Preface

Christopher Wheeler’s unexpected invitation to edit this Handbook came towards the end of a career largely spent teaching early modern European history in British universities. It also arrived when I was spending a sabbatical year in the United States, which made me aware, for the first time, of the very different forms of ‘early modern’ history which thrived on the other side of the Atlantic. After some initial hesitation over whether to accept, I came to see both the opportunity presented by the Handbook to take stock of what early modern European history was and is, how and why it has developed, and where it might be going, at a time when its study is becoming less central to university and college teaching than between the 1970s and the 1990s. Yet the subject’s remarkable growth during my own professional lifetime has been such that, even within the considerable space generously allocated by Oxford University Press, difficult choices have had to be made.

The overall aim was to produce a coherent and accessible guide to the many approaches to early modern European history which have thrived during the past four or five decades. Defining the overall framework and even establishing the period to be covered, however, proved to be more problematical than I had anticipated. In the planning and commissioning stage I was fortunate to have the benefit of advice from two associate editors: Liam Brockey (Michigan State University) and Regina Grafe (European University Institute), and both helped to shape the book in important ways. Aware of contrasting approaches to this period, the scheme was then submitted to several friends for their scrutiny: I am grateful to Carlo Capra, Stuart Clark, Bill Doyle, John Elliott, David Moon, Martin Powers, and Ted Rabb, as well as Oxford University Press.
anonymous referees, for their incisive and constructive suggestions. Subsequently Sheilagh Ogilvie was a generous source of advice on economic history.

My debt to the contributors is even greater. All have responded positively and uncomplainingly to suggestions for revision intended to strengthen the unity of the two volumes, and have patiently waited for all the authors and the editor to complete their contributions. Any enterprise involving over fifty scholars is bound to have a bumpy ride to the finishing line, and I have been particularly grateful to several contributors who completed their articles despite adverse professional or personal circumstances. When it seemed likely that the volume might be deprived of a crucial chapter on ‘Historical Demography’, the editors and publisher of the *Journal of Interdisciplinary History* graciously allowed Anne McCants to expand and update her article, ‘Historical Demography and the Crisis of the Seventeenth Century’, which originally appeared in that journal [40 (2009), 195–214] and now appears in this *Handbook* in a substantially revised version. I am deeply grateful to the journal’s editors and publisher for permitting this reprinting, and especially to Ted Rabb for swiftly facilitating this arrangement. The last-minute withdrawal of the scholar who had undertaken to write the article on ‘Travel and Communications’ threatened that another key topic might be omitted, and in the circumstances I decided at very short notice to write a replacement chapter myself.

The production of two such large volumes has been surprisingly easy, thanks to the skill and professionalism of the History team at Oxford University Press: Christopher Wheeler (before his retirement), his successor Stephanie Ireland, Rachel Naum and, above all, Cathryn Steele whose support and encouragement during the final stages has been particularly important. Elissa Connor skillfully copy-edited the articles, and Deepika Mercilee, Tharani Ramachandran, and Michael Dela Cruz have together made the transition from electronic files to printed book much smoother than it might have been: my debt to them is considerable. It is even greater to Nancy Bailey who—as in previous books which I have published—has not merely handled the computing side, but has provided continual encouragement and advice, and caught more of my slips than I like to remember! The presence in Glasgow of two contributors, Sam Cohn and Thomas Munck, has been a particular advantage. Both have offered wisdom and encouragement, and been ready to listen to me thinking out the problems which emerged during the editing. Alex Shephard has also been a local source of welcome guidance and practical help. Julia Smith has helped most of all, with sound advice, injunctions to press on, reviving cups of coffee, and quite remarkable toleration of my preoccupation, particularly during recent months.

Hamish Scott

December 2014
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Edited by Hamish Scott

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<th>received his Ph.D. from Northwestern University in 2004, and is an Associate Professor of Medieval History at Georgetown University. He has written extensively on the medieval and early modern cult of the saints, Renaissance humanism in Germany, and learned magic in the Middle Ages. His book <em>Reforming Saints</em> (Oxford, 2008) examines the expansive literature on saints produced by the early humanists in Germany. He is currently the senior editor of the <em>Cambridge History of Magic and Witchcraft in the West from Antiquity to the Present</em> (Cambridge, forthcoming), and his present research is focused on the development, reception, and ultimate rejection of scholastic approaches to learned magic—alchemy, astrology, and divination—in the later Middle Ages and early modern period.</th>
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Robert Allan Houston was born in Hamilton, Scotland, lived in India and Ghana and was educated at the Edinburgh Academy and St Andrews University before spending six years at Cambridge University as a research student (Peterhouse) and research fellow (Clare College). He has worked at the University of St Andrews since 1983 and is Professor of Early Modern History, specializing in British social history. His most recent books from Oxford University Press are Punishing the Dead? Suicide, Lordship and Community in Britain, 1500–1830 (2010) and Bride Ales and Penny Weddings: Recreations, Reciprocity, and Regions in Britain from the Sixteenth to the Nineteenth Century (2014). He is a fellow of both the Royal Historical Society and the Royal Society of Edinburgh (Scotland’s national academy), and a member of the Academia Europaea.

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David B. Ruderman is the Joseph Meyerhoff Professor of Modern Jewish History and Ella Darivoff Director of the Herbert D. Katz Center for Advanced Judaic Studies at the University of Pennsylvania. Prior to coming to Pennsylvania, he taught at the University of Maryland (1974–83) and at Yale University (1983–94). He is the author of many books and articles including The World of a Renaissance Jew (Cincinnati, OH, 1981); Kabbalah, Magic, and Science (Cambridge, MA, 1988); A Valley of Vision (Philadelphia, PA, 1990); Jewish Thought and Scientific Discovery in Early Modern Europe (Detroit, MI, 1995, 2001), published also in Italian, Hebrew, and Russian; Jewish Enlightenment in an English Key: Anglo-Jewry’s Construction of Modern Jewish Thought (Princeton, NJ, 2000); Connecting the Covenants: Judaism and the Search for Christian Identity in Eighteenth Century England (Philadelphia, PA, 2007), and Early Modern Jewry: A New Cultural History (Princeton, NJ, 2010). Three of these books, including the last, won national book awards in Jewish history. He is a past president of the American Academy (p. xxv) for Jewish Research. In 2001, the National Foundation for Jewish Culture honoured him with its lifetime achievement award for his work in Jewish history.
Hamish Scott is an Honorary Senior Research Fellow at the University of Glasgow and Wardlaw Professor Emeritus of International History at the University of St Andrews. A Fellow of the British Academy and of the Royal Society of Edinburgh, he has published extensively on eighteenth-century international relations, most recently The Birth of a Great Power System, 1740–1815 (Harlow, 2007), and has edited volumes on enlightened absolutism, nobility and political culture. He is currently completing Forming Aristocracy: The Reconfiguration of Europe’s Nobilities, c.1300–1750, to be published by Oxford University Press.

Tom Scott is Honorary Professor in the School of History at the University of St Andrews, and a member of the Reformation Studies Institute. He is the author or editor of thirteen books and over seventy articles. His research has focused on town–country relations, regional economic systems, regional identity, and popular rebellions in South-West Germany and, more recently, on city states in Europe. His latest publications include The City State in Europe, 1000–1600: Hinterland, Territory, Region (Oxford, 2012) and The Early Reformation in Europe: between Secular Impact and Radical Vision (Farnham, 2013). He holds an M.A., Ph.D., and Litt.D. from the University of Cambridge.
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Nicholas Terpstra is Professor of History at the University of Toronto. He specializes in the intersections of gender, politics, religion, and charity in early modern Italy. Recent publications include Cultures of Charity: Women, Politics, and the Reform of Poor Relief in Renaissance Italy (Cambridge, MA, 2013), and Lost Girls: Sex & Death in Renaissance Florence (Baltimore, MD, 2010). He is currently working on a project to produce an online digital map of Renaissance Florence, the Digitally Encoded Census Information and Mapping Archive or DECIMA (http://decima.chass.utoronto.ca/). His latest book is Religious Refugees in the Early Modern World: An Alternative History of the Reformation (Cambridge, 2015).
Europe—a peninsula at the western extremity of Eurasia: physical regions

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Hamish Scott

The Oxford Handbook of Early Modern European History, 1350-1750: Volume I: Peoples and Place
Edited by Hamish Scott

Abstract and Keywords

This chapter examines the emergence of the idea of ‘early modern’ history during the 1960s and 1970s, and explains its origins, particularly in modernization theory and in the expansion of the university system at that period. It focuses particularly upon developments in the Anglophone scholarly world (primarily Britain and the United States) and in West Germany. It then explores the important contribution of the Annales school to this evolution. The chapter goes on to consider the validity of the established periodization (1450/1500–1800) for the ‘early modern’ era, and suggests reasons why the centuries from 1350 to 1750 constitute a more satisfactory chronology. Finally, it outlines the structure of the Handbook and its wider aim of restoring a unitary view of the period.

Keywords: Annales school, early modern history, modernization theory, periodization, European historiography, social science history

A notion of an ‘early modern’ era is a relatively recent way of characterizing the period between approximately 1450/1500 and 1800. In Britain and North America, and in Germany too, the term first began to be consciously employed by university historians as recently as the later 1960s and early 1970s; greater precision than that is extremely difficult. Since then anyone who researches on these centuries has tended to self-identify or to be characterized as an early modern specialist. This leads on to two quite fundamental preliminary points. The first is that early modern as a term—and as a term and not an established period of study given unity and coherence by certain distinctive characteristics—really only exists in the Anglophone scholarly world and in German-speaking countries. In Romance languages these centuries are styled ‘modern history’.
histoire moderne in French, storia moderna in Italian, historia moderna in Spanish, with ‘contemporary history’ deemed to begin—in most cases—with the French Revolution or shortly thereafter. Yet in all these countries the period between approximately 1450/1500 and 1800 is an established and coherent field of study. This underlines that history is conceptualized and practised in distinctly different ways in different countries, largely in terms of an author’s membership of a particular intellectual and linguistic community.

Secondly, the notion of an early modern epoch—exactly like any historical periodization—is retrospective. It involves the imposition of a series of subsequent perspectives upon an earlier age and the privileging of a particular viewpoint. Every generation has to re-shape its view of the past and sometimes even construct it afresh. The label ‘early modern’ was the product of a particular time and place, or rather several locations. Self-evidently, those living in the sixteenth, or seventeenth, or eighteenth century might be aware that it was the ‘modern’ era, but could not know that it was the early modern epoch, since they were unable to foresee the future. It was transformed into the early modern period only by subsequent historical developments.

Until the second half of the twentieth century, scholars overwhelmingly continued to utilize the scheme of periodization which divided human history into three distinct epochs: Ancient, Medieval, and Modern. This division went back to the fourteenth-century Italian humanist Francesco Petrarch, who had distinguished between the glories of the Ancient World and the (medieval) ‘Dark Ages’ which followed, but from which he believed Europe was emerging. His distinction was elaborated by other Renaissance writers, and became a central trope of Late Humanism, as well as a negative verdict on the preceding period. This linear division of historical time was consolidated in the later seventeenth century, when the German professor and philologist, Christoph Keller (‘Cellarius’) (1638–1707), wrote a celebrated history (Historia Medii Aevi, 1688), which gave the term ‘Middle Ages’ much wider currency. The tripartite periodization which it incorporated was finally established during the eighteenth century, and survived largely unscathed for the next 200 years.

The creation of early modernity represented a move away from defining a historical period in terms of events of outstanding importance which serve as bookends—the fall of Constantinople in 1453, the Protestant Reformation after 1517, the French Revolution of 1789—towards periodization in terms of salient characteristics which define that era. Hitherto, established historical periods had reflected either one particular development characteristic of the entire age, or a central figure who appeared to shape it: the Age of the Renaissance, the Reformation or Absolutism, of Charles V or Louis XIV. By the second half of the twentieth century, such periodization was becoming redundant due to the changing nature of the historical discipline, now ceasing to be exclusively the study of
elites and high politics. Early modern was soon emerging as a powerful rival to such established chronological divisions. Emphasis in what follows is primarily on the academic study and teaching of these centuries in English. Undergraduate courses were undoubtedly influenced by changing scholarly fashion, but sometimes after an interval and far from completely. The terminology of early modern has acquired much less traction among writers of popular history, for whom established dates—Columbus’s first voyage in 1492 or Luther’s protest in 1517, for example—retain their traditional importance, largely because of the predominantly narrative nature and political subject matter of the books which are published.

Major Themes

By the later twentieth century a consensus existed over the meaning of early modern. It represented, very obviously, a unified approach to the centuries between the later fifteenth and the end of the eighteenth, and an emphasis upon social, economic, and cultural developments in particular. Where earlier accounts had privileged key developments—Renaissance, Reformation, Scientific Revolution, Enlightenment, and so on—the new terminology reduced the importance accorded to these and turned them into dimensions of a wider historical process.

The central themes in early modern history as it has been conceived, taught, researched, and written about in recent decades, and the case which these implicitly constitute for the inherent unity and coherence of these centuries, can be set out:

1. After the demographic catastrophe of the fourteenth century, renewed demographic growth which continued at a steady rate until the population explosion after 1750. It had been temporarily interrupted during the seventeenth century in large areas of Europe, though the north-west had seen a continuing if rather slower expansion.

2. Economic expansion which had been renewed between c. 1450 and c. 1480 and, after similar seventeenth-century difficulties, resumed from shortly after 1700. Manufacturing came to be carried out in larger units and to play an increased role within the economy overall.

3. Growth in authority of central government, sometimes expressed in terms of ‘state-building’ or the ‘rise of the modern state’. This was primarily evident in expanded agencies and responsibilities of central government, higher fiscal income, and much-enlarged armed forces. Simultaneously a more popular form of politics emerged, particularly in an urban setting, and contributed to an increasing questioning of the traditional order and hierarchy.
4. The Protestant Reformations shattered the unity of medieval Christendom, however much that may have been more apparent than real. These were followed by a period of attempted consolidation in all religious faiths, as church hierarchies sought to extend their authority over the lives of believers.

5. Slow transition from a society made up of communities to one consisting of individuals, which is sometimes expressed as the shift from a ‘community-based society’ (Gemeinschaft) to one based upon the ‘individual’ (Gesellschaft). In many regions of Europe, it is linked to a supposed transition from extended families resting upon kinship groups and enlarged households, to smaller, nuclear units based upon biological descent within which individualism thrived.

6. Undoubtedly, though probably relative, decline in the status of women, viewed both legally and socially, which became apparent as soon as gender was recognized by historians to be a central analytical category as well as a key development in itself.8

7. Transformation of Europe’s relationship with the rest of the world by the voyages of exploration; beginnings of a ‘global age’, particularly evident in commerce.

8. Introduction of decisive new technologies: particularly printing and gunpowder; adoption of new mechanized processes in manufacturing.


The last decade’s scholarship has given even more attention to interactions with the world beyond Europe and the global dimensions of ‘early modernity’. It has also highlighted the potential of material culture and, most recently of all, given sustained attention to the vastly increased volume of information made available by printing in particular together with the problems of storing and handling all this data, with the rise of private and even public archives.9

These themes can, of course, all be expressed in different ways or, more precisely, contrasting aspects of them can be highlighted. What is often, though wrongly, seen as the ‘rise of the middle class’, viewed as the most obvious example of the more individualist spirit which was gaining ground, has sometimes seemed to be central to social change. While in some regions of north-western Europe commercial activity and the money it generated were undoubtedly beginning to act as a solvent of established social structures, much of the continent remained deeply traditional, characterized by deference and institutionalized inequality.

**Early Modern as Terminology**

The best single date that can be advanced for the term’s adoption in the Anglophone scholarly world is 1970, with the appearance of ‘Cambridge Studies in Early Modern History’, which was to play an important role in its establishment, if one that is extremely difficult to ‘prove’ in any scientific sense. One of its founding editors, Sir John Elliott (as he subsequently became)—the other was H. G. Koenigsberger—had employed the term in an article published in the previous year, which marked an important point in a controversy over the supposed ‘crisis of the seventeenth century’ which had raged in *Past & Present* for more than a decade. The debate concerned the notion that the seventeenth century was sundered in the middle by a wide-ranging series of rebellions, the result (according to interpretative taste) of either a decisive phase in the transition from feudalism to capitalism or a widespread revolt of the country against the court, inspired by resistance to the escalating costs of monarchy, its prolonged wars, and burgeoning courts. Elliott’s article, together with an important short study by T. K. Rabb, emphasized that continuities were more obvious and important than any enduring fissures in the fabric of Europe’s past, and so contributed to the development during the 1970s of a unified early modern period.

Books now began to appear with ‘early modern’ in their title. The new period long remained in its infancy, however, and was for some time a sickly child. It is revealing that the ‘Cambridge Studies’ series had been turned down by Cambridge University Press when it had first been proposed in the early 1960s, apparently on the grounds that no such thing existed and so how could a series be devoted to it, and had only been accepted for publication when it was presented for a second time in 1966. As late as 1976, when Sir Keith Thomas (as he would later become) gave the ‘Raleigh Lecture’ to the British Academy on ‘Age and Authority in early modern England’, the President—no less a figure than the distinguished historian of ideas, Sir Isaiah Berlin—declared when introducing the speaker that this was the first occasion on which he had encountered the term. Episodes such as these underline just how slowly, tentatively, and with difficulty the new terminology became established. It would be the 1980s before it was employed more widely, and the 1990s before it became anything like universal in Britain at least.

A broadly similar chronology is evident in the United States, where the term also became established around the same time. Its pre-history there, however, was more extensive and important. Scholars had been employing ‘early modern’ quite widely from the 1930s, and this facilitated its widespread adoption in North America from around 1970. Within a decade American academic historians were becoming more familiar with the terminology. Thereafter its use spread throughout the Anglophone scholarly world, until...
the point in the mid-1990s when one scholar could refer to the ‘early modern academic machine’.19

On both sides of the Atlantic, university courses were organized in terms of early modern periodization, and it became a recognized subdivision of the modern era. Further series were founded to publish works of early modern history, while journals added the term to their title and, in several cases, were established specifically for that field.20 Two adjacent scholarly disciplines—those of Art History and Literature—embraced the terminology and periodization, though belatedly, hesitantly, and incompletely, while academic conferences—those barometers of scholarly fashion—were held to discuss its validity.21

There is, however, a vagueness and elusiveness about the establishment of ‘early modern’ as a term and category on both sides of the Atlantic. Here a revealing contrast is evident with the way in which another new historical period was created, with its own distinct nomenclature, almost simultaneously. The establishment of Barbarian Kingdoms in the West from the early fifth century, or possibly the deposition of the last Western Emperor in A.D. 476, had always seemed to mark the end of the Ancient World and the beginning of the Middle Ages. In 1971, however, Peter Brown published a short illustrated survey of what he termed ‘The World of Late Antiquity’, which he portrayed as a unified period originally extending from the third century to the seventh. The book’s striking success popularized at a stroke the notion of ‘Late Antiquity’. It posited a unified period, which initially extended for four centuries beginning in the age of Marcus Aurelius, but has subsequently expanded back into the second century and forward as far as the ninth.22 It weakened—if it did not completely destroy—the significance conventionally attributed to Rome’s fall; it also straddled the other great divide, the emergence and spread of Islam from the 630s.

Exactly as with ‘early modern’ there had been an extended period of pre-history and preparation: the term Late Antique (Spätantike) had been utilized by German art historians led by Alois Riegl from the early twentieth century onwards to designate the continuities in artistic style during these centuries; a handful of historians had employed the term after 1945, while the periodization of ‘antiquité tardive’ was employed by the influential French scholar of patristics Henri-Irénée Marrou during the generation before Brown wrote. But Brown’s book launched the term into academic parlance, and the notion of a Late Antique period has become a minor scholarly industry. The 1960s and 1970s were in fact unusually fertile for new terms for established historical periods, as well as novel periodizations: these decades saw ‘early medieval Europe’ replace ‘Barbarian Europe’ or ‘the Dark Ages’.23
No such founding moment can be identified for early modernity. The archaeology and genealogy of words are, of course, notoriously difficult terrain. Examples of the term’s use can be found long before 1970. Word searches of digitized resources by Phil Withington have revealed that early modern has a long pre-history extending back almost a century. The earliest use so far excavated was by William Johnson, a schoolmaster at Eton as well as a fellow of King’s College, Cambridge (in the nineteenth-century way of combining two such posts), who employed the term in an 1869 lecture, subsequently published, on the European sixteenth century. Thereafter the term remained dormant until the 1910s, when it began to be used occasionally, primarily but not exclusively by economic historians. Indeed, the very first volume of the *Journal of Modern History*, published in 1929, utilized ‘early modern history’ as a division in its bibliography of recent publications. In 1954 Sir George Clark employed the description ‘early modern Europe’ in a survey of the period 1450–1720 which highlighted the continuities during these centuries and initially appeared as part of a three-volume work entitled *The European Inheritance*. Based on his undergraduate lectures, it was twice reprinted as a separate study and was clearly influential: it may well have been behind the decision in 1957 by a British historical journal to begin using ‘Early Modern’ as a subdivision within its review section, while two years later a historian of science employed the terminology in a book title.

During these decades its use also became more widespread in the United States, not merely by historians but as an established category for historical linguists. By the 1930s and 1940s, specialists in the development of the English language had divided their subject into ‘Middle English’, ‘Early Modern English’, and ‘Modern English’. Among historians, however, the terminology had still to acquire its later programmatic character. It simply meant, as it had for William Johnson, the first or ‘early’ part of modern history. In other words, it was an adjective employed to describe the first part of the modern era, rather than an assertion of its unity supported by an attribution of distinctive historical characteristics to that epoch. By the 1960s, it was becoming more familiar. In 1967 the *Historians of Early Modern Europe Newsletter* was established, initially covering only the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries; it subsequently extended its coverage into the eighteenth century, and in 1991 was re-named *Scholars of Early Modern Europe*, by which point it included researchers in no fewer than twenty-five countries spread across five continents.

Wider developments contributed to its evolution in several important ways. In the most general sense, the 1960s, or more accurately the years from 1958 to 1973, were a period when many established assumptions were being questioned and some overthrown. The cultural, intellectual, social, economic, and political tectonic plates began to shift, in the
Western world at least. While this provided an essential wider context, more tangible influences can be identified.

A contemporary development in the Social Sciences was especially important. The 1950s and 1960s were the period when theories of modernization were exerting their greatest influence, particularly in the United States, and they subsequently became influential among historians. Though these ideas had a long pre-history, extending back at least to the writings of theorists such as Karl Marx, Emile Durkheim, and even Max Weber, their elaboration at this period had very specific political and intellectual origins. They were a product of the concerned reactions of academics and the governing elite in the United States to the changed international order which prevailed after the Second World War. Confronted by Cold War rivalry with the Soviet Union, whose influence had increased notably as a result of the recent conflict, and by the novel emergence of a ‘Third World’, as Europe’s colonial powers retreated from their imperial role, there was for the first time significant interest in Africa, Asia, and Latin America. By the mid-1960s more and more attention was being given by North American social scientists and their graduate students to social, economic, political, and cultural developments in the Third World, and this research was substantially funded by government agencies.

Though the various modernization theories possessed distinctive features, they all incorporated certain key assumptions. The renowned American sociologist, Talcott Parsons (1902–79) produced a particularly influential statement of the key ideas. These theories incorporated many traditional notions in Western thought, notably a belief in evolutionary theory and in functionalism. They also assumed that modernization would bring about convergence. The former colonies and other developing societies would evolve in ways which would produce a uniform, homogenized world, dominated by Western-style economies, societies, and participatory politics: a comforting conviction in the troubled postwar Western world. Theories of modernization enjoyed a relatively short heyday, however, being assailed from all points on the political spectrum. It was soon evident that they were linear in structure, teleological in nature, and Western-centric in their assumptions, while actual developments in the Third World obstinately refused to conform to the theoretical paradigm, and by the early 1970s modernization theory was coming to be eclipsed. Yet the central notion of a traditional–modernity dichotomy upon which it had rested, with an inevitable evolution from the first stage to the second, was important for the emergence of early modern as a distinct period of history.

