictated by the local authority, intent on preventing burglary. There were probably guilds that escaped Boileau's inquiries, but then Paris was the largest city in western Europe with enough craftsmen to be able to organize the most unusual of activities. There was, for example, a guild of those who made buckles for belts, but it is difficult to explain the presence of about 250 members of the goldsmiths' guild, unless we can assume that their market covered much of France.

Only in the larger cities was there a comparable proliferation of guilds. In the smaller towns the numbers participating in a particular craft were too small, and several related crafts often merged to form a single umbrella organization. Where there was a multiplicity of guilds a distinction was usually drawn between the more prestigious crafts and the more menial. Very broadly the former embraced the merchants who traded in cloth and spices and other valuable commodities. They controlled the market and made great profits, it was alleged, by exploiting the craftsmen who actually made the goods in which they traded. London, as we have seen, had its greater misteries and its lesser. Almost everywhere there was conflict between the two groups, resolved by compromise or by conflict, usually to the advantage of the merchant or patrician class. In Florence, chief center of the Italian cloth industry, there were the *popolo grasso*, the rich and well-fed merchant class, who managed the *Arti Maggiori* and controlled the manufacture of the superior cloths and thus the commercial destinies of the city. They were opposed by the *popolo minuto*, the

“little people,” who wove and finished the cloth and yet could barely afford to clothe themselves. The conflict between them came to a head in the bloody riots of the Ciompi (1378–1381), and ended with a compromise by which some of the lesser crafts gained official recognition while the rest were suppressed. But it was in the long run a victory, as it almost always was, for the merchant capitalists.

The humbler crafts—weaving, food preparation, and woodworking—were proportionately more prominent and more stable because they provided for the basic needs of the mass of the population. Even so, their number fluctuated. In Frankfurt-on-Main, a city whose population probably did not exceed ten thousand, there were fourteen guilds in 1355, increasing to twenty, and eventually to twenty-eight at the end of the Middle Ages. Liege, in Belgium, was comparable in size, and had at most thirty-two guilds, while Mulhouse, a small town in eastern France, with considerably fewer inhabitants, had only six, respectively the bakers, butchers, smiths, tailors, vine-growers, and agricultural workers. Duren, in the lower Rhineland, a town of similar size, had seven guilds, among them bakers, brewers, shoemakers (probably including tanners), smiths, weavers, and woodworkers. Such must have been the industrial organization of most of the intermediate and small towns of medieval Europe.

URBAN FINANCES

The finances of a medieval town are little understood, in part because few records appear to have been kept, in part because the task of providing services for the urban population was itself shared among several institutions. In rural parishes the Church authorities, specifically the churchwardens, handled secular as well as ecclesiastical financial affairs, and in the towns the rural practice seems to have been perpetuated. Furthermore, certain fields of activity were left to the charity of individuals and institutions. The urban authorities were very reluctant to assume any responsibility for education, public health, or the very poor.

What, then, were the financial obligations of those who managed the affairs of the city or town? Practice varied, but the answer might well have been as few as possible. The urban officials, like the parochial, usually served voluntarily, whatever may have been the benefits and perquisites they derived from their offices. The chief expenditures made

by those who governed the cities are likely to have been in wages to employees and to masons and others engaged in the building trades. Street cleaning, for example, was an obligation that scarcely arose in a rural setting, and a payment had to be made to the "rakers" who gathered and disposed of the urban refuse. The building of town walls was a major obligation, and we know that they were often in a bad condition owing to the reluctance of the authorities to authorize expenditure on them.

Towns had no budget specifically for education. This, generally speaking, was left to the Church, though late in the Middle Ages endowed schools began to be established, owing their origin to the generosity and enterprise of individuals. Apprenticing an orphan to a craft was about as far as most urban authorities were prepared to go. The same can be said of welfare. There was no mechanization whereby the urban authorities assumed any responsibility for the poor, the sick, and the destitute. Insofar as these were looked after, it was by the Church. The parochial churchwardens and monastic and mendicant institutions gave small sums in charity, but there was no organized provision, and the urban authorities never saw any reason to intervene. England was one of the foremost countries to institute some form of poor relief, and here it was imposed on town and parish by the central government late in the sixteenth century. The Elizabethan Poor Law was at the time one of the most forward-looking institutions in Europe. It was the nineteenth century before some parts of the continent began to follow the English example.

Over most of England, the expenses of local government were largely covered by the parish. Churchwardens, whose primary obligation was to look after the affairs of the Church, also assumed responsibility for maintaining roads and bridges and, though unwillingly, supporting the poor and sick. This shows through in the accounts they kept, showing their petty expenditures and how these were covered by the varied parochial impositions. Indeed, the parish, an ecclesiastical institution, remained until the nineteenth century the chief vehicle for these activities. It would probably be true to say that during the late Middle Ages the greater part of urban expenditure on secular matters was by the parochial authorities, and it was not until the early nineteenth century that the balance tipped the other way.

Nevertheless, all towns incurred some expenditure and required a budget. Usually debts were incurred, and the city council then turned to

the question of how to discharge them. Money was spent on building and cleaning, on entertaining prominent visitors, and by the councilors on entertaining themselves. The whole town participated in periodic or seasonal festivities, among which Carnival was often the most prominent and the most costly. This celebration of the last day before the beginning of the Lenten fast had a very respectable antiquity. How Carnival was paid for was a matter of local custom, but it appears that some contribution toward its cost came from the city itself. There were other expenditures, some of them regular, others only occasional, dictated by local circumstances. The purchase of a store of bread-grains by Italian cities as an insurance against war has already been mentioned. There were occasions when the city council assumed responsibility for the local church that had fallen by default under their care.

There were many ways by which the city raised the small sums needed to discharge its many petty debts. The town, like the parish, sometimes possessed property, which it let at a rental. There was an income from market tolls and from the rent of stalls in the marketplace. Then, too, the administration of justice was made into a source of income for the town. Few offenses could not be redeemed by the payment of a fine. And if in a particular year obligations looked as if they would exceed income, it was always possible to levy a tax on every "head" or every home. Among the obligation of the urban community was, in England at least, a payment of taxes to the crown. A lump sum was usually imposed and was paid by the city and recouped from the community's varied tax income.

NOTES

1. Frederic William Maitland, *Domesday Book and Beyond: Three Essays in the Early History of England* (London: Collins, 1961), p. 214.

2. Robert Ricart, *The Maire of Bristowe Is Kalendar*, ed. Lucy Toulmin Smith, Camden Society Publications, n.s., vol. 5 (Westminster: Camden Society, 1872), p. 43.

3. *Firma burgi*—literally farm [rent] of the town; the sum paid by the town annually to the king.

4. On the obstacles to the navigation of the Rhine see Norman J. G. Pounds, "Patterns of Trade in the Rhineland," *Science, Medicine, and History: Es-*

says on the Evolution of Scientific Thought and Medical Practice Written in Honour of Charles Singer, ed. E. Ashworth Underwood, 2 vols. (London: Oxford University Press, 1953), 2:419–34.

5. The German or Free Imperial Cities were those which owed allegiance only to the German or Holy Roman Emperor. Others were dependent in some way on a dependent lord. The former were virtually independent.

6. See especially William Shakespeare, *The Merchant of Venice*, in *The Complete Works of Shakespeare*, ed. David Bevington (New York and Reading, MA: Longman, 1997), 1.1.

7. See Iris Origo, *The Merchant of Prato, Francesco di Marco Datini, 1335–1410* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1957).

8. See Edouard Forestiè, Barthélemy Bonis, and Géraud Bonis, eds., *Les Livres de Comptes des Frères Bonis, Marchands Montalbanais du XIVe siècle*, Archives Historiques de la Gascogne, 3 vols. (Paris: H. Champion, 1890), 2:xix–cxliii.

9. On the London guilds, see George Unwin, *The Guilds and Companies of London* (London: Methuen & Company, 1908), Appendix A, pp. 370–71.

10. Étienne Boileau, *Réglemens sur les Arts et Métiers de Paris, Rédigés au XIIIe siècle: et Connus sous le Nom du Livre des Métiers d' Étienne Boileau, Publiés pour la Première fois en Entier, d'Après les Manuscrits de la Bibliothèque de Roi et des Archives du Royaume*, ed. G.-B. Depping, Collection de Documents Inédits sur l'Histoire de France (Paris: Impr. De Crapelet, 1837).

URBAN CRAFTS AND TRADE

Now men are drawn together upon sundry causes and occasions thereunto them moving: some by authority, some by force, some by pleasure, and some by profit that proceedeth of it.

—Giovanni Botero¹

The town or city was one of the most complex, versatile, and many-sided of all human creations. It was a mirror to human activities, reflecting the attitudes, the wealth, and the well-being of society, and, like human society, its roles were forever changing. Those factors that had brought it into existence were not necessarily those that shaped its growth and kept it in existence. It was shaped, molded by successive generations, which in the course of time changed its landscape, transformed its functions, and gave it a personality with which its inhabitants were usually all-too-willing to identify. Just as the feudal classes chose their heraldry and displayed it on their shields and their funerary memorials, so cities and towns also adopted a coat of arms, using and adapting the same charges or motifs as the secular and religious lords had done. They displayed it over their town gates as if announcing to the visitor who they were and what their pretensions were, and they impressed it in wax whenever a document was authenticated on their behalf.

Foremost among the functions served by cities and towns were the craft industries and trade. Other functions such as defense in a hostile world, monetary and other services, the spiritual welfare of large segments of the population, and even cultivation of the surrounding fields played their roles in the life of the city, but manufacturing and trade were al-

ways present, and without them there could be no town. Of these two, trade was in most instances the older and the chief contributor to the wealth of the urban community. But trade is inseparable from the specialized crafts, if only because those who made goods, whether a loaf of bread or a piece of cloth, had to sell them in order to acquire materials of their craft and the necessities of life.

CRAFT INDUSTRIES

Most crafts have traditionally been seen as urban pursuits, but they began in the countryside and in some respects have remained rural even in modern times. Some, such as mining and the metalliferous industries, were rural from the nature of their raw materials; others, such as milling and fulling of cloth,² came to depend on flowing water to operate their mechanisms. Yet others, like spinning and to some extent weaving, remained rural, domestic crafts because they could be fitted into the farming calendar, which notoriously had periods when there was little to do on the land. Furthermore, these rural, domestic crafts provided work for women who were as a general rule underemployed in a rural environment. How, then, was the change made from village cottage to urban workshop?

The answer must lie in the increasing sophistication of the craft industries themselves and the growing professionalism of the craftsmen who practiced them. There was a world of difference between the coarse woolen cloth woven on a vertical loom within the darkened space of a cottage and the elite fabrics finely woven by the Florentine *Arti di Calimala* or the expert weavers of the Flanders cities. The emergence of a class of professional craftsmen was in turn a response to the rise of an aristocratic class able and willing to pay for quality products. Not all urban products were of the highest quality; many were intended for an expanding mass market. Nevertheless, the structure of the guilds that emerged in most European towns aimed at maintaining the highest standards and excluding poor and shoddy workmanship from the market.

A few basic industries remained rural, including the extractive industries and those heavily dependent on fuel and bulky minerals. Tanning was attracted to the countryside that was the source of both the skins and hides it used and the abundant water supply needed by its processes. Furthermore, tanning was an unsociable industry owing to the smells and

pollution it caused, and citizens would not have welcomed it into their midst. Spinning never ceased to be a rural industry; there was a wider range of occupations open to women in the cities, and one rarely hears of an urban spinster. Urban crafts increased in number through the Middle Ages as formerly unified manufactures divided into distinct processes, with each process under the charge of a particular craftsman. The craft of making knives was, for example, shared among those who forged the blades, those who fitted the handles, and, last, those who made the leather sheaths in which to carry them. Clothworking involved a multitude of separate crafts according to the degree of refinement required. In addition to the spinners, there were combers, dyers, weavers, fullers, and shearers. Some of these crafts have been perpetuated in the names of the descendants of those who had practiced them. The art of fulling, or thickening the cloth so that it became in some degree felted, is commemorated in the "Fullers," "Tuckers," and "Walkers," while the "Shearers" were employed in wielding the giant shears used to obtain a smooth and even finish to the cloth. Metalworking showed a similar division of labor, ranging from the blacksmith who forged the simplest of wrought-iron wares, such as horseshoes, to the armorer who crafted a suit of armor to fit snugly on the body of his client. When the production of a single article required the services of several distinct craftsmen, it was desirable, if not essential, that they should live in close proximity to one another.

THE GILDS

Medieval crafts were, with very few exceptions, controlled by craft guilds or associations of craftsmen who pursued the same profession. One might expect to be able to trace the range and variety of the crafts pursued in any town from the number of guilds, for it is axiomatic that very few urban craftsmen escaped the obligation to become a guild member and to share in the management of their craft. But it is rarely possible to compile a list of guilds for any but the largest towns. Many crafts had so few practitioners that one cannot conceive of them as organized in any way. In such cases several closely related crafts were usually represented by a single guild. Only in this way could its members secure the advantages of collective action and participate in urban government. The urban guilds performed two very different functions: the control of productive activities and the government of the town in question. The government of

the town has been discussed in the previous chapter. It is the role of guilds as associations of producers and traders that is discussed here.

The urban manufacturing unit was always small. Traditionally it consisted of the master, a journeyman, and an apprentice, obligated to work for a term of years for a minimal payment and thus to acquire a knowledge of his craft. At the end of this period of training, traditionally seven years but usually a good deal less, the apprentice produced his *Meisterwerk*, or masterwork, proof that he had acquired the necessary skills and could be allowed to pursue his craft on his own and without supervision. But this is only the idealized state of affairs: reality was always more complex. Some crafts—dyeing, for example—called for more labor than could be brought together under this system. More wage-earners were needed and there came to be in most towns a proletariat with no hope of ever setting up in business on their own account and of becoming guild members. They were the *popolo minuto*, among whom there was often rumbling discontent, punctuated by outbursts of violence. But, however large the employment, there was never any question of mass production or of any organization approaching the factory system of modern times. When anything resembling a “factory” did appear, there was still no mechanization of production, only a large number of traditional craftsmen gathered under one roof and subject to a certain degree of supervision and discipline.

In most instances, the craftsman did not occupy a workshop separate from the house in which he and his family lived. He worked in the full glare of the public to whom he sold his wares, interrupting his task to serve a customer and doubtless to gossip about local affairs. Few craftsmen required mechanical power of any kind. The bellows of a forge were most often worked by hand. Only the milling of grain called for a unit of power greater than the strength of a workman, and grain mills usually made use of water power, which took them beyond the limits of the town. Even so, most towns had a “town mill” down by the river and just outside the town walls.

The urban-domestic system of production lasted with no fundamental change into the eighteenth century. By that time two fundamental innovations were beginning to change both the location and the scale of manufacturing. These innovations were the adoption of larger units of production or “factories” and the introduction of steam power, and these were to dominate manufacturing from the nineteenth century onward.

The range of crafts pursued in medieval towns varied very roughly with the size of the town itself. Certain branches of production were present in every town, however small. Food was a universal need, and every town had its bakers; about one baker to every hundred or so of the town's population seems to have been roughly their density. Then there were butchers, who bought live animals from the country and, if we may trust medieval illustrations, butchered them in the street in full view of the public. Cloth- and ironworkers were always present, as were woodworkers, not only those who fashioned wooden furniture and vehicles, but also the carpenters who erected the framework of homes. As towns grew larger, their service areas became more extensive and the range of demand in their markets more varied. Clothworking was divided into its more specialized crafts, and more refined types of cloth began to be made. Towns began to have their particular specialties, distinctive in weave, texture, and color. The Bonis brothers, merchants of the town of Montauban in southern France, handled the distinctive cloths of no less than fourteen places, scattered over the whole of France from Flanders to the Pyrenees.³ In the large towns one would find goldsmiths and silversmiths, whose clients were to be found only among the aristocracy and the wealthy patricians, and the leatherworkers, who made Cordovan⁴ and other types of leather which they passed on to the makers of superior footwear, purse-makers, belt-makers, and saddlers. The range of industrial production was the surest measure of the importance of a town and of the extent of the region it served.

A common decorative motif, found in churches over much of Europe, is the so-called Christ of the Trades (Figure 23). It shows the figure of a scantily clad Christ surrounded by the tools of the craftsmen. It has sometimes been seen as a representation of Christ blessing the workers in all trades. This, however, is incorrect. It shows, in fact, Christ suffering again because people were working on the Sabbath, which they had been told to observe as a day of rest and prayer.

The medieval craftsman worked on every day of the week except Sundays and certain feast days of the Church. These feast days varied from place to place but usually did not seem to have included Christmas. In the late Middle Ages the feast of Corpus Christi, customarily held on the Thursday following Trinity Sunday and thus in the early summer, came to be observed almost everywhere. The working day was as long as conditions allowed, and that was usually from dawn to dusk. Probably few



Figure 23. A late medieval wall painting showing “Christ of the Trades.” Many of the tools remain decipherable. The playing card (center-left) is almost certainly a later interpolation. Church of Saint Breage, West Cornwall.

would have wanted to work on Sundays even if the Church had permitted it, and the guilds sometimes prohibited work after dark because the ill-lighted interiors contributed to shoddy workmanship.

URBAN TRADE

The second major function of the medieval town, whatever its size, was trade, but it is impossible to separate the tradesman from the craftsman. The craft industries were mostly specialized, and those who practiced them had necessarily to sell their products in order to support themselves. Furthermore, manufacturing units were small, and every craftsman dealt directly with his public. He was himself both manufacturer and trader. Except for a few of the more refined products, the more expensive fabrics, and the oriental spices, there were no middlemen in medieval urban trade; the producer sold directly to the consumer. Only for goods from distant regions, such as Baltic grain in the cities of Flanders, did a merchant intervene.

The trades themselves can be distinguished as intra-urban and extra-urban. In the case of the former, the craftsmen sold the products of their crafts to other craftsmen and their families. Such were those craftsmen: the bakers and butchers, who produced almost exclusively for local consumption. The extra-urban craftsman also sold to his fellow citizens, but a significant part of his business was with those who came in from the countryside or from other towns to buy his wares. There had to be a balance between these two. No town could subsist on its internal production and trade. In other words, no town could be self-sufficient; it had to carry on an external trade. This extra-urban trade was carried on mainly through the medium of the local market. The butcher and the baker worked primarily to satisfy the needs of their own fellow citizens. On the other hand, few of those who bought the products of the goldsmith or the armorer were among their friends and neighbors. Their clients were scattered widely throughout the countryside and in distant towns too small to have counted a goldsmith or an armorer among their citizens. For some commodities, notably those required every day and in fairly large quantities, the market area was small. Those who produced them were present even in the smallest town, and their market area extended no farther than the nearest villages.

As towns grew and diversified their production, so they developed institutions appropriate to whatever it was that they produced and to the scale of their production. The structures of urban trade assumed three basic forms. First, there was the shop, in which the craftsman-producer met his customers face to face and haggled over prices, except insofar as these had been fixed—as was the case in some places with bread and beer⁵—by the local authority. Second, there was the market, to which people, mostly peasants from the surrounding countryside, brought the products of their own farms and gardens for sale to the citizens and in return bought such goods—mainly the products of the urban craftsmen—as they could not obtain in their native villages. The third structure in the commercial system was the fair, held less frequently and at fewer places, but attracting merchants from far greater distances, who frequently dealt partly in goods of higher value.

1. The Shop. The urban shop required no authorization. Townsfolk had carried on business with one another since towns began. There were shops in the towns of classical Greece and of the preclassical Middle East. We can still see the shops of ancient Rome, of Pompeii, and of the few towns of the Roman Empire that have miraculously survived. They were wide, arched openings, within which there might have been some display. Behind the goods exhibited for sale and clearly visible from the street was the bench, oven, or loom of the craftsman whose wares were on sale. There was no glass window to protect the display—sheet glass did not appear until late in the sixteenth century. Instead, shutters would have been closed at night to protect the shop from intruders. The craftsman, with his family and perhaps an apprentice, lived behind or above the shop. It was an arrangement that continued little changed throughout the Middle Ages and into modern times. The shops along the main street of Dubrovnik today originated in the fifteenth or sixteenth century, but they replicate those which have survived amid the ruins of Roman Ostia or around Trajan's Forum in Rome itself. The shop, as has been seen, often doubled as workshop, so that the customer could see with what care the articles offered for sale had been made.

2. The Market. Every charter that founded or incorporated a town made provision for a market, for without a market it was no town, since the town's essential function was to provide for the sale and purchase of goods. In England there was no god-given right to establish a market, as there was to open a shop. Authority—the king, duke, or territorial lord—

conferred this privilege, which was usually defined in the town's charter of foundation. The market was usually to be held weekly, and on a specified day. It should not cause any harm to markets already in existence, though there must inevitably have been some degree of competition. The ideal situation was a regular distribution of market centers, such that no place was more than a market day's journey from a place of trade, and this came by custom to be six and two-thirds miles.

Almost every town in medieval England and in much of continental Europe made provision for its market by allocating an open space for it, usually near the center of the town. In a planned town this might be one, two, or even more blocks. In towns that grew without any preordained plan, the marketplace was less regular, but it was always present. It might be as small as an acre or two, while in some important trading towns, Arras in northern France, for example, or Krakow in Poland, it was many times this size. The marketplace might contain a splendid building in which trading could be carried on and merchants might do their accounts whatever the weather might be. In Krakow, the Sukiennice—literally the “Cloth Hall”—stands in the marketplace, evidence today of the wealth and importance of its traders. A comparable “cloth hall” dominated the market of the Flanders city of Ypres. Destroyed during the First World War, it was subsequently rebuilt and stands today as a monument to the greatness of the Flanders cloth trade during the Middle Ages. Other towns had less pretentious market buildings, and in most of them, those who came to buy and sell merely set up wooden stalls on which to display their goods. The open market survives today in many European towns from Great Britain in the west to Poland and beyond in the east, creating still as colorful and as efficient a marketing system as it did during the Middle Ages. Stall-holders paid—and still pay—a charge for the privilege of doing business on market days, and during the Middle Ages a toll was levied often proportionate to the volume of goods traded. Those lords who planted a town and granted its citizens the right to have a market were likely to make a considerable profit from what was, in effect, a sales tax. Most towns, and certainly all those of great importance, gradually eliminated this imposition by emancipating themselves from feudal control.

3. The Fair. When the king granted the right to hold a weekly market, he usually coupled with it the privilege of having an annual fair. Fairs differed fundamentally from markets. They were less frequent, the range

of goods handled was far greater, and they were frequented by merchants from far greater distances. A fair, furthermore, was likely to last for several days. Goods to be sold and bought came to the fair by wagon-load, together with traders in their hundreds from all parts of Europe. Some fairs developed a specialization in the commodities they handled, in cloth, for example, or in wine, or spices, or dyestuffs. There were central European fairs that dealt in animals—chiefly cattle and sheep—driven westward from the grazing lands in Hungary or Poland to be sold to traders from the large urban consuming centers in the west. The cattle droves of the late Middle Ages and early modern times must have resembled that on the Chisholm and other trails that led from the high plains to the cattle towns of Abilene and Dodge City in the United States. The origins of fairs are obscure, because most of them began as localized but irregular gatherings of merchants who left very few records of their activities. It is even claimed—very improbably—that some fairs derived from the periodic gatherings of merchants during the late Roman Empire. Certainly fairs were present in Europe soon after the period of the Barbarian invasions had come to an end. There was a cluster of fairs near Paris—the Champagne Fairs; there were fairs at the southern and northern ends of the chief routes across the Alps, and at sites all over Europe where traditional routes converged. Swiss fairs, held at Geneva, Basel, Luzern, and at the otherwise little-known town of Zurzach, handled wine, silk, and other goods brought across the mountains from Italy, to be distributed by other merchants and different modes of transport to markets and fairs throughout western and central Europe. Goods from these fairs were retailed as far away as Stourbridge Fair on the outskirts of Cambridge in distant England. Here street names perpetuate those of some of the commodities once traded at the fairs. Most famous of European fairs, however, were those of Champagne. These were located in four cities lying to the east of Paris: Troyes, Provins, Lagny, and Bar-sur-Aube.