Modernization theories assumed not merely the inevitability of linear progress from tradition to modernity in societies which were becoming more advanced. They also defined that modernity in terms of progress towards distinctly Western characteristics: industrialization, urbanization, bureaucratization, secularization, and individualism,
together with more participatory forms of politics. It was all too easy to view earlier ages through this prism. These assumptions contributed to the clearer sense of early modernity which emerged during the final third of the twentieth century. Indeed, the notion of an early modern epoch itself fitted in with the assumptions behind modernization theories, which demanded a period of transition when the elements that would contribute to, and even bring about, full modernity were first becoming evident. Historians were beginning to incorporate social science thinking into their own perspectives far more fully than in the past, albeit with an inevitable time-lag, and the sense of pre-ordained progress towards full modernity was influential. In particular the theories contributed to a characterization of these centuries as a preparation for full-blown modernity which would be achieved at some point after 1800, imparting an aura of teleology to early modernity which has proved enduring.

A second key development was the rapid expansion of universities throughout the Western world between 1945 and the 1970s, as existing institutions increased rapidly in size and new ones were established, and the discipline of history was a clear beneficiary. Significant numbers of new staff were appointed; students were admitted and educated in ever-increasing numbers; in the United Kingdom and, to a lesser extent, the United States, generous public funding was provided for what was an unprecedented expansion of higher education. Its scale now seems astonishing, after several decades when the financial problems of universities have been more familiar. The figures for the United States reveal its magnitude. There was a five-fold increase in staff teaching history during the generation before 1970, with increases of 60 per cent during both the 1940s and 1950s, rising to over 90 per cent during the 1960s. The number of doctorates annually being awarded almost trebled in around fifteen years, from some 350 in the mid-1950s to around 1,000 by 1970. The statistics for the United Kingdom were scarcely less remarkable. Overall student numbers rose by almost a quarter during the 1950s, and by no less than three-quarters between 1961 and 1968. One important consequence was that many larger university departments fractured into semi-autonomous specialized areas, with early modern history emerging as one of these fields.

These developments facilitated the appointment of a significant number of early modern specialists and helped to establish both the subject itself and courses devoted to it, as did the opportunities created by the new universities. Yet no obvious process of institutional growth, the creation of a solid and permanent infrastructure to sustain the subject in future decades, can be identified in Britain or even the United States at this period. In the Federal Republic of Germany, by contrast, a firm base for the subject’s survival was simultaneously being created. During the 1980s and 1990s, early modern history became established in the Anglophone scholarly world, though the process was unstructured and diffuse.
The discipline of history itself was changing in the post-1945 world. Older grand narratives, which awarded a central place to the roles of high culture and of religious and political events—the Renaissance, the Reformations, and the French Revolution of 1789 above all—now seemed less relevant. By the 1960s the extent of secularization and even de-Christianization was weakening the central place conventionally accorded to religious developments. The shift away from such topics and, more generally, from political history encouraged the adoption of the new terminology, which was particularly well adapted to social and economic history which was concerned with long-term processes rather than short-term events. In this perspective early modernity—exactly like Late Antiquity—with its emphasis upon continuities and the long term was well suited to the later twentieth century.

After 1945, in the transformed postwar world in which decolonization was proceeding apace, the adoption of the nomenclature early modern was itself a claim to relevance. By problematizing the central issue of modernity, for the Third World in particular, it enabled early modern specialists to assert a central importance for their subject as a guide to contemporary practice in a way that the older emphasis upon political and cultural turning points could never do. These were in any case giving way to a historiography in which social and economic trends were placed centre stage, a development which encouraged scholars to look towards the social sciences and increasingly to anthropology for appropriate methodologies. This was to prove of lasting importance for the ways in which early modern Europe was studied during the decades when it was at its peak.

It is immediately evident that early modern history represented a move away from a conception of the human past dominated by elites, whether artistic or literary, ecclesiastical or political. Instead it gave far more attention first to social and economic themes, and then to a rather differently conceived form of cultural history strongly influenced by anthropology, all viewed from below. Here the chronology of the terminology’s development is important, though whether as cause or effect is less certain. During the 1960s and 1970s the study of society and the economy was becoming far more important for all historians. In social history in particular, methodologies and perspectives from the social sciences were extending the range of topics and notably deepening historical understanding. In early modern history the opportunities were especially abundant, since the quantity and quality of surviving written documents—upon which scholars primarily depend—was greater than for earlier eras but, crucially, not yet too voluminous as it would threaten to become after 1800. One consequence has been that the remarkable success of social history made it all-but-ubiquitous, infusing most if not all approaches to the early modern period.
Early Modern in German-language Scholarship

In German-language historical writing the chronology of the adoption of early modern was very similar indeed. It was also far more visible, due to the self-reflective nature of that country’s scholarship, its belief in the central importance of concepts (Begriffe), and the distinctive structure of German universities. It exemplifies the Tudor specialist C. H. Williams’s comment that periodization for German historians is a ‘science’, while for their English-speaking counterparts it is merely a ‘recreation’. The development was, at this period, limited to the Federal Republic of Germany; in the German Democratic Republic (DDR) orthodox Marxism prevailed and with it an assumption that all pre-industrial history should be characterized as ‘feudal’, a preparation for the capitalism which was pre-ordained to follow. The unity of the early modern centuries was certainly recognized by scholars in the DDR during the 1970s, but the actual terminology could only be adopted from the end of the following decade, with Germany’s political reunification after 1989–90.

Among West German scholars, however, the equivalent terms to early modern —‘frühe Neuzeit’, ‘Frühneuzeit’, ‘Frühe Moderne’, and ‘Frühmoderne’—began to be used more extensively at exactly the same moment, in the late 1960s and early 1970s. The unity of the period between the sixteenth and the eighteenth centuries had been familiar from the era of the French Revolution onwards. In 1787 H. M. Köster had declared that ‘since that time [1500], almost the whole of Europe assumed an entirely different form ... and there appeared in this part of the world a practically new species of mankind’. By the end of the nineteenth century professional historians thought of the period c. 1500–1789 as a unity, and around 1970 these centuries were labelled ‘early modern’.

Developments in the Federal Republic had their own distinctive context, however. The Nazi dictatorship and the Second World War, followed by the subsequent political division of the nation state, had produced a questioning of the basic assumptions underpinning the celebrated German notion of historicism and the accompanying dominance of a rigidly political approach to the study of the past. By the 1960s an older generation, who had been trained and had begun their careers before the Second World War, were passing from the scene. They were replaced by a new cohort of scholars, critical of the traditional approach, more aware of international scholarship, and much more willing to recognize the potential contribution of the social sciences to historical writing. One distinctive feature of German developments was the emergence of the idea of an epochal break around 1800, which was far less evident in Anglophone scholarship. The postwar emergence of social history, redirected and strongly advanced from the 1970s by scholars at the University of Bielefeld, tended to restrict the amount of attention...
paid to the period before the French Revolution. This development encouraged early modern historians to articulate a case for their period as fundamental in the subsequent emergence of modernity.

The nature and timing of the transition to modernity was being discussed in German academic circles at this time, and undoubtedly contributed to the specific terminology initially adopted. Reinhart Koselleck (1923–2006) was the central figure. The term ‘neue Zeit’ (‘new time’ or ‘new age’) had been familiar from the sixteenth century onwards, to distinguish that period from the Middle Ages, a term which itself only became generally accepted during the eighteenth century. Yet there was no accompanying sense of change over time until shortly before 1800, when the notion of a contemporary period (‘neueste Zeit’) began to become current. Koselleck labelled this transition the ‘temporalization of history’, since it rested upon an assumption of progress to modernity at the end of the ‘neue Zeit’ where previously there had only been the certainty of the Day of Judgement. The effect of this, in Koselleck’s own words, was that ‘the so-called frühen Neuzeit’ was an age of transition, ‘the period in which modernity is formed’. This claim would contribute in important ways to the acceptance of this terminology in the Federal Republic.

There was an even longer pre-history to its adoption by German scholarship. Once again a clear debt to theories of modernization and to the use of the term by economic historians is evident. The iconic figure of Weber had spoken of the ‘beginnenden Neuzeit’ (literally the ‘beginning modern era’ or the ‘incipient modern era’), while Werner Sombart had written of ‘early capitalism (Frühkapitalismus)’, and their influence on later scholarship was immense. During the second half of the 1940s and early 1950s the Swiss administrative historian Werner Näf had identified ‘early forms [Frühformen] of the modern State’, though he had the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries primarily in mind. In 1951 the professorship at the newly established Free University in Berlin occupied by Carl Hinrichs (1900–62), a leading historian of the old Prussian state, was designated in early modern history, while by the end of that decade the association of German historians recognized the existence of ‘early’ and ‘late’ modernity in the description of professorial responsibilities and the organization of university teaching.

A theoretical case for a distinct early modern period had first been advanced in 1957. Its advocate was the distinguished German philosopher Wilhelm Kamlah (1905–76) who, in a celebrated programmatic article, argued for the validity of ‘Frühneuzeit’. Recognizing that periodization was always retrospective and convinced that the philosophy of René Descartes (1596–1650) was important for the development of modernity, which he defined in terms of individual self-definition, Kamlah identified a long sixteenth century, stretching from the Renaissance Humanists to the lifetime of Descartes. He believed this
to be a period of transition to philosophical modernity, and so labelled that era ‘early modern’. Though Kamlah would recant a dozen years later, expressing the view that this was a teleological argument and renouncing ‘Frühneuzeit’, by then his nomenclature had been taken up by historians. By 1961 the Fischer Lexikon Geschichte spoke of ‘frühe Moderne’; in subsequent editions this became ‘Frühmoderne’.55

Seven years later the Berlin-based economic historian, Ilja Mieck (1932–2010), surveyed the arguments for an early modern period extending from 1500 to 1789, and provided a helpful guide to the terminology in an article notable for its impressive awareness of English-language scholarship.57 Books and articles were soon appearing which employed the term ‘early modern’ in their titles.58 The terminology’s adoption was surprisingly rapid, at least compared to developments in the Anglophone scholarly world. By 1973, when the biennial meeting of the Federal Republic’s historians (the Historikertag) explicitly spoke of ‘early modern history’, it appeared to have become a recognized sub-discipline.59

Institutionalization in the Federal Republic took place much earlier than in English-speaking countries. It was also more complete, due primarily to the more hierarchical nature of the German professorial system. The system of ‘Lehrstühle’ (‘established chairs’), by which a full professor (Ordinarius) was made responsible for teaching and research in a particular historical field, soon led to the establishment of a significant number of professorships in early modern history, beginning in the earlier 1970s, and this too advanced the term’s adoption.60 As in the Anglophone world, a period of expansion in higher education, including the founding of new universities (which doubled their number), facilitated this transition.61

The similar chronology in English and German academic cultures raises the question of whether one evolution was influenced by the other, or whether developments were autarkical but ran in parallel. This is a topic on which a definitive answer is at present impossible, though developments in the Federal Republic seem to have taken place marginally earlier and German historians were much more aware of Anglophone scholarship than vice versa. There is a wider point here: impressionistically, relatively few British historians—though rather more Americans—were abreast of German-language scholarship, while far more of their counterparts in Germany were fully aware of writings in English. The collected essays of the distinguished German historian, Gerhard Oestreich (1910–78), published in 1969, provides a good example. Entitled Geist und Gestalt des frühmodernen Staates, the preface contained a justification of the use of the term ‘early modern state’, revealingly supported by a specific reference to the English term ‘early modern history’.62
The Contribution of the Annales

Early modern’s specific origins in Anglophone and German-language scholarship has ensured it has remained geographically restricted, within Europe’s historiographies at least. Other national groups of historians have embraced the term, with varying degrees of enthusiasm, while some have remained aloof, as has been particularly true of France. Yet, ironically, French scholarship had contributed significantly to its establishment. During the 1960s and especially the 1970s the Anglophone discovery of the Annales movement indirectly strengthened its adoption. Indeed, a leading North American historian has declared that ‘In the 1970s and 1980s, using the term “early modern” in scholarly writing generally signalled an interest in theory derived from the social sciences, particularly from the Annales school’.

This was and is an innovative group of French historians who challenge prevailing scholarly norms: the hegemony of politics and high culture, the concentration upon influential individuals and events, and more generally the assumptions of nineteenth-century positivism. Instead the Annales championed the study of all aspects of human history—society, economy, culture (in the anthropological sense of the term), mentalities—and urged an openness towards the techniques and methodologies of the social sciences in order to create a more broadly based, interdisciplinary study of the past in which long-term trends (the longue durée) were primarily important, rather than short-term events. The movement was given unity and leadership by the periodical Annales, established in 1929 at the new University of Strasbourg in Alsace, which the Peace of Versailles (1919) had returned to French rule after almost half a century of German occupation. The journal’s founders and for long the movement’s inspiration were two remarkable historians who were members of the University’s Faculty: Marc Bloch (1886–1944) and Lucien Febvre (1878–1956).

Though both men moved from Strasbourg to Paris—the capital as well as the fulcrum of France’s highly centralized academic life—in the course of the 1930s, the approach they tirelessly advocated did not at first become influential. It was only after the Second World War (1939–45), during which Bloch joined the resistance and was captured and executed by the Nazis, that the Annales came to dominate academic history in France. Under the leadership initially of Febvre and then, after his death, of Fernand Braudel (1902–85) the movement created a secure institutional base for itself in the famous Viè Section (established in 1947) of the ‘École Pratique des Hautes Études’ and, after 1963, in the ‘Maison des Sciences de l’Homme’, set up to encourage interdisciplinary research. During the period when Braudel was president of the Viè Section (1956–72) it expanded notably until it contained more scholars than all the other sections in the ‘École
Pratique’ combined. In 1975 the VIe Section evolved into an independent institute: the École des Hautes Études en Sciences Sociales (EHESS). Thanks to Braudel’s skill and tenacity as an academic politician, the Annales also acquired—and exploited—a dominant position in the distribution of the all-important funding for research and over the outlets for academic publication.

The near-simultaneous rise of the social sciences within the French university system was dramatic: between the mid-1950s and the mid-1960s, the number of research centres increased from around twenty to over 300. The challenge to history’s traditional disciplinary pre-eminence was very real and this, together with the changed priorities of the postwar world, made the Annaliste emphasis upon a new approach to its study seem particularly timely and attractive. During the 1950s and 1960s university history went from strength to strength. Indeed, Braudel’s fundamental aim—which was to be imperfectly realized—had been to make social science more historical and to turn history into its central discipline.

For a generation after 1945, however, the Annales movement remained principally influential within France itself. Initially it found few sympathizers and encountered rather more critics within the British and West German historical professions; there may have been rather more early interest in the United States, though this is difficult to establish conclusively. But from the later 1960s, Anglophone historians demonstrated growing interest in its approach, facilitated by a notable series of translations of important articles and seminal books by the movement’s pioneers. The almost annual themed volumes of collected essays which appeared between 1975 and 1982—all chosen in consultation with the editorial board of Annales and drawn from its pages—were particularly important in the United States. These English-language versions were crucial to the reception of the Annales. The large-scale regional theses, which embodied the best of French scholarship, were—and are—more admired than read, except by specialists, and with a handful of exceptions have not been translated. But these collections of articles and shorter studies brought a new range of subjects and potential approaches to the attention of an Anglophone readership.

The discovery of the Annales was both cause and effect of the growing popularity of early modern history: it is impossible to be certain about which was more important. To understand its wider significance, however, it is first necessary to be aware of the framework within which Annales history was itself being conceived during the third quarter of the twentieth century. Where periodization was concerned, historical scholarship in France had long accepted the established three-fold division: Ancient, Medieval, and Modern. The third of these epochs, however, was and, to a large extent, is deemed to end in 1789, from which point all French history was regarded as
‘Contemporary’, attesting to the central importance of the French Revolution in the country’s evolution.

During the 1930s the pages of *Annales* had contained articles which ranged from the earliest civilizations to the present: at this point the journal aimed to make history relevant and demonstrate how a fuller understanding of contemporary events could be achieved by means of a detailed study of the past. Bloch’s own research had ranged across the entire medieval and modern period, and indeed he believed that the specific problem being investigated should determine the chronological framework adopted. After 1945, it was to be a very different matter. Successive leaders of the movement were early modern specialists, as both Febvre and Braudel were, and they naturally sponsored the study of this period, which experienced a notable renewal. While important research was conducted on the Ancient world, the medieval period, and the post-1800 centuries, the scholarly centre of gravity of the *Annales* after 1945 was to be early modern history, with wide-ranging repercussions.

After the Second World War, economic and specifically quantitative history also became dominant in France. The early modern centuries became a natural focus for such studies, since they offered sources sufficiently abundant and detailed to facilitate research, but not yet as voluminous and overwhelming as they would become during the nineteenth century. One principal reason for the turn towards quantitative economic history was the institutional and intellectual dominance which Charles-Ernest Labrousse (1895–1986) came to exercise from the chair of Economic History at the Sorbonne, France’s leading university to which he was appointed in 1945. Labrousse imposed a rigorously serial approach (as it came to be known) on his research students and insisted on the search for quantitative evidence, on which historical study was alone to rest. He had begun his own research as long ago as the mid-1920s, working on grain prices and wages in eighteenth-century France. This statistical approach had been seemingly validated by Weimar Germany’s experience of hyper-inflation and especially by the global Great Crash of 1929.

These events had strongly influenced another scholar who was to be extremely influential in the development of the *Annales*, the historical social scientist François Simiand (1873–1935), who in 1932—in the shadow of the global Crash three years earlier—had published his lecture course on the movement of prices between the sixteenth and the nineteenth centuries. Febvre declared that it was the one essential bedside book for all historians. Simiand set out to identify cyclical trends in the economy, based very largely upon the study of prices. From the perspective of early modern history, his main contribution was to establish the notion of successive economic phases, A and B, which had alternated since the close of the Middle Ages, and this came to underpin *Annales*.
scholarship. Phase A was a period of expansion, beginning between 1450 and 1480 and lasting until some point in the seventeenth century: the exact chronology varied from region to region. It gave way to Phase B, a period of recession relative to what had gone before and, in some countries, actual contraction. Once again, its chronology varied from country to country and region to region, but at some point during the first half of the eighteenth century it gave way to a renewed Phase A, as expansion once again became general. Cyclical phases of this kind, Simiand believed, continued to alternate until the global Crash of 1929, which was the ultimate destination of his researches.

Simiand’s approach was an important, if not fully acknowledged, source of Labrousse’s scholarship. In 1944 Labrousse published the work which established his academic reputation, a study of the supposed ‘crisis’ of the later eighteenth-century French economy and its central role in the coming of the French Revolution. His critics understandably saw the shadow of Marx and even of historical determinism behind his approach. Yet Labrousse’s influence in the postwar scholarly world was immense, and he supervised or shaped many of the great regional theses which became the hallmark of Annales scholarship by the 1960s. These regional studies were works like Pierre Goubert’s exploration of the seventeenth-century Beauvaisis and Emmanuel Le Roy Ladurie’s study of the peasants of Languedoc and their world during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Rigorously statistical in approach and more social in their focus, these and similar works were essentially demographic in approach, as this superseded a more narrowly conceived economic history.

Though the terminology of early modern has never become established in France, due perhaps to that country’s enduring scholarly nationalism, Annales’ history contributed significantly to its consolidation in the Anglophone scholarly world. In the first place, the unity of the period from the second half of the fifteenth century until the middle of the eighteenth century appeared validated by Simiand’s theory of economic phases, as mediated through the researches of Labrousse and his disciples, among whom can be numbered none other than Fernand Braudel. The second edition of his great study of The Mediterranean and the Mediterranean World was more quantitative in approach than its predecessor, with numerous tables and graphs, and this has been plausibly attributed to Labrousse’s influence.

The move towards a demographically based social history during the 1960s and 1970s provided a second source of unity, which was a corollary of the first. It posited the notion of a demographic ancien régime, extending from the widespread European famine of the earlier fourteenth century and the catastrophe of the Black Death (1347–51) until the mid-eighteenth century and sustained by a series of Malthusian crises every generation or so. The term came from the writings of Robert Thomas Malthus (1766–1834), an
English clergyman and fellow of Jesus College, Cambridge. Malthus was the author of an influential *Essay on the Principle of Population*, first published in 1798 and subsequently re-issued in enlarged editions on no fewer than six occasions. He believed that the availability of land was limited, and so argued that food production could only be increased arithmetically and would therefore always lag behind demographic growth, which had the potential to increase exponentially. Population expansion was constrained, however, by what he termed ‘positive checks’—primarily famine, war, and epidemic disease—as well as by the ‘preventive’ mechanism of reduced nuptiality. The consequence, Malthus believed, was that demographic expansion would always be constrained by the limited capacity of available natural resources to support a rising population. Equilibrium would be maintained by periodic crises, the last of which had occurred during the seventeenth century.

Emmanuel Le Roy Ladurie was the most influential of a number of historians who championed this approach, styling it neo-Malthusian. During the early modern period Europe’s population stagnated or, at most, expanded slightly, in contrast to the pre-thirteenth-century expansion which would be renewed after 1750. The explanation for this was primarily the inability of Europe’s agriculture before the eighteenth century to produce sufficient additional food to sustain a permanently increasing population, leading to regular subsistence crises which held growth in check. This approach had informed Le Roy Ladurie’s influential thesis on the *Peasants of Languedoc*, and was applied much more widely in a celebrated article on ‘History that Stands Still’ (‘L’histoire immobile’). Significantly this originated in his inaugural lecture to the Collège de France in 1973, when he was elected to succeed Braudel. While with hindsight this now appears rather deterministic and monocausal, it was undoubtedly influential and served to consolidate the idea of a unified period extending from the century after the Black Death until the eve of Britain’s Industrial Revolution. In a more general sense, Anglophone scholarship on the early modern centuries was strongly influenced by both the approach and the topics of *Annales* historians, mediated through the leading British journal, *Past & Present*, which provided an important conduit through which the research of French historians could pass into the Anglophone scholarly world.

**Periodization**

The notion of early modernity was predicated upon a characterization of the later Middle Ages as an age of unrelieved decline and gloom. There were several reasons for this. In the most general sense, historians often assume in an almost Hegelian way that any period can only end in a crisis or a phase of sustained difficulties: otherwise there would
be no need for it to close. Since there was widespread agreement that the Renaissance marked the ending of the Middle Ages, the assumption of a late medieval decline giving way around 1450/1500 to a period of renewed expansion was easy to accept.\footnote{17}

It was strengthened by two specific factors, one historical, the other historiographical. The first was the fourteenth-century demographic catastrophe, and its decisive and enduring impact. The generation which saw the emergence of early modern history—the third quarter of the twentieth century—also saw a series of debates identifying supposed ‘crises’ in late medieval history: the crisis of the peasantry, the post-Black Death economy, monarchical power, seigneurial authority, the nobility, and so on.\footnote{18} Since the 1970s, historians have tended to move towards a more nuanced, and less gloomy, view of the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, finding positive signs side by side with the legacies of the Black Death, but by then the early modern era had assumed its essential shape.\footnote{19} Secondly, the impact of one particular book was enormous: the Dutch historian Johann Huizinga’s celebrated *The Waning of the Middle Ages*, in the translation of the title adopted for the first English version which the author had himself\footnote{17} authorized.\footnote{19} Written under the impact of late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century pessimism and in the aftermath of his young wife’s death, and published immediately after the First World War—the original Dutch version appeared in 1919—it was translated into English five years later, and subsequently would be re-translated with, as will be seen, a significantly changed title.

In this remarkable and influential, though in some ways problematical, work Huizinga utilized the art of the Southern Netherlands and northern France, and especially the paintings of the brothers Hubert (c. 1385/90–1426) and Jan (c. 1390–c. 1461) van Eyck, to represent a pessimistic, morbid cultural outlook, which was generalized to characterize post-Black Death Europe. In his autobiography the author recalled how, on a Sunday canal walk—probably around 1907—he was ‘struck by the idea that the Late Middle Ages were not the inception of a new era, but the dying away of things that had outlasted themselves’.\footnote{20} In 1996 a revised English translation was published, with an important change to the title. It became *The Autumn of the Middle Ages*, ‘autumn’ not precluding positive developments—crops are harvested at that time, after all—but this does not negate the point. Huizinga’s melancholy picture was widely influential, not least among historians of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries (even if they advanced no further into the book than the title page!), and contributed significantly to the binary divide of decline–recovery upon which early modernity always depended.

The final and, in many ways, most important point about the concept of early modernity which has taken shape, is its assumption of a transition, with important continuities and significant changes, and with at least the implication of a pre-ordained modernity to
follow. This had been one of the founding principles of ‘Cambridge Studies in Early Modern [European] History’, as the masthead made clear:

The idea of an ‘early modern’ period of European history from the fifteenth to the late eighteenth century is now widely accepted among historians... [A] dominant theme within it [is] the interplay of continuity and change as they are presented by the continuity of medieval ideas, political and social organization, and by the impact of new ideas, new methods and new demands on the traditional structures.

This statement appeared almost unchanged on more than fifty volumes published between 1970 and 2001. A very similar approach was advocated by one of the very few scholars to try to define early modern history: the German historian Johannes Burkhardt.

In an article first published in 1990 and therefore reflecting on the scholarship of the preceding two decades, he wrote that early modernity was ‘a transitional age when the structures of the medieval way of life were still alive, whereas at the same time developments were on their way which would lead to the present state of things’. The influence of modernization theory was here especially evident, particularly in the way in which the survival of the old and traditional side-by-side with the new and innovative becomes the central theme. The challenge facing its historian was and is to explore the interaction and especially to try to determine the relevant importance of continuities compared with new directions.

This approach immediately poses two specific problems. The first is that the notion of early modernity aspired to provide a unified explanatory framework, yet the speed of historical change was demonstrably far swifter in some regions. The era was less extended in north-west Europe, above all England, the Dutch Republic, and parts of France and the Rhineland, where it ended earlier. The Dutch economy, for example, has been pronounced to be ‘the first modern economy’, and certainly the extent of its modernity is striking, particularly compared to its rivals. In a similar way continental visitors to Hanoverian England felt they were entering a very different society, even before the beginnings of British industrialization in the later eighteenth century.

Acknowledging different chronologies for individual areas might suggest that the early modern era in Russia, for example, continued at least until the freeing of the serfs in the 1860s. In the wider European perspective the experience of countries and regions in the north-west was actually untypical since the transition to modernity occurred rather earlier there, though it shaped thinking about the early modern era. For the Iberian and Italian peninsulas, Habsburg central Europe, Scandinavia, Russia, Poland–Lithuania, and eastern regions of Germany (in other words for most of the continental landmass), there is actually much to be said for an early modern period continuing until the mid-nineteenth century.
This disparity can be resolved fairly simply, by acknowledging the need for varying chronologies in different regions of Europe. This is why the issue of periodization has not been discussed until now, though it is quite crucial. All periodization necessarily involves the privileging of a particular viewpoint. The established framework sees the early modern era extending from—very broadly—1500 to 1800; the start date was at times moved back into the second half of the fifteenth century, to 1480, when the economy and demographic expansion of the long sixteenth century was firmly underway, or even to the 1450s: the Ottoman conquest of Constantinople appeared an important date in political history, while the crucial technologies of printing and gunpowder were beginning to be influential by mid-century. The French and Industrial Revolutions are conventionally viewed as marking its end. This division rested upon two established assumptions: that the transition from medieval to modern was located in the later fifteenth or earlier sixteenth century, and that the upheavals in France after 1789 were the origins of modern participatory politics in the same way that the shift to a factory-based manufacturing system in Britain was the beginning of modern industrial society. Both assumptions were clearly influenced by modernization theory.

More recently, however, the unity implied in the term has fragmented, while its usefulness and even its validity, together with the historical periodization it incorporates, have been questioned. Criticism has focused primarily on its potential teleology, since it seems to assume inevitable progress towards economic, social, and political modernity. The problem is a real one, and is very difficult to resolve satisfactorily. An historian of the peasantry, Govind Sreenivasan, has referred, in a significant phrase, to all scholarship on early modern Europe being haunted by ‘the spectre of transition’. By this he means the difficulty of wrestling with the phenomenon of seemingly pre-ordained modernization which faces all who attempt to study or write about this period. Being an historian, of course, is rather like reading a detective story knowing in advance that the butler committed the murder and this will be revealed on the last page: the ever-present problem of pre-vision. All historians of early modern Europe know that modernity follows: how do they prevent that knowledge shaping and even distorting their approach?

Or does it? Is modernity itself really inevitable? Here historians of early modern Europe can learn from discussions during the past two decades between specialists in East Asian history and particularly Sinologists. Europe’s growing interconnections with other continents from the fifteenth century onwards, together with the parallel developments that were visible within each geographical area, encouraged the adoption of the term ‘early modern’ to describe the analogous period in the country or region they were studying: whether it was Tokugawa Japan, India or, most importantly and influentially, China. An examination of Ming and early Ching China reveals particularly striking similarities: demographic and economic growth, technological progress, impressive
material and artistic culture, consolidation of central authority, undoubted social and intellectual transition. Yet there was no transition to modernity during the nineteenth century, if modernity is measured (as it conventionally is) in terms of industrialization and more participatory political life. On the contrary: it would take two revolutions in the twentieth century to create the first of these and to begin to establish the second. The notion of an early modern era in East Asia in any case quickly came under heavy attack from the perspective of subaltern studies and postcolonial studies, as a form of Western scholarly imperialism, and many Sinologists currently seem to be retreating to the less value-freighted nomenclature of the ‘Late Imperial Era’.

The non-transition of China to modernity after 1800 should indirectly encourage European specialists to continue to employ the terminology of early modernity. Historians cannot avoid knowing what comes next: that is intrinsic to our discipline. As long as we are continually aware of the dangers of teleology and pre-vision, and strive to avoid writing history backwards, that is sufficient. The Chinese case is an important reminder that an industrial society and economy did not emerge everywhere, even when many of the seeming preconditions were present. It therefore helps the incorporation into the early modern time-span of those large areas of Europe where such developments are not to be observed until around or even after 1850. More controversially, it may weaken the central place in the master narrative conventionally held by economic and social developments, which was established by the way the concept of early modernity took shape, but needs to be critically re-examined.

The established periodization in any case had always had its critics, and interesting alternatives were on offer. One of the most promising was the notion of an ‘Old European Age’ (Alteuropa) extending from the twelfth century, if not actually earlier, to around 1800. This bridged the conventional medieval–modern divide and highlighted the real continuities, particularly in the corporate and hierarchical foundations of Europe’s society and political structures. It had its origins in the writings of the renowned nineteenth-century historian of the Renaissance, Jacob Burckhardt (1818–97), and before him of Alexis de Tocqueville (1805–59), but was most fully worked out by the Austrian historian Otto Brunner (1898–1982). Brunner’s undoubted Nazi sympathies made his views toxic after the Second World War, however, and when the German émigré historian, Dietrich Gerhard (1896–1985), revived the idea of ‘Old Europe’ during the 1950s he was careful to obscure its tainted origins. By the mid-1970s it was possible for it to be explicitly embraced by the influential new periodical, the Zeitschrift für Historische Forschung, and over the past decade in particular it has gained considerable support among German scholars. Its real value lies in highlighting the undoubted continuities and emphasizing the corporate foundations of social and political life; its principal shortcoming is that it rests upon a binary divide between a static Old European
age and a developing industrial society, and it can only with difficulty incorporate a
dynamic model of historical change.\textsuperscript{102}

Though the contours of Brunner’s specific arguments are ultimately not fully convincing,
the periodization which underpinned his approach has undoubted merits. It is strikingly
similar to the notion of a ‘long Middle Ages’, which the distinguished French historian,
Jacques Le Goff (1924–2014) gradually elaborated over the last three decades of his
life.\textsuperscript{103} His premise was that the Renaissance had not merely created the ‘Middle Ages’
but ensured that this period would always be seen in a very negative light. Instead Le
Goff suggested that pre-industrial Europe possessed real unity, not merely in its social
and economic structures but also in the ascendancy of the Christian religion, and that
these only began to be weakened during the nineteenth century. German-language
scholarship has also questioned established chronologies and proposed interesting
alternatives. A survey entitled ‘The coming of modern Europe’ published in 1959 made an
early and influential case for the coherence and significance of the period 1300–1600.
Subsequently Heinz Schilling has argued powerfully for the integrated study of the period
from around 1250 to the mid-eighteenth century.\textsuperscript{104}

Anglophone scholars have also recognized the need to extend the conventional
chronology of early modern backwards.\textsuperscript{105} The 1450/1500–1800 periodization was always
too limited chronologically for Italian specialists, for whom the Renaissance occupied a
secure place as the beginning of modernity in the West. It was equally problematical for
the fourteenth- and fifteenth-century Low Countries in view of the notable social and
economic changes in the towns in particular.\textsuperscript{106} Historians of gender have been
particularly conscious of the shortcomings of the conventional medieval–modern divide
and, indeed, of many established chronological divisions, believing that these obscure the
experience of women.\textsuperscript{107}

In a more general sense, a growing awareness of European developments in the fifteenth
and even the fourteenth century raises questions about how convincing the established
periodization of early modern ever really was. It depended upon the predominantly
negative view of the later medieval centuries prevailing at its birth. Yet many dominant
themes of post-1500 Europe now seem to have their origins and even their counterparts
during the era conventionally styled the ‘Later Middle Ages’: whether in topics as diverse
as state-formation, high culture, or voyages of exploration. Here the development of a
more positive view of the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries has actually facilitated an
extension of the early modern era backwards. Economic and demographic developments
in particular appeared to demand a detailed knowledge of trends \textsuperscript{(p. 21)} from the early
1300s onwards. This is confirmed by the situation where written sources were concerned.
By the fourteenth and especially the fifteenth century, the volume of surviving, secular
records in vernacular languages and especially government documents and private
correspondence, was significantly increasing, ensuring that Europe’s past did not have to be reconstructed primarily from sources which were ecclesiastical in nature and written in Latin.

The Structure of this Handbook

These considerations have shaped the chronological coverage and geographical perspective adopted. Contributors were asked to begin their chapters at the point during the fourteenth or fifteenth century which had greatest validity for their particular topic, while certain chapters extend beyond the mid-eighteenth century where this seems necessary.\(^{108}\) The end point of the early modern era, in any case, is difficult to determine with any precision, as it clearly varied not merely between regions of Europe but within individual countries. By the mid-eighteenth century, however, many of the solvents of early modernity—increasing circulation of the ideas of the Enlightenment, in some regions the appearance of new manufacturing processes, the early stages in improvements in communications, above all a dramatic rise in population—were beginning to be apparent, and for that reason many chapters end around that point.

The choice of c. 1350 as a starting point recognizes that in the mid-fourteenth century many features of Western Christendom broke down, with demographic, social, and economic dislocation, and this was followed by important structural changes. More and more it appears to be the logical starting point for any study of early modern Europe, as many chapters make clear, rather than the conventional dates around 1450/1500. The fourteenth and fifteenth centuries saw the initial fracturing of Western Christianity as well as the invention of a moveable-type printing press in Germany and important cultural and artistic changes. It also saw an extended phase of new-style warfare which put pressure upon existing systems of monarchical government and encouraged administrative innovations, as well as the emergence of new monarchical regimes in western Europe, with the recovery of France and its incorporation of much of the Burgundian Duchy, together with the emergence of Christian Iberian kingdoms with the completion of the Reconquista. In eastern Europe the Mongol tide, which in the thirteenth century had overwhelmed Kiev Rus’, ebbed after c. 1300 and facilitated the fourteenth-century rise of the Polish–Lithuanian union, bringing large areas within Latin Christianity. The adoption of this periodization also incorporates the initial Ottoman conquests in south-eastern Europe, which made that empire a European state.

Crucially, the Handbook aims to be more than a series of joined-up national histories, with all the limitations inherent in such an approach. Instead, an attempt is made to sponsor an integrated, thematic perspective upon European history as a whole; and to
range across the entire geographical area extending from the British archipelago in the
West to European Russia in the East (where the Urals only emerged as a ‘border’
during the eighteenth century), and from the Baltic region south to the northern shores
of the Mediterranean. It also seeks to restore a unitary chronological view, believing that
the very proliferation of detailed studies of the early modern period, while welcome in
itself, has tended to obscure the unity and cohesion of these four or five centuries of
European history. The chapters which follow make clear that what gives validity to the
idea of early modern history is the persistence of real continuities until the eighteenth
century at least, in large parts of Europe, together with important developments which
put pressure upon and eventually undermined traditional modes of activity but which
took place on different time-scales in separate regions of the continent. An attempt has
been made to avoid too great an emphasis upon the more dynamic north-west (France/the
Netherlands/the Rhineland/England), and to prevent it being viewed as normative, while
recognizing that agrarian and economic innovations occurred rather earlier there, with
the single exception of the northern half of the Italian peninsula, and may have been
more transformative.

The Handbook is divided into two volumes, which are intended to be used together. It is
organized around seven over-arching themes, which have emerged out of the past
generation’s scholarship and collectively underscore the strong and important
continuities within early modern history, the more dynamic elements which emerged
within these structures, and the different chronologies and geographies of change. An
initial section [1] is devoted to the long-term and sometimes imperceptible structural
changes which can easily be neglected. The remainder of the first volume explores social
and economic continuities and discontinuities [2] and the dominant role of religion in
shaping individual lives and collective identities, during the last era when this was
unequivocally the case [3]. The second volume opens with a substantial section devoted
to cultural and intellectual developments [4]. It is followed by an account of the
transformation of Europe’s position in the world and its relationship with other continents
and societies [5]. Finally the emergence of stronger systems of monarchical government,
their personnel, growing authority and yet limitations, together with the important
changes in the conduct of warfare and international relations, are examined [6 and 7].
The chapters which follow together constitute an authoritative and up-to-date survey of a
field which has been at the heart of historical study for the past half century and remains
one of the most capacious and exciting topics at the present day.

Further Reading


Dewald, Jonathan. ‘Crisis, Chronology and the Shape of European Social History’, American Historical Review, 113 (2008), 1031–1052.


Fasolt, Constantin. ‘Hegel’s Ghost: Europe, the Reformation and the Middle Ages’, Viator, 39:i (2008), 345–386.


**Notes:**

(1.) I am indebted to Samuel K. Cohn, Jr., Jeroen Duindam, Thomas Munck, Justus Nipperdey, Sarah Pearsall, Mía Rodriguez-Salgado, and Jochen Schenk, who all read versions of this introduction and made valuable suggestions for its improvement. Parts of it were given as a paper to Professor Munck’s ‘Early Modern Work in Progress’ Seminar at the University of Glasgow, whose members commented helpfully. Essential research in the Library of the German Historical Institute, London, was materially assisted by its Deputy-Director, Dr Michael Schaich, who also arranged for photocopies of two key articles to be secured from Germany, and I am very grateful for his help.

(2.) A handful of French scholars have spoken of ‘la première modernité’, following the lead of Fernand Braudel, but this terminology has never become established: Pierre Chaunu and Richard Gascon, *Histoire Économique et sociale de la France*, vol. 1: *De 1450 à 1660, premier volume: L’État et la Ville* (Paris, 1977), 1; in any case Braudel may only have been referring to the ‘long sixteenth century’. In a similar way, references to the ‘prima età moderna’ in Italian can be found, but they are relatively few.


(5.) For the idea of ‘solar’ dates, which establish historical periods, and an important discussion of different approaches to periodization, see K. N. Chaudhuri, *Asia Before Europe: Economy and Civilisation of the Indian Ocean from the Rise of Islam to 1750* (Cambridge, 1990), ch. 4, esp. 99–100. See also Green, ‘Periodization in European and World History’, and the same author’s overlapping ‘Periodizing World History’, *History and Theory*, 34 (1995), 99–111.


(8.) There are now some very good and accessible guides to a topic that remains controversial: see Merry E. Wiesner-Hanks, *Women and Gender in Early Modern Europe* (1993; 3rd edn., Cambridge, 2008); Cissie Fairchilds, *Women in Early Modern Europe 1500–1700* (Harlow, 2007); and Margaret R. Hunt, *Women in Eighteenth-century Europe* (Harlow, 2010).


Withington, Society in Early Modern England, 2; K. V. Thomas, The Ends of Life: Roads to Fulfillment in Early Modern England (Oxford, 2009), 4 and note; the lecture is printed in Proceedings of the British Academy 62 (1976), 205–248. It is revealing that Thomas himself had not employed the term ‘early modern’ in his seminal Religion and the Decline of Magic, published five years earlier, though it was devoted to that period and asserted (ix–x) its ‘essential unity’.


Quoted by Wiesner-Hanks, ‘Do Women need’, 542.


For example, Early Modern Literary Studies, which began online publication in 1995. One of the earliest uses in literary studies (where it was a way of avoiding the classification of literature as ‘Renaissance’, with all that entailed, and instead asserting its modern or even postmodern features) appears to be Margaret Ferguson, Maureen Quilligan, and Nancy Vickers, eds., Rewriting the Renaissance: The Discourses of Sexual Difference in Early Modern Europe (Chicago, IL, 1986); see also Leah S. Marcus, ‘Renaissance/Early Modern Studies’, in Stephen Greenblatt and Giles Gunn, eds.,


(23.) The first volume of the periodical Frühmittelalterliche Studien was published in 1967, with an editorial which revealed that ‘Frühmittelalter’ (‘early Middle Ages’) was coming into use; J. M. Wallace-Hadrill, Early Medieval History (London, 1975), especially his inaugural lecture of that title given in 1974, 1–18, with only a brief discussion of where the notion itself came from, at 14f.

(24.) Society in Early Modern England, 7ff, explains the methodology adopted and its limitations.

(25.) Early Modern Europe: An Introduction to a Course of Lectures on the Sixteenth Century (Cambridge, 1869). Johnson is rather better known as the author of the ‘Eton Boating Song’ (1864), the unofficial anthem of the College. The obscurity of his subsequent career is almost a metaphor for the fortunes of the term he had coined during the next hundred years. Three years later he seems to have been asked to leave his post as a schoolmaster amidst suspicions that his relations with pupils were not entirely proper; he subsequently resigned from his fellowship at King’s; in the Victorian manner he changed his name in order to inherit money, married, and went to live in Madeira, leaving little or no trace: Withington, Society in Early Modern England, 43 and, more generally, 19–44.

(26.) These are by historians as diverse in their backgrounds and scholarly interests as the economic historians Sir John Clapham, John Nef, Sir George Clark, and Herbert Heaton; the expert in science and magic Lynn Thorndike; the specialist on climate Gustaf Utterström; and political historians such as Herbert H. Rowen and John B. Wolf, in
reviews, articles, and even book titles; Utterström, ‘Climatic Fluctuations and Population Problems in Early Modern History’, Scandinavian Economic History Review, 3 (1955), 1-47. No doubt further early usages can and will be found.

(27.) Journal of Modern History, 1 (1929), 144. This continued until 1944. Dr Justus Nipperdey is currently engaged in a major study of the term’s pre-history both in North America and Germany, and I am grateful for his advice on this point.

(28.) Sir Ernest Barker, Sir George Clark, and Paul Vaucher, eds., The European Inheritance (3 vols.; Oxford, 1954), Section IV: ii.3-181. Clark, it should be noted, was a friend and protégé of Clapham, who had employed the term in 1913: Withington, Society in Early Modern England, 46, 49. The periodization adopted for Clark’s survey in The European Inheritance, excluding the eighteenth century, was determined by the presence among the editors of the distinguished French historian of the eighteenth century, Paul Vaucher, who wrote that section.


(30.) Withington, Society in Early Modern England, 46, 58.


*International Encyclopedia of the Social Sciences*, ed. David L. Sills (18 vols.; New York, 1968–79), x.386–409 (published in 1968, when modernization theory was close to its zenith); and its successor, Neil J. Smelser and Paul B. Baltes, eds., *International Encyclopedia of the Social and Behavioral Sciences* (26 vols.; Amsterdam, 2001), xv.9939–9971 (by which time the notion had fallen into disrepute). The periodical *Daedalus* published a special issue devoted to ‘Early Modernities’ (127:iii (1998)), the guiding principles behind which were the notion of Jürgen Habermas’s ‘public sphere’ as the handmaiden of modernity and the conviction that its many forms needed to be studied on a global stage.


(40.) See at 9ff.

(41.) Jonathan Dewald, ‘Crisis, Chronology and the Shape of European Social History’, *American Historical Review*, 113 (2008), 1031–1052, at 1050.
(42.) Geoff Eley, A Crooked Line: From Cultural History to the History of Society (Ann Arbor, MI, 2005) and William H. Sewell, Jr., Logics of History: Social Theory and Social Transformation (Chicago, IL, 2005), are particularly interesting and highly personal guides to the later twentieth-century transformation; see also Bentley, ed., Companion to Historiography.


(45.) Andreas Dorpalen, German History in Marxist Perspective: The East German Approach (London, 1985), chs. 1–4.


(50.) Koselleck, Futures Past, 5.

(51.) Behringer, ‘Frühe Neuzeit’, is important for what follows.

(52.) Hans-Ulrich Wehler’s brief, enthusiastic advocacy of the potential of modernization theory was influential: Modernisierungstheorie und Geschichte (Göttingen, 1975).

(54.) ‘Zeitalter’ überhaupt “Neuzeit” und “Frühneuzeit”’, Saeculum, 8 (1957), 313–332.


(56.) Behringer, ‘Frühe Neuzeit’, col. 83.


(58.) Ernst W. Zeeden, Deutsche Kultur in der frühen Neuzeit (Frankfurt-am-Main, 1968), for example, though this survey of art history followed Kamlah in employing the term to apply only to the period until the earlier seventeenth century and, specifically, the outbreak of the Thirty Years’ War (1618–48). When the Zeitschrift für Historische Forschung was founded in 1974, it announced its scope as to be ‘late medieval and early modern history’: ‘Vorwort’, vol. 1, 1. The article published in the following year by one of its editors, Johannes Kunisch, ‘Über den Epochencharakter der frühen Neuzeit’, in Eberhard Jäckel and Ernst Weymar, eds., Die Funktion der Geschichte in unserer Zeit (Stuttgart, 1975), 150–161, was a prospectus for the new journal.


(60.) Völker-Rasor, Frühe Neuzeit, 401–414, for the process of institutionalization. The earliest chairs were at Trier (1971), Bielefeld (1972), Aachen (1973), and Oldenburg (1974).

(61.) Iggers, German Conception, 292.

(62.) Gerhard Oestreich, Geist und Gestalt des frühmodernen Staates (Berlin, 1969), 6; another example would be Mieck’s article, cited at n. 57.
(63.) A good example would be ‘Forum: Divides and Ends—Periodizing the Early Modern in Russian history’, *Slavic Review*, 69 (2010), 398-447.