A fair must have looked like a market on a greatly exaggerated scale. Wooden stalls were set up along the streets or in the surrounding fields, to be taken to pieces and stored when the fair had ended. Sometimes lack of space drove the fair into the open country. Stourbridge, probably the largest in England during the late Middle Ages, spread far beyond the limits of the city of Cambridge and extended over the fields along the banks of the river Cam.

The fair as an institution belonged to a certain period in the social and economic history of Europe. It was a primitive means of handling long-distance trade. The merchant still accompanied his goods from the point at which he had acquired them to that where he sold them to the next person who would pass them on to the consumer. Toward the end of the Middle Ages, goods came increasingly to be dispatched by sea or overland in the charge of a ship's master or of a carrier, while the merchant himself sat in his counting house in Florence or Venice, Genoa, or Lyons. The business of fairs had been intermittent, lasting only for the few days during which the fair was held. It then passed to the towns where it became a continuous, year-round operation. Goods were received at any time, were held for a period, and were then sold. The warehouse replaced the market stall and became typical of the large commercial towns of the late Middle Ages and Renaissance. Most of the late medieval warehouses have been swept away to make room for later buildings, but they still survive in Augsburg—the Fuggerei, at Provins in France and Amsterdam in the Netherlands and in a few other cities.

4. Service Occupations. This is an all-embracing term, used to cover the multitude of occupations that resulted in no tangible product. Service occupations enable others to pursue their manifold crafts and occupations more efficiently and in greater comfort and security. Service occupations include such professions as those of the scribes—the professional writers who inedited letters and charters, prepared accounts, and recorded events for a society that was still basically illiterate. Then there were teachers—very few outside the monastic schools; messengers, who, in the complete absence of any kind of postal system, carried messages and bills of exchange across town and country; street sweepers who fought a generally losing battle against the filth, litter, and excreta that accumulated in the streets; the water carriers who brought polluted water from well or river to the domestic home; the carriers who transported timber and fuel; and the broad mass of people who supplied unskilled and casual labor, drifting from one humble, laborious job to another and in doing so barely keeping themselves above the starvation line.

Such people were most numerous in the larger towns: men who perhaps had deserted their rural homes for the anonymity of the city and others who had good reason to fade unnoticed into the urban background. They were always there, the “little people,” the urban crowd, always ready to engage in destructive revolt and yet totally lacking in any

sense of direction or purpose. They were the original proletariat. They were less numerous in the smaller towns and almost absent from the smallest, in which anonymity was impossible. But they must never be forgotten or their importance underrated. It would not be an exaggeration to say that the urban upper classes lived in constant fear of the “little people,” who had it in their power to disrupt the business and destroy the material assets of their masters and betters.

One service industry has not yet been mentioned—the Church. In the minds of contemporaries, the Church may well have been the most important service industry of them all. The Church provided a service that everyone was presumed to need, and to which most gave money and resources according to their means. Its physical structures broke the urban skyline and were, in the larger towns, to be found on almost every street corner. Its influence was pervasive and inescapable. So important was the Church in the medieval city that it is the subject of a separate chapter in this book.

5. A Seat of Authority. The earliest towns almost without exception were administrative centers, however weak and undeveloped that administration may have been. Many of the hillforts discussed in Chapter 1 were the power centers of tribal chieftains. Every Greek *polis*, or city-state, had a town at its center, and when Rome began to extend its authority over southern and western Europe, it established a town as the focus of each tribal area, or *civitas*. The empire declined, but an aura of authority continued to cling to the ruins of its more important urban settlements. Tribal leaders sought them out and made them the capitals of their domains. They built primitive palaces there, and when Christianity arrived, sometime during the fourth and later centuries, its missionaries turned for recognition to the former centers of Roman power. When Augustine brought the Gospel to England in 597, he had been directed by the Pope to head toward the former Roman city of Londinium. In fact, Augustine got only as far as the city of Durovernum, or Canterbury, and found that an Anglo-Saxon tribal leader had arrived there before him. When, following his papal instructions, Augustine began to establish churches throughout England, he turned to the former Roman towns of Rochester (Durobrivae), London, and York (Eburacum). The same was happening throughout the Christian West. Only where the Romans had never conquered and settled did the Church have to look elsewhere to found bishoprics and build its cathedrals.

Secular authority, no less than ecclesiastical, sought the aura conferred by the relics of the Roman Empire. To occupy its sites was in some degree to inherit its authority. Most of the cities of regional importance under the Romans continued, sometimes after the lapse of many decades, to be centers of government. Feudalism, on the other hand, had a rural basis. At its heart was the possession of land and the source of its power was the rural castle. But, as we saw in Chapter 1, feudal society took the town under its wing and attempted—in the end unsuccessfully—to absorb it into its system. One such method was to impose a royal or feudal residence on the town, and increasingly king and baron made the town the focus of their authority. In England, rural Windsor and Clarendon⁶ were balanced by urban Whitehall and the Tower of London. The same was happening in the territorial states of central and northern Europe and in France, where Paris and a small number of provincial cities grew in political importance and eventually dominated administrative affairs. The castle epitomized royal or baronial authority. Again to cite English examples: every regional capital of Roman Britain, with the exception only of the very few that had not survived the Barbarian invasions,⁷ came to have a castle, and most of them remained in the possession of the king for most of the time. In fact, the urban castle became the seat of the jurisdiction of the king's local representative, the sheriff. Often the castle had been created at the expense of the town. Domesday Book, compiled twenty years after the Norman Conquest, records in city after city the destruction of domestic houses to make space for the castle.

The system of counties that was established in England and later in Wales and Scotland very roughly replicated Anglo-Saxon tribal areas, as these had succeeded the *civitas* areas of Roman Britain. Within each county, there had been a Roman town, the *civitas*, or capital, and many centuries later this capital became the site of a Norman castle and the center of the county or shire administration. Since Anglo-Saxon times, the ruler had placed an administrator—a “reeve”—in charge of each county. He became the “shire-reeve,” abbreviated at an early date to “sheriff.” Every county had, and still has, its sheriff. At first the seat of his authority was in the urban castle, but this has in modern times been overwhelmed and destroyed by the growth of the town, and the county administration is today usually housed in a modern office block. But in London we can still envisage in the Tower of London the means by which the royal government once held sway over the unruly population of a

great city. In Paris the outbreak of the French Revolution was marked by the destruction of the royal castle, the Bastille, even though by that date this was little more than a symbolic act.

In England feudalism seldom broke down into anarchy, and the urban castle was very rarely called into service in defense of the monarch. In continental Europe things were less orderly and regular, chiefly because the power of king and emperor was much less, and that of the barons, supported by more extensive lands, was proportionately greater. It is as difficult to generalize regarding continental Europe as it is about England, but here, too, in varying degrees the city became the seat of power and the focus of the machinery of government. In some regions, where the authority of the central government had broken down, as in the Low Countries and Italy, the authority of the city came to predominate and brought large areas of the surrounding countryside under its control. Thus were formed the city-states, in each of which the urban focus had assumed great administrative powers. Ghent and Bruges in Flanders and Florence, Lucca, Siena, Ferrara, and many others in Italy all represent the governmental role the city had assumed. In each a castle was built or, at a later date, a palace, that represented the power of the city as the Doge's Palace did in Venice and the castle of the Counts of Flanders in Ghent.

The administrative role of the smaller towns was generally restricted to the towns themselves and their immediate surroundings. They had no jurisdiction very far beyond their walls or farther afield than the land their citizens cultivated. Their local government was, by and large, in the hands of unpaid, part-time amateurs.

FROM WORKSHOP TO FACTORY: THE STRUCTURE OF URBAN MANUFACTURING

Urban manufacturing activities remained into modern times predominantly small scale. In most instances the manufacturing unit embraced at most half a dozen people and in the majority of cases they were significantly smaller. Only in nonurban pursuits, such as mining, quarrying, and smelting, does one find large units of production before modern times.

Another feature of medieval craft industries was that they were never separated far from the residence of those who practiced them. The me-

dieval craftsman lived “above the shop,” and domestic and manufacturing quarters were never clearly differentiated. In most nonwestern cultures the craftsman or retailer lives in one place and carries on his business in another. In medieval Europe, these two activities were almost always combined. A result was that for craftsmen there was never a journey to work. At the same time, the manufacture of an article, with the significant exception of cloth, was not often separated from the shop where it was sold. For most commodities the workshop was both the place of work and the point of sale.

One speaks today of industrial integration, of the union in some kind of association of all units engaged in the same branch of manufacturing—horizontal integration—or of all sequential processes within a single branch of manufacturing—vertical integration. Medieval manufacturing knew of neither of these types of industrial organization, except insofar as the guild system provided for the association in common membership of those in a particular town who followed the same craft. The cloth industry provides a partial exception. The production of a fabric involved a number of sequential stages from the shearing of the sheep to the shearing and finishing of the cloth. The more refined the fabric, the greater the number of these discrete processes, most of which were carried on by separate, independent craftsmen. But very rarely does one encounter any significant degree of vertical integration between these separate branches, each of which sold its products on to the next in the manufacturing process for which they had become its own raw material.

Nor can one detect any significant change in the structure of manufacturing before the end of the Middle Ages. The only conspicuous example of the application of mechanical power to any industrial process during the whole Middle Ages was the adoption of the fulling mill in the thirteenth century, which has already been mentioned. The process consisted of beating the cloth, to which a detergent, usually fuller’s earth, had been added, with large, flat beaters. This process had at first been carried on by the fullers themselves who trod the cloth in large wooden vats (hence their alternative name of “walkers”), in much the same way that their country cousins trod the grapes to make wine. The mechanization of the process consisted in using a simple waterwheel to raise and lower the “beaters.” The fulling mill represented an important piece of capital equipment, not only in the timber structure itself but also in the conduits by which the flowing water was taken from a river and re-

turned to it after its task of turning the mill wheel had been accomplished. This often called for the services of skilled surveyors and engineers.

The flour mill used basically the same type of equipment, and it too called for the diversion of a stream so that it flowed over or under the mill wheel. Both flour mills and fulling mills had necessarily to be located in the countryside, which provided the force for their wooden machinery. These industries were nevertheless carried on as family enterprises.

The factory as a large unit of production, employing a relatively large number of people, was an invention of the very end of the Middle Ages. A modern factory depends on the employment of mechanical power to operate its machines, and this had, in effect, to await the invention of the steam engine in the eighteenth century. About 1540, one William Stumpe purchased the buildings of the dissolved monastery of Malmesbury in England, and there he established the manufacture of cloth. At this time he was visited by Henry VIII's antiquary, John Leland. Leland found "every corner of the vaste houses of office that belongid to thab-bay be fulle of lumbes [looms] to weve clooth yn, and this Stumpe entendith to make a stret [street] or 2. for clothier[s] in the bak vacant ground of the abbay."⁸ It was, however, no factory; it used no power beyond the fingers of the weavers who sat before their looms under the watchful eyes of William Stumpe. It was a means of ensuring quality and maintaining discipline, and it lasted for only a few years. The true factory lay two centuries in the future, and it was at first a rural rather than an urban phenomenon because it was dependent on water power.

NOTES

1. Giovanni Botero, "A Treatise Concerning the Causes of the Magnificency and Greatness of Cities," in *The Reason of State*, trans. P. J. Waley, D. P. Waley, and Robert Peterson (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1956), p. 227.

2. E. M. Carus-Wilson, "An Industrial Revolution of the Thirteenth Century," *Economic History Review* 11, 1 (1941): 39–60.

3. See Edouard Forestiè, Barthélemy Bonis, and Géraud Bonis, eds., *Les Livres de Comptes des Frères Bonis, Marchands Montalbanais du XIVe siècle*, Archives Historiques de la Gascogne, 3 vols. (Paris: H. Champion, 1890), 2:xix–cxliii.

4. A very fine leather which took its name from the Moorish city of Cordoba.

5. The Assizes of Bread and Beer were courts which sat periodically in England in order to fix the price of these commodities. Some cities in Italy and elsewhere had a similar practice.

6. Clarendon was a rural palace of the English kings, located near Salisbury. It fell to ruin and only faint traces now survive.

7. Several towns in Roman Britain failed to survive the Barbarian invasions and are represented today by at most a few ruins. Well-known examples are: Silchester (Calleva Atrebatum) and Wroxeter (Uriconium). Verulamium was abandoned, but the nearby town of St. Albans took its place. In France, Glanum is now a ruin, but was succeeded by nearby St. Remy.

8. John Leland, *The Itinerary of John Leland in or about the Years 1535–1543*, ed. Lucy Toulmin Smith, 5 vols. (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1964), 1:132.

HEALTH, WEALTH, AND WELFARE

And before a few years finish famine shall arise,
.....
Through floods and foul weather fruits shall fail;
Pride and pestilence shall take out many people.

—Piers Plowman¹

We turn at last to the social structure and well-being of the population of the medieval town. Medieval urban society was, in contrast with that of the countryside, free. “Stadt Luft macht frei” ran a very old saying. The villein who had escaped to a town and had breathed its “free air” for a year and a day became a free man or woman and could not be hauled back to his or her village of origin by any territorial lord. There is, however, little evidence that this really happened on a regular basis. There was no “underground railroad” as there was in the U.S. antebellum South. All citizens might be free, but the town was very far from egalitarian, more unequal in fact than the contemporary countryside.

Medieval society was often represented even by contemporaries as consisting of three classes. At the summit of its social structure was the noble class of lords and warriors. Besides them were the clergy whose task it was to serve God and thereby to save the souls of all others. Below them both and at the bottom of the social pyramid were the peasant class who tilled the soil, produced the crops, and thereby ensured the welfare of the other two. No place was found in this model for those who dwelt in towns and who made and sold things. These constituted a class that emerged during the early Middle Ages, the burgesses or bourgeoisie. The

burghesses in turn divided into three overlapping groups, which nevertheless constituted a social pyramid. At its summit, by the late Middle Ages, were the patricians, men who had accumulated a modest fortune, usually by trade, and used their wealth to achieve status within their respective towns. It was usually this class of person who occupied the mayoralty and comprised the common council. Below them was the class of master craftsmen, men who had their own workshops, where they worked with the help of a journeyman or two and usually an apprentice. Last, there were the laborers and unskilled workers, the journeymen and the apprentices, many of whom hoped to climb the social ladder and join the class above them. In order to do this they had to be very fortunate indeed. Nevertheless, there was a sufficient social mobility to blur the lines that have here been drawn between the classes that made up urban society. The merchant class included both the “grocer” who, by definition, made bulk purchases in gross and sold them on to lesser traders, and the man who bought a pig from a peasant, butchered it, and sold it piecemeal from a stall in the open market. The smaller the town, the fewer there were of the grocers, until in the smallest towns there were only petty traders who dealt in local produce together with the urban proletariat.

Nor was the line between merchant and craftsman clear cut. Many, perhaps most, craftsmen were traders insofar as they sold the products of their own workshops to passing customers. With few exceptions their workshop was their shop. Some required little by way of tools, equipment, and capital; others had necessarily to be well capitalized in order to carry on their business. The stock in trade of the goldsmith or the silversmith was itself worth a very considerable sum. They were craftsmen, but their personal wealth must have been far greater than that of many a patrician who dealt in simple commodities such as wool or cloth.

The operating unit was small, consisting of the master craftsman and, since his skills had to be passed on to the next generation, an apprentice, bound for a notional seven years to do his master's bidding and acquire the rudiments of his craft, even if these could have been learned in a week or two. All too often the apprentice constituted a form of cheap labor. The idealized production unit was filled out with one or more journeymen—from *journee*, because paid by the day—a class, underpaid and overworked, who had learned a craft, but lacked the capital or the influence to be able to set up shop on their own account. The journeymen

were always a restless class, and it was chiefly from them that the troublesome, rebellious medieval crowd was drawn. They were, along with the unskilled and footloose, the underclass. This is the social background of the stories of the apprentice who married his master's daughter, rose in the social scale, and joined the elite of the town. Few could ever have done so well for themselves, for the master in an average lifetime would have trained far more apprentices than could ever have married his daughter and inherited his shop.

The craftsman class thus graded downward into that of workers, some of them skilled, most of them not, who accepted what work they could and lived on the margin of subsistence. They, if they were fortunate, served a master but had no hope of ever becoming more than a wage earner. Otherwise, they swept the streets, cleaned the sewers, manhandled the merchandise, or stood around waiting for the next remunerative job to turn up. They were *les classes dangereuses*—"the dangerous classes"—of medieval society. They fed the criminal class, and we encounter them in urban revolts and in the proceedings of the criminal courts.

Urban society consisted, therefore, not of three neatly bounded classes, but of a continuum, which reached from the richest merchant to the poorest of the unskilled. This fragmentation of society had emerged slowly and was in a state of constant change. There was a degree of social mobility, though this is difficult to measure and, through the tales of successful apprentices, has certainly been exaggerated. There was a kind of hierarchy into which people fresh from the countryside were constantly being fed at the bottom, some making their way a short distance up the steep slope of the social pyramid, few reaching its summit. But there were those who did. The English story of Dick Wittington, the poor country boy who made his way to London accompanied by his remarkably talented cat and there rose to fame, fortune, and the lord-mayoralty of London, is firmly entrenched in popular folklore and also has a firm foundation in fact. Such cases were rare, but nevertheless sufficiently numerous to raise the hopes of a poor country lad.

The sex ratio in the medieval town is far from clear, but there would appear to have been a surplus of men, if only because men were more likely to abandon the country and make for the city. The city held less attraction for women. There were fewer occupations in which they could find employment, and within the city, if they could not find refuge in

marriage, they had little hope of employment outside what came euphemistically to be called "domestic service." The unmarried woman was a "spinster," but the spinning of yarn was not a significant urban employment.

Many of the great merchant families were remarkably short-lived. Rapid rise from the bottom to the ranks of the elite and as quick a decline was often the case if it was not also the rule. From rags to riches and back again within three or four generations was often the fate of elite families. There were many reasons. The merchant's business was a precarious one. Ships were lost at sea; goods were stolen on the highways; debts could not be collected; there was a constant fear of fire and flood, and against none of these was it possible to insure. Then too the accidents of birth and death led to the extinction of many a merchant dynasty. Last, many of those who did survive the trials and tribulations of medieval life and succeeded in accumulating a modest fortune often sought safety in the ownership of land far beyond the city's walls. When all is said, real estate was the only safe and satisfactory form of investment. Merchant families retired to the countryside, bought a small estate, and joined the ranks of the gentry. Many of the European aristocracy had their origins in that urban trade which they later affected to despise.

MEDICAL CARE AND HEALTH

The medieval town offered little by way of medical care. Toward the end of the Middle Ages the well-to-do and the well-disposed often founded and endowed hospitals and schools. The larger towns were rarely without them, but the purpose of hospitals was not to heal the sick. They were places where the old and the infirm could pass their last days in relative peace and comfort. There were no institutions dedicated specifically to healing the sick because the sick were rarely healed unless nature itself healed them. The practice of medicine consisted of little more than a few traditional methods, which, if they did no harm, nevertheless had no therapeutic value. The medical knowledge that was taught in the schools of medicine derived from the classical world of Greece and Rome and in fact had made no significant advances since the time of Hippocrates and Galen. Their writings had been transmit-

ted by way of the Arabs of North Africa and had reached Europe together with all the corruptions and additions they had picked up on the way. For most people the practice of medicine meant following a small number of traditional practices and remedies, which had been perpetuated through the Anglo-Saxon “leechdoms.”² Medieval people had no concept of the nature of pathogens. They could not understand that disease was the product of organisms that could be carried by vectors from person to person, city to city. One might have expected that their experience of the Great Plague and of the pragmatic value of quarantine would have taught them something along these lines, but it did not. As late as the mid-nineteenth century, the London cholera epidemic was overcome not by medical science, but by the chance association of high mortality with the vicinity of a particular source of water. The important breakthrough had to await the period of Pasteur (1822–1895) and the discovery of pathogens. Medieval people talked of *malaria*—“bad air,”—the exhalations of marshland, instead of realizing that the source of many of their ills lay in the stench of the cesspit and the foul taste of polluted food, and they even supposed, with Chaucer, that illnesses came from the heavenly bodies. There were doctors whose fees were out of all proportion to the value of the services they offered. In fact, any serious illness was likely to be fatal. Despite the existence, at least during the late Middle Ages, of schools of medicine at Salerno, Montpellier, Paris, and elsewhere, medical knowledge was compounded of superstition and folklore. Little was known of human anatomy, and nothing of the nature of disease. The result was a very high death rate generally, and highest in the cities. In no field of medicine was this higher than in childbirth. For this there is no quantitative evidence, but it is clear from documentary sources that the death rate in childbirth was appallingly high and remained so into modern times. And in this, as in most other aspects of medicine, the rich suffered as much as the poor.

The medieval town made as little provision for the education of its citizens as it did for their health. Toward the end of the Middle Ages, schools were established primarily for the teaching of “grammar,” which meant, of course, Latin grammar. Only boys received this restricted education, which they subsequently employed in the service of either the merchant elite or the priesthood. Previously the only schools had been

attached to monasteries, where the curriculum contained little or nothing outside the liturgy of the Church. Only in the universities was the curriculum broadened to include the elements of mathematics, philosophy, and theology, and these institutions could never have trained more than a minute fraction of one percent of the population. Not even the parish priest had been educated. His virtue lay in ordination, not in education.

THE URBAN UNDERWORLD

Every town, small as well as large, has at all times faced its problems of crime, and in this the medieval town was no exception. The city was more crime-ridden than the countryside. Crime has always been more readily practiced in the crowded, anonymous city. The inhabitants of the small town may have constituted a "face-to-face" society in which everyone knew everyone else, but in towns above a certain size this aspect of life disappeared. The individual was lonely within the crowd, and the watchfulness of neighbors and the rigors of law enforcement became less effective. There was, as a statistical study of medieval court rolls has demonstrated, relatively more crime in the city than in the village, merely because detection was less easy and the criminal could more easily melt into the anonymity of the crowd. Crimes of violence were common, and criminal law was extremely ineffective; few out of many criminals came to their appointed end.

Crimes can be divided into four categories according to their severity and how they were committed. First, there was larceny, which consisted merely in taking the goods of another person. Larceny was accomplished without violence and was often a spontaneous, unpremeditated act. It related usually to goods of little importance and low value, and often went unreported. Larceny included the actions of the cutpurse, the brewer who adulterated his beer, the baker who sold short weight, and the citizen who stole a handful of grain from a market stall, all of them, as we know from medieval court records, prevalent in the medieval town whatever its size. In England a distinction was drawn between petty larceny, which involved goods worth less than a shilling, and grand larceny. Petty larceny was treated as little more than a misdemeanor and was commonly condoned by society. Barbara Hanawalt has shown how a poor woman who stole a loaf to feed her children was let off with little more

than a caution.³ Grand larceny, however, which consisted of the theft of goods of a higher value than a shilling—about a week’s wages for a common laborer—was a very different matter and was usually visited with a far greater penalty.