(64.) Wiesner-Hanks, ‘Do Women Need’, 541-542.


(71.) Edited by two distinguished French historians, Robert Forster and Orest Ranum, then teaching at Johns Hopkins University and published by that University’s Press, seven volumes appeared: Biology of Man in History (Baltimore, MD, 1975); Family and Society (1976); Rural Society in France (1977); Deviants and the Abandoned (1978); Food and Drink in History (1979); Medicine and Society in France (1980); and Ritual, Religion and the Sacred (1982).


(76.) His first important publication was Esquisse du mouvement des prix et des revenues en France au XVIIIe siècle (Paris, 1933).

(77.) Recherches anciennes et nouvelles sur le mouvement général des prix du XVIe au XIXe siècle (Paris, 1932); Simiand also published a simplified version of his main arguments, based on lectures given in Belgium: Les fluctuations économiques à longue période et la crise mondiale (Paris, 1932).

(78.) Dosse, New History, 51.

(80.) La crise de l’économie française à la fin de l’ancien régime et au début de la Révolution (Paris, 1944); though this was described as ‘vol. 1’, it seems to have been the only one published. Labrousse’s thesis enjoyed an extended period of popularity since it appeared to link up economic trends to the causal pattern of the Revolution of 1789, but is now seriously questioned: see Jean-Pierre Poussou, ‘How, and How Not, to Use the Concept of Crisis in the Reign of Louis XVI’, in Julian Swann and Joel Félix, eds., The Crisis of the Absolute Monarchy: France from Old Regime to Revolution (Oxford, 2013), 29–44.


(82.) For Labrousse’s great influence, which the author views as deleterious, see Burguière, The Annales School, 103–132.

(83.) Burke, French Historical Revolution, 55.

(84.) Donald Winch, Malthus (Oxford, 1987), is a convenient brief introduction, while Robert J. Mayhew, Malthus: The Life and Legacies of an Untimely Prophet (Cambridge, MA, 2014) is an important recent study.


(86.) The original article was published in Annales E.S.C., 29 (1974), 673–692; an English translation can be found in E. Le Roy Ladurie, The Mind and Method of the Historian


(90.) Wesser Krul, ‘In the Mirror of van Eyck: Johan Huizinga’s Autumn of the Middle Ages’, Journal of Medieval and Early Modern Studies, 27 (1997), 353–384, and Edward Peters and Walter P. Simon, ‘The New Huizinga and the Old Middle Ages’, Speculum, 74 (1999), 587–620, are informative responses to the new English translation, by Rodney J. Payton and Ulrich Mammitsch, which was published by Chicago University Press in 1996. Several potential translations have been advanced for the Dutch word ‘Herfsttij’ in the original title, Herfsttij der Middeleeuwen, of which ‘Autumn’ or even ‘Harvest’ seem the most persuasive.

(91.) Quoted and translated by Krul, ‘In the Mirror of van Eyck’, 357.


(99.) See especially his essay, ‘Das „Ganz Haus“ und die alteuropäische „Ökonomik”’, which is reprinted in a revised version in Brunner’s *Neue Wege der Verfassung-und Sozialgeschichte* (2nd edn.; Göttingen, 1968), 103-127. For Brunner, see the valuable introduction to ’Land’ and Lordship: *Structures of Governance in Medieval Austria*, ed.

(100.) See Dietrich Gerhard, 'Periodization in European History', American Historical Review, 61 (1955–56), 900–913, and the same author’s Old Europe: A Study of Continuity, 1000–1800 (New York, 1981). The first study did not mention Brunner, while the second contained one casual reference (at 5).

(101.) See esp. Peter Blickle, Das Alte Europa: Vom Hochmittelalter bis zur Moderne (Munich, 2008), where an unconvincing attempt is made to yoke ‘Old Europe’ to the author’s well-known emphasis on communalism, and the essays in Christian Jaser, Ute Lotz-Heumann, and Matthias Pohlig, eds., Alteuropa, Vormoderne, Neue Zeit: Epochen und Dynamiken der europäischen Geschichte (1200–1800) (Berlin, 2012), which are rather more persuasive.


(104.) Erich Hassinger, Das Werden des neuzeitlichen Europa, 1300–1600 (Brunswick, 1959), esp. xi–xii; Heinz Schilling, Die neue Zeit: Vom Christenheitseuropa zum Europa der Staaten. 1250 bis 1750 (Berlin, 1990), esp. 9–15 (Schilling, it should be noted, has long been sympathetic to the notion of ‘Old Europe’, publishing an article in the very first issue of the Zeitschrift für Historische Forschung which employed that adjective). More recently, Constantin Fasolt has published an important article, ‘Hegel’s Ghost: Europe, the Reformation and the Middle Ages’, Viator, 39 (2008), 345–386, arguing for a similar periodization and identifying the continuation of the confessional historiography of the Reformation as the main obstacle; see also the same author’s ‘Religious Authority and Ecclesiastical Government’, in John J. Martin, ed., The Renaissance World (London, 2007), 364–380. These two articles are now reprinted in Martin, Past Sense: Studies in Medieval and Early Modern European History (Leiden, 2014), 545–596 and 525–544, together with some important reflections on periodization: ‘Introduction: A Program of Research’, 62–106.
(105.) For example, the comments of Anthony Grafton in favour of c. 1350, Frühneuzeit-Info, 7 (1996), 263, and the decision of the newly founded Journal of Early Modern History, 1 (1997), 1, to date the beginning of the global early modern era to around 1300, with the break-up of the Mongol empire; cf. George Huppert, After the Black Death: A Social History of Early Modern Europe (Bloomington, IN, 1986; 2nd edn., 1998), for a similar awareness of the importance of the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries for the post-1500 period.

(106.) Martha Howell and Marc Boone, ‘Becoming Early Modern in the Late Medieval Low Countries’, Urban History, 23 (1996), 300–324.


(108.) The existence of William Doyle, ed., The Oxford Handbook of the Ancien Régime (Oxford, 2013), which—mostly—picks up the story during the middle decades of the eighteenth century, was a further, pragmatic reason for selecting c. 1750 as the terminus of this Handbook.

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Like any human construct, Europe had to be imagined into being. It emerged gradually as an idea, a place, a people, and a culture, from its first appearance in ancient texts through its triumphalist self-assertion as Queen of Continents in the early modern era. This chapter opens with a chronological survey of ancient, medieval, and early modern understandings of Europe, and then turns to the difficulties posed by the blurry margins where Europe set itself apart from others. Oceans set clear boundaries around three sides of Europe, but establishing the eastern limits, especially in the region we now call Russia, raised persistent challenges. In a final section, the chapter explores some views from outside, from those who occupied grey zones of potential membership in the European club and from places definitively categorized as non-European.

Keywords: Europe, cartography, personification, myth of the continents, Ptolemy, boundaries, conceptions of Europe, moral and political geographies

The topic of this Handbook, is not a fact, a given, like a rock or an apple.¹ It is not even a naturally delimited geographic entity, an integral continent fully surrounded by water, like Australia, or connected by only a narrow isthmus, like North and South America. Rather it is a small appendage to a vast, sprawling landmass stretching from the Atlantic to the Pacific and only notionally separated from Africa by the Mediterranean. Like any human construct, Europe had to be imagined into being and disseminated as an idea. It had to be discussed and lived and practised before it hardened into the effective form—though with still uncertain and shifting boundaries—that it has in the world today. Even the conviction that the world essentially divides into continental blocks as opposed to other sorts of geographic units is a culturally conditioned one, a myth.²
As it happens, the quest for an early modern emergence of Europe proves complex and rewarding. While the term and concept of Europe as a division of the globe hailed back to antiquity and remained in use through subsequent centuries, their meanings and contours changed significantly over time. Europe emerged gradually as an idea, a place, a people, and a culture, from its first appearance in ancient Greek texts through its triumphalist, and often brutal, self-assertion as Queen of Continents, regnant over a world she was set to conquer and colonize in the early modern era.

Credit goes to the historian Denys Hay, with some early inspiration from Arthur Toynbee, for conceptualizing Europe as an idea that developed over several millennia. Hay’s book, *Europe: The Emergence of an Idea*, appeared in 1957 and inaugurated a new field of study. He opened his investigation with an examination of the use and meanings of the term in ancient Greece, traced its occlusion in the Middle Ages by the concept of ‘Christendom’, and then marked an upsurge in the importance of Europe in Renaissance and early modern texts. To a remarkable degree, subsequent studies have replicated the same chronology and have added nuance to Hay’s findings rather than overturning them. In the past decade, two novel approaches have moved the idea of Europe in new directions. First, with the rise and consolidation of the European Union and the recent uncertainties besetting it, the history of the concept has assumed new urgency. Second, with intensifying interest in the non-west, stimulated by contemporary politics as well as by postcolonial and subaltern theory, scholars have made strides towards balancing European ideas about itself with those of its neighbours, victims, partners, and competitors in the world. This chapter opens with a chronological survey of ancient, medieval, and early modern understandings of Europe, and then turns to the difficulties posed by the blurry margins where Europe set itself apart from others. Oceans set clear boundaries around three sides of Europe, but establishing the eastern limits, especially in the region we now call Russia, raised persistent challenges. In a final section, the chapter explores some views from outside, from those who occupied grey zones of potential membership in the European club and from places definitively categorized as non-European.

**Ancient and Medieval Antecedents**

The term ‘Europe’ was in use already in ancient Greece, as were its counterparts, Asia and ‘Libya’ (Africa). Europe denoted the lands north of the Mediterranean and west of Asia Minor and sometimes also ‘Scythia’ north of the Black Sea. The origin of the term remains murky. Scholars point with notable lack of conviction to a possible derivation from a word meaning broad-faced. More certain than this unhelpful and unconvincing etymology is Europe’s mythological association with Europa, the princess of Tyre.
abducted by Zeus in the form of a bull from her home in the Levant and carried across the sea to Crete, where she married the king and mothered heroic sons. The legend with its disconcerting themes of kidnap and rape would cling to ideas about Europe in centuries to come.

Map 1.1 Ptolemaic map of the world

A late fifteenth-century version of a Ptolemaic world map, published in the world chronicle, Nachdruck der Ausgabe Nürnberg (The Nuremburg Chronicle), by Hartmann Schedel (also, Schedel). Ptolemaic maps reappeared in Europe in the early fifteenth century, although they had long circulated in the Islamic world. The monstrous races, familiar from the works of ancient authors such as Pliny and Solinus, populate the left-hand margin. The three sons of Noah, here called Iaphet, Sem, and Cam, appear in the corners holding the world, and winds blow in from all sides.

Hartmann Schedel (1440–1514), Secunda etas mundi (Nuremburg: Anton Kroberger, 1493, 31 × 43 cm). Courtesy of the Osher Map Library, University of Southern Maine.

Geographic and cartographic sciences flourished in ancient times, as epitomized by the work of Ptolemy (Claudius Ptolemaeus), who built on the work of important Greek and Roman forerunners in his great Geography, c. 150, a compendium of more than 8,000 places, each identified by longitude and latitude. His roster of place names began in Europe, moved through Africa, and ended in Asia. His book contained descriptions of his great world map as well as specifications for twenty-six regional maps, including ten for Europe. None of his maps survive from ancient times, but the textual descriptions would provide the basis for later reconstructions, once the Geography reclaimed the attention of medieval Arab and European cartographers. Ptolemy attached the labels of Asia, Africa, and Europe to the three component parts of the inhabited world, but his world map charted a great, conjoined landmass, where continental divisions held little difference (see Map 1.1).

Even in ancient times, spatial distinctions may have carried more than simple geographic meaning, although scholarship remains divided on this point. Hay maintains that by the
fifth century B.C. Greek writers came to associate the East (Troy, Persia) ‘with concepts of lavish splendour, of vulgarity, of arbitrary authority, of all that was antithetical to Greece and Greek values’. M. E. Yapp disputes the claim that the ancients attributed moral or political valence to the continents, asserting that the more meaningful division for them was between ‘Greeks (defined as those who spoke Greek) and non-Greeks or barbarians’. It seems fair to conclude, nonetheless, that already among the Greeks, Europe could in certain contexts signal a particular, though flexibly defined, collective character.

Map 1.2  T-O map, with the sons of Noah

An early printed version of a medieval T-O map, based on the work of Isidore, Bishop of Seville from about 599 until his death in 636. Here the Don and Nile Rivers appear as the crossbar of the T, labelled ‘Mare magnum sive’. The names of the sons of Noah are inscribed on their respective continents.

From: Isidorus, Etymologiae (Augsburg: Güntherus Zainer, 1472).

Courtesy of the Department of Special Collections, Stanford University Libraries.

In the medieval period, ancient geographical models were lost or fell out of favour, and western cartographers and scribes often relied instead on the vision of the world advanced by Isidore of Seville, a vision that invested far more weight in the continental division of the world. Working in the seventh century, Isidore introduced the so-called T-O (orbis terrarium) map, a schematic plan that depicted the world as a disk surrounded by an encircling ocean. Three bodies of water, the Nile, the Mediterranean, and the Tanais (the River Don) created a T inside the O, slicing the world into three clearly differentiated segments. Asia occupied the entire top half, while Europe and Africa partitioned the semicircle at the bottom. Jerusalem took centre stage at the juncture of...
the T (see Map 1.2). The division of the earthly pie, with the lion’s share going to Asia, and the theologically significant eastern orientation, suggest that medieval mapmakers had little interest in establishing the supremacy of Europe. Maps devoted to Europe and only Europe are extremely rare in the medieval period. A unique manuscript map by Lambert of Saint Omer, *Europa mundi pars quarta*, c. 1120, is one of the precious few until the boom of European maps in the early sixteenth century, and quite clearly represents the European quarter of a T-O map.

This lack of interest in geographic competition among the continents squares with early medieval narrative sources. As a collective identity, ‘Christendom’ held far more purchase than any elusive idea of ‘Europe’ or ‘Europeanness’. Provocative work by Robert Bartlett and R. I. Moore suggests that post-Carolingian European Christendom was deliberately created out of a Roman and Frankish core by churchmen intent on building their own institutional power bases and working hand-in-glove with nascent state systems to do so. Through their efforts, societies mobilized defensively, first against Muslim attacks and later against minority populations imaged as enemies—heretics, lepers, Jews. Unified in part by shared fears, an increasingly homogeneous European Christian culture took hold, with a common core of Latin texts, a cosmopolitan cadre of university-trained bookmen and churchmen, and a set of common institutions and understandings of the proper ways to legislate and order society.7

The extent to which this Christendom included the Greek Orthodox East in different periods remains somewhat uncertain. Historian Christian Raffensperger contends that the east-west division had little meaning for early medieval Christians, and that from its formation in the ninth century until its collapse in the mid-eleventh century, medieval Rus’ (the East Slavic principalities that reached from Kiev in the south to Novgorod in the north) was as fully and actively a member of ‘European’ Christendom as any other state. Undeterred by any religious or geographic divides, its princely families intermarried with western dynastic lineages. Raffensperger urges a rethinking of the imperial Roman legacy, arguing that it was the specifically Byzantine Roman mantle that aspiring rulers throughout Europe, from Rus’ to England, claimed to continue, and that Europe in that period should be understood and defined by its shared reverence for the ‘Byzantine Ideal’.8

The fissure between the Roman and Orthodox Churches deepened after the formal schism of 1054, and thereafter the Orthodox world became one of many external foes against which an emerging Europe came to define itself. Crusaders in the Holy Land declared their ties to Christendom by battling Muslims, at the same time that the errant Fourth Crusade of 1204 pitted Latin force against Byzantine Christians. Evangelizing orders of monastic knights subdued, colonized, co-opted, and converted pagans in Scandinavia, the Baltic, and finally Lithuania in 1386. With these colonizing forays, the
meanings of the term ‘Christendom’ shifted, acquiring more precise geographic as well as confessional connotations.

Medieval Latin texts and artefacts on occasion expressed a serene sense of distinctiveness in geographic and cultural terms. Large, richly elaborated T-O maps from the twelfth and thirteenth centuries—particularly the Ebstorf and Hereford maps—embellished the edges of the globe with images of monstrous races and beasts, curiosities more densely depicted in non-European regions. These maps convey both universal inclusion (even monsters are held within the embrace of Jesus) and differentiation of Europe from its more fancifully imagined counterparts. Among the monsters regularly appearing on medieval mappamundi were Gog and Magog, giants imprisoned by Alexander the Great under a mountain range in the East until the end of time. When the Mongols appeared suddenly on the European horizon in the thirteenth century, any illusion of protective barriers shielding Europe from Asia was shattered, and commentators wondered if the invaders signalled the coming of End Times from the East. Tacit assumptions about continental divisions confronted sharp reminders of continental contiguity, introducing a strain of geographic ambivalence.

In order to better understand the limits of membership in the community of Latin Christendom, European writers of the twelfth, thirteenth, and fourteenth centuries began to inflect their collective identity with other characteristics as well. In principle if not reliably in practice, membership of the Latin Christian collective meant operating in a world governed by law, with various kinds of freedoms and safe from arbitrary or tyrannical rule. It meant observing correct marriage practices and reining in patriarchal excess. Although the vaunted unity of the ‘universal church’ was repeatedly fractured, not least during the fourteenth-century papal split between Avignon and Rome, a notional list of best practices provided a framework for imagining a harmonious and homogeneous Christendom.

Most ‘Europeans’ almost certainly remained oblivious of these carefully crafted notions of cultural unity and were far more invested in local, parochial concerns than in grand cultural parameters. For literate elites, however, these self-declared traits came to constitute core aspects of the understandings of Christendom that anticipated and would bleed over into an emerging sense of Europe as the site of Christian virtue. Recent research on medieval identity formation to some extent undermines the notion of an early modern ‘emergence of Europe’, and destabilizes the claims, now commonplace in historical scholarship, that Europe came to know itself only in the great era of overseas expansion, through encounters with alien ‘others’. Instead, medieval thinkers developed their own notions of Europe, and these earlier iterations contributed to shaping the ‘Europe’ of early modern imagination. As Robert Bartlett writes, ‘The European Christians who sailed to the coasts of the Americas, Asia and Africa in the fifteenth and
sixteenth centuries came from a society that was already a colonizing society. Europe, the initiator of one of the world’s major processes of conquest, colonization and cultural transformation, was also the product of one’s.

The conflation of geographic location and moral standing found expression in the story of the sons of Noah, who came to embody the three continents. The tale surged in popularity in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries. The book of Genesis recounts that Noah, who overindulged in the wine produced from his postdiluvian grape harvest, collapsed naked in his tent. His son Ham came across him in his indecent state and told his brothers, Shem and Japheth, who respectfully backed into the tent, eyes averted, and covered their father’s nakedness. When Noah awoke, he cursed not the unfortunate Ham, but his son, Canaan:

25 And he said, Cursed be Canaan; a servant of servants shall he be unto his brethren.
26 And he said, Blessed be the LORD God of Shem; and Canaan shall be his servant.
27 God shall enlarge Japheth, and he shall dwell in the tents of Shem; and Canaan shall be his servant.

From this cryptic (and patently unfair) grandparental malediction grew the notion that Noah divided the earth’s regions among his three sons. Slowly, across several centuries and with much shifting of positions, the brothers came to be associated with particular continental abodes. Benjamin Braude shows that Ham was generally connected with Asia in the fourteenth century, and only with a fifteenth-century turnabout did he move to Africa, while Shem and Japheth divvied up Asia and Europe between them (with some uncertainty at first about who got which piece). Over the course of the fifteenth century, Ham assumed African appearance in visual and textual representations and came to personify Africa. Shem stabilized his association with Asia, and Japheth came to stand in for Europe. The brothers’ names or figures often adorn late T-O maps, where each man stands on his appointed slice of the earth (see Map 1.2).

While these avatars of the continents solidified a sense of European distinctiveness, advances in observational mapping and the renaissance of a Ptolemaic cartographic system in the fifteenth century subjected that sense of unity to scrutiny and doubt. The re-emergence of Ptolemaic cartographic science has been encased in powerful mythologies about the darkness of the Dark Ages and the glories of the Renaissance. Patrick Gautier Dalché’s research on the rediscovery and reception of Ptolemy’s Geography in the Renaissance demonstrates that almost nothing of the legend holds up to scrutiny. The Geography had not been forgotten: Latin writers from the sixth century onward referred to it, and from the twelfth century, translations of Arabic texts made astronomical and geographic discussions in the Ptolemaic tradition available to European
readers. Much of the content of the Geography—long lists of place-names with their coordinates—circulated in the medieval west as well. What was not transmitted to the Latin Christian West through the Middle Ages was an explanation of the system the great geographer had used to project the earthly globe onto a flat surface. In the mid-twelfth century a Moroccan geographer, al-Idrīsī, drew up a number of maps, including a Ptolemaic world map, for his patron, King Roger II of Sicily, but his exemplar spawned no immediate imitators. European production of Ptolemaic maps would wait until the missing piece of the corpus, Ptolemy’s description of his graphic projection, arrived in Florence with a complete manuscript of the Geography, probably courtesy of a Greek named Manuel Chrysoloras, invited there in 1397 by a circle of eager humanists. Chrysoloras translated the work by 1400, and it generated tremendous interest not only in Florence but elsewhere throughout Europe.

Scholarship has been polarized between those who maintain that the rediscovery of Ptolemy revolutionized a backwards, medieval approach based on the Bible and mythology, and those who maintain that, on the contrary, it locked early modern cartographers into a limited, ancient science that blocked them from understanding the scale of the globe. Dalché argues against both extremes of interpretation, explaining that Ptolemaic cartography neither burst on the scene unheralded nor precluded further advances with its authoritative wisdom. Regarding the former, the medieval period had developed a number of observation-based cartographic forms, most notably the portolan, a detailed form of chart that represented the contours of navigable coastlines with astounding accuracy.

As to the claim that Ptolemy’s stature inhibited further developments, the profusion of alternative experimental projections that flourished in the late fifteenth and sixteenth centuries—gores (the pointed oval forms that would fit together to paper over a globe), double hemispheres, or projections within geometric shapes such as cordiform (heart-shapes), cones, or ovals—belie that position. So too do the recalculations of the globe’s circumference precipitated by the discovery of the New World and corrections of ancient spatial coordinates. Far from freezing geographic knowledge, the Ptolemaic system of mapping longitude and latitude on a gridded page allowed for flexible incorporation of fresh data from travellers to near and distant parts of the globe. In fact, already in the fifteenth century, publications of Ptolemy generally consisted of two halves, first the ancient geographer’s maps and then a set of ‘new’ or ‘modern’ tabulae, updated versions that incorporated new findings and improved on the originals.
Europa Nova Tabula: New Cartographies

New geographic information flooded into European centres throughout the early modern era, as explorers, adventurers, merchants, diplomats, and armies travelled across the globe. In connection with new mapping techniques and an increasingly globalized world economy, the invention of the printing press and the rise of a print market facilitated a great expansion in mapmaking and marketing. The Dutch proved particularly adept at adapting advanced cartographic and printing methods to the tastes of the day. Maps became stock items of tasteful home décor, and appeared in the paintings of Holbein, Vermeer, and many others as markers of prosperity and position. Abraham Ortelius produced the first atlas in 1570, with the encouragement of his compatriot Gerardus Mercator, who published his own atlas in 1578.

The atlas, this new genre, a compendium of maps from around the globe, provoked focused meditation on the position of Europe in a greater world. The resurgence of Ptolemaic cartography made it difficult to imagine Europe as a sharply defined geographic entity. The Ptolemaic projection, as seen in Map 1.1, showed Europe as a negligible nubbin adhering to the western edge of Asia. The whole Mediterranean world looked rather small, and the centre of gravity was distinctly eastward. Ruminating on his home continent’s place in the world, Mercator, famed for the creation of a projection that maximized Europe’s place in the world, acknowledged that Europe was ‘least of all’ ‘of the chiefe Delineators of the terrestriall Globe’.12
Map 1.3 Prior to the sixteenth century, mapmakers depicted Europe either as one section on world maps or followed Ptolemy in showing it sliced into segments, as seen in this version of Ptolemy’s eighth part of Europe, ‘Octava Evrope Tabvla’, from a 1513 edition by Martin Waldseemüller and Mathias Ringmann. *Claudii Ptolemei viri Alexandrini mathematice discipline philosophi doctissimi Geographie opus nouissima traductione e Grecorum archetypis castigatissime pressum, ceteris ante lucubratorum multo prestantius ...


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dcu. Library of Congress Rare Book and Special Collections Division Washington, D.C. 20540-4650 dcu <http://www.loc.gov/resource/g3200m.gct00262/#seq-84> (accessed 1 May 2014).

Map 1.4 One of the first published maps of Europe as a whole. Sebastian Munster’s ‘Europa Prima Nova Tabula’, first printed in 1536. This version from a later edition of his *Geographiae Clavdii Potlemaei Alexandrini* (Basel: Henrichus Petrus, 1552). Map 25.3 × 34.3 cm, on sheet 31.8 × 39.8 cm. William L. Clements Library, University of Michigan.
Nonetheless, Mercator and his compatriots entertained no doubt that Europe existed as a geographic and cultural entity, nor that it could rightfully claim superiority to all other parts of the globe. Beginning in the early sixteenth century, cartographers demonstrated a clear sense of Europe’s integral geography as they increasingly dedicated separate maps to Europe itself, as opposed to the world or regional maps favoured by earlier generations, or the segmental slices depicted in the Ptolemaic numbered tabulae. H. A. M. van der Heijden notes that the earliest maps of Europe as a separate and distinct entity appeared as early as 1511 as guides for pilgrims heading to Rome or to the great shrine of Santiago de Campostella. Reflecting their southerly destinations, these itinerary maps were oriented to the south, as seen in one of the earliest maps of Europe, a hand-drawn sketch by Sebastian Münster, c.1515–18, and printed by him as ‘Tabula Europe’ in his Mappae Europae in 1536. The northern orientation would not stabilize until later in the century. Van der Heijden identifies the earliest printed map of Europe as a woodblock printed by Martin Waldseemüller: Carta Itineraria Europae in 1520 (Maps 1.3 and 1.4). 

Typically, early modern atlases (and they were an astonishingly popular genre) divided their contents into sections by continent and opened with extended discussions of Europe, expansively singling out its virtues. Mercator includes a list of cultural, political, and moral achievements in his description of what makes Europe a meaningful (and meritorious) entity.

We have here [in Europe] Justice and Lawes: we have the dignitie of Christian Religion, we have all the delights of mankinde, we have the strength of Armes, innumerable Senators, Men venerable both for Wisedome and Learning: and if you please to compare famous men together, there was never so great a company of Heroes, and Noble men in other parts of the World, as in any one part of Europe. Besides, this part of the World is so studious of Arts and Sciences, that for the invention and preservation of many things, it may worthwhile be called, the Mother and Nurse of Wisedome. In this are many excellent and flourishing Universities, but in other Countries there is nothing but meere Barbarisme.

‘Our Europe’, he continues, boasts the most excellent soil and is the ‘most beautifull part of the earth’. It has proven its worth through force of arms and conquest, and has ‘borne many noble Heroes, which have added to their Empire America unknowne (as the most do suppose) to the Ancients, and the better and stronger parts of Asia, and Africke’.

13
14
Europe excelled not only through force of arms, but also by dint of hard work. Continuing the line of reasoning already noted in the medieval period, early modern authors identified their continent as a place populated by brave, freedom-loving, law-abiding people, where individuals owned property individually and claimed it through their labour. Maps reinforced this picture through their illustrative insistence on divisions of individual property holdings and on the virtues of labour. The elaborate cartouches and ornamental flourishes that adorn early modern printed maps spell out the details of ownership and the boundaries of properties and depict hardworking Europeans tilling neatly fenced fields or tending their livestock. Corresponding scenes of non-European life frequently (though not always) depicted scenes of barbarism, tyranny, and rootlessness. Dutch mapmakers emblazoned maps of Brazil with gory scenes of cannibalism. North American maps often show Indians as hunters stalking their prey in the woods without link to land or property, or wrenched out of context, floating in surrounding oceans along with decorative elements such as ships and sea monsters. In maps of ‘Tartaria’, camels and tents make the same point: the nomads of North Asia enclose no property and invest no labour in the land. Private property and intensive labour conferred rights to landholding that the indigenous population had manifestly failed to earn (Map 1.5 and Map 1.10).
Europa: The Continent Incarnate

Personifications of European industry and ingenuity appear with increasing frequency on maps and in other genres of literary and artistic production in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Showcasing the intellectual capacities of Europe’s great men in ornamental vignettes, Martin Waldseemüller’s 1507 twelve-panel map of the world, *Universalis Cosmographia*, depicts Ptolemy (visually claimed as part of the great European heritage) and Amerigo Vespucci, wielding sextant and drafting compass. Jan van der Straet (Johannes Stradanus) paired Vespucci with Columbus, again shown with the tools of navigation and cartographic measurement, in a 1592 print of the globe dedicated to the centenary of Columbus’s discovery of America: *Retectio America*. Van der Straet’s better known *Nova Reperta*, an allegorical etching of Vespucci’s discovery of America, depicts America as a naked female, ensconced in the exotic setting of New World flora and fauna, rising from her slumber at the approach of the fully clad and scientifically equipped European Christian scholar.

*Click to view larger*

*Map 1.6* Hendrik Hondius, *Nova totius Terrarum Orbis geographica ac hydrographica tabula*, published by Jan Jansson, Amsterdam, 1633, 40 x 56 cm.

State Library of New South Wales—Ca 63/2.
While particular males from the pantheon of European exploration, conquest, and scholarship exemplified their continent and culture in these maps and images, allegorical female figures increasingly came to personify the continents themselves. Van der Straet’s naked America is just one of a crowd of female incarnations of the continents. Hendrik Hondius ornamented his spectacular world map of 1630, *Nova totius terrarum orbis geographica ac hydrographica tabula*, with male and female emblems of the continents: men as representatives; women as personifications. He added inset portraits of Julius Caesar, crowned with laurels, Ptolemy, decked in seventeenth-century garb, Mercator, and his own father, the cartographer Jodocus Hondius, in the four corners of the map. Jutting up between the curves of the two hemispheres, crowned and enthroned in regal majesty, sits Queen Europa, receiving tribute from the other, female continents (Map 1.6 and Map 1.7).
In his use of female continents, Hondius looked back to a precedent set by the frontispiece of Abraham Ortelius’s *Theatrum Orbis Terrarum* (Antwerp, 1570). The famous image displays Europe crowned, enthroned, and regnant over the globe, dominating over modest, richly dressed Asia, proud, semi-clad Africa, and recumbent, naked America, holding a human head to evoke her cannibalism. A naked bust of yet another woman rests behind America, representing fiery Magellanica or other continents yet to be explored. Michael Wintle argues that this title page conveyed a critical development in the idea of Europe that followed on the heels of the discovery of the New World. The medieval view of the continents, he maintains, was quite an egalitarian one. ‘Generally speaking, there was a trinity of equal continents: Europe, Asia, and Africa each had a son of Noah, and each had a Magus, and there may have been difference, but their status was more or less equal. The discovery of America blew away such harmonious thoughts. Europe was now the undisputed champion’, superior even to the ancients (see Map 1.8).  

Beginning in the late sixteenth century, personifications of the continents proliferated on maps and prints and book illustrations, on allegorical representations in frescoes, sculpture, and friezes. The sons of Noah yielded their place as continental avatars to Princess Europa and her retinue of other female continents. Cesare Ripa’s influential
Iconologia, first published with illustrations in 1603 and reprinted widely thereafter, standardized the imagery. Often identified by her accompanying bull, Europa occasionally appeared dishevelled and alarmed by her abduction, with erotic implications fully apparent. More frequently she presented herself with utmost composure, crowned with either crown, orb, and sceptre, attributes due to her regal lineage, or with Minerva’s helmet, appropriate to her claims to wisdom and learning. The bull signalled not only her classical heritage but also her might and force, at the same time that it fit in with agrarian scenes that echoed Mercator’s catalogue of Europe’s agricultural bounty, its excellent soil, ‘many woods and forrests, which afford pasturage for cattell’, and diligent population.16

Map 1.9 Johann ‘Bucius’ Putsch (1516–42) depicted Europe as a queen in 1537, in an imaginative anthropomorphic woodcut in two sheets. Putsch’s map was reduced and adapted by Heinrich Bünting (c. 1545–1606) for publication of his Itinerarium sacrae scripturae, Das ist: Ein Reisebuch über die gantze heilige Schrift in a 1587 edition, along with a series of floramorphic and zoomorphic maps. Matthias Quad (1557–1613) published a close copy of Putsch’s original in Cologne in 1587, and yet another revision of the map was included in posthumous editions of Sebastian Münster’s Cosmographia universalis from 1588 to 1628. The Münster version is shown here.

Courtesy of the Stephen S. Clark Library of the University of Michigan.

Some cartographic personifications twisted the script of European unity to advance the claim of a single state or monarch. In an early innovation, Johann ‘Bucius’ Putsch depicted Europe as a queen (Europa in forma virginis) (c. 1537). The map, oriented to the west, ingeniously transforms Spain into the queen’s crowned head, with Bohemia at her heart. Italy, her right arm, stretches out to hold Sicily as her royal orb, in some versions shown as an inverted T-O globe. Denmark, her left arm, juts out into the Baltic Sea. In the
east, Greece, Bulgaria, Scythia, Moscovia, and even a bit of Tartaria, located beyond the Don, make up the bottom of her belled skirt. Indisputably a bit of Habsburg propaganda, the map enjoyed tremendous success and was included in Sebastian Münster’s *Cosmographia* and copied by other artists (Map 1.9).\textsuperscript{17}

This politicized imagery points to a complication in the narrative of the rise of European consciousness spelled out to this point. Just as Europe was being imagined as a meaningful continental unit, its residents were imagining alternative solidarities of nation, religion, and region, and rising monarchies were aiming to establish uniform sovereignty over bounded territories. In other words, this era of continental integration was also a period of bitter division and consolidation of difference. National polemicists boasted of the exceptional merits of their countrymen, just as Euro-supporters touted continent-wide virtues. English writers, for instance, proudly claimed to consume more beef and beer than anyone else, a clear sign of their superiority. In the project of imagining and constructing territorial states, as with the process of coming to visualize a single Europe, mapping played a key role. Most early modern European monarchies undertook ambitious cadastral surveys to allow them to see, on paper, their lands, people, and resources, although these projects met with varying degrees of success. This inward-looking turn worked at cross-purposes to the construction of a sense of European homogenization, but reflected the same newly spatialized conception of rule (that is, a shift from jurisdiction over people to jurisdiction over territories) and an attribution of unifying moral, social, and cultural traits to the inhabitants of those territories. Europe, like Christendom or Latinity in prior centuries, offered just one of countless modes in which denizens of that part of northwestern Afro–Eurasia might think about themselves and their place in the world.

Despite the separatist dynamics of national consolidation, for the most part personifications of Europa eschewed partisanship and instead presented Europe as a single, virtuous figure, devoid of divisive identifying marks. Beyond her regal poise, her might, wisdom, wealth, and enterprise, artists included little to help the viewer identify her by nationality or by flavour of Christianity. Europe, she seemed to suggest, was harmoniously integrated, without any internal tensions to flaw that placid surface. When one remembers the confessional violence that raged throughout the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, the harmony embodied in these lovely figures is all the more remarkable. Cool, civilized, and unquestionably in charge, Europeans exercised martial might, as Mercator’s commentary indicates, in conquest of ‘their Empire America ... and the better and stronger parts of Asia, and Africke’, not within their own united core. Riven by the passions of Protestant and Catholic Reformation, by civil wars and conflicts between states, Europe nonetheless appears at peace with herself.
How to explain this visual, textual, and cartographic insistence on the unity and shared identity of a Europe so profoundly and bloodily at war with herself? Benjamin Schmidt suggests one important solution to this conundrum. The business of composing, printing, and selling maps and atlases was centred largely in the Netherlands after about 1560. The Dutch, eager to find a place in the competitive world of early overseas empires, carved out a particularly advantageous niche for themselves in the shape of a non-territorial, commercial empire. Circling the globe, their merchant ships pooled together the wares of the world and featured global exotica on the products they produced and marketed so well. Playing with the embodiments and symbols of the continents, they mixed and matched. Cartouches on printed maps, Chinese-themed porcelain, and lavish prints paired African elephants with Asian parasols, smoking censers and cannibals with crocodiles and armadillos. The Dutch crafted an empire of commerce: other continents melded in a consumer mélange, while Europe solidified as a concept, defined by its good taste, curiosity about the world, and cosmopolitan knowledge. They deliberately marketed a single Europe, empowered and distinguished by her ability to enjoy the circulating products of the world that was so effectively, delightfully, and rightly subject to her dominion.\(^\text{18}\)

As the choice of pronoun acknowledges, Europa appears always as a woman, which raises another host of questions. More than an accident of nomenclature, Europe’s female qualities were central to the understandings set forth in cosmographical meditations. Mercator chose to employ the neutral ‘it’ when enumerating Europe’s virtues, but nonetheless cast it as ‘Mother and Nurse of Wisedome’, ‘mother of the Conquerours of the World’, and ‘onely mother of many Kings and Princes fighting in Christs cause’, and ‘Nurse of a People conquering all Nations’. The insistence on Europa as not only a royal but specifically queenly, sometimes motherly, female figure has drawn considerable attention. Less scholarship has considered the ways in which warring configurations of gender and sexuality lay at the very heart of the fierce conflicts that wracked the lands Europa represented. Catholic and Protestant theologies both fixated on the gendered body and its uses, and gendered sexual practices took on highly charged significance in the culture wars of the early modern period.\(^\text{19}\) In depicting Europe as an imperial female, Europe’s artists and cartographers found a way out of that impasse. By representing their allegorical Europa as a stately and majestic female, modestly and richly clothed, draped in insignia of power, and unencumbered by bothersome references to sex or marriage (except for that pesky bull!), the continent’s propagandists sidestepped painful residues of the religious wars. Queen Europa urged potential consumers to set aside their differences and indulge in the well-earned fruits of their global emporium.
Who was In and Who was Out? The View from the Blurry Margins

Theorists of identity formation emphasize the role of encounters with ‘others’ in the process of understanding the self. In closest proximity, Europeans came to know themselves ‘in the Turkish mirror’, or in the ‘Muscovite mirror’. As M. E. Yapp notes, all parts of the world ‘provided a fruitful source of negative recognition for Europeans’, but ‘of all the negatives known to Europe the nearest, the most obvious and the most threatening has been the Islamic Near East, represented from the fourteenth century onwards by the menace of the Ottoman empire’. Turkey assumed various roles in European thinking, but was associated with a fairly stable set of negative psychosocial and political characteristics: its people were given to fatalism; women were demeaned and abused; people of both sexes were given to perverse (and titillating) same-sex debauchery; social classes were undifferentiated, and the sultan ruled despotically. In the negative mirror, Europeans could make out the outlines of what they hoped not to be, and therefore, of what they aspired to become.

Sharply delineating those who were ‘in’ from those who were ‘out’ was critical to the business of figuring out who these estimable Europeans were. Encounters at the margins of the European comfort zone could prove more taxing than distant overseas adventures, particularly as explorers’ reports drove home the fact that no imposing natural divide separated Europe from Asia. As Europeans became increasingly self-aware, they also became increasingly conscious that their continent could claim no obvious cultural boundary at its indeterminate eastern edge. The Balkans fell clearly on the European side of any conventional continental divide, but from the fourteenth century on they belonged to the Ottoman Empire and much of their population adhered to Islam. Eastern Europe in general posed a conundrum. Larry Wolff finds ‘the essence of Eastern Europe ... [was] its resistance to precise geographical location and description’. Until the early eighteenth century, what we would call eastern Europe fell conceptually under the rubric of ‘the North’, a troublesome part of the world largely unfamiliar to the southern and central Europeans who produced the majority of early modern maps. As colourfully noted by Münster regarding the map of Europe in his 1544 Cosmographia: ‘All important parts are on the map, with the exception of large areas in the North such as England, Scotland, Denmark, Gotland, Norway, and more remote areas. Although everyone considers them part of Europe and it is thought that they continue up to the Pole, but they are as yet insufficiently explored and moreover not all are populated by human beings’. Despite his protestations of ignorance, Münster had the benefit of familiarity with Olaus Magnus’s 1539 map of Scandinavia, Carta Marina, which circulated widely and greatly advanced understanding of boreal geography. A century and a half later, ‘the North’ continued to serve as a meaningful geographic entity. A map printed in Amsterdam by
Nicholas Sanson at the opening of the Great Northern War between Russia and Sweden in 1702, bore the title ‘Theatre of the War of the Crowns of the North’. Depicting Sweden, Russia, and Poland, the map was bounded in the south by the name ‘Ukraine’ printed on the margin. Falling outside the theatre of war, southerly Ukraine belonged to a different conceptual category. Only when the hostilities required a new geography that would distinguish Sweden from Russia did the idea of the North begin to fade and eastern Europe come to replace it. Wolff identifies a 1708 ‘Map of Muscovy, Poland, Little Tartary, and ye Black Sea’, by H. Moll as a cartographic turning point. The map’s title evoked ‘not a conventional association of lands, but the ambitions of Peter [the Great] and Charles [XII], and the progress of their Northern War, had rendered such a map both necessary and plausible, a map of Eastern Europe’.22

Russia posed its own set of difficult conceptual problems. The first problem was establishing what territory the name designated. A study by Kaléna Uhryn finds that in early modern European maps and geographies, the name ‘Russia’, usually with an adjectival descriptor such as ‘Little’, ‘White’, ‘Red’, or ‘New’, attached to all of the east Slavic lands that we would now call Eastern and Western Ukraine, Lithuania, and Byelorussia, and only to a lesser extent to ‘Muscovy’ or the ‘realm of the tsar’. The great national historian of Ukraine, Mikhailo Hrushevskii, lamented that the Ukrainian people had even their name stolen by the ‘Russians’.23

Next arose the second problem of determining which if any of these several Russias might claim membership in Europe. Until the reign of Peter the Great (1682–1725), the

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22 Wolff, ‘Theatre of the War of the Crowns of the North’, 1702. Wolff identifies a 1708 ‘Map of Muscovy, Poland, Little Tartary, and ye Black Sea’, by H. Moll as a cartographic turning point. The map’s title evoked ‘not a conventional association of lands, but the ambitions of Peter [the Great] and Charles [XII], and the progress of their Northern War, had rendered such a map both necessary and plausible, a map of Eastern Europe’.22

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Tsardom of Muscovy was in many ways understood as antithetical to all that made Europe European, and yet almost all geographies included its western portion in the European orbit, as ‘European Tartaria’. Politically, the tsar’s rule was understood to be despotic, tyrannical, and lawless, hence the polar opposite of what Europe claimed to be about. The English merchant-diplomat Giles Fletcher offered a typical enumeration of Russia’s inadequacies in his account published in 1591: ‘The State and form of their government is plain tyrannicall, as applying all to the behoof of the Prince’. He complained that Muscovites observed no rights in private property, that even the nobility were enslaved to the whim of the ruler, and that they altogether lacked rule of law. ‘The oppression and slaverie is so open and so great, that a man would marvell how the Nobilitie and people should suffer themselves to be brought under it’. Fletcher compared this sad state of affairs unfavourably with the enlightened rule of his own gracious monarch, Elizabeth I, to whom he dedicated the work.24 Looking in the murky Muscovite mirror, Fletcher was able to identify the core characteristics that set England, or Europe, apart. In his important and much copied publication of Anthony Jenkinson’s 1562 map of Muscovy and Tartaria, Abraham Ortelius imprinted the Muscovite north with a somewhat barbaric figure of a bearded and exotically garbed tsar, identified as Ivan IV, ‘Ioannis Basileus Magnus Imperator Russis Dux Moscouie &c’, lowering heavily outside of a tent, signalling his despotic rule (see Map 1.10, top left).

Clear as it was that Muscovy was something exotic, horrifying, and decidedly un-European, geographic wisdom maintained that Russia, or at least part of it, fell in the European portion of the world. Sigmund von Herberstein, author of the most influential sixteenth-century account of travels to Muscovy, expressed his confusion when he wrote, in tellingly repetitive language, that Moscow lies ‘if not in Asia, at any rate at the very extreme confines of Europe, where it joins Asia’.25 The uncertainty about how to discuss Russia was reflected in a persistent haziness about where that dividing line should be located. Mercator’s map of Europe and those of Ortelius and most other contemporaneous exemplars, eschew altogether the placement of borders, either national or continental. Toponyms indicate the locations of countries and continents. On one of Mercator’s maps of Europe, the label ‘EV-RO-PA’ in three letter pairs stretches from France to Poland, via Germania, but borders are nowhere in evidence.26

A subset of early modern maps and geographic texts do explicitly address the question with printed continental borders. Most followed the ancients in asserting that the boundary between Europe and Asia lay at the Hellespont in the south, and then ran through the Black Sea to the Sea of Azov, along the Tanais or Don River, and up, sometimes to the mythical Riphaean Mountains, often shown running east–west somewhere in the unknown territories north of the Black Sea. Since the ancient Greeks had little knowledge of the north of Europe, in their mental geography the lands we know
as Russia simply faded out between the Black Sea littoral and a northern ocean. Over time, with the opening of diplomatic and trade relations in the sixteenth century, the region grew increasingly familiar, and its contours were redrawn to fit the reports flowing in from informants. The mysterious Ripherian range shifted its orientation to the north–south line of the Urals. The landmass north of the Black Sea was recalculated, its newly understood dimensions far exceeding the narrow strip of classical imagination. It also became clear that the Don River, rather than providing a powerfully coursing continental divide, instead originated well south of Moscow and then wended along a short, marshy path. In order to preserve the Don’s role as boundary marker, mapmakers tried elongating the Sea of Azov, thereby pushing the Don’s short route far to the north. But this solution too proved unsustainable as travellers brought back more concrete observations. Herberstein reported that if one travelled by land in a straight line from the mouth of the Tanais to its source, ‘you will find that Moscow is in Asia, and not in Europe’. His observation reveals an ingrained Ptolemaic sensibility; he presumes that a border should follow a straight meridian.

Map 1.11 Rudimentum Novitiorum sive Chronicarum et historiarum epitome (Lübeck: Lucas Brandis, 1475).

The various parameters of uncertainty reignited debates about where precisely to place the divide between Europe and Asia. Following long-standing tradition, most mapmakers placed Russia in Europe. For instance, a late variant on the T-O map, which may well be the very first printed world map, dating to 1475, places countries within its quartiles with only a flimsy sense of geography, but Russia appears at the northern edge of the European quadrant. Identified in two parts, Moscavia and Tartaria, it is neighboured by Cyprus and Crete to the south (Map 1.11). A century later, Mercator and Ortelius
produced their landmark atlases based on entirely different geographic premises, but the same continental understandings kept Russia in the bounds of Europe.