Next in order of severity came burglary, the act of breaking into a building—a house, a shop, even a church—for the purpose of stealing its contents. Burglary was premeditated and usually involved goods of a higher value than those taken in a case of larceny. Furthermore, burglary often involved more than one “professional” thief. In the German poem of Helmbrecht we find such a professional:

Wolfsrüssel, he’s a man of skill!
Without a key he bursts at will
The neatest-fastened iron box.
Within one year I’ve seen the locks
Of safes, at least a hundred such,
Spring wide ajar without a touch.⁴

A professional indeed! A locked chest nevertheless provided some security. In England, parish churches were required to have such a safe place, ostensibly for keeping documents and silver plate such as chalices, but we know that on occasion parishioners also stored their few valuables in the parish chest. Furthermore, the quality of medieval building construction actually encouraged burglary. Locks, usually the crude product of the local blacksmith, presented little obstacle to a Wolfsrüssel. Doors were easily forced and could be secured only by drawbars or wooden bars, which, when drawn across the doorway, prevented them from opening, and windows were protected at best by an iron grill.

Robbery, the third type of common crime, was far more serious. Robbery involved violence, even homicide, and was committed most often in the open countryside and on the highways, and the victim was frequently a traveler or a merchant transporting his wares across country. Robbery was visited with the severest penalties, but was not on the whole an urban crime. The fourth category of crime was homicide itself. It might result from disputes of a commercial or personal nature. Homicide was as likely to be committed in the town as in the countryside, and was most likely to arise, whether intentional or not, in the course of a burglary. Hanawalt has analyzed the recorded crimes committed during the first half of the fourteenth century within a limited area of England:⁵

Cases	Number	Percentage
Larceny	6,243	38.7
Burglary	3,818	24.3
Robbery	1,640	10.5
Homicide	2,952	18.2
Others	<u>1,299</u>	<u>8.3</u>
	15,952	100.0

There is no reason to suppose that these statistics would have been significantly different elsewhere in Europe. A feature of medieval crime was its simplicity, almost its crudity, and in this it reflected the low level of crime detection. Little planning went into medieval crime. There was the case of the thief who stole a silver chalice from a church where it had been left unguarded and at once tried to sell it in the local market only a few yards away, where it was immediately recognized.

The incidence of crime varied. There were some times when crime was a serious social problem, and other times when there were relatively few cases. A high crime rate, it has been claimed, coincided with periods of political unrest, when the power and authority of the government may have been weakened. But Hanawalt's study of crime during the disturbed early fourteenth century does not support this contention. Open warfare, however, certainly increased the total volume of crime, since marching armies lived off the land and, the sources tell us, committed every variety of crime in doing so. The fighting soldier, in fact, expected to be rewarded with loot. The armies of the Fourth Crusade, for example, were disappointed of their promised loot when the Adriatic (and Christian) port city of Zadar (It. Zara) surrendered before their final assault. It was a military convention that a city was not to be pillaged if it had surrendered before being attacked. The Crusaders nonetheless pillaged the defenseless city after it had passed into their hands. The effects of war are, however, overshadowed by other factors. Larceny, especially petty larceny, was most common when the prices of basic foodstuffs were high. There was a close correlation between the level of crime and the price of grain.

Methods of law enforcement varied from country to country, city to city, but were always inefficient and never more than moderately successful. There were constables, parochial officers, untrained and unpaid, who held office for only a year. Punishments were generally harsh. If

criminals were not often caught, then it seemed only reasonable to make a horrific example of those who were.

PROSTITUTION

This, the “oldest profession,” was never reckoned to be a felony, even though in the eyes of the Church it was a grievous sin. When, in the late Middle Ages, records began to be kept of the visitations of bishops and archdeacons, accusations of sexual misconduct were among the most common. But in England and in much of Europe, the Church had no sanction by which it could enforce its judgments upon the lay population. Its range of punishment was limited to penance and excommunication, and these the lay person could, and often did, ignore. The Church admitted that procreation was necessary and that sex was therefore legitimate, but many churchmen demanded that it should not be pleasurable. More reasonable counsels eventually came to prevail. Given the nature of human desire, the Church admitted unwillingly that prostitution served at least to contain it and to prevent it from becoming a social evil and a threat to society. To St. Thomas Aquinas it was a necessary evil.

The evidence that we have for prostitution is almost wholly urban. Brothels, often associated with bathing establishments, had been a feature of towns under the Roman Empire. In some form they survived the Dark Ages to become authorized and profitable institutions in many towns of continental Europe. They were commonly established around the perimeter or in the suburbs of towns. In London the “stews,” as they were called, lay in Southwark on the south bank of the Thames and opposite the city itself. Here they were a source of profit to the local landowners, among whom was the bishop of Winchester. The Church at large derived a considerable income from the brothels it condemned.

Some urban authorities attempted to control prostitution and even to reform prostitutes. Their motives, however, were often less the reform of morals than the suppression of the petty crime that took place around brothels and among prostitutes. In France, King Louis IX (St. Louis) tried to outlaw prostitution, but his successors more wisely and more successfully attempted only to restrict it to specific quarters of the town. The former existence of such a “red-light district” is occasionally commemorated even today in a place or street name.

Prostitution was throughout the Middle Ages an activity of poor and destitute women for whom there was no other source of income. Such women followed armies and accompanied the crusaders. But some prostitutes had been members of middle-class families that had fallen upon hard times. Prostitutes were also employed by the authorities for the pleasure of visiting dignitaries, and, in varying stages of undress, they figured in the processions and shows staged for the populace. More is known of the mistresses who were kept by kings and people of note. They were condoned by the Church and by society and were the predecessors of the courtesan of later centuries. The number of illegitimate children of the royalty and aristocracy is some measure of the practice.

URBAN CRAFTS AND THEIR LOCATION

There was a tendency in the medieval town, just as there is in the town today, for similar businesses to be sited close to one another. This was, indeed, convenient for their customers and was probably advantageous to the businesses themselves. In small towns each category of business had so few practitioners that this aggregative tendency had little opportunity to manifest itself, but in cities of intermediate and large size there was a marked tendency for similar businesses to cluster together. In London's Cheapside, it was said, there were a dozen or more goldsmiths, and in most large towns the customer was burdened by the range of choice. In some instances, crafts were forced together by their common demand for some raw material or facility. The need for water drew tanners to the banks of a river; butchers and bakers were attracted to the most densely populated areas, which provided their customers. Conversely, smiths, metalworkers, and armorers were drawn to the urban periphery where their polluting activities would cause the least inconvenience. The luxury trades clustered together, as, indeed, they continue to do, even though in terms of the materials and techniques they used they had little in common. Merchants might gather around the marketplace or near the town hall, the focus of power and authority within the town, but their warehouses lay along the waterfront where ships unloaded and loaded. As documentation—wills, contracts, conveyances—accumulates, we can begin to put together the jigsaw puzzle that is the medieval town, but always there are missing pieces, areas for which we do not know their precise significance in the

town's economy. There are towns for which we can compile a kind of social and economic geography. We can say which were the affluent areas where the merchants and influential people lived, and we can identify those areas where one would not have ventured alone at night, where one would have gone to purchase quality clothing, and where good weapons and armor were fabricated. Urban tax records give us some idea of where the more wealthy citizens chose to live, and this was almost always close to the city center and near the gildhall, the seat of urban authority. Figure 24 shows the distribution of wealth in the French city of Amiens.

The richer members of the urban society tended to live in the central area and along a north-south axis. In these respects the large city of the Middle Ages did not differ greatly from the metropolitan city of today. A social differentiation also becomes apparent through the tax rolls. The houses of the rich tended to cluster around the seat of local authority. Even today the finest medieval housing can still be found around the central square, as at Brussels, Prague, and Krakow, even though the city fathers no longer live there. The foremost instance of this tendency for like people to live close together was the formation of the Jewish Ghetto.

THE GHETTO

One often finds that in any city similar professions and businesses tend to locate close to one another. Banks and financial institutions, high quality shops, and consumer services tend to have their own streets or quarters. Whether this occurred in the medieval city for the convenience of clients or for that of shopkeepers and salesmen is not clear. What is certain, however, is that this was never a requirement of city government; it was never part of public policy.

In the same way ethnic segregation has taken place in many cities, and this too is of great antiquity. In medieval Europe the people who were thus segregated or chose to set themselves apart most conspicuously were the Jews. Their ghetto became a feature of many towns of continental Europe.

The Jewish people had spread across much of the Roman Empire. The edict of Caracalla (188–217 c.e.) gave them Roman citizenship, and their distinguishing religion was free of any kind of discrimination or persecution. Christianity did not receive comparable recognition until about

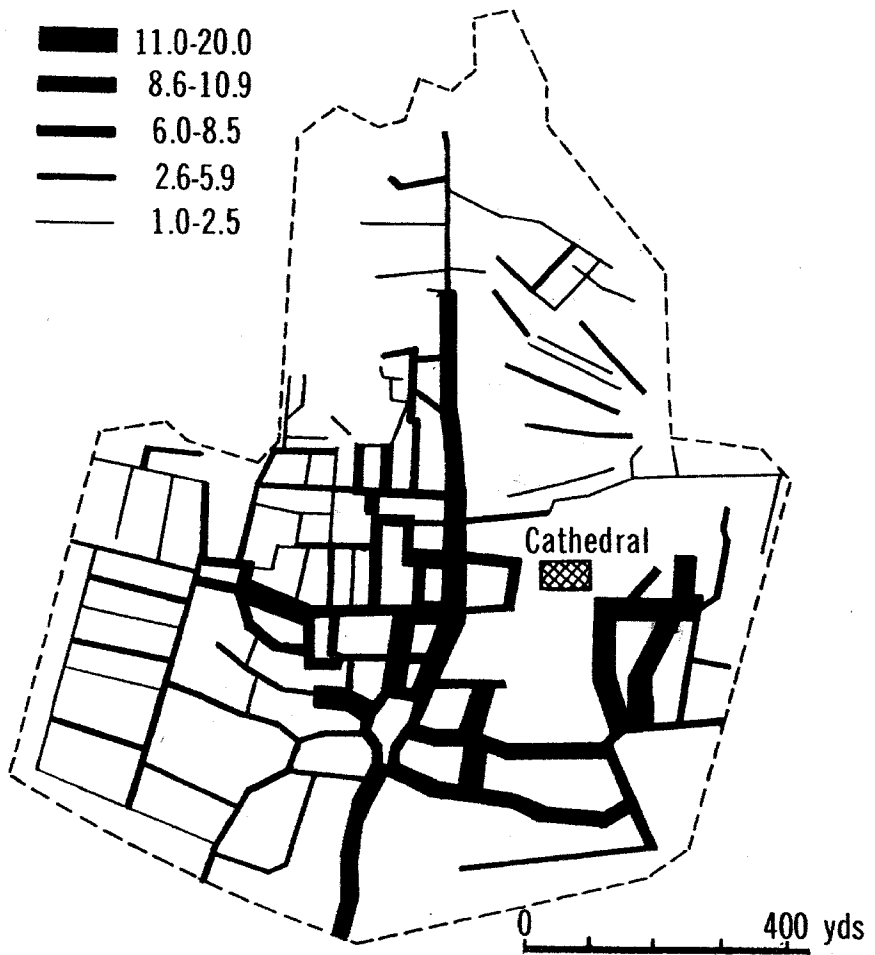


Figure 24. Amiens, northern France. The lines represent streets and their thickness indicates the tax (in *livres tournois*) paid by each house. After Pierre Deyon, *Amiens Capitale Provinciale*, Paris, 1967, p. 543.

313. In the Theodosian Code, issued by the Emperor Theodosius II in 439 C.E., Christianity was recognized as the religion of the empire. For the first time the Christian hostility to the Jews and Judaism became also the policy of the state, and so it has remained until modern times.

The Jews became almost exclusively an urban people. They could not hold land, and thus they lived outside the feudal system. Only in the towns could they gain some kind of acceptance, and here they came to domi-

nate certain commercial activities, including moneylending, an occupation they made their own. The Catholic Church, increasingly intolerant, encouraged their oppression and financial exploitation. The first of the many pogroms the Jews suffered occurred about 1100, when the masses, unable to participate in the First Crusade (1098–1100), turned their hatred against the Jews of the Rhineland cities. In their search for security the Jews formed ghettos in most important European cities. The word *ghetto* derives from Venice where one of the earliest ghettos took shape.

It is impossible to say how many Jews there may have been in medieval Europe. Many thousands lived in the cities of southern Europe, where their commercial success did nothing to endear them to their gentile neighbors. They did not reach England until after the Norman Conquest. In the twelfth century they probably numbered no more than 5,000. In 1290 they were expelled from England and from France shortly afterward. Then followed their expulsion from parts of Germany and Italy. Curiously, the ghetto in Rome survived, and the papacy showed greater tolerance than most secular states. Not until the rise of modern fascism was the Jewish population seriously threatened here.

The expulsion of the Jews from western European cities drove them eastward. They were welcomed by King Kazimierz of Poland, thus beginning the long association of the Jewish people with their “Pale” of settlement in eastern Europe. Here and in western Russia they remained until, in the nineteenth century, they began again to drift westward.

The Jews were tolerated, even encouraged, in Moorish Spain, where they did much to preserve the scientific and medical knowledge of the classical world. They drifted back into central and western Europe in modern times, but nowhere were they obliged to live segregated from Christian society until after the Reformation. There is no other case of ethnic segregation in medieval Europe; apart from the Moors in southern Spain, there were no other ethnic minorities.

NOTES

1. William Langland, *William Langland's "Piers Plowman": The C Version: A Verse Translation*, ed. George Economou, Middle Age Series (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1996), p. 79, lines 346–49.

2. See *Leechdoms, Wortcunning, and Starcraft of Early England. Being a Collection of Documents, for the Most Part Never before Printed, Illustrating the History*

of Science in This Country before the Norman Conquest, ed. Thomas Oswald Cockayne, *Rerum britannicarum medii aevi scriptores, or Chronicles and memorials of Great Britain and Ireland during the middle ages*, no. 35, 3 vols. (London: Longman, Roberts, and Green, 1864–1866).

3. Barbara Hanawalt, *Crime and Conflict in English Communities, 1300–1348* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1979), pp. 65–101.

4. Clair Hayden Bell, ed. and trans., “Meier Helmbrecht,” in *Peasant Life in Old German Epics: Meier Helmbrecht and Der Arme Heinrich*, *Records of Civilization Sources and Studies*, no. 13 (New York: Columbia University Press, 1931), p. 69, lines 1203–8.

5. Hanawalt, *Crime and Conflict*, Table 3, p. 66.

CONCLUSION: THE CITY IN HISTORY

The city and civilization are inseparable: with the city's rise and spread, man at last emerged from the primitive state. In turn, the city enabled him to construct an ever more complex and, we would like to believe, more satisfying way of life.

—Gideon Sjoberg¹

In recent years the problems of the city have been the subject of countless conferences and studies, ranging from the incidence of urban crime to the quality of urban housing. These matters, as the foregoing chapters have shown, are far from new. They troubled the medieval citizen as much as they do the modern. And yet, if we take the long view, towns owed their origin to the dangers and difficulties present in countryside rather than in the town. The classical Greeks who saw in the synoecism of several rural communities the origin of the *polis*, or city, had no doubt but that the change was for the better. The late Roman writer Isidore of Seville defined a city as a place where *vita tutior est*—"where life is safer"—but this was at a time when barbarian invasions were making life hard everywhere, and the only protection was to be found behind the line of urban walls. The Romans, furthermore, saw in the foundation of cities a means of civilizing the barbarian peoples whom they had conquered. The quality of *urbanitas*, the way of living in *urbs*—the city—was both urban and urbane, and the Romans thought it the most valuable gift they could bestow on their conquered peoples. In modern times, escape to the city from the poverty and near starvation of an overcrowded countryside was a blessed relief. The town was the "promised land," the Ziemia Obiecana

of Wladyslaw Reymont's novel on this very subject, where employment could be found and food could be purchased.² It was where every poverty-stricken peasant hoped to go. The peasant saw the vast brick factories and the smokestacks belching their pollution over the landscape merely as symbols of that wealth, in which he hoped to share. But the peasant's views were as illusory as those of the romantics who visualized the joys of the countryside. For those near the bottom of the social ladder, both town and country were harsh, unrewarding environments in which to live, and that was where most people found themselves. For those with the means to choose between town and country, however, they each had their attractions and their advantages. For urbanites a week in the country was a welcome holiday, and for the eighteenth-century landowner a residence in London or Paris or some other city of distinction was a social necessity.

And so it was also during the Middle Ages. The city, especially a large one, was a land of opportunity, where young men could hope to make their fortunes in trade or in marriage. Few succeeded, but hope sprang eternal in their minds. The rich and highly placed built palaces, and the poor lived in squalid, rat-infested, disease-ridden tenements. The social spread in a large city was greater by far than it ever had been in the countryside. Late in the seventeenth century, the English Duke of Buckingham built for himself a grand house on the western edge of the city of London. It now serves as the town house of the English queen, who, like her predecessors, also has several rural homes. Over its facade the duke had inscribed the words *Rus in Urbe*—"a bit of the countryside in the town." He, like many others both medieval and modern, was trying to make the best of both worlds, to bridge the gap between country and town. He might claim to have succeeded, even though the vast, park-like grounds of Buckingham Palace are today enclosed within the grip of main roads and the roar of traffic is never absent.

THE MAKING OF A MIDDLE CLASS

Both rich and poor migrated to the town, the former to add to their wealth by commercial activities and financial manipulation, the latter because towns offered the prospect of a livelihood at however humble a level. They continued to come from the early, formative years of the city until, by the end of the Middle Ages, more than 10 percent of the pop-

ulation of western Europe were dwelling in towns, and in some well-favored areas, such as Flanders, the percentage must have risen to twenty or more. Migration from country to town intensified in modern times, and, with industrial development in the nineteenth century, more than half the population of every town in Europe soon came to be living in a town.

The urban population was drawn from every social class, but its proportion varied from one part of Europe to another. "The noblem[a]n of Italy," wrote Giovanni Botero, "divideth his expense and endeavours part in the city, part in the country, but the greater part he bestows in the city. But the Frenchman employs all that he may wholly in the country, regarding the city little or nothing at all."³ Not entirely true, but nevertheless a perceptive observation. The town houses of the aristocracy had to be more compact in the congested Italian cities; they also had to be defensible. And so the Italians raised their slender towers a hundred feet and sometimes more above the level of the streets. In northern Europe the landed classes in general continued to live on their estates, where their fortified castles gradually gave way to the stately homes that survive today in their hundreds and are so often beyond the means of their owners to maintain. The balance of classes within the city thus varied from those in which an aristocratic class dominated, such as Florence, Siena, and Rome, to those which had drawn the bulk of their population from the overcrowded land, like Nuremberg, Cologne, and London. But whether predominantly aristocratic or plebeian or somewhere between the two, the city proved to be a social melting pot, and what came out in the end was the bourgeoisie.

Medieval social thought had conceived of society as built of three classes: the landowning, feudal, and military class, which protected the rest; the churchmen, who prayed for all; and last, the rural masses, on whose broad shoulders fell the task of supporting the other two. To these the bourgeoisie came to be added. Its very name suggests its origin in the town, "burg," or "borough." It was to become the fastest growing and the wealthiest of any division of society, and it was quick to make its influence felt at least in western and central Europe. King Edward I of England in 1295 brought the towns within the sphere of national government. Parliament, the king's legislative and advisory body, had hitherto consisted of those barons and lords who had received a "writ of summons," commanding their presence at the royal palace of Westmin-

ster or at any other place the king might designate. In that year Edward commanded each city, together with each of the forty or more counties that made up the land of England, to send two representatives to a parliament to be held at the palace of Westminster. This was the first English—or indeed European—parliament to be summoned, representative if not of the whole population then at least of three of its main social classes, the aristocratic and landowning class, the Church, and the city-dwelling and bourgeois. Thereafter, Parliament continued in England to be summoned at irregular intervals throughout the Middle Ages and early modern times until, toward the end of the seventeenth century, their meetings became more regular and their responsibilities greater. No king could henceforward evade or avoid the obligation to consult Parliament, since it became the law of the land that only Parliament could authorize the levying of taxation to pay for the machinery of government. Parliament divided in the course of time into two houses. One, representing the barons and the landholding class, became the Upper House or House of Lords, and to it were added the bishops and the abbots of at least the more important monasteries. The other, composed of the representatives of the towns and of the counties or shires, became the House of Commons. The latter came inevitably to be dominated by the representatives of the towns, since they were far more numerous than the “knights of the shires,” who could never have numbered more than about eighty.

It is true that King Edward and his successors were selective in their choice of the cities and towns which they commanded to send members to Parliament, and that they saw in the Commons a counter to the power and authority of the barons who made up the House of Lords. They could never have anticipated that in time the Commons, composed mainly of urban representatives, would dominate Parliament and in effect make law as well as authorize taxation, but such has now been the situation for more than many centuries. Today it is the towns, the bourgeoisie, which effectively control the destiny of England.

The summoning of the first or “Model” Parliament was an event of immense political importance, not only for Great Britain, but also for Europe and the rest of the world. From it derived the concept and the practice of democratic government. The earliest English parliaments were called more to advise the king than to make law and authorize taxation, though the latter functions crept in at an early date, because the Lords and Commons began to impose conditions and make demands, which

the king sometimes found difficult to refuse or to resist if he was to receive the revenues he needed. Democratization was a long, slow process in which the towns, through their representatives, played a leading role. In the words of the poet Tennyson:

Freedom slowly broadens down
From precedent to precedent.⁴

And this we owe to the rise of the towns and the development of a bourgeois class, sufficiently wealthy and educated to play a role in government. If Westminster is the mother of parliaments throughout the world, then it was the towns that produced the personnel of the first and subsequent parliaments and gave its members the skills and the will to shape politics in the interests of the people.

The bourgeoisie, as it took shape in the cities of late medieval Europe, became a distinct class like the aristocracy, distinguished by its wealth, its occupations, and its level of education, all of which allowed it to participate in government. Its degree of freedom also set it apart from those who labored in the fields; it also separated itself from the urban underclass, which played no role in city government. To keep to the English example, the right to vote was, until the reforms of the nineteenth century, restricted to the moneyed and educated within the towns. However, the English bourgeoisie was unique in Europe, at least before modern times, in being able to send representatives to a national parliament and thus to participate in national government. The only other cities to acquire comparable privileges were those of the Swiss Confederation, in which a dozen cities each constituted a separate and largely self-governing city-state or Canton. In central Europe the Reichsstädte, or "Free Imperial Cities," also achieved virtual independence, but, though they formed leagues among themselves for their mutual protection, they never achieved a common representation in an assembly of the German Empire until modern times. There were also occasions when some French cities were consulted individually by the king of France. It must not be assumed, however, that burgesses at the time greatly relished these rights and privileges. They were costly. Members of the English Parliament were not paid for their services until the nineteenth century. They came to Westminster at their own or their city's expense, and it was to the financial advantage of the cities that parliamentary sessions should be both

infrequent and short-lived. In retrospect it seems strange that medieval towns should have objected to the political process by which they achieved power and their representatives came to share in the government of their country.

Neither Edward I nor his successors ever prescribed how the urban representatives were to be chosen. We can be sure that, at least during the Middle Ages, there was nothing in the least resembling an election; there was never a group of candidates competing for the honor of representing their community. In all probability those who would represent the town at the next session of Parliament at Westminster would have been chosen by the city's council, and some would probably have made the journey to London under protest. Serving their city by attending Parliament was not at the time seen as a privilege or as an honor. Attitudes began to change, however, when members of Parliament found that through their office they could remedy grievances and influence public policy and the legislative process. Such is the nature of progress: the reinterpretation of old institutions, earlier legislation, and practices. It was like pouring the new wine of democracy into the outworn bottles of absolutism and feudalism.