Yet questions about the eastern boundary of the continent persisted, and cartographers continued to revisit it. As Mark Bassin writes, ‘precisely at the moment that the Classical distinction between Europe and Asia as separate continents was being enhanced with an appealing ideological dimension, advances in geographical knowledge threatened to erode its very basis. The response to the problem created by the evaporation of the Azov-Tanais boundary was to seek out another to replace it’. Western geographers proposed alternative possibilities that situated the continental divide at a variety of inventive places, from the Dniester in the west, to the Volga, Kama, Dvina, Ob, Pechora, and, remarkably, in the eighteenth century the Yenisei River, thereby allowing Europe to engulf a great swath of the Eurasia expanse. In the seventeenth century, the Ob variant won many adherents among western geographers, despite gnawing unease at the prospect of defining the tyrannical Muscovite tsars and their enserfed population as fully European.

With the cultural reforms of Peter the Great and his successors in the eighteenth century, Western observers came to recognize themselves in the Dutch canals and Baroque architecture of St. Petersburg, in the learned conversations of the Academy of Sciences, and in the sophisticated soirées of the court. All of the barriers that had made Russia seem so alien melted away, and educated men and women moved easily between Russian and European capitals. After centuries of dynastic isolation, Russian royals re-entered the European marriage market, coming back full circle to the medieval period when Rus princes had intermarried freely with all other European dynasties. Voltaire, a great enthusiast of the accomplishments of Peter the Great, boasted that whereas previously ‘the customs, diets, and manners of the Russians, ever bore a greater affinity to those of Asia than to those of Europe’, Peter’s reforms put a distinctively European stamp on his land and people. Once Russia donned European-style wigs, silks, and breeches, it became incontestably European. Voltaire entertained such a mutable sense of geography that he felt Peter could wrest even China and the steppe into Europe’s orbit.

In spite of Peter’s successes in rebranding his erstwhile ‘Asian’ potentate, the puzzle of Russia’s affinity and continental location lingered. Voltaire drew on long-time cartographic practices when he invoked scrambled terminology to describe Russia’s eastern and western territories. He labelled the western regions ‘European Sarmatia’, a parallel to ‘European Turkey’, also mentioned, or more expansively, ‘the north-eastern part of Europe’. He is definitive in his declaration that Astrakhan, a city at the mouth of the Volga, ‘is the boundary of Asia and Europe, and is so situated as to be able to carry on a trade with both’, but a few short pages later he acknowledges that, ‘If after surveying
all these vast provinces, we direct our view towards the east, we shall find the limits of Europe and Asia again confounded’.

A new name is wanting for a considerable part of the globe. The ancients divided their known world into Europe, Asia, and Africa: but they had not seen the tenth part of it: hence it happens, that when we pass the Palus Mæotis (the marshy mouth of the Don at the Sea of Azov) we are at a loss to know where Europe ends, or Asia begins; all that tract of country lying beyond mount Taurus was distinguished by the general appellation of Scythia, and afterwards by that of Tartary. It might not be improper, perhaps, to give the name of Terræ Arcticæ, or Northern Lands, to the country extending from the Baltic Sea to the confines of China.30

The vision of ‘the North’ persisted and continued to mould the European geographic imagination. Russia, occupying ‘a considerable part of the globe’, defied categorization and required ‘a new name’.

Nonetheless, the tide had turned. By mid-century, Russian elites dressed, read, spoke, flirted, danced, and bought on credit like their western counterparts. Presumably it was this cultural homogenization of elites, as well as Russia’s full participation in the political system of European states, that allowed Catherine the Great to assert in the opening of her great ‘Instruction’ of 1767 that ‘Russia is a European State’, but the fact that she felt obliged to state such an axiom betrayed some lingering ontological uncertainty. When travelling along the Volga, glimpsing her Tatar subjects in Kazan, she marvelled that within the borders of her ‘European State’, she found herself in Asia.

The two-continent solution had a great deal to recommend it, and it was a Russian statesman, historian, and geographer, Vasilii N. Tatishchev, along with Phillip-Johann von Strahlenberg, a Swedish prisoner of war held by the Russians, who proposed the equation most widely adopted today. Writing in the 1730s, Tatishchev insisted: ‘The Russian empire [is located] not in Europe alone, but also has a significant part in Asia as well’. This, he continued, was a commendable thing, a source of greatness and diversity. Mark Bassin notes that Tatishchev’s emphasis on the dual nature of Russia did more than solidify age-old geographic wisdom: it also trumpeted Russia’s standing as a fully fledged empire, complete with metropole and colonies, equal to other European powers. Yet, ‘affirmations that the Russian Empire divided into European metropolis and Asiatic colony remained meaningless as long as there was such palpable uncertainty as to exactly where one ended and the other began. Thus, within little more than a generation the vagueness surrounding the Europe–Asia boundary had been transformed from a point of remote scholastic interest into a problem of definite political moment’.31 Tatishchev stepped up with a fresh formulation. Sidestepping the awkward contortions of his...
forerunners to chart a river-based boundary, he chose the Ural Mountains as the dividing line. Although some debate over the particulars of the southern line continued in the subsequent decades, the Ural solution has stuck, replacing the earlier riparian efforts at delineating a meaningful continental boundary. Today a series of monuments and informative signs confidently marks the line along the Urals where the two continents part, but controversy over who can claim membership in the European Union and who cannot demonstrates that the question remains far from resolved.

In a study of historical movement of the boundary published in 1960, at the height of the Cold War, geographer W. H. Parker posed the question: ‘Europe: How Far?’ Parker noted that through the entire two and a half millennia covered by his study, from the Greeks to the twentieth century, geographic consensus had split Russia into a European and an Asian component. The 1917 Russian Revolution, however, precipitated a thorough recalibration, and hostile European voices complained that the boundary line should never have been placed at the Urals. Russia in its entirety had to be relegated (and the verb reflected the implied value judgment) to Asia. Gonzague de Reynolds, a Swiss geographer, concluded, ‘Russia is the geographical antithesis of Europe. This premise is fundamental: the Russia–Europe antithesis is found at every level’. In light of the difficulties faced by centuries of geographers in locating a continental divide of any satisfactory kind, de Reynolds’s declaration rings hollow, exposed as pure polemic. Recognizing the weakness of geographic arguments, Parker advocated a political solution that established a new sub-continent, conterminous with the Soviet Union and clearly set off from Europe. Like Voltaire, who searched for ‘a new name ... for a considerable part of the globe’, Parker proposed a new geographic taxonomy, whereby Eurasia would be carved up into (historical) Europe, the USSR, China, India, and Southwest and Southeast Asia. If the philosophes judged Peter the Great’s retrofitting sufficient to allow Russia into the European camp, Parker pushed Soviet Russia back across the continental divide and into a fortified gulag of its own. Though he acknowledged that the boundaries of the Soviet Union were ‘merely political’ and ‘as such liable to change’, he judged such possibilities ‘unlikely’ and ‘remote’. His assessment was reasonable in 1960, but significantly less so since 1991. Parker’s argument and the impassioned responses to it provide a vivid illustration of the ways in which the division of Europe and Asia continues to serve as a battleground on which moral, political, and cultural claims are hashed out. In this sense, modern, like early modern, geographic discussions mask in neutral, tectonic terms a set of notional values and hierarchies rife with claims about identity.
Europeans as Others: Views from the Outside

In the preceding sections of this chapter, we have sifted through the various inconclusive efforts on the part of Europeans to define themselves along their edges and in response to confrontations with others. Now with this final section, we shift perspectives to explore a handful of the innumerable views from outside of Europe’s hazy perimeter. How, if at all, did non-Europeans view Europe in the early modern period? Was Europe a category with any purchase on the imaginations of people outside of its own narcissistic bubble? If so, what meanings did non-Europeans read into the concept? If not, what alternative categories were in use? These are the questions that drive this necessarily abbreviated run through some of the cartographic and textual records of a few of Europe’s neighbours.

For the most part, until Europeans solidified a sense of collective sovereignty and imposed it forcibly on the surrounding world, the idea of Europe is little in evidence. Ptolemaic mapping practices, kept alive in the Islamic world throughout the medieval period, preserved the labels for the three component parts of the Afro–Eurasian complex, but in spite of familiarity with this continental framework, cultural production from the broad Islamic world and South Asia expresses little awareness of or interest in Europe as either a specific place or as a human collectivity. Nabil Matar shows how after the expulsion, Spain figured in early modern Arab sources as a site for historical thinking and for nostalgia, as a land of ‘nasara’, Christians, but not as a manifestation of anything European. Precise dating is often hard on Arab and Persian maps, since templates produced by medieval masters were copied and recopied, but world maps from the fourteenth through the early eighteenth centuries share a schematic approach that renders Europe as fragmented series of unconnected places. Gerald Tibbett describes an Islamic map that leaves vacant indentations where Europe and the Mediterranean would be. In India and the Indian Ocean region, according to Sanjay Subrahmanyam, awareness of Europe grew in the sixteenth century. ‘But this Europe is not a physical place for the most part, and is instead a vague site from which the Franks (firanghis) or Hat-Wearers (kulah-poshān) come’. South Arabian chronicles of the beginning of the century describe ‘nefarious actions’ of Portuguese in the Indian Ocean and Red Sea but never seriously explain ‘where these Franks actually come from, or how they are organized’. A group of Syrian Christians in Kerala wrote in 1504 that: ‘from the Occident powerful ships have been sent to these countries of India by the king of the Christians, who are our brethren the Franks’. They further specified: ‘the country of these Franks is called Portkal, one of the countries of the Franks’. Subrahmanyam notes, ‘What this country looks like, or what
context it is embedded in, is, however, of no apparent concern or interest to [them].

Geographically displaced, materializing out of nowhere in particular, these were, in
Subrahmanyam’s words, ‘Europeans without Europe’.36

South Asian maps can often be distinguished from their Persian and Arabic sources by
their oversized depiction of South Asia, drawn at a much larger scale than other parts of
the world. In the South Asian arena, a map from c. 1627, probably by an Indian
mapmaker following an Arab model, frames the world within an elliptical ocean. A note in
the western region indicates Portugal, close to a well marked with the title ‘Darkness’.
The land of the Franks (Farang) and Russia (Rus) are noted several times each.37 On
other South Asian maps, European countries appear on small islands floating vaguely in
northern oceans.

In China, several different mapping traditions developed over many centuries. The most
pervasive form of world mapping showed China as the Middle Kingdom, with the rest of
the world surrounding that potent centre in concentric rectangles or circles,
encompassing ever more distant and barbaric lands and peoples. In these configurations,
in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, a few European countries might appear,
again as islands, and often oddly clustered, for instance with Russia and Holland sharing
a single small island. The scattering of untethered islands graphically conveys the
absence of a collective, continental sense of an entity called Europe.

It is widely presumed that Chinese mapping was transformed in the late sixteenth
century by its encounter with more scientific European cartographic accomplishments,
most particularly with the Ortelian world map brought by the Jesuit missionary-scholar
Matteo Ricci in 1583. It is true that Chinese copies of the Ricci map appeared
immediately, as early as 1584, and enjoyed some success in Chinese circles. A Ming
official expressed his enthusiasm for the project in an introduction to the fourth printing
of Ricci’s world map in 1603, specifically calling attention to the organizational conceit of
the continents. The map, he wrote, ‘fixes the confines [of the world] by means of the Five
Great Continents, and adds to them the specialties of products and the singularities of
customs of peoples. What a nice thing!’ Yet Cordell D. K. Yee demonstrates that the
influence of western mapping was actually extremely limited. He finds not response but
rather ‘lack of response’ to the Ptolemaic cartographic techniques imported by the
Jesuits, an indifference that persisted until the beginning of the twentieth century.38

Confirming this impression, Kenneth Pomeranz and Steven Topik describe what they call
the first accurate Chinese printed world map, printed in Canton in 1701. Strikingly, the
map of ‘the countries and oceans of the world’ organized the world and its peoples
according to the ocean that they faced, a sensible mode of depicting global trade routes.
Pomeranz and Topik observe: ‘What may be most interesting, though, is what [the map]
does not do. It does not organize the world into continents or people into “races.” ... And
when it comes to “people of the great western ocean” [the Atlantic] it makes no sharp distinctions between Africans, Europeans, and Americans’. Not a lack of knowledge but a preference for a different, more usable geographic taxonomy precipitated the Chinese mapmakers’ indifference to a European geographic entity and to a continental framework.

Equally uninterested in Europe as a whole but more equivocal on the question of membership, Russians in the sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries manifested sharp, often antipathetic awareness of their neighbours to the west. Europe as a geographic indicator was available to Muscovite authors, but they rarely found occasion to use it. They framed the world and their position in it with different terms and concepts. They identified particular nations (Poles, Swedes) where appropriate, or when speaking more broadly, they employed more redolent collective nouns: nemtsy (foreigners, literally, mutes), Latins, or heretics. These were not complimentary terms.

By the middle of the seventeenth century, within the limited circles of literate elites in Moscow, translations of Dutch, German, and Polish maps and atlases began to circulate in manuscript, and Muscovite geographic vocabulary came to reflect familiarity with the continental vocabulary. In 1698, Semyon Remezov, a Siberian servitor of the tsar and a self-taught cartographer, spent several months studying imported ‘cosmographies’ in the central Moscow chancelleries. There he encountered works by Ortelius, Blaeu, and others. He familiarized himself with their notion of continents, yet he set Russia distinctly apart from any of them. In a flowery introduction to one of his three atlases, compiled in manuscript, Remezov praised Tsar Peter, ‘our pious great monarch’, for sending young Russians ‘from Moscow to the European states across the sea [to
learn] all sorts of clever sciences’. Located ‘across the sea’, Moscow was not European.
Nor was it Asian, nor divided between the two. Remezov preferred a concept of an in-
between. He labelled his copy of a European two-hemisphere map with a text that locates
Russia ‘between Europe and Asia and America’. He described his atlases as depictions ‘of
the entire interior of Siberia … especially between the countries of Asia, Europe and
America’. He was not alone in advocating this vision from the middle. The Russian author
of a late seventeenth-century cosmography, Brief Selection from the Book called
Cosmography, enthused: ‘The land [of Russia] is great and wide and its expanse covers
the space between all parts of the universe’ (Map 1.12).40

With their celebration of the in-between, these authors attributed Russia’s greatness to
its vastness, its diversity, and its role in connecting all parts of the globe. While Europe
had a great deal to offer, and Tsar Peter acted wisely in sending his young men abroad to
study and bring European knowledge back home, Remezov and his fellow
cartographers and cosmographers had no interest in claiming membership in Europe.
Rather, they touted their homeland’s unique standing, stretching from one end of the
earth to the other and bringing the many varied peoples of that huge expanse under
Orthodox Christian rule. This late seventeenth-century vision bears comparison with the
Cold War solution advanced by Parker: both position Russia as a sui generis geopolitical
entity, a Eurasian anomaly, but unlike Parker’s isolated pariah state, Remezov’s Russia
functions as a connective span, a vibrant and blessed space in-between.

![Map 1.13](image)

Click to view larger

*Map 1.13* University of Michigan, Map Library, Ivan Kirilov and Joseph Nicolas de
L’Isle, ‘Mappa Generalis Totius Imperii Russici’, in Atlas Rossiiskoi (St. Petersburg:
Imperial Academy of Sciences, 1745). This western-style map, based on instrumental
survey data, was included in an atlas printed in German, Latin, and French as well as
Russian.

By permission of the Stephen S. Clark Library at the University of Michigan. 55 × 97

Remezov completed most of his work between 1690 and 1701, and his position on Russia
and Europe reflected the ambivalence toward European culture that characterized his
era. By the time of his death sometime after 1720, the situation had changed
dramatically. Peter the Great and his propagandists worked assiduously to make sure European powers accepted Russia as one of them. In mapping the realm, Peter and his successors energetically pursued the latest geodesic techniques. In the decades following Peter’s untimely death, the Russian cartographer I. K. Kirilov and the French astronomer and cartographer Joseph Nicolas de L’Isle produced the first printed atlases and comprehensive maps of the empire. Published in a preliminary version in 1734 and a more complete edition in 1745, the maps and ethnographic and allegorical cartouches underscored the fact of Russia’s membership in the European brotherhood of civilized nations while also visually differentiating the empire’s European core from its eastern expanses. Fewer cartouches adorn the Siberian pages, and the scale of the maps changes where the atlas moves across the Urals. The thirteen maps of European Russia are drawn at a scale of 1:1,470,000 (35 versts to the inch); the six maps of Siberia at a scale of 1:3,444,000 (82 versts to the inch), with far less detail and fewer toponyms (Map 1.13).

This scalar reinforcement of the Europe/Asia divide reflected the real problems of representing the huge tract of Siberia at the same resolution as the far smaller territory of European Russia, but it also manifested political and ideological claims. As Mark Bassin points out, one goal of Peter’s decision to exchange the traditional Muscovite tsarist title for the Latin title ‘emperor’ was ‘to create something more recognizably European out of the expansive and rather formless agglomeration of lands and peoples sprawling out across the East European plain and northern Asia to the Pacific’. A critical aspect of claiming imperial status in a way his neighbours would understand was the acquisition and celebration of an empire, complete with distant colonies. Here ‘the fact that the Russian state in some manner overlapped two continents assumed an unprecedented importance. It suggested a basic dichotomy in Russia’s physical corpus that, on the surface at least, seemed to reproduce that of the western empires and could be adduced as further evidence of a natural affinity with them. Like Spain or England, the Netherlands or Portugal, on the largest scale Russia as well could be divided into two major components: on the one hand, a homeland or metropolis that belonged within European civilization, and, on the other, a vast, but foreign, extra-European colonial periphery’. By this circuitous logic, Russia’s domination of non-European territories secured its claim to European membership.

Through cultural reform, relentless image-making, and strategic mapping, Russia deliberately moved itself into Europe in the eighteenth century. In the following century, the question of Russia’s relationship with Europe retained its urgency, but acquired a very different valence. Rather than agitating for acceptance in Europe, Russian intellectuals came to wonder what they had lost by casting aside their ancient traditions and masquerading as something alien and new. With the rise of the Slavophil movement and its romanticizing nostalgia for a purer, more authentic pre-Petrine age, membership
in Europe became once again a burning question but now also a raw and open wound. Europe was becoming Russia’s ‘negative mirror’.

In Conclusion

Whether a concept of Europe emerged in the early modern age remains a debatable proposition. Medievalists insist that the early modern focus occludes the degree to which Europe had already coalesced as a potent mobilizing concept, full of glory and danger, by the later Middle Ages. Voices from outside of Europe perturb an easy narrative of emergence and consolidation by pointing out that for all Europe’s satisfied understanding of itself as a special and superior geo-cultural unit, not everyone accepted this vision or even saw continental divisions as particularly useful. Regions located along the edges of the core western European states tell their own counter-narratives, in which definitions of belonging to or exclusion from the European fraternity carried varying emotional charges. No stable consensus has ever emerged about the boundaries, the criteria, the costs, benefits, and entitlements, or the moral or cultural significance of being European or sharing a continental address.

Undercut by ferocious internal divisions and rivalries throughout the early modern period, even at the height of her popularity, Europa was always a mirage. Her human flesh, the monarchs and ministers, scholars, churchmen, and ordinary women and men who lived in her ill-defined lands never succeeded in quelling the wars of religion, the struggles for autonomy, or the battles among rising nation states that bloodied the ground so happily represented by her serene and majestic figure.

Further Reading


Chatterjee, Kumkum and Clement Hawes, eds. *Europe Observed: Multiple Gazes in Early Modern Encounters* (Lewisberg, 2008).


Notes:

(1.) I would like to thank Matthew Kieliszewski, Benjamin Schmidt, and Daniel Lord Smail for their generous help and suggestions, and Mary Sponberg Pedley for going above and beyond in cartographic research on Europe’s emergence. All mistakes remain my own.


(10.) Braude shows that a justification of African slavery as a legacy of the Hamitic curse developed only much later, and gained acceptance only in the seventeenth century. He also explores the geographic and racialized imagery of the Three Magi. Benjamin Braude, ‘The Sons of Noah and the Construction of Ethnic and Geographical Identities in the Medieval and Early Modern Periods’, *The William and Mary Quarterly*, 3rd ser. 54 (January 1997), 103–142.

(12.) Gerard Mercator and Jodocus Hondius, Historia Mundi: or Mercator’s Atlas. Containing his Cosmographickall Description of the Fabricke and Figure of the World. Lately rectified in divers places, as also beautified and enlarged with new Mappes and Tables; by the studious industry of Iudocus Hondy. Englished by W.S. (London, 1635), 8.


(14.) Mercator and Hondius, Historia, 8, 11–12. Mercator takes some of this description from Aristotle and Pliny the Elder.


(16.) Mercator and Hondius, Historia, 11.


(27.) Herberstein, *Notes upon Russia*, 13.


(30.) Voltaire, *The History of Peter the Great, Emperor of Russia*, trans. Tobias Smollett (Gutenberg EBook #42540), 17, 21, 23–24, 38, 45, 66, 94.

(31.) Bassin, ‘Russia’, 6.


The Cartographic Emergence of Europe?


(41.) Ivan Kirilov and Joseph Nicolas de L’Isle, Atlas Rossiiskoi (St. Petersburg, 1745). One verst = 3,500 feet.

(42.) Bassin, ‘Russia’, 5.

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Abstract and Keywords

This chapter provides an introduction to environmental history and discusses the economic and ecological dimensions of agrarian societies in relation to weather and climate. Agricultural production of biomass, food, animal feed, and forest produce, powered by the sun, was their only source of energy, the supply of which fluctuated according to weather conditions and could not be increased on a per capita basis. Weather patterns in western and central Europe are known in outline after 1200, and in more detail after 1500. During the Little Ice Age, from 1300 to 1900, the winter half year (October to March) was colder than today. Cold springs followed by rainy summers, repeatedly triggered by volcanic explosions in the tropics, led to harvest failures and famines, often in synergy with wars. These were particularly frequent between 1570 and 1630, in the mid-seventeenth century and during the 1690s.

Keywords: Environmental history, agrarian society, sun’s energy, Little Ice Age, famines

What is Environmental History?

History is currently ‘one of the most productive and innovative fields of historical research’.\(^1\) A child of the ecological movement in the 1970s, it grew with the expansion of public awareness and practice of environmental issues. Whereas in 1985 an overview of the field could still have been obtained within a single summer, two decades later more than a hundred summers would have been needed.\(^2\) Though the first attempt to establish a European Society for Environmental History (ESEH) on the model of the
American Society for Environmental History (ASEH) in the United States failed in 1989, a second initiative in 2001 was successful. Other umbrella associations were created at a regional level during subsequent years, and in 2009, they were integrated into an International Consortium of Environmental History Organizations (ICEHO) to foster communication on a global level.

In general terms, environmental history investigates the interactions between man’s natural environment and human societies on the basis of anthropogenic sources (those created by human activity). In this respect environmental historians need to take account of the work of natural scientists, who have the same objective but make use of different evidence. It is only since the 1970s that social scientists and historians have recognized that natural events could either cause or result from human actions. The fundamental change involved is evident from Wolfram Siemann’s argument that, from a twenty-first-century perspective, the environment needs to be regarded as a fourth fundamental category of human history, on an equal level with governance, economy, and culture. Indeed, every human action depends on biological preconditions, while control over crucial natural resources such as water, productive land, and energy is essential for the exercise of power. In a similar way, strong interconnections are recognized to exist between the environment, the economy, and culture. There is hardly any subject that cannot be investigated from an environmental perspective, though the field still lacks a clear thematic and methodical profile. Most studies explore the ways in which local people dealt with environmental problems over a small number of years. There are, however, important exceptions. Some surveys such as Joachim Radkau’s *Nature and Power* are global in scope. Others, such as Ian Simmon’s *Environmental History of Great Britain* stretch back in time over the last 10,000 years. John L. Brooke is the first environmental historian to draw a global picture of the material history of humankind in relationship with climate and earth history and even to examine the long geological period from the Palaeolithic to the present. But, of course, he is not able to get close enough to grasp the meaning of events for historical agents. The economic historian, Reinhold Reith has written the first environmental history of early modern central Europe. A recent concise volume of essays edited by the same author provides a useful survey over the many facets of environmental history.