Every town, as we have seen, had a controlling council, which had been prescribed in its founding charter and subsequent confirmatory deeds, but not all of them were represented in Parliament. How were parliamentary boroughs chosen? The king and his advisers invited—one might even say commanded—certain boroughs each to send two representatives to the gathering at Westminster. The king probably chose towns most likely to comply with his demands. Some were minute; a few had even ceased to have any semblance to a town. These were the so-called rotten boroughs, which, early in the nineteenth century, lost the privileged role they had acquired in the Middle Ages.

And who chose the men who were to represent the town in the Parliament at Westminster? The electors may have been the council or the leading figures in some or all of the guilds or those who managed the wards or civil divisions of the town. The system, we may be sure, was not democratic as we would understand the term today. Women could not participate in any way until the twentieth century, nor could most of the men until the nineteenth century. The importance of the medieval institution of Parliament and of the medieval practice of summoning representatives of the towns lies in the fact that the manifold systems of

urban government were all capable of modification, of extension, of adjustment, so that they could slowly be made more truly democratic. The United States were far more democratic from the moment when the Constitution was ratified in 1788, but this was only because they had the British example, with all its imperfections of which the founding fathers were well aware, to guide them.

It was many centuries before the bourgeoisie had established itself in most European cities, and not until the nineteenth century did most come to be represented in some kind of national assembly. These pages have been given to the political experience of English, later of British,⁵ cities and towns because it was largely through them that parliamentary representation was shown to be both effective and possible. Edward I's Parliament of 1295 was indeed the mother of parliaments.

CHARITABLE WORKS

It was characteristic of the urban middle class that it was able to accumulate capital, something which was beyond the capacity of both the rural, feudal class and the agricultural masses. To the Marxist historian this arose from the surplus value of business activities, the sum by which the value of products or of services exceeded the cost of either making or performing them. The urban merchant or craftsman always acquired, or at least hoped to acquire, a surplus value from his professional pursuits. His chief problem was what to do with it. Investment at interest, or usury, as it was called, was forbidden by canon law. Of course, the Jews could lend at interest, and Christians could on occasion make use of their services without any hurt to their souls. As for the Jews, in the eyes of the Christians, they had no souls to compromise. The middle class sometimes devised ways of evading the usury law, and in doing so were sometimes aided by the canonists themselves. Interest might be allowed, for example, if there was risk in the venture on which the money had been gambled. Shakespeare's *The Merchant of Venice* is essentially a play about the nature of usury. Metal or coins, it was said, were barren; they could not breed or increase their value: "for when did friendship take / A breed for barren metal of his friend?"⁶ Such medieval concepts were, however, being abandoned when Shakespeare wrote his plays.

Nevertheless, there were no sure ways of investing capital and of obtaining a regular income from it. There was no stock exchange in which

to invest, and most opportunities that did exist were accompanied by great risks. Well-to-do members of the bourgeoisie were in fact left with three courses of action during the late Middle Ages: investment in land, good living and the purchase of *objets d'art*, and investment in works of charity or religion. The land market was not at this time as fully developed as it later became, though many a merchant became a substantial landowner. To do so, however, usually meant deserting the city to live in the countryside and to join the society of the local gentry, a step not all urban patricians were prepared to take.

The gratification of personal desires assumed many forms. Clothing became more elaborate and more extravagant toward the end of the Middle Ages. To wear the latest fashion in style and material became a mark of status, a form of conspicuous consumption. So common did this practice become that some cities initiated sumptuary legislation that restricted certain articles of clothing to the patrician class. The same went for diet. The consumption of elaborate meals and exotic foods became a mark of class, and those who ate well wanted others, including their peers and those who could not afford to do so, to know how extravagantly they were indulging themselves. The twelfth-century writer Alexander Neckham urged his wealthy readers to allow the smells from their kitchens to circulate beyond their walls so that those less fortunate would know how well they were faring.

There was also an expenditure, which increased as the Middle Ages progressed, on personal memorials, mementos, art objects, and other ornaments. From the fourteenth century onward wealthy patricians had themselves commemorated in portraits. Albrecht Durer was a prominent artist in this regard, having painted the portraits of the patricians of Nuremberg as well as the portrait of Anton Fugger (see p. 109). Nowhere was the employment of artists in this way more important than in Italy, where both urban patricians and the rural aristocracy had themselves memorialized in this way. This practice ensured profitable employment for painters and sculptors and ensured a sound economic basis for the art of the Renaissance.

The expenditure on personal art and art created for the home merged with the expenditure on art created for the Church. Artists were employed to create funeral monuments and to decorate chapels and chantries erected for the celebration of masses for the souls of the deceased. One rarely if ever finds a will that does not bequeath money for

some church-related activity. The doctrine of purgatory had evolved in the twelfth century, together with its corollary that its pains could be alleviated, if not wholly removed, by masses sung on behalf of the deceased. And so chapels were founded in their hundreds, each of them endowed with enough land to support a priest who would serve in it and perform the rituals.

This was, of course, an unproductive investment, since its yield was supposedly the welfare of the founder's soul. Yet very large amounts of urban capital were diverted into this spiritual activity. The second outlet for capital was socially more desirable. Public-spirited members of the bourgeoisie established hospitals and schools and left money for such charitable enterprises as apprenticing orphans to a craft and providing dowries for impoverished maidens. Few towns were without an endowed hospital. The hospital did little by way of curing the sick, but it provided a home and a very modest income for the infirm and aged, for whom society had made no other provision. Many such hospitals, each with its modest endowment in urban real estate, survive today, especially in Great Britain, and still perform the functions their founders had prescribed for them more than five centuries ago.

Of the greatest social value in the long run was the foundation of schools. In the late Middle Ages the bourgeoisie was beginning to appreciate the importance of education, not merely the liturgical education that cathedral and monastic schools provided, but more practical skills as well. Townsmen were beginning to keep accounts and to communicate their orders to merchants in distant cities and other countries; double-entry bookkeeping was developing, and there was a growing demand for literate employees. The newly founded schools taught primarily Latin, the language in which most international correspondence was carried on, but the pupils who had learned to write in Latin could readily turn their skills to English or French or whatever was the current language of business.

Investment in education most often took the form of the founding and endowment of schools for the very limited purpose of teaching Latin grammar. But the need arose for schools that specialized in other fields, notably medicine and the law. The medical traditions of the classical world had passed to the Arabs through the schools at Alexandria and other cities of the Middle East, and from here they were returned to Europe by the Arab invaders. One of the first European schools of medi-

cine was at Salerno in southern Italy, close to areas infiltrated by Arab culture. At about the same time the study of law, both Roman and canon (the rapidly evolving law of the Church), was established in some of the cities of central and northern Italy, Bologna preeminent among them. In each case a teacher gained a reputation for his scholarship and teaching ability and soon attracted a body of students. Hostelries then appeared to accommodate the students. This development inevitably occurred in the larger and more important cities. In the course of time both students and teachers acquired some kind of organization, which in some degree was borrowed from that of the contemporary craft and professional guilds; teachers and students very broadly replicated the relations of master craftsmen and apprentices. One college at Cambridge was actually founded by a local gild and still today bears in its name the dedication of that gild. The student bodies then began to receive help from both the aristocracy and the patricians because they could in various ways assist their benefactors. Among the latter were churchmen, especially bishops and their more highly placed servants, who desired to see the number of theologians and canon lawyers increase. These institutions then began to grant degrees to those who had completed the course of studies in their schools, even though they were in origin merely licenses to teach. At this point we can think of these institutions as universities in the modern sense.

The earliest universities in Europe had emerged in Italian cities in the late twelfth and early thirteenth centuries. The idea of the university spread. It reached Paris, where a number of schools, some of them attached to Notre Dame, the cathedral of Paris, emerged. Students from Paris reached Oxford in the late twelfth century, and there established schools similar to those they had known in Paris. Oxford students migrated to Cambridge where, by the middle years of the thirteenth century, there was a similar organization.

The university came later to Spain and central Europe. In Spain it had to wait until the Moors had been driven back to the south of the country, Andalusia, where they had first settled and where their imprint has been the strongest. The first university north of the Alps was at Prague, where the Emperor Charles IV established it on the basis of less formal student gatherings. The Charles University at Prague was closely followed by those of Krakow, Vienna, Heidelberg, and Cologne. The University of Leipzig was established by the German students from the

Charles University at Prague who had left in the face of opposition from Czech students. By 1250 there were some twenty-five universities in Europe, all of them in prominent cities whose importance and prestige they increased by their presence. Many had papal authorization; all were in some way attached to the Church. A few had specialized fields of study, like medicine at Montpellier in France and canon law at Bologna, but most pursued the *Studium Generale*, or “General Studies,” which, despite its name, was restricted to fields related to theology and philosophy.

URBAN PRIDE

Medieval Englishmen may not have cherished their obligation to be represented in Parliament, but they demonstrated in many ways their pride in their city. They extolled its beauty, its amenities, even the quality of the fish in its river. They praised its buildings, coupling this with remarks on the beauty of its womenfolk. Such writing became a genre in the Italian cities and was imitated in other parts of Europe. Above all they invested money in their city. In rural areas the parish church was the foremost object of pride. Parishioners, when alive, planned its expansion far beyond the needs of the community, and after death they bequeathed money to replace a window or to add a statue. So in the towns the citizens invested in town walls, towers, and gates. The town gate was that part of the town the visitor first encountered, and for that reason it was often highly decorated. Today many European cities, such as Prague, for example, still retain gate-towers, which in their size and decoration far exceed the needs of urban defense. When the king of England authorized the building of the town walls of Norwich, they were, he said, for the beautification as well as the defense of the city.⁷

THE ARCHITECTURAL HERITAGE

One of the ways this pride in the city manifested itself was in the townspeople’s willingness to erect buildings and monuments for its beautification. Pausanias, who wrote a travel guide of the second century c.e., had no doubt about the nature of a city. It had to be resplendent with public buildings and facilities, serving the intellectual and leisure activities of its citizens as much as their commercial and economic needs. In this the medieval city reverted to the classical tradition of Greece and

Rome. It was on the classical model that the medieval city was built, and it became the object of a similar pride. People identified with their cities and looked upon them with a kind of reverential regard. They were prepared to expend much of their wealth on public buildings and they commissioned writings that showed them, not without a certain judicious exaggeration, to the best advantage. Such a work was the paean of praise in honor of the city of Chester (England), written by Lucian, a monk of the local Benedictine monastery.⁸ Felix Fabri, a German humanist of the late fifteenth century, tells us how the rebuilding of the cathedral of Ulm, his native city in south Germany, was begun in 1377. Foundations were dug and piles driven. Then the foundation stone was laid with great ceremony, and "not by workmen, but by the august members of the [city] Council, some of them turning the great wheel,⁹ others guiding the ropes, . . . and all this was done most seriously while the people prayed, the monks chanted, and the town band played. . . . And when the first stone had been laid the Lord Mayor opened his purse, took out a number of coins and adorned the hewn surface with 100 glittering gold pieces. When he had done so the other patricians stepped down, each in his turn, and covered the stone with gold and silver, and the men of the people did the same. And so, on this day, was collected a great fund for the building of the new church."¹⁰ What is significant is not the amount of money contributed, but the fact that it was the patricians, not the Church dignitaries, who were foremost in the undertaking. In Ulm they were lavish in their support of the city's outstanding public building, but the same or similar activities were taking place in all large cities, in many of intermediate size and importance and even in some of the smallest. Ulm was not the only cathedral whose construction owed more to the lay patriciate than to the ecclesiastical hierarchy itself. The cathedrals of Cologne and Strasbourg were also built in part at least to flatter the vanity of their rich citizens. The role of the city's council, itself made up largely of the richer citizens, was dominant no less in the chief parish churches of the town. In city after city we find that the city council appointed the priest and paid for the construction of the more important parish churches, and, as if in return, used the church for its gild ceremonies and other formal occasions.

Scarcely less important in the eyes of its citizens were the town's secular buildings. Throughout Europe the management of a town's affairs was becoming more complex. There were records to be kept, taxes to be

collected and accounted for, and contracts to be drawn up and enforced. These activities all demanded office space and a secretariat or chancery. There had to be a meeting place for the council. Warehouses were needed for the storage of the grain the town held for an emergency. How towns faced up to these requirements varied from one town to another, but in most there was a town hall, a *hotel de ville*, Rathaus, or Ratusz, splendidly decorated and appointed, since it was an expression of corporate civic pride. Many have survived from the late Middle Ages, among them the ornate town hall of Brussels, built during the years 1401–1456, which today still looks out over the spacious marketplace. Town halls proliferated across medieval Europe, some of them as spikingly Gothic as any medieval cathedral, as in the Ratusz of Wroclaw; others massively utilitarian, like that at Torun, built like a fortress to safeguard and protect the city's interests. The town hall represented the aspirations of the urban bourgeoisie to govern itself and to manage its own affairs. It was a challenge to the rural, feudal classes; it made a statement that the future lay with its members.

The argument of this chapter has been that the city can exist only by means of its manufacturing, commercial, and service industries; that these industries generate a surplus and that this surplus in turn both supported a leisured class and permitted those who enjoyed it to indulge their taste in art of all kinds. This included, given the prevailing spiritual inclinations of the age, church art and religious observances. It also embraced "high art," so that we must see in the urban patricians not only the source of the soaring spire of Ulm cathedral, the highest but not necessarily the most beautiful in Europe, but also the inspiration of much of the great art of the Renaissance and seventeenth century. The artistic and cultural achievement of western civilization, like its political legacy, was by and large the achievement of its cities and towns.

NOTES

1. Gideon Sjoberg, *The Preindustrial City: Past and Present* (Glencoe, IL: The Free Press, 1960), p. 1.

2. Wladyslaw Stanislaw Reymont's novel *The Promised Land* is concerned with the migration of peasants from an overcrowded land to the newly industrializing city of Lodz in Poland.

3. Giovanni Botero, "A Treatise Concerning the Causes of the Magnificency and Greatness of Cities," in *The Reason of State*, trans. P. J. Waley, D. P. Waley, and Robert Peterson (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1956), pp. 259–60.
4. Alfred, Lord Tennyson, "You ask me why, though ill at ease" (1842).
5. The terms England, Britain, Great Britain, and United Kingdom each have precise but different meanings. "England" denotes the area ruled from London during the Middle Ages; the term "Britain" is used for the whole island, including Wales and Scotland; "Great Britain" and "United Kingdom" are used for the island of Great Britain together with Northern Ireland, and "British Isles" is the inclusive term for the United Kingdom together with the Irish Republic.
6. William Shakespeare, *The Merchant of Venice*, in *The Complete Works of Shakespeare*, ed. David Bevington (New York and Reading, MA: Longman, 1997), 3.1.131–32.
7. William Hudson and John C. Tingey, eds., *The Records of the City of Norwich*, 2 vols. (Norwich: Jarrold & Sons, 1906–10), 1:xli–xlii.
8. Lucianus, *Extracts from the MS. "Liber Luciani de Laude Cestrie,"* *Written about the Year 1195 and now in the Bodleian Library, Oxford*, ed. Margerie Venables Taylor, The Record Society for the Publication of Original Documents Relating to Lancashire and Cheshire, vol. 64 (Edinburgh and London: Record Society, 1912).
9. The great wheel must have been the medieval crane, in effect a kind of man engine in which the motive force was provided by men "walking" inside a giant wooden wheel.
10. From Felix Fabri's "Description of Swabia," qtd. in Gerald Strauss, *Sixteenth Century Germany: Its Topography and Topographers* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1959), p. 77.

BIOGRAPHIES AND PLACES

Augsburg and the Fuggers

The family of Fugger typified the great trading and financial houses of late medieval Europe. It derived from a petty craftsman living at Graben, near Augsburg in south Germany. Augsburg was an imperial city, subject only to the German emperor, a fact that gave its citizens a greater freedom of action than those of lesser cities. The earliest known members of the family moved to Augsburg, only a few miles away. There they prospered and turned from the simple craft of weaving, which they had pursued in their home village, to the vastly more profitable business of trading and banking.

Jakub Fugger established the fortunes of the family in the first half of the fifteenth century. He died in 1469 and was succeeded by seven sons, most of whom entered the family business. For five generations the Fugger family dominated trade in Augsburg and much of south Germany. Then their business began to decline. The commercial revolution that resulted from the opening up of a sea route from western Europe to Asia and from the discovery of the New World greatly affected commercial firms in central Europe. Augsburg ceased to be the northern focus of a trading route that crossed the Alps from Germany to the Mediterranean Sea and the Middle East. Trade passed to the port cities of western Europe: Antwerp, Amsterdam, and London. Furthermore, the Thirty Years' War (1618–1648), which ravaged the whole of central Europe, interrupted their trade. Finally, the several lines within the vast Fugger family began one by one to die out, so that by the mid-seventeenth century the Fuggers' commercial empire had ceased to exist.

The fortunes of the Fuggers had been based first on the crafts and commerce of the Augsburg region, but in the mid-fifteenth century they began to see that profit was to be made from the mines—mostly for silver—which were beginning to open up in the Austrian province of Tyrol. This led on to the exploitation of mines, still largely under Austrian rule, in the province of Slovakia, then called upper Hungary. The Fuggers at first looked for silver, which they coined and passed into circulation. The silver from mines at Jachimov in Bohemia (now part of the Czech Republic) was minted to give coins known as Taler, from which we get the word “dollar.”

From silver they turned to copper, which occurred more abundantly in the mountains of Slovakia. Copper was beginning to be used extensively in the manufacture of bronze, from which the cannon (just beginning to come into military use) were cast. The Fuggers were thus among the very first people to make money from the armaments trade. The many small towns of Slovakia, which continue today to show the attractive Renaissance architecture of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, are evidence of the activities of the Fuggers more than five centuries ago.

Jakub Fugger and his successors accumulated vast fortunes not only for themselves, but also for the dukes of Austria, on whose lands they were particularly active. Jakub was ennobled by the German emperor, himself an Austrian Habsburg, and became the banker or chief financial agent of the House of Habsburg. Like big corporations today, the Fuggers spread their interests into other fields. Their mining activities were extended to the mercury (cinnabar) mines of Spain. They invested their profits in land and acquired large personal estates. They also went, on behalf of the Habsburgs, into land management. This brought them into close personal contact with the German princes and gave them entrance to the aristocracy of both Austria and Germany.

Like wealthy urban merchants elsewhere in Europe, the Fuggers undertook charitable works and became patrons of art. They built the Fuggerei in Augsburg, a quarter of the city established to house large numbers of the laboring poor. Other members of the family became collectors of classical manuscripts, authors of historical treatises, and advisers and confidants of the princes of Bavaria. The churches of St. Anna and St. Ulrich in Augsburg itself became the burial places of many members of this extended family, and their family mansion, the *Fuggerhaus*, still stands within the old city, whose fortunes they had assured.

The Cinque Ports

Urban leagues were not a feature of Germany alone. There was an important association of port towns in England, the Cinque (pronounced “sink”) Ports. In origin there were, as their name implies, five of them. Their purpose was not, as in the German urban leagues, the self-protection of their individual members, but rather the protection of this vulnerable coastline, which lay opposite and in places in sight of the shores of continental Europe. The defense of this stretch of coast was a major preoccupation of the English—later the British—government from at least the fifteenth century until the threatened German invasion of 1940.

This urban association began to take shape in the thirteenth century, and from its early days embraced the five small port towns of Dover, Hastings, Hythe, Romney, and Sandwich (Figure 25). To these were subsequently added, though without any change in the name of the group, the towns of Rye and Winchelsea.

These towns were not seen as bastions, protecting the coastline from invasion by enemy forces. Most had no defensive walls, though castles were built at Dover and Hastings. They were, rather, schools of seamanship and places where the broad-beamed, sail-driven, wooden ships of the time could be built, launched, and maintained. They were thus highly specialized towns. At no great distance in their hinterlands lay the forested region known as the Weald (from the German “Wald,” meaning forest). We must think of the great oaks being dragged down to the coast, cut up and fabricated into “cogs,” caravels, and other types of ships.

This urban association was united under the Lord Warden of the Cinque Ports. He was usually a seafaring man and was appointed by the English crown. His office still continues, but is today wholly honorific, and he resides whenever he wishes to be present amid his “ports,” in Walmer Castle, a fortress built by King Henry VIII about 1540 to provide further coastal defense against the French.

Among the duties of the Lord Warden was to preside over the Court of Admiralty for the Cinque Ports. This was an important and powerful body, which coordinated the activities of the individual ports and settled the disputes that inevitably arose between them. The national obligations of the Cinque Ports declined from the seventeenth century. Shipbuilding ceased, and the protection of the realm passed to ships larger

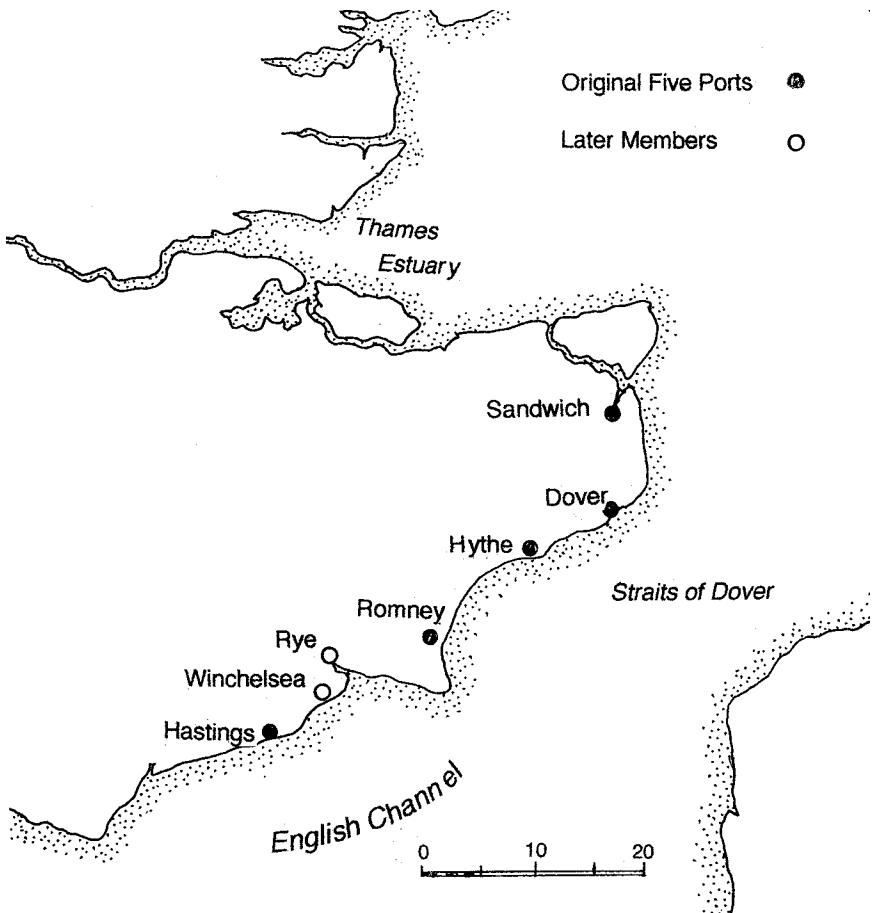


Figure 25. The Cinque Ports, which had the function of guarding the coast of southeast England. They were superseded in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries by a series of masonry fortresses.

than those which could be accommodated within the small harbors of the ports themselves. Most of these once important port towns declined almost to insignificance. Today only Dover remains a significant port. The waterway of Romney has silted; Old Winchelsea was overwhelmed by a surge of the sea in the late thirteenth century and was rebuilt a mile or two inland. No ship could today reach the town of Tye, which nevertheless still retains its old world charm. The rest are merely coastal resorts, coming alive only during the short holiday season in summer.

The Fair Towns of Champagne

Many of the hundreds of charters granted to towns in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries conferred on them the right to hold a fair. A fair was a simple, almost primitive, means of doing business. Traders, carrying their goods by cart or pack animal, would gather at agreed places and at prearranged times and do business with one another. It was face-to-face trading. The merchants knew one another. They recognized those who were trustworthy and those who were not, and they had their own rough and ready means of settling the disputes that inevitably arose between them—the courts of “pie-powder,” *pieds poudres*, or “dusty feet,” whose name suggests the informality with which they were conducted.

No one knows when or exactly how that series of fairs arose that made the plains of Champagne the hub of European commerce during the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries. There had been periodic gatherings of merchants here as early as the fifth century c.e., and it appears that some of the early monasteries encouraged such meetings on the occasions of their dedicatory feasts. There was, for example, a fair at the Parisian abbey of Saint-Denis in the seventh century. It lasted no less than four weeks and attracted merchants from all parts of western Europe. Fairs were then established in the cities of Flanders and handled the cloth, which was already becoming a specialty of the region.

But no region offered greater advantages than Champagne, the extensive region lying to the east of Paris. Across it ran the most used routes between Italy and Flanders. Above all, the counts of Champagne maintained order and, in this turbulent age, gave shelter and protection to traders and travelers. There were numerous markets spread among the town of Champagne, handling the produce of their local regions. Four of them acquired a wider reputation and developed a trade with more distant parts. They were Troyes, capital of the counts of Champagne, Provins, Lagny, and Bar-sur-Aube. Each had some local advantage. Troyes itself derived from the Roman tribal capital of Augustobona and had already become the seat of a bishop. Lagny lay on the navigable river Marne and close to Paris. Both Bar and Provins had the advantage of much-used highways. The Church also contributed to the rise of the fairs by encouraging and protecting merchants, so that by the mid-twelfth century, all four fairs were in existence, and each was building a continent-wide reputation for the volume of trade conducted here.

The four towns adapted to the regular influx of traders, with carts and baggage-trains and their demands for food and accommodation. In each of them certain quarters were for a period in each year given over to their activities. Stalls were erected in the streets; warehouses were built for storage; and an infrastructure of transportation, legal, and financial services was created. At the same time the fairs generated their own underworld of thieves, prostitutes, and pimps.

The number of fairs increased and their dates became fixed and were rigidly observed. In the end a cycle of fairs evolved. There were six, more or less evenly spaced throughout the year. Two were held at Troyes and two at Provins while the lesser towns of Bar-sur-Aube and Lagny each had one. The duration of each fair was about six weeks. During the first week the merchants were gathering, setting up their stalls and getting to know others who had come. This was followed by periods devoted to specialized trades: cloth, leather goods, and so forth. The fairs ended with a period during which accounts were settled. Money did not change hands during the main part of the fair. The traders themselves had come from all parts of Europe, and they used every currency that was in general circulation. Money did not pass from one to another with every transaction. Instead, a record was kept, and a balance was struck at the end, when many transactions were found to have cancelled one another out. Little remained to be settled by the payment of coin, which was just as well because there was always a shortage of minted money.

By the end of the twelfth century, the fair towns had become adapted to the routine of short periods of intense activity, each followed by longer periods, when damage and losses were repaired, and the townsfolk prepared for the next influx of noisy, undisciplined, and grasping traders. The system reached its peak during the thirteenth century, but by 1300 its importance was beginning to decline. The volume of trade had grown to the point at which it could no longer be transported and handled at the fair towns. Varieties and qualities of woven and leather goods had become standardized, so that a merchant in distant Italy had only to order a dozen of this or of that cloth for the order to be understood and filled. It was becoming as simple as the mail-order business of today, and the necessary financial devices were developed in the shape of bills of exchange—the medieval equivalent of checks—for making payments. The face-to-face gatherings of merchants were no longer necessary, and the fairs of Champagne gradually became less important in the commerce of Europe.

The decline of the fairs was not wholly due to changes in business methods. The government of the County of Champagne, which had carefully nurtured them, passed to the French crown, which was less careful in protecting them. Civil wars deterred merchants from visiting the fairs, and in 1312 the first of the Venetian galleys conveyed merchandise between the ports of the Mediterranean and those of northwest Europe. The final blow was struck by the outbreak of the Hundred Years' War in 1337.

The Hanseatic League

Of all the associations of towns that arose during the Middle Ages, the German Hanse was by far the most important and the most successful.¹ It was, to quote its earliest title, a community of the merchants of the German empire frequenting Gotland. The term *Hanse*, which was later applied to it, was a Middle English word denoting a society or against the imperial frontier, where wide rivers and extensive marshland had given it some protection against the barbarian peoples beyond. It had been little developed under the Romans and contained few roads and no city of any great significance. It did, however, produce a certain rough cloth from the wool of the sheep which grazed the marshland, and, made up into garments, the cloth gained a certain reputation during the Dark Ages as *pallia Fresonica* (Frisian cloaks). It was on this slender basis that one of the great cloth manufacturers of the Middle Ages was built.

In the sixth century this began to change. The Germanic Franks pressed "company," and the Hanseatic League was just that: a rather informal and fluctuating group of merchants doing business in the Baltic Sea. The island of Gotland, with its chief town of Visby, was then the focus of their activities and their chief meeting place.

The merchants of Gotland, a large island in the Baltic Sea, were heirs to the Vikings who had dominated the Baltic region from before the eighth century. From Visby their commerce had extended eastward to Novgorod and thence up the Russian rivers and down the Volga to the Caspian and Black Seas. Here they encountered the merchants of the Byzantine Empire and did business in its capital city of Byzantium. These Viking traders were known as the "Rus," and it was from their settlements along the headwaters of the Volga that the first Russian state was to emerge. It was by the route they had marked out that oriental silks and

spices as well as the Byzantine gold coin—the Bezant—became known in the West. At the same time loot from English monasteries passed through the emporium of Visby to Russia and the Middle East.

By the eleventh century this trade had declined, and the Vikings had ceased to threaten the coastlands of western Europe, but a small-scale commerce continued between Scandinavia and the eastern Baltic region. Its terminus was the Russian city of Novgorod where merchants established a trading base. Their penetration of the hinterland was, however, obstructed by the Prussian and Lithuanian tribes. In the twelfth century, conditions were beginning to change. German settlement was advancing slowly along the south coast of the Baltic, first to the Elbe, then the Oder, and last into the basin of the Vistula. Land was being cleared and brought under the plow. Towns were founded and commerce developed along the rivers that discharged to the Baltic Sea. In 1143 the town of Lubeck was founded and within a very short time its merchants were participating in Baltic trade alongside those of Visby.

The future was to be with the men of Lubeck and of the towns along the south Baltic coast. They had advantages which allowed them to usurp the role previously played by those of Gotland. In the first place, their hinterland was developing and becoming more populous. Its expanding agriculture generated a surplus of grain which was needed in the West, and its forests yielded timber and furs.

A further advantage arose when the Order of German Knights, having abandoned its role as protector of the Holy Places in the Middle East, looked for other peoples and realms to conquer. They were invited by a Polish prince, Conrad of Mazowsze, to turn their energies against the Prussian and Lithuanian tribes. Their success was followed by the rise of towns in the eastern and southeastern Baltic lands, and this in turn contributed to the trade of the Baltic ports.

Within the councils of the ill-organized community of Gotland merchants, the men of North Germany and of Lubeck in particular soon gained the upper hand. The earlier trade, which had been across Russia to the Middle East, diminished and eventually disappeared as the savage Tartar peoples—the Golden Horde—came to control the whole steppe region. It was replaced by the newly developing trade with Poland and the Baltic lands. The change within the Hanse, as we must begin to call this rudimentary organization, came when it was decided that disputes between member cities should be settled in Lubeck rather than

Visby and that the Hanse's chest, or treasury, should also be transferred there.

The Hanse was a loose association, never a formal league. At any given time, its membership consisted of those cities and towns that had sent representatives to its most recent assembly of *Hansatag*, which met at irregular intervals at Lubeck. The Hanse had no constitution, or regular meeting place, though this role tended to be assumed by Lubeck. Its rules were merely the decisions reached at its *Hansatage*. Yet it clearly had a policy, which its members pursued with vigor and considerable success, and that was the achievement of commercial profit. It negotiated agreements with territorial princes, and even made war on the kingdom of Denmark in protection of its right to send its ships through the Danish channels into the North Sea.

Membership fluctuated, but was generally between seventy and eighty. It included rich and powerful city-states, such as Lubeck, Rostock, and Stralsund on the Baltic and Hamburg and Cologne in the West, as well as many small towns of minimal commercial and political importance. The league also did business with towns such as London, Bruges, and Novgorod, which were outside its direct control. But it was able to negotiate treaties with the king of England, the Count of Flanders, and the prince of Moscow and was allowed to set up "counters" or *Kontor* in their respective countries. These served at the same time as domiciles for German merchants, as warehouses for their goods, and as places of business. Their *Kontor* in London was known as the *Stahlhof*, or Steelyard. There exist today in the small English town of King's Lynn considerable remains of the late medieval *Kontor* of the German Hanse.

Together with its most distant *Kontors*, the league's membership was vast at the height of its prosperity. During the fifteenth century, the league's power and importance began to decline. Territorial states ceased to tolerate the pretensions of these autonomous cities, and in some cases the privileges of the *Kontors* were withdrawn. The Novgorod *Kontor* was closed by the Russian tsar in 1494; in London the *Kontor's* privileges were terminated by Queen Elizabeth I (1558–1603). In Flanders, Bruges ceased to be accessible to the ships of the Hanse. Above all, the opening of sea routes to the Middle East and Asia undercut the Hansards' trade, while English and Danish merchants themselves encroached on the Baltic sphere. The wars of the seventeenth century in central and northern Europe were the final blow. A diminishing number of cities maintained the

fiction of the Hanseatic League into the eighteenth century, and its last assets were liquidated early in the nineteenth.

The Laws of Breteuil

Breteuil is today a small town in upper Normandy. In the eleventh and twelfth centuries, however, Breteuil played a significant role in the urban development of northwestern Europe. About 1060, William, Duke of Normandy and the future William I of England, built a castle here to protect his dukedom from enemies to the north and placed it in the charge of his cousin, William FitzOsbern. A town then grew up in the shadow of the castle, and was in the course of time granted a charter of liberties. We do not know when this occurred, nor has a copy of the charter survived, but the liberties it granted to the men of Breteuil were to become the model for the charters that some of Duke William's followers were to grant in England, Wales, and Ireland.

The stages in this process have been reconstructed in a series of papers written by Mary Bateson more than century ago.² Roger, the second son of the first castellan of Breteuil, also known as Roger of Breteuil, followed Duke William to England, fought at Hastings (1066), and was rewarded by the grant of extensive lands taken from the defeated Anglo-Saxons. Among these possessions were lands along the border—the Marches—between England and Wales. It was here that Roger of Breteuil, alive to the advantages, both military and monetary, of the possession of boroughs, gave urban privileges to the settlements that had grown up beneath the castles he had founded. It is likely that the only urban privileges with which Roger was familiar were those his father had granted to his French hometown. Among the towns which thus came to be endowed with the Laws of Breteuil was Hereford, which was already the seat of an Anglo-Saxon bishop. Domesday Book, which was compiled in 1086, clearly states that Hereford enjoyed the *leges et consuetudines quae sunt . . . in bretuill* (the laws and customs which prevail in Breteuil).

At about the same time a castle was built and a town established at Rhuddlan in north Wales, but also within the Welsh Marches. Of it Domesday states that it possessed the laws and customs of "Hereford and Breteuil." More than a century later the town of Shrewsbury was stated to be governed *per legem Bretoll* (according to the law of Breteuil). The laws and customs of Breteuil were also adopted (by what agency we do

not know) in towns as far from the Welsh Marches as the English midlands, the southwestern peninsula of England, and Ireland, where, a century after the Norman Conquest of England, their descendants were striving to subdue the Irish. Altogether there were seventeen towns in Great Britain that claimed to follow the “laws” of Breteuil, together with eight more that may well have done so. A dozen towns in Wales derived their “liberties” from the model FitzOsbern had brought from France.

What then were those “laws” that had proved to be so popular and so convenient? This we do not know, since none of the confirmatory charters have survived. Bateson, however, made a valiant effort to reconstruct them by tracing the common elements in the urban practices of these towns during the late Middle Ages. It appears that the original Laws of Breteuil were especially notable in one way. They were generous; they set out to attract settlers. The burgage plots were large; amerce-ments, or fines, were low; permission was granted for citizens to take wood from the forests belonging to the lord for building and heating their homes.

The territorial, feudal lords were evidently competing for settlers who would come and occupy the plots in their new towns. They were needed not only to pay market tolls and burgage rents to their lord, but also to provision the castle and to serve its garrison, small though this may have been. “The lord,” in the words of Bateson, “offered as a bait a liberty which men are seeking; the men who care to accept the grant, who accept it with every security legal forms can give, will strive to defend it from all encroachments.”³ From this contract, over a period of many centuries, emerged the self-governing town of the late Middle Ages and modern times.

Ludlow, England, and Kalisz, Poland: A Contrast

Ludlow lies in the Welsh Border, that area of rare beauty, partly in England, partly in Wales, which was fought over by the two countries for centuries. Ludlow is therefore a defended town, founded by the Norman conquerors in the twelfth century. Its nucleus was a castle, founded in all probability by a local lord, William de Lacy, shortly before 1100. It crowned a steep bluff, overlooking the river Teme and facing into Wales, while to the east lay a flat-topped ridge over which the town itself was to spread.⁴

The castle appears to have been built of masonry almost from the start,

with a tall tower that served as a strong entrance to its inner courtyard. Work continued intermittently on the castle throughout the Middle Ages. A fine dining hall was built on the most protected side of the court, in which a circular castle chapel was built freestanding, and domestic buildings continued to be added throughout the remaining years of the Middle Ages, when Ludlow became the “capital” of the Marches or Borderland. Not until the eighteenth century did the castle cease to be inhabited.

South of the castle (Figure 26) and reaching down to the river, the small settlement of Dinham developed. It evidently prospered and was followed by the more regularly planned town that came to extend eastward over the low ridge. On the map today, Ludlow shows a regular layout, with its streets intersecting more or less at right angles. It is difficult not to see in this the work of the lord of the castle who created the street pattern, provided for a market area, and aligned the long, narrow burgrave plots. On the highest ground a church was built, occupying, together with its cemetery, a whole block. Last, sometime in the thirteenth century, a wall was built to enclose the whole and to link it with the walls of the castle, together with no less than seven fortified gates.

Castle and town together occupied a strongly defensive site, though their strength was never put to the test. Wales was conquered by the English late in the thirteenth century, and Ludlow became a peaceful market town, doing business with the fertile and productive region that surrounded it.

The town must have been granted a charter, probably during the twelfth century, but it has been lost. A second charter, dated 1449, renewed the privileges the town had already received. The town was administered by a council made up of twelve alderman and twenty-five councilors, all elected by the burgesses of the town. But the town’s independence was restricted. The lord of the castle continued to enjoy extensive privileges, including that of holding the chief court of justice, which provided him with a small income from fines and penalties. The lordship itself passed from one noble family to another, until it came to the Mortimers, the earls of March (i.e., the “March,” or border of Wales). In 1425 it passed into the possession of Richard, Duke of York, and ultimately into that of King Edward IV.

Some 900 miles to the east and within the territory of the modern state of Poland is the town of Kalisz, about 120 miles west of Warsaw. Kalisz

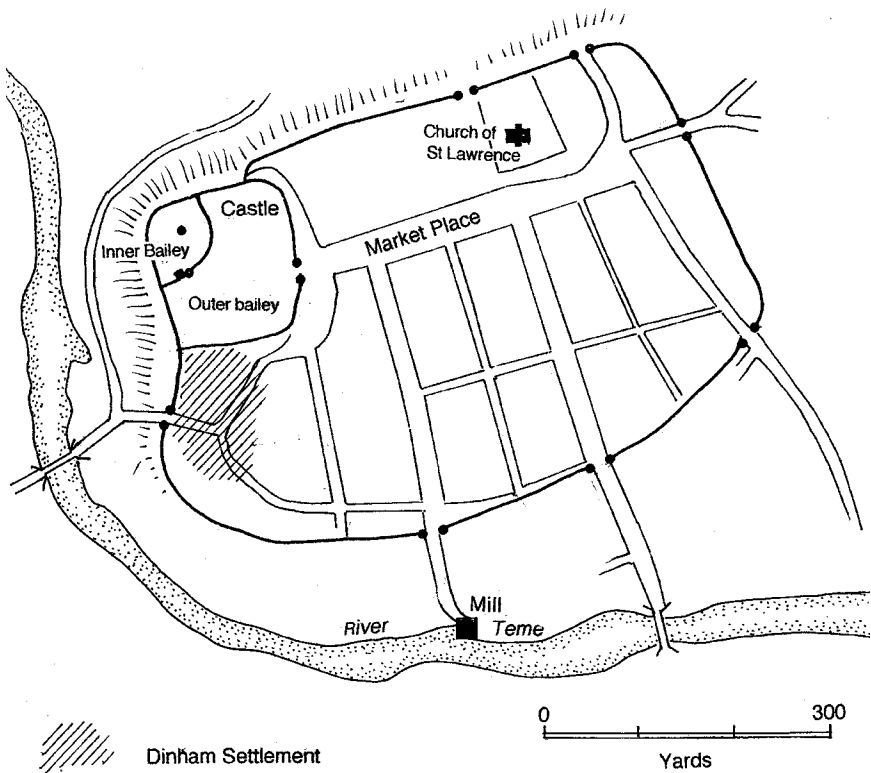


Figure 26. Ludlow, England: a town on the Welsh border. The planned town was established as an extension of the castle and of its adjoining settlement of Dinham.

was developing at the same time as Ludlow and under not dissimilar conditions. Kalisz, too, was a frontier town, founded by a local territorial lord to serve its agricultural countryside and to make profit for its master. Kalisz differed in one respect from Ludlow. It also had a castle (*grad*) as its nucleus, but this lay half a mile away along the marshy bank of the small Barczyk River. This was in all probability because there was no firm, dry site for the town above the river's level in the close proximity of the *grad*.⁵

The town of Kalisz was laid out, like Ludlow, with a network of intersecting streets (Figure 27), but their alignment has become slightly distorted. A charter was granted at some time during the twelfth century, but, as at Ludlow, the territorial lord retained a considerable degree of control, which was, however, diminished during the late Middle Ages as

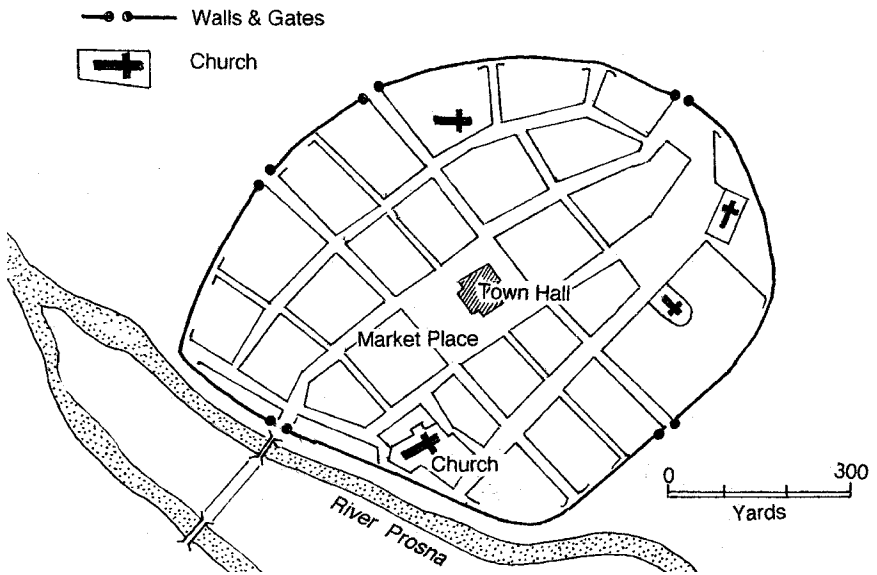


Figure 27. Kalisz, Poland: a planted, walled, and planned town.

the burgesses increasingly exercised control. Within the town, authority lay mainly in the hands of a council made up of citizens of the patrician class. These were merchants who controlled the crafts and trade of this rich region of central Poland. By the end of the thirteenth century they had organized a system of guilds. Two blocks within the town had been set aside for a market, and a town hall, or “Ratusz,” was built within them. In addition to this weekly market, Kalisz also had a fair, which played an important role in the trade between the Baltic region to the north and the plains of eastern Europe and the Danube Basin.

Kalisz came to be enclosed by defensive walls, which have now entirely disappeared. There was a parish church, which at first had the whole town as its sphere of influence. But this was supplemented as the town grew during the fourteenth century, by a second parish church and by a convent of Franciscan friars.

Ludlow and Kalisz are typical of a kind of town that proliferated in most parts of Europe, except the Mediterranean region, during the Middle Ages. It was to be found from Wales to the Danube valley and from southern France to Switzerland and Germany. What these regions had in common was a feudal organization of society, which permitted a ter-

ritorial lord to establish towns and set up markets wherever these might be profitable to himself. A second feature was their political insecurity. Towns were safe places, or at least safer than the open countryside, where economic activities could be pursued in relative security. Last, most of these towns showed evidence of planning, and many of them today still have their streets aligned on a regular, gridiron pattern.