This present chapter first examines current knowledge about environmental history. It then surveys how weather and climate have been and are being studied. Finally, the results of this research are assessed.
Agrarian Societies and their Environments

Most environments in early modern Europe—with the exception of remote forests, swamps, and high mountain areas—were modified in such a way that human labour had effectively eliminated the natural variety of habitats or areas of previously uniform environmental conditions (known as ‘biotopes’) in favour of a small number of crops, mainly cereals which were ‘artificial bio-converters produced and reproduced by humans’. Keeping and breeding livestock fed on grass, acorns, leaves, and so on, and then slaughtering them for meat, allowed humans to consume biomass (organic matter) that would otherwise be indigestible for them. On the other hand, domestic animals needed to be tended and fed, and often required human protection to survive. This led Marina Fischer-Kowalski to coin the term ‘colonization of natural systems’ to describe the process underway. This colonization occurred in a multiplicity of ways, depending on local circumstances and available technical skills. It also involved systematically persecuting, harrying, and destroying animals identified as harmful, such as birds of prey, otters, wolves, bears, lynxes, and foxes.

The notion of social metabolism was employed by Rolf Peter Sieferle and his co-authors in order to establish systematic perspectives which would describe the interactions of agrarian societies with their environment. The concept of metabolism had first been developed from the 1860s in biology, where it stands for the totality of exchange processes between a cell and its environment. Over the last forty years its meaning has been expanded to encompass the exchange processes between society and its natural environment that are labelled social metabolism. They primarily entail production, consumption, technology, and population. The organization of social–metabolic processes differs over time as well as according to the local environment and to the prevailing culture. Cultures are self-organizing communicative systems among humans. They follow their own internal momentum rather than being primarily tailored to adapt to external stimuli from the natural environment.

The amount of energy available and its sources are essential both for conditions within societies and for their exchange with the environment. Breaking down the economic-ecological history of the northern hemisphere according to the key energy source of society permits a distinction to be made between a period of hunter-gatherers, a period of agricultural society based on biomass production, a period of industrial society based on coal, and a period of consumer society based on petroleum and natural gas.

From this perspective, traditional agriculture should be understood as an economic-ecological system powered through photosynthesis by the sun’s energy. Photosynthesis is used by green plants to convert solar energy into biomass that may then be used to fuel...
living organisms. The sun’s energy that falls on a given surface is relatively small and limited, albeit infinitely renewable.¹⁸

Fields, meadows, and woodlands produced the lion’s share of the plant biomass on which early modern people depended for their existence. Fields and meadows provided food, fodder for the cattle, and raw materials, such as leather, horns, and wool, for the trades which dominated textile production. Working on the land, whether as a wealthy ‘full-time’ farmer or as a poor cottager depending on additional sources of income, provided a livelihood for 80 to 90 per cent of households. Cultivated land was the focal point of social logic: it provided the most important means of production, the safest known investment, the most productive source of taxation, the only source of security for society. Land ownership evolved to become the index of social status and political power. Early modern farming was labour intensive and unproductive in monetary terms compared to the modern fossil-fuel-based industrial agriculture. ‘The most important crops were annual. After harvest they constituted an energy stock that was then largely consumed during the subsequent year. Other forms of solar energy such as wind and water power could not be stored. They had to be used in the moment when they became available.’¹⁹

Forests provided the largest source of energy available to agrarian societies. Wood provided most of the energy needed for cooking and heating. At the same time it was the fundamental material for building houses and ships, and making all kind of tools, vehicles, and machines. Woodlands were also employed for other purposes such as growing crops, grazing cattle, collecting litter, and producing potash and charcoal.²⁰ Charcoal became a fuel for iron-working. ‘Earlier generations of scholars tended to suggest that iron-working produced deforestation and hence the move to coal as the major fuel. The British historical ecologist Oliver Rackham, on the other hand, has adopted the contrary argument that it was largely agriculture which fragmented the woods and that ironmasters were much in favour of the sustained production of charcoal, of which their chief source was the coppice.’²¹ Typically, a coppiced woodland is harvested in sections on a rotation. Young tree stems are repeatedly cut down to near ground level. In subsequent years, new shoots will emerge, and, after a number of years, the coppiced tree is ready to be harvested, and the cycle begins again. This regulated, sustainable way of iron production is also found in the German Siegerland (North Rhine-Westphalia).²² Glass- and salt-works being large consumers of firewood caused the deforestation of the area around the salt mine in Lüneburg (Lower Saxony) led to the growth of heathland. In the Salzkammergut (Austria) a system of ductworks stretching over dozens of kilometres guided the brine to forests which exist to the present day.²³
To a limited extent, certain fossil fuels were exploited regionally. Peat was a cheap source of energy mainly exploited in the Netherlands. Coal extracted locally from deposits close to the surface by strip mining was utilized in England, in parts of Germany and the Southern Netherlands mainly for lime-burning, brick-making, glass manufacture, the production of salt, soap and alum, and in malting, brewing, and sugar refining. From the sixteenth century, coal was increasingly exported from the Tyne (North-East England) to London to meet the growing energy demands of the metropolis.24

One characteristic of pre-industrial societies was that materials were re-used rather than thrown away. Most metals were used over and over again, while in England there was a brisk market in second-hand garments and cloth. Paper was made from rags, initially of linen. All production depended on such re-use, with the result that the export of rags was forbidden in late seventeenth-century England.25

The amount of biomass that could be harvested was proportional to the surface of the cultivated area and required a correspondingly large workforce. Cultivation of plants usually provides more energy in the form of biomass than peasants needed for their subsistence. This surplus was appropriated by the ruling elites to support their own lives and to maintain the territorial administration.26 If the agricultural workforce was inadequate or exiguous, it was augmented by forced labour as was common in the regions east of the river Elbe.

‘The governmental apparatus, maintained by the surpluses of the peasant economy, was usually subdivided into three sectors: military, urban administration and public works sector, and the sphere of ritual and religion.’ It was normally concentrated in towns. ‘Foods and raw materials flowed into these centres to be processed and consumed there. A number of service professions, wage workers, artists, doctors and traders, who formed the mass of the urban population, settled there to sustain the territorial authorities.’27

‘Urban centres depended both on the resource flows from the countryside and the loyalty of the rural population. Consolidation of rule was only possible through concentration of power, but in the end the exercise of authority was tied to a decentralisation of decision-making competence. In a sense a permanent flow of legitimacy from the centre to the provinces had to be organised, mirrored by a material return flow of resources in the form of taxes or tribute.’28

Plant biomass, as the most important energy source, was gathered from across a wide area. To be exploited by humans it needed to be accumulated, which required a significant expenditure in transportation energy, taking into account the constraint that the energy content of a cargo should always exceed the energy input required to transport it. Transportation costs varied greatly according to the method employed. Moving goods by sea was the cheapest. On canals, transport was three times more
expensive, and over land—by carriage on bad roads—it was as much as nine times more expensive than by sea. These considerations placed regions situated close to the sea at an advantage, as people could import bulk articles such as grain and timber at much lower cost than communities in landlocked areas. Big cities could emerge only in the heart of rich agricultural zones or on rivers and coasts well served by cheap transport. Cities in temperate climates also made heavy demands on their hinterlands for fuel. According to the calculations of Canadian geographer Vaclav Smil, in the temperate latitudes of Europe or China a city needed to have reliable access to woodlands for fuel amounting to fifty times its own area.

For these reasons, the size of towns in landlocked areas was generally restricted. Rubbish in early modern towns was subject to laws and ordinances relating to the disposal of human and animal waste. Sewage went into private cesspits but before long, these compromised other dwellings. Animal refuse was another major problem: there was dung and straw from stables (especially of inns), the corpses of semi-feral pigs and dogs, and refuse from butchers.

Agrarian societies were far from being unchanging. Although the inflow of the sun’s energy flow was fixed, the efficiency with which it was utilized could usually be increased. On the one hand, this was a matter of improving irrigation methods and ploughing technology by using better methods of yoking horses together. On the other hand, parts of the cultivated land area within the cycle of the customary three-field system in central Europe were allowed to remain fallow every three years due to a lack of manure. Since the later Middle Ages, fallow land had served as a testing ground for innovations, initially for crops that naturally produced nitrogen such as legumes, then for new crops imported from the Americas from the sixteenth century onwards, that offered a higher nutritional return per unit of area, such as the potato in Europe north of the Alps and maize in the Mediterranean region. These innovations were connected to the new stage in globalization achieved through the discovery of the Americas. Early agricultural growth in England involved intensification through the introduction of forage crops such as the turnip (from around 1580) and clover (from around 1650), though the latter was only widely adopted after 1700. These provided food for the cattle which then contributed their dung to the fields. This meant among other things that there were fewer famines and so population growth was set to become constant. By 1700, crop yields had increased by about one-third upon their 1400 level. In general, innovations expanded slowly and irregularly due to the shortcomings of the communications networks and the inherent constraints of the prevailing agrarian regime.

As additional labour was needed to increase yields or cultivate more land, agrarian societies were not capable of sustaining per capita economic growth. Marginal returns declined in the absence of more productive technologies and so every economic upturn...
choked itself off after a time. This obstacle to growth was only removed through the access to abundant sources of fossil fuels from the late eighteenth century.

In addition, regional and supra-regional trade networks were improved, facilitating exchange between surplus and deficit areas, for example the growth of grain exports from the Baltic to western Europe which began in the sixteenth century. Substantial parts of Europe, such as the Pannonian Basin (southeastern central Europe, with its centre in Hungary), Poland, and Russia were much less densely populated, which paved the way for immigration into these regions.

Agricultural change was primarily a response to population increase. Marginal lands were cultivated during periods of population growth, low wages, and high grain prices and were then abandoned when these trends were reversed. Reliable overviews of population in early modern Europe prior to 1750 are scarce and fragmentary. More continuous information is available for England, France, and the territorial area of ‘Germany’. In the 1340s, on the eve of the Black Death, Europe’s population may have been as high as 75 million, but it took until 1750 to almost double to 140 million. The four centuries from 1350 to 1750 can be divided into climate-friendly phases of relatively rapid demographic growth such as 1500 to 1570 and 1700 to 1740 which were interrupted by setbacks through repeated waves of plague (1340 to 1450) and the ‘long seventeenth century’ which was a phase of climate- and war-related decline followed by recovery.

To a certain extent, early modern society was able to adapt the capacity of its agriculture to dynamic population growth. A proportion of the population came to be prevented from marrying at all, while a rise in the age of first marriage was evident and was important for the west European marriage pattern. By comparison with other cultures, women married relatively late, not until their mid-20s, and this reduced both the period of possible fertility and the likely number of children. This pattern of late marriage was brought about by the scarcity of landholdings which could be transferred from one generation to the next. Sons and daughters from a propertied household had to wait patiently for the point at which the property or at least the running of the farm was handed over, while the lower classes had to save the means necessary to establish a household through an extended period of employment as servants. A substantial proportion of Europe’s population never married at all.

Urban populations generally were so unhealthy that they could not reproduce fast enough to offset their mortality; they were sustained only by constant influx from the surrounding countryside. Cities were black holes for population until improvements in sanitation and disease control were developed, only about 100 to
120 years ago. The natural decrease (surplus of deaths over births) in London in 1750 was so great, that it alone cancelled half the natural increase of all of England. Agrarian societies were not entirely sustainable in the long run even though their system was powered only by solar energy. In addition to forest depletion, soil degradation, exacerbated by frequent heavy rainfall, tended to undermine its fertility. Whether improvements in soil management could outweigh these problems, is open to debate. Systemic analyses like that of Rolf Peter Sieferle and his co-authors all but ignore that life in agricultural societies was hard and highly uncertain. The inherent lack of stability is, on the one hand, related to the permanent threat of sudden death from epidemic disease. The experience of sudden death striking every age, every rank, men and women, infants and children through a handful of recurrent epidemics such as smallpox, typhus, dysentery, and plague was part of everyday life. On the other hand, the availability of plant biomass, fluvial transportation, wind and water power were highly volatile and unpredictable according to the character of the seasons. Harvest failures due to inclement weather were a high risk for early modern society, comparable to the threat of severe natural disasters for people today. They undermined the economic basis of the numerically preponderant lower social strata through a surge in food prices, plummeting real wages, unemployment, poverty, and hunger. The study of natural crises, which over the past fifteen years has become an important dimension of environmental history, has convincingly demonstrated that nature, rather than being a benign mother, was often a source of disruption and disaster. This also relates to recent experiences of natural disasters such as the devastating Elbe flood of 2002, the terrifying tsunami of 2004, and the disaster of hurricane Katrina in 2005.

The Historical Study of Weather and Climate: The Roles of the Scientist and the Historian

Robust evidence that weather and climate have changed significantly over the last millennium has been assembled by palaeo-climatologists and historical climatologists. Palaeo-climatologists are scientists who analyse data stored in what may be styled the ‘Archives of Nature’, such as tree rings and ice cores. These data reveal changes in climate, usually temperatures, for periods extending over many centuries or even millennia. Climate stands for the statistical properties of climatic elements, usually temperature and precipitation in a given region over several decades. Historical climatologists are historians, geographers, and physicists interpreting documentary sources which survive in the ‘Archives of Society’ such as chronicles and weather diaries. Climate and climatic change cannot be experienced by our senses, in contrast to weather
which is understood as atmospheric conditions over shorter time scales, ranging from
days to seasons. There is thus a gap between the scale on which palaeo-climatologists
produce information and that on which humans perceive atmospheric changes and
respond to them. Compared to data from Archives of Nature, documentary sources have
the advantage of shedding light on the interplay of different weather elements, such as
temperature, precipitation, snow-cover, cloud cover, and wind.

The objectives of palaeo-climatologists and historical climatologists are similar to the
extent that both attempt to reconstruct climate for the period prior to the creation of
national meteorological networks from the mid-nineteenth century. To that extent, data
from Archives of Nature and Society to some extent complement each other.

Where documentary data are fragmentary or lacking, longer term temperature or
precipitation trends may be drawn from evidence contained in the Archive of Nature. In
cases where it is important to establish the nature and severity of extreme conditions,
documentary data are more differentiated and case-specific. Beyond reconstructions of
climate, historical climatologists also study the history of rainfall and sunshine to
investigate weather impact on time scales to which past societies were vulnerable,
including short-term events such as killing frosts and devastating hailstorms. At the same
time, extreme events and nature-induced disasters are foci for debates on, as well as
social representations of, weather and climate. The article by Rudolf Brazdil and his co-
authors provides an extended analysis and interpretation of documentary sources and
their value and limitations.

The study of the interaction of weather and society was central to historical climatology
in the 1970s and early 1980s. This is related to the interests of its two founding fathers.
Emmanuel Le Roy Ladurie is a historian with a passion for studying weather and climate.
His *History of Climate since the Year 1000* was widely read and proved influential. The
late Hubert Lamb was a climatologist with a passion for human history. In 1979 he
convened an international ‘Conference on Climate and History’ in Norwich (United
Kingdom). This gathering provided an umbrella organization which brought together
more than 250 historians, geographers, climatologists, and archaeologists who had until
then worked more or less in isolation. The public debate about the global food crisis
taking place at that time made it an opportune moment to consider the impact of climate
in the past. From the early 1980s, when the ‘Green Revolution’ gained momentum,
famines disappeared from the headlines. At around the same time, the mainstream of
historians turned away from investigating the facts of material life towards the more
promising field of cultural history. Historical climatologists for their part became involved
in research programmes which sought to reconstruct past temperatures in the context of
the new debate on anthropogenic climate change. More recently, investigations into the
consequences of weather and climate for human societies in the past are once more
gaining ground. An International Society for Historical Climatology and Climate History was founded in 2012.

Weather History—A Composite Puzzle from Thousands of Parts

Humans are part of two different spheres of existence and causation: the natural and the cultural. With their bodies, they are part of the biological sphere of nature. With their minds, they are part of the symbolic sphere of culture. Weather has a prominent place in both. Prior to the industrial age it was not only a significant component of man’s biological life, but as a fundamental everyday experience it also held a prominent place in people’s minds. Knowledge about and understanding of weather had been a central part of the culture of agrarian societies ever since the advent of writing. In order to make the memory of past events permanent, literate societies used to set down their experience of weather episodes together with their knowledge of climate, which was remarkable for the pre-meteorological era.

With regard to the content of sources, climate historians distinguish between three types of data: early instrumental measurements, direct narrative data, and indirect proxy-data (Table 2.1).
Table 2.1 Survey of data on weather and climate from Archives of Society according to data category

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Data category</th>
<th>Contents</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| **Direct data**        | **(Early) instrumental measurements**  
  • Air pressure, air-temperature, precipitation, water gauges  
    (Instrumental diaries) |
| **Direct or narrative data:** |  
  • Measurements, from several times a day down to hourly  
    (Weather diaries and ships’ logbooks)  
  • Reports of spells of weather, extreme weather anomalies, weather impacts and perceptions (Chromicles)  
  • Dates of and reasons for Rogation Ceremonies and Days of Penitence (Ecclesiastical data) |
| **Indirect or proxy data** | **Biotic data:**  
  • Plant phenological observations  
  • Timing of agricultural work |
|                        | **Physical data:**  
  • Freezing and thawing of rivers and lakes, time of snowfalls and duration of snow cover (cryospheric data)  
  • Reports on floods and low water; flood and low water marks (hydrological data)  
  • Paintings of ancient glaciers; reports on advance and retreat of glaciers (glaciological data) |
|                        | **Archaeological data:**  
  • Abandonment of settlements, changes in statistics of human height and in nutrition |
The earliest meteorological instruments were developed by Galileo Galilei and his successors in Italy. In 1654 the Grand-Duke Ferdinand II of Tuscany sponsored the establishment of the first network of meteorological stations located mainly in the Italian peninsula. In the eighteenth century, many individuals—priests, nobles, scholars, and wealthy landowners—acquired barometers and thermometers and began instrument observations. Early instrument measurements, prior to the period of national network observations from the late nineteenth century, are usually found in weather diaries alongside narrative accounts. Linking early instrument measurements to modern ones requires careful standardization, because early instruments were inadequate and guidelines as to where instruments should be located are often lacking, while metadata is seldom available.

Direct data are weather narratives set down serially, ranging from scant mentions in weather diaries to extended descriptions found in chronicles. Chroniclers describe how people experienced and interpreted extreme weather events on the basis of their particular worldviews. Weather diaries began to be kept from the late fifteenth century, when the large-scale publication of astronomical calendars first provided a suitable medium for the daily recording of outline meteorological observations. On the high seas, daily changes in wind and weather were duly registered in ships’ logbooks from the late seventeenth century. Every officer on board was required to keep data of this kind. Ecclesiastical data about the time and purpose of rogations, religious services conducted to mitigate climatic extremes such as droughts (Pro Pluvia Rogations) or endless rains (Pro Serenitate Rogations), are an important proxy for assessing the severity of extreme episodes of weather.

Indirect data refers to biophysical evidence that is to some extent controlled by weather and climate. The word ‘biophysical’ is made up of the terms biological and physical. Biological data refers to the time of ripening of crops and wild plants, and the dates of agricultural activities such as the harvest. Physical data refers to indicators such as the duration of snow cover, the freezing and thawing of rivers, lakes, ponds, and streams as well as the incidence of floods and low tides. Many chroniclers were eager to include biophysical observations in their narratives, because those were known to be compatible with analogous occurrences in the past and future, and therefore suited to advance human knowledge concerning climatic risks. The relationship of biophysical proxies to climatic elements, temperature, and precipitation, must be established by the researcher employing statistical analysis. Pictorial representations of historic glaciers in the form of drawings and paintings allow reconstructions to be made of the previous extension and volume of the ice as far back as the seventeenth century.

Another indirect source which is important is archaeological evidence. Archaeologists investigate climate and human activity in the past, primarily through the recovery and
analysis of man-made relicts buried in Archives of Nature. Evidence about people’s body height or about the establishment and abandonment of settlements is often assumed to result from the long-term effects of climate and/or climatic extremes, but such hypotheses need to be carefully validated.49

Another important distinction in the area of documentary evidence concerns the agents who generated or directed the production of sources. Knowing who produced the sources and why these were produced is essential in order to detect flaws and shortcomings (Table 2.2).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Data category</th>
<th>Personal sources</th>
<th>Institutional sources</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Instrumental:</td>
<td>• Instrumental diaries</td>
<td>• Protocols of meteorological network stations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Direct or narrative:</td>
<td>• Weather diaries</td>
<td>• Ships’ logbooks</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Chronicles</td>
<td>• Mandatory reports about weather impacts</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Letters, diaries</td>
<td>• Ecclesiastical evidence</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Travellers’ accounts</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Scientific papers</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Indirect or proxy:</td>
<td>• All personal sources</td>
<td>• Administrative records on weather-related activities and sources of income</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

- **Personal sources** were generated and shaped by individuals who were motivated to record weather observations. Such sources may contain both direct and indirect data. Most suffer from gaps of varying length for biographical reasons. Knowing the personal background of an author is helpful to assess which climatic elements he may have highlighted and which he may have disregarded. The date of an event can only be accepted if it falls within the lifetime of the author of the source, which requires the date of his birth and death to be established.
Institutional sources were generated and shaped within the framework of administrative structures, that is, organizations such as monasteries, hospitals, and town governments. These bodies did not primarily intend to document weather. Rather, they were concerned with the accounting of receipts and expenditures, some of which fluctuated according to the weather. Bureaucratic routines involved annual record keeping, also for years of ‘average’ climate, sometimes over several centuries. For example, the start of the sailing season each year in Stockholm, deduced from administrative sources on harbour activities, may serve as a proxy variable for January to April temperatures over the entire period from the early sixteenth century until at least the beginning of the 1870s, as Lotta Leijonhufvud and her co-authors demonstrated. Another example concerns the start of the winter grain harvest in Switzerland and southwest Germany which can be obtained from the accounts of the Basle Hospital and other administrative sources from 1444 to 1970 and acts as a proxy for March to July temperatures. Serial information concerning the beginning of the grape harvest in France and elsewhere goes back as far as the late fourteenth century. Bureaucratic routines may also include reporting to a higher authority. For example, Venetian governors in the Adriatic and Eastern Mediterranean had to report annually to their superiors in Venice about events which affected income and expenditure in their territories, for instance storms damaging port installations or droughts destroying the harvest. In a similar way, authorities submitted reports about weather damage to crops or buildings when households who had suffered applied for a reduction in their taxes, as case studies from today’s Czech Republic demonstrate.50

There remains the problem of creating continuous quantitative time series from miscellaneous evidence contained in personal and institutional sources. Historical climatologists take on the challenge of fitting together thousands of individual pieces of evidence to create a detailed picture of past weather, which is then converted to continuous time series of proxy indicators of temperature and precipitation. The procedure is carried out as follows. Initially, it is essential to make sure that the picture obtained for a particular time span is ‘meteoro-logical’, that is, in accordance with atmospheric laws. Subsequently, an ordinal index is derived from the evidence for every month or season. It consists of seven grades encompassing values for temperature of -3 (extremely cold), -2 (very cold), -1 (cold), 0 (‘average’), +1 (warm), +2 (very warm), and +3 (extremely warm). Accordingly, the precipitation index employs the same methodology using grades of -3 (extremely dry), -2 (very dry), -1 (dry), 0 (‘average’), +1 (wet), +2 (very wet), and +3 (extremely wet). Of course, assessing these so-called ‘Pfister indices’ is to some extent subjective, depending upon the quality of the evidence and the experience of the researcher. Yet there is a high degree of correlation for the indices obtained independently for separate countries. Nearly continuous monthly temperature indices are available for Germany, Switzerland, and the Czech Republic from 1500 until
the early nineteenth century. Petr Dobrovolný and co-authors succeeded in assessing continuous temperature estimates from this evidence for every month of the year.\textsuperscript{51} Another group under the same lead authors estimated monthly precipitation for the Czech lands from 1501 to 2010.\textsuperscript{52} Sea-level pressure, temperature, and precipitation have been reconstructed statistically for the whole of Europe on a monthly (1659 onwards) and seasonal (1500 onwards) basis by Jürg Luterbacher together with his colleagues.\textsuperscript{53}

**Climatic Trends and Weather Extremes**

The geographical range of documentary evidence and its availability over time in Europe are uneven. Data are still fragmentary for Northern Europe (except Iceland), the Balkans, and Russia, while it is almost continuous for western and central Europe from about 1170, at least for ‘summer’ and ‘winter’ seasons. This enabled Pierre Alexandre to produce a critical compilation of data from this core region for the period 1000 to 1425.\textsuperscript{54} Records of seasonal temperature variations for Germany exist for the past millennium, extending back into the Middle Ages.\textsuperscript{55} In the period after 1550 the quality and density of information greatly improves and near continuous indices are available for several countries. For England and France measured monthly temperatures are available from 1658/59.\textsuperscript{56}

The final section of this chapter provides an outline of the main climatic trends. More detailed information may be found in regional syntheses of weather and climate which are available for Iceland, France, the British Isles, the Southern and Northern Netherlands, Germany, Switzerland, Italy, the Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland, and Russia.\textsuperscript{57}

The principal change was that, within the last millennium, a warm medieval era gave way around 1300 to a cool ‘Little Ice Age’, which lasted until around 1900 when it, in turn, was replaced by a warmer trend mainly related to man-made global warming. The preceding warm period is now attributed to a higher incidence of solar radiation in the northern hemisphere, which results from orbital forcing brought about by variations in the path of the earth’s orbit and of the angle and the spinning motion of its axis.\textsuperscript{58} The concept of the ‘Little Ice Age’ describes a phase of renewed moderate glaciation after the disappearance of most mountain glaciers during the Climatic Optimum about 5,000 years ago.\textsuperscript{59} The cooling of the Little Ice Age documented in the Alps through three major glacier advances is related to small fluctuations in solar activity and frequent volcanic eruptions in the tropics.\textsuperscript{60} Rather than being uniformly cold, the climate during the Little Ice Age showed manifold, often contrasting, temperature and precipitation intervals including warm and dry extremes. There were also sharp contrasts between different
parts of Europe due to the different effects of atmospheric shifts. These temperature and precipitation trends between 1350 and 1750 are described subsequently for western and east-central Europe as well as for the Mediterranean region.