The Most Highly Urbanized Region of Europe

In Flanders and neighboring parts of Brabant and Hainault, a number of towns began to emerge in the eleventh century, which were eventually to include some of the largest in Europe: Bruges and Ghent, Brussels and Antwerp, and, between them, a host of smaller towns. The only comparable region lay in northern and central Italy, where the medieval towns mostly derived from those of the late Roman Empire. The cities of Flanders and its neighboring provinces, however, owed nothing to Rome. Their roots did not lie in the distant past, but in the development of trade that took place long after Roman rule had ended. (See Figure 28.)⁶

The territory had been part of the thinly populated Roman province of Belgica, which lay across the lower courses of the Rhine and Meuse. During the fifth and sixth centuries it was invaded by the Germanic Franks, who settled over much of the region. A century or two later the Scandinavians, sailing up the great rivers, began to ravage it. The local population sought refuge in fortified enclosures, which must have resembled the burhs being built at about the same time in Anglo-Saxon England. Some may have been communal enterprises; others were the fortified homes—castles, in fact—of the local elite. Yet others were founded by the Church to protect its monastic sites. By the eleventh century, the land was dotted with strong points that attracted settlers on account of the protection they afforded. In this way, burh and castle together gave rise to a scatter of small towns, just as they were doing across the water in England. These urban settlements then developed a trade, not only locally with their respective hinterlands, but also with other parts of northwestern Europe. Markets and fairs began to emerge. They already had an important commodity in which to trade—the coarse local cloth. In the course of time, this cloth became more refined and supplied an ever-widening market. The weaving industry outgrew its local

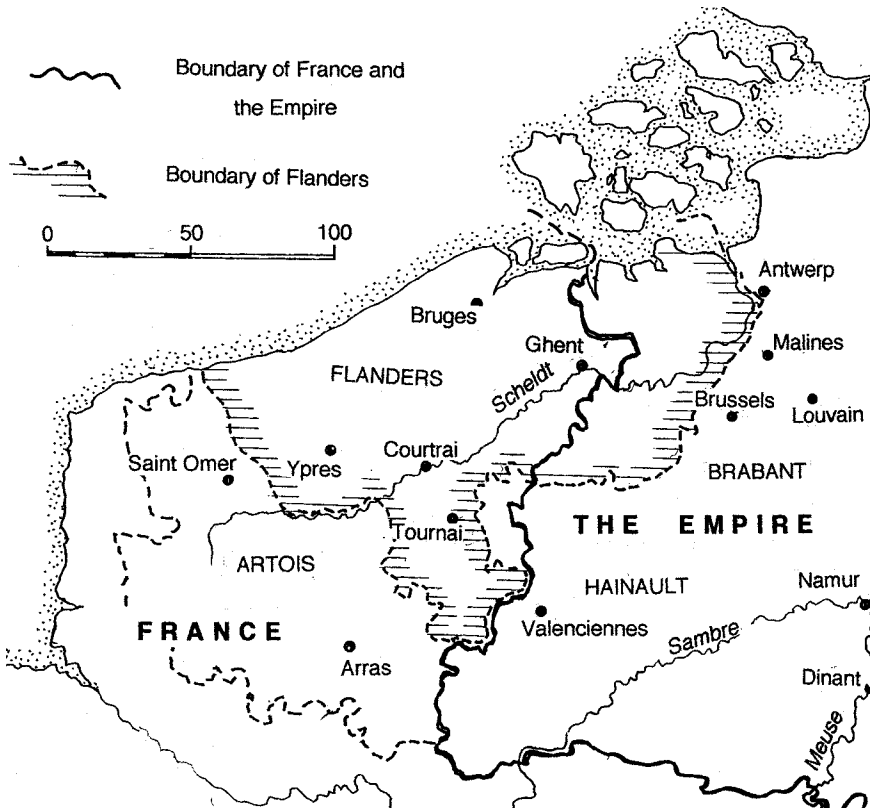


Figure 28. Flanders, the most highly urbanized and industrialized region in late medieval Europe.

supply of wool, and English and French wool began to supplement that which came from the sheep of the Flemish marshes. Related trades—especially dyeing and finishing the cloth—developed. At the same time, metalliferous mining developed in the hills to the south; a copper and brass industry appeared in the valley of the Meuse, centering in the town of Dinant, and its products also passed through the markets of the Flanders cities.

The region had, furthermore, an advantage of incalculable importance in the quality of its rulers. The Count of Flanders, who had brought much of the region under his control, recognized the value to himself of prosperous towns and developed industries. They brought profit to his lands and, through taxes and tolls, money for himself. From the mid-eleventh

century, the counts pursued a policy of encouraging the growth of towns and the spread of commerce. Generous charters of liberties were granted, and the cities were allowed to develop self-governing institutions on a scale that led the eminent Belgian historian Henri Pirenne to write of the “urban democracies of the low Countries.”

The liberties the count conferred upon his Flemish cities were modeled on those of Arras in northern France. The count retained ultimate control, but allowed each of the towns to be governed by a council of *echevins* (councilors), chosen from among the burgesses themselves. In the course of time the authority of the counts diminished while that of the burgesses increased. The Flemish cities did not quite become urban republics on the lines of the great cities of Italy, but there remained little external control over their activities.

The cities of Flanders carried on manufacturing industries on a quite considerable scale. They were of two kinds. First, there was the production of goods required by their own urban population and by the surrounding villages. These included the preparation of foodstuffs and articles of everyday use, and in this respect the Flemish cities differed in no way from those of the rest of Europe. Second, there were the major—the staple—industries: cloth weaving and finishing and the metal industries. These were not managed by craftsmen in small, domestic units and governed by the rules of their respective guilds. They were in the hands of merchant capitalists, men who purchased wool and metal in bulk, put it out to domestic weavers and metalworkers, and later collected the finished goods and marketed them throughout western and central Europe. Their market, by contrast with that of the craftsman, was the known world. No guild regulated their activities, and they were in a position to make vast fortunes. They were among Europe’s first capitalists.

The cities in which they lived were large, their population increased by immigration from the countryside. The immigrants, mostly penniless, became the workforce of the clothing trades and were wholly dependent on the class of merchant capitalists who employed them. In all the large towns the proletarian clothworkers made up a large part of the population. The cities themselves were far larger than could have been sustained by their surrounding hinterlands and were supported by foodstuffs imported from as far away as the Baltic Sea and paid for by the export of cloth. Inevitably, strife arose between the merchant and patrician class on the one hand and the mass of the working population on the other.

City government was firmly in the hands of the patricians. Working-class discontent began to show itself from the mid-thirteenth century in outbreaks of violence, culminating in disastrous wars in the early fourteenth century. The question of the independence of the Flemish and other towns came to be wrapped up with the struggle between Flanders and France, and this was in turn a factor in the beginning of the Hundred Years' War between England and France. Flanders' dependence on English wool helped to cement the alliance between them in opposition to France.

The short-lived independence of the democratically governed cities of Flanders ended in war and confusion. This inevitably influenced the cloth industry. But there were other factors in the decline of the clothing towns at the end of the Middle Ages. The supply of English wool began to dry up with the expansion of the weaving industry in England itself, and the European market for Flemish cloth was reduced to a fraction of what it had once been. At the same time seaborne trade began to desert the Flemish towns as their rivers silted and became shallow. Commercially their heir was the great port city of Antwerp, which until late in the sixteenth century was the greatest trading center of north-western Europe. It in turn was succeeded by Amsterdam, and in more recent years by Rotterdam.

Penryn, Cornwall, a Bishop's Town

The Cornish historian Charles Henderson described Penryn as a speculation of the bishops of Exeter. The bishops owned the surrounding land, where they possessed a manor house at which they frequently stayed during their rare forays into this remote part of their diocese. It was a bishop of Exeter, William Brewer (1223–1244), who in 1236 incorporated the small settlement that had grown up near the manor house by giving its residents a charter. This document has not survived, and the earliest record that exists today is a confirmation of it given by Bishop Walter Bronescombe some forty years later.⁷

From this record we learn that the men of Penryn held burgage plots, each of them paying the annual rent of 12 pence. In return the burgesses were to possess all liberties and free customs that they had hitherto enjoyed. The charter, unfortunately, does not tell us what these liberties were, though they had probably been specified in the earlier charter,

which has been lost. They probably included the right to hold a weekly market as well as an annual fair and possibly to organize guilds for its craftsmen and merchants. The fair appears never to have been successful; there was probably insufficient long-distance trade to support it. Nor do we know what jurisdictional and administrative privileges the bishops allowed to their tenants; probably very few, for bishops liked to keep a tight control over the towns they founded.

The town of Penryn consisted of little more than a single street, which climbed steeply from the tidal waters of the Penryn River and then followed a ridge toward the higher ground to the northwest. Near its middle, the street widened to form an open space that would have served as the market and in later centuries contained a freestanding town hall. Houses and shops would have lined the street, and behind each its burgage plots, long and narrow, would have reached down the slopes on each side of the ridge.

The borough lay entirely within the ecclesiastical parish of St. Gluvias, whose church lay away on the other side of the Penryn River. It is curious that a bishop had founded his borough without any regard for the church and the parish in which it lay. The burgesses, finding the journey to their parish church longer and less convenient than they had anticipated, obtained in 1374 permission to build a small church, known as a chapel-of-ease,* within the borough, but it appears to have been demolished during the Reformation, and the burgesses were left to make the journey on foot to their parish church.

The bishops took no great risk when they founded the borough of Penryn. It lay on the bank of the Penryn River, which discharged into the spacious Falmouth Harbor, one of the best and most sheltered in all northwestern Europe. Its chief port had hitherto been Truro, some eight miles inland, but the port of Penryn quickly cut into the trade of Truro and enjoyed a period of prosperity until the foundation of the town of Falmouth in the early seventeenth century created a highly successful rival to Penryn. A rent roll of the bishops of Exeter of 1307–1308 showed the borough paying £7 "13 "2½ by way of rent on its burgage plots, whereas the weekly market yielded no less than £26 "7 "5 in tolls. Altogether it must indeed have been a profitable undertaking.

*A "chapel-of-ease" was a church built to relieve pressure on a parish church from overcrowding or to serve the needs of a newly developing community.

Penryn differs from those planted towns discussed earlier in that Penryn never possessed fortifications. It was sufficiently far from the coast to have had little fear of piratical raids, and warfare and civil disorder were too rare to threaten the security of the town. There were hundreds of such towns in medieval Europe, and bishops participated in their foundation as readily as other landholders. The unwallled street town was particularly common in England, though not in Wales, which never enjoyed England's level of peace and security.

Sir Richard “Dick” Whittington

It is a British custom around Christmastime to stage an entertainment known as a “pantomime.” It is intended primarily for children, but is sometimes satirical and always coarsely humorous. There are a number of stock characters on whom the action depends. One of them is Dick Whittington together with his cat. In popular folklore Whittington was a poor boy from the provinces who, accompanied only by his cat, set out for London in order to make his fortune. There are many variants of the story. One has it that he took employment in the household of a London merchant by whom he was badly treated, until the cat proved its worth by exterminating a plague of mice. Another version of the Whittington saga tells us that he despaired of ever making his fortunes and had turned for home, when he heard the “Bow Bells”—the bells of the church of St. Mary le Bow (or “Beau”). They seemed to say to him: “Turn again Whittington; thrice Lord Mayor of London town.” He turned, and at once his fortunes changed.

This is all popular folklore, but there was indeed a Richard Whittington. He was the younger son of a Gloucestershire squire. As he had little chance of ever inheriting his father's land, he took up the trade of mercer, or dealer in high quality textiles. This took him to London, where he married a rich heiress and quickly established himself as a member of the city's ruling elite. He continued in the cloth trade and became the chief officer of the Staple, or association of merchants dealing in England's most important or “staple” export—cloth. This led on to his election as mayor or chief executive officer of the City of London in 1398–1399. His term of office was for a year. He was re-elected for the year 1406–1407 and again for 1419–1420, but died three years later.

It was typical of such a wealthy merchant that he was called upon to lend money to both King Henry IV (1399–1413) and to his son, King Henry V (1413–1422). In the absence of any system of banking that we would recognize, kings could obtain credit only through the goodwill of their rich subjects, and Whittington was not only a financier to the king but was also well rewarded for his pains. Whittington left a vast fortune at his death for charitable purposes. He expended money for building London's Guildhall and for adding to the Grayfriars or Franciscan church. During this tenure of the office of mayor it is said that he was so disgusted by the condition of Newgate, one of the city's prisons, that he himself paid for its rebuilding. He also restored St. Bartholomew's Hospital, endowed almshouses, and established a piped water supply for at least part of the city.

How then was the memory of a good and charitable public servant transformed into the story of a poor boy who made good with the help of his cat? The latter story first appeared in a play licensed for the stage in 1605. It was frequently referred to thereafter, and even appeared in the folklore of continental European countries. The real Richard Whittington must have been a well-known and highly respected figure, a suitable person on whom to hang the story of the poor immigrant to London who had prospered and made good.

NOTES

1. Philippe Dollinger, *The German Hansa* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1970).

2. Mary Bateson, "The Laws of Breteuil," *English Historical Review* 15, 57 and 58 (January and April 1900): 73–78 and 302–18; "The Laws of Breteuil. Part II. The English Evidence (Continued)," *English Historical Review* 15, 59 (July 1901): 496–523; "The Laws of Breteuil (Continued)," *English Historical Review* 15, 60 (October 1901): 754–57; "The Laws of Breteuil (Continued)," *English Historical Review* 16, 61 and 62 (January and April 1901): 92–110, 332–45.

3. Mary Bateson, "The Laws of Breteuil," *English Historical Review* 16 (1901): 344.

4. Ron Shoesmith and Andy Johnson, eds., *Ludlow Castle: Its History and Buildings* (Almeley, UK: Logaston Press, 2000).

5. Pierre Francastel, ed., *Les Origines des Villes Polonaises* (Paris: Mouton & Company, 1960), pp. 179–90.

6. Henri Pirenne, *Early Democracies in the Low Countries: Urban Society and Political Conflict in the Middle Ages and the Renaissance* (New York: Harper & Row, 1963); Michael M. Postan, "The Trade of Medieval Europe: The North," *The Cambridge Economic History of Europe* vol. 2, ed. Postan and H. J. Habakkuk (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1952); *Ciba Review*, 2, 14 (October 1938): pp. 466–504. Issue "Cloth-Making in Flanders."
7. Roland J. Roddis, *Penryn: The History of an Ancient Cornish Borough* (Penryn: D. Bradford Barton, 1964), pp. 16–29.

PRIMARY DOCUMENTS

DOCUMENT 1 “The Ruin”

An Anglo-Saxon poem, usually known as “The Ruin,” describes the condition of a former Roman city after the Anglo-Saxon invasions. The city in question has been identified from the allusions to the springs and hot baths with the city of Bath in southern England, the Roman *Aquae Sulis*.

*Wondrously wrought and fair its wall of stone,
Shattered by Fate! The castles rend asunder,
The work of giants moldereth away,
Its roofs are breaking and falling; its towers crumble
In ruin. Plundered those walls with grated doors—
Their mortar white with frost. Its battered ramparts
Are shorn away and ruined, all undermined
By eating age. The mighty men that built it,
Departed hence, undone by death, are held
Fast in the earth’s embrace. Tight is the clutch
Of the grave, while overhead for living men
A hundred generations pass away.*

*Long this red wall, now mossy gray, withstood,
While kingdom followed kingdom in the land,
Unshaken ’neath the storms of heaven—yet now
Its towering gate hath fallen . . .*

*Radiant the mead-halls in that city bright,
Yeah, many were its baths. High rose its wealth*

Of hornèd pinnacles, while loud within
 Was heard the joyous revelry of men—
 Till mighty Fate came with her sudden change!
 Wide-wasting was the battle where they fell.
 Plague-laden days upon the city came;
 Death snatched away that might hose of men . . .
 There in the olden time full many a thane,
 Shining with gold, all gloriously adorned,
 Haughty in heart, rejoiced when hot with wine;
 Upon him gleamed his armor, and he gazed
 On gold and silver and all precious gems;
 On riches and on wealth and treasured jewels,
 A radiant city in a kingdom wide.
 There stood the courts of stone. Hotly within,
 The stream flowed with its might surge. The wall
 Surrounded all with its bright bosom; there
 The baths stood, hot within its heart . . .

Source: Albert S. Cook and Chauncey B. Tinker, eds., *Select Translations from Old English Poetry* (Boston and New York: Binn and Company, 1902), pp. 56–57.

DOCUMENT 2

Anglo-Saxon Chronicle

The following extract is from the records of the foundation of fortified burhs in Anglo-Saxon England, many of which subsequently developed into chartered boroughs.

913. Here Æthelflæd built Tamworth and also Stafford stronghold. Here, around Martinmas in this year, King Edward ordered to be built the more northerly stronghold at Hertford, between the Maran and the Beane and the Lea. And then after that, the summer after, between Rogation days and midsummer, King Edward went with some of his reinforcements to Maldon in Essex, and camped there while they made and strengthened the stronghold at Witham; and a good part of the people who were earlier under the control of Danish men submitted to him. And some of his reinforcements made the stronghold at Hertford on the south side of the Lea. [from the Worcester manuscript]

914. Then in this, the next year, [was made] that [stronghold] at Edisbury in early summer; and later in the same year, late in harvest-time, that at Warwick.

915. Then in this, the next year after mid-winter, [was built] that stronghold at Chribury, and then that at Weardbyrig; and in the same year before mid-winter that at Runcorn. [from the Abingdon manuscript]

921. Here in this year before Easter King Edward [the Elder, 899–924] ordered them to go and build the stronghold at Towcester; and then after that, at Rogationtide in the same year, he ordered them to build the stronghold at Wigingamere.

The same summer, between Lammas and midsummer, the raiding-army from Northampton and from Leicester and north of there, broke the peace and went to Towcester and fought against the stronghold all day, and thought that they would be able to break it down. However, the people who were inside there defended it until more help came to them; and then they left the stronghold and went away. . . . At the same time the raiding-army went from Huntingdon and from East Anglia and made that fortress at Tempsford, and lived in and constructed it. [from the Winchester manuscript]

Source: M. J. Swanton, trans. and ed., *The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* (London: J. M. Dent, 1996), pp. 97, 98, 99, and 101.

DOCUMENT 3

Domesday Book

The preparation of Domesday Book was ordered by King William I of England in 1086. It was a listing of places, their feudal ownership, and their population and resources. Its purpose was fiscal; it was, in Maitland's words "a geld book, no more and no less," and the king expected to be able to use it in assessing national taxation in his newly acquired kingdom. All English towns were included, with the exception of the cities of London and Winchester, which for no known reason were not included in the completed Domesday Book. The following extract, which is typical of most English towns at this time, shows a settlement in which agriculture was probably more important than industry and crafts.

HUNTINGDON

IN THE BOROUGH OF HUNTINGDON THERE ARE 4 FERDINGS

In 2 ferdings [quarters] there were TRE [Tempore Regis Edwardi—in the time of Edward the Confessor] and are now 116 burgesses rendering all customs and the king's geld, and under them are 100 bordars who help them to pay the geld. Of these burgesses, St Benedict of Ramsey [i.e., Ramsey Abbey] had 10 with sake and soke [civil and criminal jurisdiction over them] and every custom, except that they paid geld TRE Eustace took them away by force from the abbey, and they are now, with the others, in the king's hand [i.e., possession].

Ulf Fenman had 18 burgesses; now Gilbert de Ghent has them with sake and soke, except for the king's geld.

The Abbot of Ely has 1 toft [farmstead] with sake and soke, except for the king's geld.

The Bishop of Lincoln had on the site of the castle 1 messuage [house and garden] with sake and soke, which is not there now.

Earl Siward had 1 messuage with a house, with sake and soke, quit of all custom, which the Countess Judith has now.

On the site of the castle there were 20 messuages [assessed] to all customs, rendering 16s8d a year to the king's farm, which are not there now.

In addition to these, there were and are 60 waste messuages within these ferdings, which gave and give their customs.

And in addition to these, there are 8 waste messuages which TRE were fully occupied, and gave all customs.

In the other 2 ferdings there were and are 140 burgesses, less half a house, [assessed] to all customs and the king's geld, and these had 80 closes [enclosed piece of land] for which they gave and give all customs. Of these, St Benedict of Ramsey had 22 burgesses TRE. 2 of these were quit of all customs, and 30 paid 10d each. All other customs belonged to the abbot, apart from the king's geld.

In these ferdings, Ælfric the sheriff TRE had 1 messuage, which King William afterwards granted to his wife and sons. Eustace has it now; a poor man, with his mother, claims it. In these 2 ferdings, there were and are 44 waste messuages, which gave and give their customs. And in addition to these, in these 2 ferdings Burgræd and Thorkil TRE had 1 church with 2

hides* of land and 22 burgesses with houses belonging to the same church with sake and soke, all of which Eustace has now. Therefore these men claim the king's mercy. Nevertheless these 22 burgesses give every custom to the king. Bishop Geoffrey has 1 church and 1 house of the aforesaid, which Eustace took away from St Benedict, and the same saint is still claiming them. In the borough itself, Gos and Hunæf had 16 houses TRE with sake and soke and toll and team. Countess Judith has them now.

[A passage—omitted—defines the tax obligations of the town to the king.]

1 mill renders 40s to the king, 20s to the earl. To this borough there belong 2 hides carucates and 40 acres of land 10 acres of mellow, of which they divide the rent, the king [having] 2 parts, and the earl the third [part]. The burgesses cultivate this land and lease it through the servants of the king and the earl. Within the aforesaid rent are 3 fishermen paying 3s. In this borough there were 3 moneyers paying 40s [shared] between the king and the earl, but now they are not there. TRE it rendered £30; now the same.

Source: Ann Williams and G. H. Martin, eds., *Domesday Book: A Complete Translation*, Alecto Historical Editions (London and New York: Penguin Books, 2002) p. 551.

DOCUMENT 4

Urban Charters

Charter of King John to the Borough of Cambridge. The charter confirms to the burgesses their right to have a gild merchant—Gilda Mercatoria. This was a predecessor of the more specialized craft and trading guilds, and probably embraced those citizens who were engaged in commerce or the crafts.

John by the grace of God, King of England . . . we have granted and by this our present charter have confirmed to our burgesses of Cambridge a gild merchant, and that none of them may make a plea outside the walls of the borough . . . none of them may fight a duel and they shall plead without the walls of the borough of Cambridge concerning any plea, unless they

*Hide, a variable measure of land, originally a unit sufficient to support a family.

be pleas of exterior tenures, except our moneyers and servants. Moreover we have granted to them that none of them shall make [proof by] battle, and that with regard to pleas pertaining to our crown they may deraign themselves according to the ancient custom of the borough. This also we have granted to them, that all burgesses of Cambridge of the gild of merchants shall be [free] of toll and passage [road toll] and lastage [toll for attending a fair] and pontage [bridge toll] and stallage [fee for setting up a market stall], in fairs and without, and throughout the ports of the sea and beyond the sea, saving in all things the liberties of the city of London, and that none be adjudged to be in mercy as to his money except according to the ancient law of the borough. . . . And that they may justly have their lands and pledges and all debts, whosoever may owe the same. And that right shall be done to them touching their lands and tenures which are within the borough according to the custom of the borough. And of all their debts which shall have been contracted at Cambridge and of the pledges made there, pleas shall be held at Cambridge. And if any in all our land shall take toll or customs from the men of Cambridge of the gild of merchants and shall have made default in right, then the sheriff of Cambridge or the reeve of Cambridge shall take therefore a distress at Cambridge, saving in all things the liberties of the city of London. Moreover for the amendment of the borough of Cambridge we have granted to them their fair in Rogation* week with its liberties as they were accustomed to have it, and that all the burgesses of Cambridge be quit of jherescheve and of scotale** if our sheriff or any other bailiff shall make a scotale. These customs aforesaid we have granted to them and all other liberties and free customs which they had in the times of our ancestors when they best and most freely had the same. . . . And whoever shall seek the borough of Cambridge with their merchandize, whencesoever they be, whether strangers or others, they may come, stay and return in our sure peace. . . . And we forbid that any cause herein injury or loss or trouble to our burgesses aforesaid upon pain of our forfeiture of ten pounds. Wherefore we will and firmly command that the said burgesses and their heirs shall have and hold all

*Rogation Week, the week following Trinity Sunday, during which it was customary to bless the crops.

**Scot-ale; scot means "free-from." This means free of the obligation to contribute ale to the king's sheriff on certain festive occasions.

these things aforesaid in inheritance of us and our heirs well and in peaceably, freely and quietly, entirely and honorably as is written above.

Source: Frederic William Maitland and Mary Bateson, eds., *The Charters of the Borough of Cambridge* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1901), pp. 5–7.

Charter of Walter Bronescombe, Bishop of Exeter to the Borough of Penryn. *This is a confirmation of the earlier charter of Bishop William Brewer (1223–1244), which has been lost.*

To all faithful Christians who shall hear these present letters Walter by divine mercy Bishop of Exeter, greets you.

We have examined the letters of our predecessor of pious memory, William [Brewer] . . . in these terms: To all Christian people . . . William by divine mercy . . . know ye that on behalf of ourselves and our successors I have conceded and by this charter have confirmed to the good men of our borough of Penryn and their heirs and assigns that they may hold their burgage plots freely of us and for each acre wholly and properly measured by the payment to us and to our successors of 12 pence by way of rent per year at the two terms, namely All Saints' Day [Nov. 1] and May 1st . . . for all services. We have furthermore conceded that on the surrender of a burgage or on the death of a tenant, they ought to pay a relief of 12d. for each complete acre. . . . We wish and order that the said burgesses may have all things specified, together with all liberties and free customs in perpetuity. Given at Penryn, 1236.

Source: *Exeter Episcopal Registers [Bishops Bronescombe and Quivil]*, ed. Hingeston Randolph, vol. 2 (1889), pp. 220–21.

DOCUMENT 5

Fairs and Markets

Care was taken by the crown that no new market or fair might be established to the injury of one which already existed, as here in Essex:

In 1318 a jury at Colchester found “That the Abbess of Barking (Berkyngg) [Barking Abbey in East London] holds a market at Salcote

every Monday, to the injury and hindrance of Colchester Market, by what warrant and for how long they know not.

Source: W. Gurney Benham, ed. and trans., *The Red Paper Book of Colchester* (Colchester: Essex County Standard Office, 1902), p. 45.

DOCUMENT 6

Gilds and Gild Regulations

Some gilds received charters from the patrons or territorial lords of the towns in which they had been established. Almost all devised their own rules or ordinances which governed the conduct of their members and prescribed standards of workmanship. The following extracts are from the regulations of three of the gilds of the important town of Colchester in Essex, England:

1. [T]he sise [assize]* of a Spicer is that he have no weght but thei be sised [authorized by a court] and sealed and trew beme [balance used for weighing], and that he sell by no horns [containers of indefinite size] nor ayme of hande [by the handful], nor by no nother sotilty [subtlety] to disseyve the poure commyns; and that his spice be gode and clene garbeld. and yf he do the contrary to this hys fine is at every tyme iij^s. iij^d, and if he wil not be ware by ij warnynggs, the iij^d tyme to be juged according un to the statute.

2. The statute of a Whitetawier is that he taw no ledir [lather] but shepe ledir, gyts (goats') ledir, deris, horss, and hownde ledir, and that it be made of sufficient stuff. And if he do the contrary to this, he to be mersed [amerced or fined] according un to the forme of the statute.

3. Also the sise of a Tanner is that he tanne no shepis ledir, geyts, deris, horsh ne honnd [hound] ledir, nor he have no maner [kind of] ledyr to sell, but it be thurgh tanned. And if he do the contrary his fyn is at every tyme vjs. viij^d,** and to forfet that is forfetabull, and if he will not by . . . ware by ij warnings, the iij^d tyme to be juged according un to the form of the statute.

*Assize, either a law, as in the "Assize of Clarendon," or the court which administered the law.

**Values are given in pounds, shillings, and pence, shown as £, s, and d. There were twelve pence in the shilling and twenty shillings to the pound. Pence were always represented by "d," from the Latin *denarius*.

Source: W. Gurney Benham, ed. and trans., *The Red Paper Book of Colchester* (Colchester: Essex County Standard Office, 1902), pp. 19–20.

Confirmation of the Tanners' Guild at Rouen, Normandy

Henry, by the Grace of God King of England [Henry II], etc. . . . Be it known that I have granted and confirmed with this charter of mine to the tanners of Rouen that they may have their gild with all its customs, freely and quietly, fully and honorably. Furthermore, on account of the services which these tanners perform, no one may follow their craft in Rouen or its region unless they permit. Therefore I order that no one shall interfere with them or act against their craft except through me.

Source: Author's translation of *Documents Relatifs a l'Histoire de l'Industrie et du Commerce en France*, ed. M. Gustave Fagniez, 2 vols., Collection de textes pour servir à l'étude et à l'enseignement de l'histoire (Paris: Alphonse Picard et Fils, 1898), 1:89.

Cordwainers' Guild of Oxford: Charter of Henry II of the Late Twelfth Century (c. 1175)

Know ye that I have granted and confirmed to the corvesars [cordwainers] of Oxford all the liberties and customs which they had in the time of King Henry [I] my grandfather, and that they may have their gild, so that none carry on their trade in the town of Oxford, except he be of that gild.

I grant also that the cordwainers who afterwards may come into the town of Oxford shall be of the same gild. . . . For this grant and confirmation, however, the corvesars and cordwainers ought to pay me every year an ounce of gold.

Source: R. Trevor Davies, *Documents Illustrating the History of Civilization in Medieval England (1066–1500)* (London: Methuen and Company, 1926), p. 115.

Approval of the Regulations of the Coopers' Guild of York, 1471: The coopers were the makers of wooden barrels, in which wine and other liquids were (and are) transported and stored. The "searchers" were the officials who examined the products of gild members and judged of its quality.

[T]he serchiours and the honest personnes of the craft of coupleurs . . . desired the constytucions under writen to be added to thaire saide crafte.

It is ordained . . . that no maister of the craft of coupleurs within the said cite shall take non alien borne oute of this royme . . . to his apprentez in the same crafte, apon payne of forfeitur of xx s.

[I]t is ordained that evere hyred man of the same craft . . . that has ben apprentez in the same craft within the said cite, shall yerely pay to the serchiours of y^e same craft . . . iiij d.; and, yif he were nat apprentez within the saide cite, yerly he to paye . . . vjd.

[I]t is enact and ordeyned that yif ony [every] maister of that craft . . . be duele warned by his serchiours . . . to com to eny place . . . touching the wele [welfare] and worshipe of y^e saidez cite and craft, and therin fayles, he shall forfeit . . . vjd.

[T]hat what maister . . . is rebell and disobeysaunte unto his serchiours . . . shall forfeit x s.

[T]hat . . . the serchiours [may] . . . make due serche . . . upon all maner of warke of newe wroght . . . such as is to be put to saile. [Inferior workmanship to be forfeit.]

[T]hat, yif eny straunger . . . com to this cite and will wirke in the same occupacion . . . shall aske leyfe of the serchiours . . . and than his warke to be seyn by the same serchiours yif it be warkmanly don or no; and than his hier to be extented by it for yere or be weyk, as reason and conscience will.

Source: *York Memorandum Book*, Part I, 1376–1419, Publications of the Surtees Society, vol. 120 (London: Andrew & Company, 1912), pp. 69–70.

Complaint of Poor Workmanship

The common people complain to the bailiffs of Colchester that the Tile-makers

maken her (their) tyll bi diverse fourmes, more and lesse, none of hem (them) acordaunt to nother, to gret noissaunce and harmyng of the said people, wherfore hit is ordeyned and enstablished bi the said Bailifs and the generall counseill that no maner Tylemaker of the said toun of Colchestr ne with inne the fraunchise of the same toun fro this tyme forth make no maner tyll, but all of one lengthe and of one brede

(breadth) . . . acordaunt to a standard abidyng in the Moothalle of the said town; upon peyne of [a fine of 20 s.] . . . half [of which is to go] to the comoun profit of the said toun, and [the other half] . . . to hym that wil compleynen [the complaint].

Source: W. Gurney Benham, ed. and trans., *The Red Paper Book of Colchester* (Colchester: Essex County Standard Office, 1902), p. 49.

DOCUMENT 7

Apprenticeship Contract

I, Peter Borre, entrust my son Stephen to you, Peter Feissac, weaver, in order to learn the craft of weaving. He is to live at your house and to work for you from the next feast of Easter for four years. I understake to see to it that my son works for you, and that he will be faithful and trustworthy in all things and will not steal from you nor run away for any reason until his apprenticeship is complete. I, Peter Borre, will recompense you for any loss or damage that might arise. . . . For his part Peter Feissac undertakes to instruct Borre's son faithfully and to provide him with food and clothing. [Dated 1248.]

Source: Louis Blancard, ed., *Documents Inédits sur le Commerce de Marseille au Moyen Age*, vol. 2 (Marseilles: Barlatier-Feissat, 1884), p. 33.

DOCUMENT 8

Urban Conditions

Information on urban housing is most readily obtained from the contracts made between householders and the builders—masons and carpenters—who had contracted to build their houses. The following extracts are from contracts published in L. F. Salzman's Building in England, Appendix B. Most are in Latin, and have been translated or summarized by the author.

Housing

Simon of Canterbury undertakes in the presence of the Mayor and Aldermen to build for William de Hangitone, using his own materials, "a hall and chamber together with a small chamber, and a larder between the

aforesaid hall and chamber; also a solar above the chamber with a fireplace; there is to be a gallery at the upper end of the hall [*in capite aule*] and an outside staircase from the ground to the gallery, and two compartments in the cellar under the hall, and one compartment crosswise under the hall for the drain [*toilet, cloaca*] and two conduits for the said drain, and a stable of the length between the said hall and the [illegible in manuscript].

London, 1308. No. 3

Source: L. F. Salzman, *Building in England down to 1540: A Documentary History* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1967), pp. 417–18.

Contract to Build Four Tenements in Canterbury, 1497

This indenture between William Haute, Knt [Knight] and John Browne of Canterbury, carpenter, witnesseth that John shall build four tenements on the land of the Augustine Friars in the parish of St George, in length along the street 84 feet and 24 feet deep. There are to be 4 halls with windows on the south side, and a stair from the hall to the chamber in each house. Also four shops next the street, with 4 chambers with windows over them. Each shop is to measure 12 feet by 8½ feet. At the end of each shop there is to be a buttery,* 4 feet wide and 8½ feet long, and each buttery is to have a convenient window. There is to be a kitchen, 10 feet by 12 feet, in each tenement. The upper floors are to be jettied.

The said William is to find all timber and other materials. Payment is to be in instalments, the first being when all the premises are fully framed and ready in form to be set up. [It is clear from this that the wooden framing of the house was first laid out flat on the ground and then raised into a vertical position, a method still used in house building in the United States. It is likely that Sir William Haute was investing in urban real estate, from which he expected to obtain a regular income. It is interesting that a knight, almost by definition a rural landowner, is here engaging in urban transactions.]

Canterbury, 1497. No. 101.

Source: Salzman, *Building in England*, pp. 554–56.

*Place where common foodstuffs were kept.

Contract to Build the Boar Inn on the Market Place

An indenture between William Ludlowe and John Fayrebowe, carpenter of Busshopestrowe, Wiltshire witnesseth that John “will make for the said William a house within the Bore [tavern] adjoining the Market Place . . . containing in length 63 feet and within the walls 20 feet. The grounsills* are to be 15 inches wide and 10 inches thick. There are to be 14 principal posts, every post 16 feet long and 13 inches wide and 12 inches thick. Every ‘somer’** to be 16 inches wide and 15 inches thick. And every joist 8 inches thick and 9 inches wide. There are to be 10 inches between every joist. Every ‘byndyngbeme’*** is to be 9 inches thick and 15 inches wide, and every wallplate, 8 inches thick and 9 inches wide, and every rafter 4 inches thick at the top and 5 inches at the foot. The rafters are to be spaced at 9 inch intervals. . . .

The house is to be well and truly made of sufficient timber, clean and without sap or windshake, ready to be set up and reared by the feast of the Nativity next. The said John shall find all timber for doors and windows and studs for the walls. And William shall find all nails, wattle [withies or osiers to be daubed with clay; see Glossary], roofing and mason’s work necessary, and also meat and wages for two men working with the said John for seven days at the rearing of the house, and also the meat and wages for the men carting the timber to Salisbury. William will also pay 20 li [*livres*, i.e., pounds] for building the house and finding the timber, to be paid in three installments.”

Salisbury, 1444. No. 73.

Source: Salzman, *Building in England*, pp. 516–17.

*Timbers placed on the ground, above which the wooden framing of the house was raised.

**Bressomer, a “summer” or beam extending horizontally over a large opening, and sustaining the whole superstructure of wall.

***Cross-beam; diagonal to strengthen the wooden framework.

DOCUMENT 9

Sanitary Conditions

The London Assize of Nuisance is a record of complaints of physical conditions within the City of London and of judicial proceedings taken to rectify them. The published record gives details of sixty-one cases heard between 1301 and 1431. The majority relate to roofing gutters which discharged storm water onto the streets below, and to objectionable cesspits within houses or close to adjacent properties.

77. Robert le Barber complains that William le Mareschal has constructed a gutter (goterum) from which the water falls at his door (hostio), and has built a jetty (jacticium) above (ultra) his beams (trabes) opposite his door and windows (fenestrarum) which obstructs his view, and that his chimney (caminum) is too near the [plaintiff's] party-wall (parieti), causing danger of fire to his house. . . . Judgment that *within 40 days etc.* [William] remake the gutter in dispute . . . that he remove . . . the jetty . . . and that he rebuild his chimney. (March 1305)

396. The commonalty complain . . . that whereas Fisshyngwharf lane . . . used to be common to all citizens conveying their goods and merchandise . . . by horse and cart, William Trig has obstructed it with wooden stalls (trunci), wood and other things so that there is no longer access by it to the [river] Thames. . . . William comes and allows that the lane was . . . and still is . . . too narrow to be used by carts, which cannot turn in it . . . [Judgment: the jury finds for the defendant]. (February 1346)

324. William de Thorneye complains that when he hired workmen to build the cess-pit of a privy in his house . . . Andrew Aubrey and Joan his wife had the work prohibited. [They] say that the cess-pit is not built in accordance with the custom of the City, since the fence (claustura) is not 2½ ft. from their wall. . . . [T]he mayor and aldermen . . . having viewed the cess-pit, find that it is not to the nuisance of the [plaintiff], but sufficient and tolerable according to the custom of the City. (May 1333)

119. In a perambulation* made that day it was found that a stone gable (gabulam) of the house of Stephen de Abyndone . . . is ruinous, to

*A walk about their city to assess damage or to determine boundaries.

the danger of the neighbours and passers-by. The sheriff is ordered to warn [Stephen] to repair the wall *within 40 days etc.* (June 1307)

214. The mayor and commonalty complain . . . that whereas of old . . . a gutter (guttera) running under certain of the houses . . . so that the flow might cleanse the privy . . . Alice Wade has made a wooden pipe (pipam ligneam) connecting the seat (sedile) of the privy in her solar with the gutter, which is frequently stopped up by the filth therefrom, and the neighbours under whose houses the gutter runs are greatly inconvenienced by the stench. Judgment that she remove the pipe. (August 1314)

369. The commonalty complain . . . that [certain persons] have neglected to repair the pavement outside their tenements . . . in accordance with the City ordinance; with the result that it is broken and worn down (concauium) and crushed (quassatum) to the danger of both pedestrians and horsemen. . . . Judgment . . . that . . . each of them repair the pavement outside his own tenement. (July 1341)

394. The commonalty complains . . . that Walter de Eure has a vacant plot of land . . . which is unfenced, so that malefactors and disturbers of the king's peace and robbers lurk there by night and waylay passers-by, attacking, beating and wounding them and stealing their goods. . . . Judgment . . . that . . . he fence the plot of land. (Sept. 1345)

569. [Complaint] that Richard Bayser, [butcher], and Emma his wife have built a "skaldynghous"* in their tenement . . . in which they slaughter pigs and many other animals, and the water mixed with the blood and hair of the slaughtered animals, and with other filth from the washing (lortura) [of the carcasses], flows into the ditch or kennel in the street . . . causing a stench in many places there. [Judgment postponed.] (Feb. 1370)

617. Thomas Yonge and Alice his wife complain [that several people] built a forge (fabricam) of earth and timber, 40 ft. from the road . . . of which the chimney (tuellus) is lower by 12 ft. than it should be, and not built of plaster [mortar?] and stone as the custom of the City requires; and the blows of the sledge-hammers (grossis malleis) when the great pieces of iron called "Osmond" are being wrought into "brestplates," "quysers"** [cuirasses], "jambers" [protection for the arms] and other

*Scalding-house, a room in which utensils or carcasses of animals are scalded.

**Cuirass, another term for body protection; from "cuir"—leather—of which it was made.

pieces of armour, shake the stone and earthen party-walls of the [plaintiffs'] house so that they are in danger of collapsing, and disturb the rest of the [plaintiffs] and their servants, day and night, and spoil the wine and ale in their cellar, and the stench of the smoke from the sea-coal used in the forge, penetrates their hall and chambers, so that whereas formerly they could let the premises for 10 marks a year, they are now worth only 40s [shillings]. [The defendants] deny the [plaintiffs'] contention that chimneys ought to be built of stone and plaster, and high enough to cause no nuisance to the neighbouring tenements, and declare that good and honest men of any craft, viz. goldsmiths, smiths, pewterers, gold-beaters, grocers, pelters, marshals and armourers are at liberty to carry on their trade anywhere in the City, adapting their premises as is most convenient for their work, and that according to ancient custom any feoffor [owner] may give . . . his property as well to craftsmen using great hammers as to others. [Furthermore] he has set up his anvil in what was formerly the kitchen at a sufficient distance from the [plaintiffs'] messuage, and strengthened the chimney with mortar and clay and raised it by 6 ft. or more. (March 1378)

Source: Helena M. Chew and William Kellaway, eds., *London Assize of Nuisance, 1301–1431: A Calendar*, London Record Society Publications, vol. 10 (Leicester: London Record Society, 1973), pp. 16, 97, 79, 26, 45, 89, 96–97, 142, 160–61.

Construction of a Sewer in Cambridge, 1294

Thomas le Cuteler . . . of Cantebrige [Cambridge] and Margaret his wife complain of Gilbert Sys that he unfairly discharged (*levarit*) a sewer to the hurt of his [Thomas's] free tenement in Cantebridge after etc. and so unjustly, because the opening of that sewer lies bare against the walls, by reason of which the filth of that sewer causes the walls to decay so that they cannot hold them up. And also whereas Thomas and Margaret have been accustomed to let their house up to two marks a year, now no on [*sic*] is willing to hire it at more than one mark on account of the foulness of that sewer.

A sworn jury confirms that the sewage “rotted the ‘grundsellis’ [wooden ground plate] and posts of the house, so that it will shortly fall to the

ground.” Gilbert is found guilty [sic] and Thomas and Margaret recover damages.

Source: W. M. Palmer, ed., *Cambridge Borough Documents*, vol. 1 (Cambridge, UK: Bowes and Bowes, 1931), pp. 9–10.

DOCUMENT 10

Street Life

Life on the streets of a medieval city is best seen through the records of the city's courts. It was violent; assault and murder were commonplace, and public control of urban development was at best spasmodic and ineffective. Citizens extended their properties into the street, narrowing it until traffic could no longer pass. Steps were cut in the highway to gain access to cellars and basements to the grave danger of pedestrians, and animals were slaughtered and even forges erected in the midst of the highway. Safety precautions, which would today have been normal, were ignored, and the loss of life, especially of the young, was horrendous. The following extracts from the London Eyre of 1244 throws some light on these conditions.

HOMICIDE

102. John Black “courector” was found strangled in his shop, and Thomas le Custurer who strangled him because of a wound John had dealt him, fled to the hospital of St. Thomas the Martyr across the Bridge, where he died of the wound. The value of Thomas’s chattels is 12 d. [a deodand].

107. Robert of St. Osith struck Thomas de Haldham on the head with a staff, and killed him. He fled to a church [i.e., sought sanctuary] and acknowledged the deed and abjured the realm.* . . . He had chattels worth 4s.

142. Honorius le Rumunger killed Roger de Vilers with a knife, and fled to the church of St. Bartholomew, where he acknowledged the death and abjured the realm. He had no chattels and was in frankpledge in the ward of Joice fitz Peter.

*Left the country, swearing never to return.

Source: Helen M. Chew and Martin Weinbaum, eds., *The London Eyre of 1244*, London Record Society Publications, vol. 6 (Leicester: London Record Society, 1970), pp. 42, 44, 46.

ACCIDENT

80. William son of Adam le Cost was crushed by a stone wall which fell upon him, and was killed. Judgment: misadventure. No one is suspected. Value of the wall 1 mark.

81. [A] girl of two fell into a pan full of hot water and was scalded. No one is suspected. Judgment: misadventure. Value of pan 6d.

91. [A] woman named Juliana of Camberwell fell from a solar in the house of John de Exeport, and was crushed by the beams of the solar which fell upon her, so that she died. No one is suspected. Judgment: misadventure. Value of the planks 3s.

101. [A] man named William Aubyn fell into the Thames, pulled in by a bucket which he had in his hand for drawing water, and was drowned. No one is suspected. Judgment: misadventure. Value of the bucket 4d.

126. A boy was found crushed to death by a block of wood. No one is suspected. Judgment: misadventure. Value of the block of wood 8d.

Source: Chew and Weinbaum, *The London Eyre*, pp. 33, 34, 38, 43, 51.

STREET OBSTRUCTIONS

350. A forge stands in the middle of the king's highway [in Farrington Ward] opposite the New Temple and renders yearly to the king 12d.

351. Another forge stands in the king's highway opposite Shoe Lane which renders to the king yearly 6d. by the hands of the same brethren.

364. Stephen of Bocking has a cellar and a pentice* above the steps of his cellar to the nuisance [of the public]. Let it be demolished.

445. Andrew the Draper has a cellar the steps of which stand 3 ft. in the king's highway. The same Andrew has a porch which is to the nuisance [of the public]. Let them be amended.

Source: Chew and Weinbaum, *The London Eyre*, pp. 137, 140, 148.

*Pentice, a lean-to shelter.

LONDON BRIDGE

344. The justices ask by what warrant the citizens of the London built upon London Bridge. The City answered that for the most part the fabric of the bridge was maintained by the alms of the citizens of London, and the wardens and brethren of the bridge built mostly from those alms upon the same bridge shops for the maintenance and improvement of the fabric; this did not however cause the deterioration of the street which is sufficiently wide everywhere and those crossing by the bridge do so the more securely and boldly for the buildings built thereon.

Source: Chew and Weinbaum, *The London Eyre*, p. 134.

DOCUMENT 11
Urban Finances

Most larger towns had an official in charge of its finances. He rendered an account to the city council every year, but the amount of money that he handled was usually very small. There was as a general rule no urban taxation, though there might have been a levy to cover an exceptional expenditure such as the building of the town walls. Maintenance of the streets was the obligation of those who lived along them. Many of the duties which were later to be discharged by the municipal authorities were performed by the parishes of which the city was made up. The chief source of municipal income was the property which it owned and from which it received a rent. Also important were the tolls received for the use of the market and the fines imposed for breaches of urban "laws."

Below is the earliest treasurer's account for the borough of Cambridge for the year 1347. It shows how petty were the sources of income and how trifling the matters on which it was spent.

RECEIPTS

20s. 9d. received of the old treasurers . . . [i.e., carried over from the previous year]

71s. received of the shops near the wall of the Augustine friars

20s. received of the new shops opposite the Gildhall

£5. 16. [sic] received of divers [various] men purchasing their freedom . . .

66s. 8d. received for divers fines in the Court

£15. 7s. 2d. received of the collectors of the hird penny for the armed men
72s. 11d. received for the tallage made for the archers

PAYMENTS

To the sheriff, for the new gift to him that he would not take victuals, £3; to the undersheriff, half mark*

To Sir Richard de Kelleshall for the new gift to him, 20s.; to his clerk, half mark; to his esquire, 2s.

To Sir William de Tjorp, justice, 40s.; to his clerk, 2s.

To Master John de Thoresby, for his fee, 20s.; in other expenses, 20s.; to the keepers of the horses of the Lord the King, half mark; in wine for the same, 3½ d.; to John Tayllefor, messenger of the Lord the King, 2s.

To the messenger of the Lord the King, coming for the armed men, 40d.

To a page carrying the writ for the said armed men**

To a messenger carrying the writ for a ship, 2s. [meaning not clear]

Paid the mayor and the bailiffs for their fee, 30s.

To William de Horwood, clerk, for his fee, half mark

To the same William for a tallage tenth, half mark; to the same William from the tallage of wool, half mark

Paid William de Lolleworth and Thomas de Cottenham going to London for the Parliament, 20s.

In one cup sent to Matthew Hardy, 54s.

To John de Steping for three gaol deliveries, 18d.***

Paid John de Hilton for the write for the archers, 1 mark

In expenses of Thomas Wyth and William de Horwoode to Ely with the commission for having a ship, 2s. 2d.

In ale for the archers, 6d.

In clay bought for the Great Bridge, 2s.

In wine for the King's ministers, 8d.

In timber for the pillory,**** and divers expenses for the same, 12s. 9d.

*A mark was 6s. 8d., or two-thirds of a pound. It was a unit of value very commonly used.

**A legal writ authorizing the conscription of soldiers.

***A gaol delivery; the king's judges toured the royal prisons and heard the cases against all the prisoners being held there, thus "delivering" or emptying the gaols. Hanging was almost the only penalty inflicted on the guilty.

****Pillory, a wooden structure in which the guilty were fastened by the neck and hands to a wooden cross and held up to the ridicule of the crowd.

To Johnde Hilton going to the admiral, 1 mark; in expenses of the same then and one horse for his esquire, 3s. 7d.; in expenses of the said John returning from the admiral, 14d.; paid the same John for his labor, 2 marks; to his esquire, 40d.

DOCUMENT 12

Citizenship

62. Be it known . . . that no one may be in the City as a citizen, and stay there and enjoy the law of the City for more than three nights, unless he finds two pledges [guarantors of his good behavior] and thus is in frankpledge; and if he stays one night longer in the City . . . and commits a felony or does anything in breach of the king's peace, and does not stand his trial, the alderman in whose ward he was, ought to be in mercy for harbouring him . . . when he was not in frankpledge.

209. The mayor and sheriffs are ordered to take into the king's hand all the houses and buildings which belonged to Bernard de Salette in the City of London, because he was a stranger [alien?] and not in lot and scot, and did not belong to the liberty of the City; and they are to enquire concerning the chattels which the said Bernard had and to answer for them.

Source: Chew and Weinbaum, *The London Eyre*, pp. 25, 86.

DOCUMENT 13

Urban Description and Illustration

While there is no lack of documentary sources for the conditions of life in the medieval city and also a small but growing body of archaeological evidence, we know little about how these cities looked. Little attempt was made to draw or paint them, and literary descriptions are few and not particularly informative. Yet there were illustrations and descriptions of a kind. Their weakness was that they were generalized. A city was not seen as a place with its own particular characteristics, its own personality. A description or illustration of one town could be reused with little change for another. Not until the early sixteenth century was any attempt made to portray the city as it actually was, distinct and different from every other.

DOCUMENT 14

The Visual Arts

Little attempt was made before the fifteenth century to represent cities visually. They appear in the paintings of the Italian Renaissance but are usually so generalized that one cannot ascribe them to any particular place.

In 1493 Hartmann Schedel published his *Liber Chronicarum*, a history of the known world, profusely illustrated with woodcuts, among which is a very large number of urban views.¹ The context assigns names to each of them, but most are so alike that they must be dismissed as largely figments of the engraver's imagination. Only a small number, including Nuremberg, which was Schedel's birthplace, bear any relationship to reality.

In the second half of the sixteenth century this began to change. Just as cartography, in the hands of the Dutch, became a precise science, so panoramic views of cities acquired a greater precision and accuracy. For this, it has been suggested, there was a good practical reason. Artillery was beginning to play an increasingly important role in warfare, especially in the sieges of cities, and it became important for artillery masters to have some idea of the location of important buildings within any city that was under siege. There was thus a ready market for panoramic urban views with some pretension to accuracy.

Be that as it may, urban views without any accompanying text became more numerous and increasingly accurate. They reached their highest point in the vast, three-volume urban atlas, compiled in the late sixteenth century by Braun and Hogenberg.² The Middle Ages had already ended, but their record is the best representation of how European cities must have looked soon after the Middle Ages had drawn to a close.

DOCUMENT 15

Literary Descriptions

Literary, in particular poetic, descriptions of cities became a literary genre in classical times. Ausonius used it in his *Ordo Nobilium Urbium*, and his example was followed, albeit unconsciously, by a few writers during the Middle Ages. Most often the writer used it to praise the splendor and nobility of his native town. Such accounts were rarely accurate. In this age of faith, their authors tended to stress the saints with whom their cities had been associated and emphasized their relics and associated churches and miracles.

This tradition, sometimes in verse, sometimes in prose, continued through the Middle Ages. It was peculiarly Italian, as if emphasizing its classical origins, and very few examples derive from north of the Alps. They were too greatly concerned with religious life and miraculous happenings and symbolism to dwell on topographical aspects of the city. A list of such writings was published by J. K. Hyde,³ whose critical evaluation of them is of the highest value.

Among the exceptions to this generalization is William FitzStephen's description of London. It was written about 1200, and is known to us as a preface to his *Life of Thomas à Becket* (1118–1170), who was born in London. This account contains far more topographical material than is usual. Extracts from FitzStephen's record follow.

Lucian's Chester. The earliest urban description to be written in Great Britain is probably that in which the monk Lucian described the town of Chester.⁴ It shares the characteristics of many of the Italian writings of this period. It is rhetorical, wordy, and moralizing. It opens with a religious exhortation, and continues with a discussion of the origin of the name "Chester." Lucian mentions that the city has walls and four gates, and that it stands above a beautiful river which has abundant fish and also permits ships from Aquitaine, Spain, Ireland, and Germany to unload their cargoes at the city.

The city has two straight streets, intersecting at its center, so that in plan it symbolizes the Cross. A market at the center represents the birth of Christ, the "Eternal Flood" (*ad exemplum panis eterni de celo venientis*). The churches of St. John the Baptist, St. Peter, St. Werburgh, and St. Michael lie respectively on the eastern, western, northern, and southern streets. Throughout the symbolism of these locations is emphasized.

This is followed by a sermon which calls upon the four dedicatory saints to protect the city and by a brief account of the other churches of Chester. Then comes a passage in praise of the abbey of St. Werburgh (now Chester Cathedral), before the author returns to the subject of the city's gates and the symbolism of the churches which lie near them. This eulogy concludes with a long discourse on the roles of priest and monk and lavishes praise on those to be met with in Chester.

DOCUMENT 16

FitzStephen's Description of London

Among the noble and celebrated cities of the world [is] that of London, the capital of the kingdom of the English. . . . Higher than all the rest does it lift its head. It is happy in the healthiness of its air; in its observance of

Christian practice; in the strength of its fortifications; in its natural situation; in the honour of its citizens; and in the modesty of its matrons.

In the church of St. Paul there is the episcopal seat. . . . As regards the practice of Christian worship, there are in London and its suburbs thirteen greater conventual churches and, besides these, one hundred and twenty-six lesser parish churches.⁵

It has on the east the Palatine castle, very great and strong: the keep and walls rise from very deep foundations and are fixed with a mortar tempered by the blood of animals. On the west there are two castles [i.e., Baynard's and Muntifichet, both now entirely lost] very strongly fortified, and from these there runs a high and massive wall with seven double gates and with towers along the north at regular intervals. London was once also walled and turreted on the south, but the mighty Thames, so full of fish, has with the sea's ebb and flow washed against, loosened, and thrown down those walls in the course of time. Upstream to the west there is the royal palace [i.e., Whitehall] which is conspicuous above the river, a building incomparable in its ramparts and bulwarks. It is about two miles from the city and joined thereto by a populous suburb.

Everywhere outside the houses of those living in the suburbs, and adjacent to them, are the spacious and beautiful gardens of the citizens, and these are planted with trees. Also there are on the north side pastures and pleasant meadow lands through which flow streams wherein the turning of mill-wheels makes a cheerful sounds [*sic*]. Very near lies a great forest [probably Epping Forest is meant] with woodland pastures in which there are the lairs of wild animals: stags, fallow deer, wild boars and bulls. The tilled lands of the city are not of barren gravel, but fat Asian plains that yield luxuriant crops and fill the tillers' barns with the sheaves of Ceres [the goddess of the harvest, hence "cereal"].

There are also outside London on the north side excellent suburban wells with sweet, wholesome and clear water that flows rippling over the bright stones. Among these are Holywell, Clerkenwell and St. Clement's Well, which are all famous. These are frequented by great numbers and much visited by the students from the schools and by the young men of the city, when they go out for fresh air on summer evenings.

The city is honoured by her men, glorious in its arms, and so populous that during the terrible wars of King Stephen's reign [1135–52] the men

going forth from it to battle were reckoned as twenty thousand armed horsemen and sixty thousand foot-soldiers, all equipped for war.⁶ The citizens of London are regarded as conspicuous above all others for their polished manners, for their dress and for the good tables which they keep.

[There follows an account of the schools in London.]

Immediately outside one of the gates there is a field which is smooth both in fact and in name. On every sixth day of the week, unless it be a major feast-day, there takes place there a famous exhibition of fine horses for sale. Earls, barons and knights, who are in the town, and many citizens come out to see or to buy. It is pleasant to see the high-stepping palfreys with their gleaming coats, as they go through their paces, putting down their feet alternately on one side together. Next, one can see the horses suitable for esquires, . . . [and then] there are the sumpter-horses, powerful and spirited; and after them there are the war-horses.

By themselves in another part of the field stand the goods of the countryfolk: implements of husbandry, swine with long flanks, cows with full udders, oxen of immense size, and woolly sheep. There also stand the mares fit for plough, some big with foal, and others with brisk young colts closely following them. [There follows an account of the Smithfield horse fair.]

To this city from every nation under heaven merchants delight to bring their trade by sea. The Arabian sends gold; the Sabaeans send spices and incense. The Scythians bring arms, and from the rich, fat lands of Babylon comes oil of palms. The Nile sends precious stones; the men of Norway and Russia, furs and sables; nor is China absent with purple silk. The Gauls come with their wines. [This fabrication appears to have derived from a classical source; it is grossly exaggerated.]

To this it may be added that almost all the bishops, abbots and magnates of England are in a sense citizens and freemen of London, having their own splendid town-houses. In them they live, and spend largely, when they are summoned to great councils by the king or by their metropolitan, or drawn thither by their private affairs.

Source: See William FitzStephen, "Description of the City of London," in *English Historical Documents 1042–1089*, 13 vols., ed. D. C. Douglas and George W. Greenaway (London: Eyre & Spottiswoode, 1953), 2:956–60.

DOCUMENT 17

Two English Towns: Lincoln and Nottingham

In 1533 John Leland, librarian to King Henry VIII, was commissioned by his master to tour England and Wales, visiting religious houses and reporting on their manuscripts and other treasures. In the course of his travels he gathered notes which were to become the basis of *The Itinerary* of John Leland. This work presents a picture of England and of much of Wales as they were early in the sixteenth century. His accounts of two English cities are given here: Lincoln and Nottingham. They show us what these cities were like at the end of the Middle Ages. These extracts show how practical were the urban descriptions of Leland, and how free they were from the religiosity of Lucian and of the Italian topographers. There were very few towns which he did not visit and describe, and his work is a mine of topographical information. There are several editions of Leland's work, but the most accessible is *The Itinerary of John Leland as edited by Lucy Toulmin Smith*.

Lincoln

He first describes very briefly the city's gates and encircling walls. The original city lay on the summit of a hill, which drops steeply to the river Witham. It was founded by the Romans as *Lindum*, and there are some architectural remains from this period, including the north gate, or Newport Arch.

It is very likely that in old tyme the toppe of the hille only was waulid and inhabitid.

The ryver of Lincoln breking into 2. armes [branches] a very litle above the toun passith thoroug the lower part of Lincoln toun yn 2. severalle partes of the south ende of the toun very commodiusly, and over eche of them is an archid bridge of stone to passe thoroug the principal streate.

The lesser arme lyith more southly, and the bridg over it is of one arche. The bigger armes *fert cymbas piscatorias*. Gote bride [bridge] to passe over the lesser arme. Highe bridge to passe over the great arme.

A very goodly house longging to Sutton is hard on the north syde of S. Annes chirch yarde.

A litle above Gote bridge, on the este side of the high streat, is a fair guild haul, longging to S. Annes chirch e reigione, of the fundation of Bitlyndon and Sutton, marchants.

I hard say that the lower parte of Lincoln town was al marisch [marshy], and won be policy, and inhabitid for the commodite of the water.

This part of the toune is caullid Wikerford [Wigford]: and yn it be a 11. paroche chirches, one there I saw in clene ruine, [be]side the other xi.

The White Freres [i.e., Carmelites] were on the west side of the high streat [in] Wikerf[ord].

There be in the residew of the toun, as in the north parte upon the hille, xiiij. paroche chirchis yet usid. I saw a rolle wherin I countid that ther were xxxviiij. paroche chirchis yn Lincoln.

There goith a commune fame [report] that there were ons 52. paroche chirchis yn Lincoln cite, and the suburbes of it.

[He then describes the suburbs of the city.]

It is easy to be perceivid that the toune of Lincoln hath be notably buildid at 3. tymes [i.e., three separate building periods]. The first building was yn the very toppe of the hille, the oldest part wherof inhabited in the Britans tyme, was the northethest part of the hille, directly withoute Newport gate, the diches wherof yet remayne and great tokens of the old towne waulles buildid with stone taken oute of [the] diche by it: for al the top of Lincoln Hille is quarre ground. This is now a suburbe to Newporte gate: in the which is now no notable thing but the ruines of the house of the Augustine Freres on the south side, and a paroch church of the est side: and not far from the chyrch garth apperith a great ruine of a toure [tower] in the olde towne waulle. . . . Much Romaine mony is found yn the northe [fieldes] beyond this old Lincoln. After the destruction of this old Lincoln men began to fortifie the souther parte of the hille, new dicing, waulling and gating it, and so was new Lincoldn made out of a pece of old Lincoln by the Saxons.

Source: See John Leland, *The Itinerary of John Leland*, ed. L. Toulmin Smith, 5 vols. (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1964), 1:29–31.

Nottingham

Nottingham is booth a large toun and welle buildid for tymber and plaster, and standith stately on a clyminge [i.e., steep] hille.

The market place and streate both for the building on the side of it, for the very great widenes of the streat, and the clene paving of it, is the most fairest without exception of al Inglande.

Ther be 3 paroches chirches; but the chirch of S. Mary is excellent. . . . Southeward as to the water side be great clifes and rokkes of stones, that be large and very good to build with, and many houses sette on the toppes of them: and at the botom of them be great caves wher many stones hath bene diggid out for buildinge yn the toune, and these caves be partly usid for dwellynge howses, and partly for cerllars and store houses.

Ther hath beene 3. houses of freres, as I remembre, whereof 2. stooede toward the west of the towne and not far from the castelle.

The towne hath be meately welle wallid with stone, and hath had dyvers gates; much of the waul is now down, and the gates saving 2. or 3.

There is no suburbe over the stone bridge . . . on the south side of the toune.

The castelle of Notingham stondith on a rocky hille as on the newest side of the towne; and Line ri[ver] goith by the rootes of it.

There is [a great] likelihood that the castelle was buildid of stones taken owt of the rokke and the great diches of it. [There follows a very detailed description of Nottingham Castle.]

Source: See Leland, *The Itinierary of John Leland*, 1:94–96.

NOTES

1. Hartmann Schedel, *Liber Chronicarum* (Nuremberg, 1493).

2. Georg Braun and Franz Hogenberg, *Civitates Orbis Terrarum*, 6 vols., 1572–1618. Twenty-four illustrations were republished as *Old European Cities: Thirty-two Sixteenth-Century City Maps and Texts from the “Civitates Orbis Terrarum” of Georg Braun and Franz Hogenberg*, ed. Ruthardt Oehme (London: Thames and Hudson, 1965), and there is a modern facsimile edition of the whole work, published as *Civitates Orbis Terrarum: “The Towns of the World,” 1572–1618*, ed. R. A. Skelton (Cleveland, OH: World Pub. Co., 1966).

3. J. K. Hyde, “Medieval Descriptions of Cities,” *Bulletin of the John Rylands Library, Manchester*, vol. 48 (1965–1966): 308–40.

4. *Liber Luciani de Laude Cestrie* [Lucian’s Book in Praise of Chester], ed. M. V. Taylor, *The Record Society of Lancashire and Cheshire*, vol. 64 (1912).

5. This total for the number of parishes is approximately correct, but includes some which lay outside the line of the Roman/medieval walls.

6. This estimate of the number of armed men which London could put into the field is grossly exaggerated, and is a good example of the unreliability of medieval figures. The total population of the city could not about 1200 have exceeded 10,000.

GLOSSARY

Ale: An alcoholic drink prepared by fermenting vegetable grains, usually malted barley; differs from beer in not having been flavored with hops.

Bastide: Small, fortified town, built in southern and southwestern France by the kings of both France and Great Britain; the latter was duke of Aquitaine and thus held this part of France.

Beer: An alcoholic drink prepared by fermenting vegetable grains, usually malted barley; differs from ale in having been flavored with hops.

Bourgeoisie: The body of the inhabitants of a “bourg” or borough; usually restricted to its middle class of traders and craftsmen.

Bread-grains: The cereal grains usually used in making bread because they contain gluten, which allows the bread to rise; preeminently wheat, but also barley, rye, and on rare occasions, oats.

Burg, Burh: A town, usually referring to a town of early date, for example, Anglo-Saxon.

Burgage plot: Small, clearly defined unit of urban land, suitable for building a single house and/or shop.

Capital: The central place of a civitas.

- Central-place theory:** The theory that there is an even scatter of “central places” (villages or towns) over any relatively homogeneous surface of the land; that smaller or “lower order” central places are denser on the ground than larger, and that the range of urban functions is related to the size of these units.
- Cesspit:** Pit or hole in the ground dug to receive the effluent from a toilet, usually domestic.
- Charter:** A document, usually of parchment, in which its author grants prescribed lands, rights, or privileges, typically those of urban self-government.
- City-state:** Small, sovereign territory, focused in a single dominant city; a term used chiefly for those of classical antiquity.
- Civitas:** A tribal territory of the period of the Roman Empire; many survived as a Roman administrative unit and in many instances as the territory subject to a medieval bishop.
- Contado:** Italian for “county”; a restricted area subject administratively to a count; Fr. Comte.
- Deodand:** Literally “given to God.” This was the value of any inanimate object through which someone had lost his or her life, for example, a broken ladder. It was assessed by the coroner at the judicial inquest, and was payable by its owner to the king, who was presumed to give it to some charitable purpose.
- Domesday Book:** A record ordered by King William I in 1086 for as much of England as then lay under his control, of the ownership of land and the possession of resources.
- Eyre:** Judicial circuit, as in “Justices in Eyre”; hence the court that made a progress through the country.
- Fair:** A gathering of traders, usually lasting several days and rarely held more than twice a year; from the eleventh to the fourteenth centuries, the chief medium in the long-distance trade of Europe.

Frankpledge: Every person in medieval England was presumed to belong to a Frankpledge, which was jointly responsible for the good behavior of each member. Periodically checks were made on membership; this was the “View of Frankpledge.”

Geld: Literally, money; hence, tax.

Ghetto: A name deriving from a quarter in medieval Venice in which most of the city’s Jews lived; by extension, any part of a town in which a particular ethnic minority settled.

Gild, Guild: An association of people for an economic, social, or religious purpose, or for some combination of these ends.

Gild Merchant: The association of traders in any one town, which generally preceded the formation of individual gilds.

Hanse: An association of people for a particular purpose; specifically the association of North German merchants trading in the Baltic Sea: the German Hanse.

Hearth: A household, or the group of people living together in a single home. It was used as a unit for determining taxation.

Hinterland: Literally the “land behind”; hence the territory served by a particular town or port.

Hospital: During the Middle Ages an endowed institution that cared for the aged and impotent, and not necessarily the sick.

Hospitallers: A knightly order of the Hospital of St. John of Jerusalem whose task it was to protect and safeguard pilgrims to the holy sites.

Jetty: The projection of an upper floor of a house over a lower; possible only in timber frame construction.

Just price: The theory that the price of a commodity should reflect the labor of producing it, and that no attempt should be made to profit from scarcity or need; the opposite to market price.

- Lammas:** August 1st, seen as the end of harvest, when the open fields were made available for the communal grazing of the animals of the community.
- Lavatorium:** The place in a monastery (usually in the cloister and close to the refectory), where hands were washed before meals; by extension, a toilet.
- Market:** A gathering, usually on a preordained day of the week, of peasants and townsfolk for the purpose of exchanging urban and rural products.
- Osemond, Osmund:** A high quality iron or wrought iron, chiefly made in Scandinavia from iron ores that were relatively free of harmful impurities; imported by some western European countries and used for making steel.
- Parish:** The smallest unit of ecclesiastical jurisdiction and subject to a single priest; of variable extent. The urban parish might cover only a few acres; the rural, several square miles.
- Pathogen:** The disease-bearing microorganism that is passed from one patient to another by means of a vector or carrier, the flea in the case of the Plague.
- Pentice:** A projecting or overhanging roof, sometimes extending over the street from a house in order to give shelter to a shop or basement stairway.
- Plague:** Strictly *pestis pestiferous*, which is spread by the symbiotic relationship of flea and rat; correctly used for the “Black Death” of 1348–1350, but also for several later outbreaks in Europe. Also used, incorrectly, for other severe epidemic diseases.
- Planted town:** A town resulting from the deliberate act of foundation by a territorial lord; usually, but not always, planned on a gridiron pattern.
- Porticullis:** An iron grill set vertically in a defensive gatehouse; can be lifted to allow passage; frequently found in urban gates.

Primate city: The theory that in any extensive area there is always one urban center that is very much larger than all others, and that there is a mathematical relationship that approximately defines this relationship.

Relief: Feudal payment for land or other concession.

Sea coal: The name used to distinguish mineral coal from “*char* coal.” So named because it was imported into London by sea from the coastal coalfields of Northumberland and Durham.

Sheriff: From the Middle English “shire-reeve,” meaning the king’s chief representative and administrative officer in each county. The office survives, but his duties are now mainly honorific.

Studs: The wooden framework of a “half-timbered” house or other building. The intervening spaces would have been filled in with either wattle-and-daub (the pliable branches of the willow tree, woven together and daubed with clay) or brick.

Synocicism: The coming together of the inhabitants of the villages in a relatively small area to form a single city or *polis*.

Tallage: A tax or levy imposed by feudal authority; the implication is usually that it is arbitrary and unauthorized.

Tan, Taw: The process by which skins are converted into leather by soaking them in a bath of tannin, a complex chemical of vegetable origin. Oak bark was commonly used.

Templars: The Order of the Knights of the Temple; founded during the twelfth century for the purpose of protecting the Temple of

Jerusalem and the other holy places and the pilgrims frequenting them.

Tower house: Fortified house built within a city for the protection of the family which inhabited it; chiefly in Italy, where the tower houses were built to very great heights, but also to be found widely in cities and also the countryside of western Europe.

Tuberculosis: Disease of the lungs, brought on mainly by living in a damp and dirt-ridden environment, such as that found in many medieval towns.

Typhus: A disease commonly met with in damp and dirty living conditions and resulting in a high mortality; its vector was the body louse; also known as “trench” fever and “gaol” fever.

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