Western Europe

In western Europe (France, the British Isles, the Benelux countries, Switzerland, and Germany) the winter half-year (October through March) was colder and generally drier than in the twentieth century. This was particularly so from 1351 to 1370, 1418 to 1425, 1432 to 1443, 1477 to 1483, 1560 to 1573, 1680 to 1697, and in the 1740s. During the most severe winters, such as 1364, 1435, 1573, 1695, 1709, and 1740, cold and dry air masses flooded large parts of Europe for several months. The most extreme cold episode in January 1709 involved polar air which penetrated as far south as the Mediterranean Basin, killing most subtropical plants such as citrus and olive trees.\(^6\) Winters were rather warmer from 1401 to 1417, in the 1470s, from 1520 to 1545, and again from 1617 to 1650. Temperatures from 1600 to 1615 frequently alternated between extremes of cold and warmth.

In a similar way, the data now available for the summer half-year (April through September) enable us to distinguish between colder periods (1452 to 1465, 1490s, 1510s, 1560 to 1598, and 1684 to 1705) and warmer intervals (1380s, 1412 to 1427, 1530 to 1565, and 1718 to 1730) as well as periods of more average, unspectacular weather. The transition from the ‘Medieval Warm Period’ to the ‘Little Ice Age’ involved a drop in April to July of average temperatures from 13°C to 12.4°C in England between the late thirteenth and the early fifteenth centuries. Superimposed on this long-term trend are alternating phases of colder and warmer growing seasons. The 1390s and the 1410s were slightly warmer. Cold periods were located around 1380, as well as in the early years of the fifteenth century.\(^\text{(p. 83)}\) The growing seasons (April to September) in the 1390s and the 1410s were rather dry. Increased rainfall occurred between 1355 and 1375, around 1380, in the early years of the fifteenth century, and the early 1420s.\(^6\) Record breaking heat-waves and multi-seasonal droughts were registered in much of Europe in 1473 and 1540.\(^6\)

After 1560 a phase of cooling set in which lasted for many decades, gradually extending from winter to spring, summer, and autumn. By the 1580s the wide Denmark Strait between Iceland and Greenland was often found to be entirely blocked by pack-ice, even during summer.\(^6\) Winters in central Europe were 0.9°C colder from 1560 to 1600 compared to 1531 to 1560, while temperatures in spring declined 0.6°C, those in summer 1.0°C, and those in autumn 0.5°C. The decade from 1591 to 1600 was the coldest.\(^6\) Summer rainfall increased from northern Germany to the Alps with snow falling more...
frequently in higher altitudes. Alpine glaciers advanced rapidly—the Lower Grindelwald Glacier (in the Bernese Oberland) by one kilometre within as little as twenty years—and the number of severe floods in Switzerland increased four-fold. The agrarian economies located north of the Alps repeatedly suffered from ‘years without a summer’, such as 1585, 1628, 1675, and 1692, often triggered by large volcanic explosions in the tropics. In many countries, harsh weather occurred in the periods from 1618 to 1630, from 1640 to 1650, and from 1687 to 1695.

**Eastern Europe (Poland and Russia)**

During the later fourteenth century, particularly in the 1360s, Russia experienced severe droughts resulting in dried out rivers, and forest and peat bog fires. In the country’s central regions, the fifteenth century was the coldest since the high Middle Ages. Rainy summers (mainly in the 1450s), severe droughts (mainly in the early 1470s), and cold winters (mainly from 1440 to 1460) resulted in four decades when famines were frequent. The decades from 1480 to 1520 were very wet, while the first half of the sixteenth century was rather warm. In Poland, winters were rather mild, but highly variable during these decades. From 1550 winter temperatures dropped and remained low for two hundred years until 1750. In Poland, information about cool summers is lacking up to 1650, while in Russia both severe winters and cool summers were more often recorded, particularly between 1590 and 1620. Higher temperatures in the North during the first half of the seventeenth century allowed Russian vessels to pass through the Bering Straits and open the North-Eastern Route from the shores of the Kola Peninsula to the Pacific. Every second summer was dry between 1640 and 1659. Poland saw more warm summers during the first half of the seventeenth century than at other periods. In Russia, rainy summers, with recurring early season cold spells and late season frosts, became common during the second half of the seventeenth century. The eighteenth century was dominated by adverse conditions such as cold springs, summer cold spells, and late summer frosts. Likewise, cool summer seasons were recorded in Poland during the first half of the eighteenth century with the coldest in the period 1721 to 1740.

**The Mediterranean Basin**

Average winter temperatures were, by comparison with twentieth-century figures, almost consistently colder, particularly in the Eastern Mediterranean. In Catalonia (northeastern Spain) dry spells during the winter half-year were frequent in the mid-sixteenth century. Beginning around 1570, wetter and colder conditions became evident with increased precipitation and, at times, greater snowfall in higher altitudes. Rivers frequently flooded during the rainy season. The extent of marshlands increased due to
greater fluvial discharge, while the Eastern Mediterranean suffered from both coldness and drought. From 1590 to 1619 the climate was truly anomalous, especially due to the high frequency of catastrophic flooding in the western part of the Mediterranean, while the Ottoman lands experienced their longest drought during the past six hundred years. The situation was similar in the mid-seventeenth century.

The Importance of Weather and Climate for History

Viewpoints on the extent to which past variations in climate have affected societies are sharply divided. Physical scientists are unshakeable in their conviction that climate must have affected society in the past. Scientific reconstructions involving societal aspects are often presented in the form of monocausal arguments supported with smoothed curves on a high level of temporal and spatial aggregation. Nico Stehr and Hans von Storch argue that ‘a large proportion of today’s climate impact research is genuine climate determinism’. Discussions about the social significance of climatic variations were and still are discredited by environmental determinism carried to an extreme by the geographer Ellsworth Huntington and his followers. This may be one reason why many historians tend to ignore altogether the possible importance of weather and climate on human development. Another reason may be the tendency of historians to avoid broad generalizations, because the differences from one case to another are fundamental in historical research. Admittedly, controversial issues need to be discussed without ideological blinkers, albeit with good knowledge of the evidence and methods within both of the ‘Two Cultures’. Rather than turning into a search for a deterministic explanation of the past, ‘the inclusion of the climate factor in the study of history [as Jan de Vries has
rightly argued) should be seen as an expansion of the context in which the workings of past societies are to be understood’. In order to explore interactions between climate and human history, we need to bear in mind that many changes in the human realm such as the development of technology and trade, changes in institutional structure, as well as wars and the rise of territorial states, to a large extent follow their own internal momentum. To become more meaningful, the issue of ‘climate’ and ‘history’ needs to be broken down to lower levels of analysis, with a specific focus, for example on food, health, or energy systems or on activities such as transportation, communications, military or naval operations (see Figure 2.1).

According to this model, weather and climate influence the availability of water with its many ramifications for irrigation, power generation, and river navigation. They also affect food production and demand for fuel as well as the health system. Most importantly of all, we need to remember that individuals are not simply passive victims of climatic variations. Rather, humans also developed adaptive strategies to buffer themselves, more or less effectively, against extreme weather and climatic change. The comprehensive volume edited by Robert W. Kates and his colleagues still provides the most elaborate and comprehensive framework with which to study climate–society interactions in the past. It results from cooperation between over a hundred authors and reviewers, and covers almost all important aspects such as agriculture, fisheries, water and energy resources, extreme event analysis, perception, and numerical modelling.
A common sequence in climate impact study involves ordering impacts parallel to the major domains of science, beginning with the physical sciences, then moving to the social sciences, and finally to cultural responses and strategies of coping. This approach assumes that the impacts of weather and climate triggered a chain of events that would otherwise not have occurred. The size of the top-down arrows in Figure 2.2 indicates how closely the effects are related to the climatic impact.

The most immediate consequences of extreme weather and induced extreme events are, of course, of a biophysical nature including primary (biomass) production, water availability, and micro-organisms. Fluctuations in food prices are among the most obvious consequences of a second-order impact, masked by the influence of other factors, such as supra-regional trade, public grain storage and speculation, together with epidemics and epizootics. A third-order impact makes itself felt mainly through demographic effects, such as a slump in the birth rate and excess mortality. The fourth-order impact includes cultural responses, such as rogations, coping strategies to adapt to meteorological stress in terms of learning processes and social conflicts. Bottom-up arrows indicate how broad the options of individual or collective actors are to cope with direct or indirect effects of meteorological stress. The figure itself has merely a heuristic value. The model does not include the many other variables which, apart from climate, affect the various types of human activity; nor does it specify in detail which climate variables are critical for each activity.

Investigating the consequences of crop failures necessitates examining the vulnerability of the main sources of food to variations in weather. In the words of Lucien Febvre: ‘The action of climate on the natural environment in which man lives must be known before we can understand the action of climate on man.’ With regard to western and central Europe such a strategy mainly concerns food, grain, wine, and dairy production. It was shown that a given set of specific sequences of weather spells over the agricultural year named ‘Little Ice Age Type Impacts’ (LIATIMP), mainly involving sequences of chilly springs (April) and extremely wet mid-summers, were likely to paralyse even sophisticated systems of risk avoidance. Such weather sequences affected not only the output, but also the quality of grain and wine production. Harvesting during long wet spells made it much more difficult to store grain for food use, and a wet harvest compromised the following year’s crop if damp seed prematurely sprouted or rotted in storage. Moreover, extreme weather in terms of severe droughts, cold or wet spells affected cattle and sheep through epizootics. By contrast with older views, it was shown that good and bad years do not necessarily follow each other randomly. Rather, they often appear bundled together in the form of longer runs of favourable and unfavourable years. The seven decades from 1560 to 1630 witnessed a significantly higher level of
climatic stress when compared to preceding and subsequent periods. Simultaneously, grain prices in southern central Europe were far higher.\textsuperscript{81}

Examinations of the vulnerability of society to climatic change need to be pursued by regional case-studies. The narrow framework which these provide best reveals the multifaceted political, social, and cultural settings influencing human perceptions of the world. ‘In historic studies, the availability of data usually dictates the unit to be studied.’\textsuperscript{82} In most cases, such evidence is produced in the regional context of communities, territories, or emerging nation states.

Periods of high climatic stress, particularly in synergy with war, had a disastrous impact on Europe’s societies and economies, producing turmoil and rebellions, as Geoffrey Parker has recently demonstrated on a global level for the long seventeenth century.\textsuperscript{83} The 1590s were a period of crisis and upheaval in many parts of Europe. Observers in France, England, Italy, and Spain referred to the 1590s as a time of great turbulence. From the mid-1580s to the late 1590s, France suffered from harvest failures, epidemics, and religious warfare. Sicily and Naples were shaken by a subsistence crisis in 1590 to 1592, while parts of Spain suffered from harvest failures during the same decade. In a similar way, England and Scotland saw a disastrous sequence of harvest failures (1593–97) with economic depression, widespread poverty, and high mortality from disease and starvation. In Austria there were large-scale peasant uprisings between 1594 and 1597 precipitated by higher food prices. Crops failed both in Finland (from 1595 to 1601) and Sweden (from 1596 to 1603) with great scarcity and consequent starvation. In Russia, a period of extreme winters, harvest failures, and famine in 1601 to 1603 turned a political succession crisis into the widespread outbreak of vagrancy, violence, and civil war over the following decade known as the ‘Time of Troubles’.\textsuperscript{84}

Yet, as Sam White argues, ‘even when the fit between climatic and historical events seems too perfect to dismiss as mere coincidence, simply coupling the two fails to explain how and why one development led to another which constitutes the basic task of history’.\textsuperscript{85} He provides a convincing and detailed line of reasoning why climate was a critical factor for the seventeenth-century crises of the Ottoman Empire: ‘In the 1590s, the eastern Mediterranean underwent its longest drought in the past 600 years, causing widespread famine. At the same time, a disease of livestock wiped out most of the sheep and cattle in Anatolia, the Balkans, and the Crimea. Locked in a difficult war with the Habsburg Empire, the Ottoman state imposed high taxes and requisitions on the starving peasantry, fuelling a major uprising in Anatolia called the Celali Rebellion (1596–1610). Recurring Little Ice Age drought and cold contributed to the widespread violence, flight, and famine that followed, which left much of the Ottoman countryside depopulated by the early 1600s.’\textsuperscript{86}
Needless to say, a universally applicable picture of social vulnerability to climate impacts is not to be expected from such studies. Quite the contrary: it would be worthwhile to illustrate the plurality of human responses and solutions in mitigating societal vulnerability to climate variability. Such cooperation would yield a picture of man’s relation with climate which is tailored to the realities of the twenty-first century.

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Abstract and Keywords

This chapter surveys the history of medicine and health from the middle of the fourteenth century through the mid-eighteenth century. It discusses major points in that history: diseases and their impact in early modern Europe; the generation and distribution of medical knowledge including education and training; medical practice in all its form; medical institutions; and the health of the people. The chapter emphasizes the variety of medical practice and contextualizes medicine within the larger society. The various sections draw on the most recent historical scholarship, especially in the fields of the social and cultural history of medicine. While canonical medical events, such as the discovery of the pulmonary circulation of the blood are thoroughly treated, the chapter also emphasizes the breadth of medical practices, the number of medical practitioners of all types, and the varieties of medical training that pertained in the early modern world.

Keywords: Disease, health, medical regulation, medical education, medical practice, vital statistics, institutions, madness, gender

Introduction

The history of disease and medicine in early modern Europe is, like most histories, one of continuity and change. Over the course of the last several decades, older scholarship on science and medicine that emphasized medical progress, valorized the ‘great men of science and medicine’, and regarded ‘The Scientific Revolution’ as a movement that radically broke with the medieval world and its world view, have yielded to newer versions that downplay the sense of rupture and that question the revolutionary
character of the scientific revolution or even its existence. These same interpretations suggest the importance of medieval precedents to the changes wrought in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Thus, historians have offered revisionist perspectives on old topics—such as the anatomical revolution of the sixteenth century, the impact of major figures in medicine, and the character of epidemics—while also turning their gaze on non-canonical parts of medicine: the role of women, the multiple sites of science and medicine, the impact of global encounters, and the persistence of the old in the new. These more recently introduced methodologies and perspectives, especially the insights provided by cultural history, linguistic theory, and the ‘spatial turn’, as well as a recognition of the critical influence of race, class, and gender, have increasingly shaped the investigations of scholars into the medical world we have lost.¹

**Disease and Diseases**

Few occurrences in early modern history imprinted themselves more deeply on the European consciousness than did the many ‘plagues and pestilences’ which struck with frightening suddenness and often great lethality. Plagues, pestilences, and poxes, however, were by no means the only, or even the most frequent, diseases afflicting early modern peoples. A vast array of others—those that killed, those that incapacitated, or those that merely annoyed—characterized the early modern world much as they do today. Nonetheless, there exist substantial differences between then and now in types and frequency of common diseases as well as in the expectations people held about illness. Among other things, levels of nutrition affect susceptibility to disease, although the relationship is complicated. One must first realize, for example, that famine and famine-related diseases are never simple matters of too little food. Multiple factors come into play. When, for example, people flee starvation areas, they throng together in ways that facilitate the rapid transmission of viral and bacterial diseases; those groupings also allow for the easy passing of parasites and verminous diseases. Thus the effects of famine on disease-occurrence are synergistic. Moreover, malnutrition takes various forms and does not simply result from inadequate caloric intake. While famine-induced diseases plagued early modern Europeans frequently, other conditions of malnutrition—diets that continually lacked certain essential nutrients or provided them in the wrong proportion (too much or too little)—struck people whose caloric intake remained sufficient. Gout is a germane example. While the predisposition to gout is genetic, diets high in red meat, sugar, alcohol, and seafood—a ‘rich’ diet—accounted for a significant percentage of cases in the early modern world among those who by no means lacked food. The dearth of food can also drive people to consume what is unripe, hard to digest (in both cases producing diarrhoea), or unsuitable for human consumption. Outbreaks of ergotism occurred when
people consumed bread baked with rye or barley damaged by a particular mould, *Claviceps purpurea*. Motor dysfunctions, gangrene, and hallucinations resulted. Diseases of malnutrition and dearth, such as rickets, anaemia, growth retardation, and scurvy, particularly affected children, although not only children were susceptible.

A more important question is the extent to which malnutrition increased a general susceptibility to disease. Here no simple answer exists. It seems commonsensical to believe that the malnourished are more prone to all diseases. Malnutrition alone, however, causes only some conditions. One does not, for example, develop influenza because of malnutrition; in the absence of the pathogen, that is, the influenza virus, one cannot contract influenza. Poor nutrition and, for that matter, stress, weaken one’s resistance to disease but form equally great, or perhaps even greater, factors in preventing recovery from a disease once acquired.

For these and many other reasons, the mortality curve of early modern Europe sharply diverged from today’s and that reality also shaped people’s expectations about health and illness. Life was precarious from the very beginning. Childbirth could be hazardous for mothers and infants alike. Children born with birth defects that were more than just unsightly, such as spina bifida or anencephaly, rarely survived and never survived long. Cleft palates, congenital amputation, or even club foot, and other less serious problems, could hinder a normal life. Most obvious, however, were the very high rates of infant and child mortality; for example, of 1,000 live births in England from 1620–29 only 752 survived to age 10 and in France from 1740–49, only 469. All sorts of ailments and accidents plagued the years of childhood and adolescence, but they were not restricted to those years either: fractures healed poorly or not at all; eye infections could blind; teething (or, rather death during teething) swept others away. Intestinal parasites, vermin, and verminous skin diseases abounded. Early modern people were not spared the degenerative diseases that strike the elderly today, but these may have been less obvious because fewer people attained their seventies, eighties, or nineties.

Illness struck mind as well as body. Despite the claims of some sceptics, mental illness is not merely a disease of civilization; nor is it, as Thomas Szasz famously argued, a ‘myth’ and a means by which society controls and stigmatizes those whose behaviour it finds unacceptable. In medieval and early modern Europe, people understood some individuals as mad even if the definitions and behaviour so designated would not necessarily strike us moderns as obvious forms of mental illness. Certainly, ordinary people possessed a rather clear idea of what they considered madness. Ideas about its cause ranged from the somatic to the religious or supernatural to the psychological. People who disobeyed or flouted authority, did not recognize natural affections (such as love for their children), tore their hair or clothing, ran about naked, raved, or suffered
serious delusions believing themselves, as one man did, to be made of glass and liable to break at the slightest shock, were adjudged addled in their wits. Moreover, madness ran the spectrum from those who were melancholic, sad, or ‘mopish’, to those who had to be chained or confined for their own safety and that of their fellow humans. Madness was also not merely a label imposed on people; the mad themselves often quite acutely felt their afflictions and were deeply disturbed by them. Attributed causes were multitudinous. They could be physical, a crack on the head; or emotional, a broken engagement; or religious, fear of damnation and despair of God’s saving grace. Treatments ranged from the kind and gentle to the truly barbaric. The lightly ‘touched’ might be allowed to roam about quite freely, while furious ‘lunatiks’ frightened everyone and were quickly restrained or shut away. ‘Mad-doctors’ were not necessarily physicians. At least until the late eighteenth century, priests and ministers were just as likely to treat the mad.

These common ailments and afflictions, including madness, formed what may be called the background to Europeans’ expectations of disease. While one should not by any means dismiss their impact on Europeans demographically, socially, and psychologically, they rarely evoked as much fear and loathing, or even panic, as did epidemics. In this respect, plague was the quintessential disease experience of the early modern world, despite the relative infrequency of its incursions when compared to the whole range of other diseases that were less mortal in their effects, less frightening in their appearance, or not ‘catching’.

While historians and epidemiologists still argue about the exact demographic impact of plague, no one doubts that its effect was enormous whether we accept a low total mortality of 20–30 per cent or a much higher one of 60 per cent, while also acknowledging the great differences in die-off in time and place. It was, moreover, not only that first catastrophic incursion in the middle of the fourteenth century that mattered. Rather, plague’s repeated appearance, or the threat of its recurrence, lingered in the European consciousness, evoking fear and promoting measures to prevent its return.

This pestilence struck southern and eastern Europe in 1347–48. Frequently if incorrectly termed the ‘Black Death’, this incursion was the most terrible, widespread, and long-lasting, but plague repeated its depredations until the last major outbreaks occurred in Marseille in 1720–21 (perhaps 100,000 deaths), Messina in 1743 (48,000 deaths) and, finally, Moscow in the early 1770s (with 52,000–100,000 deaths). Thereafter plague disappeared from Europe if by no means from the rest of the world.

Scholars have long debated the question of what this ‘great plague’ was. Over the course of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, a rather standard story emerged that
soon became the reigning orthodoxy on plague. Physicians and bacteriologists working in Asia during the 1893–94 outbreak of plague in Hong Kong laid the basis for an elegant epidemiological explanation. Bubonic plague was caused by a bacillus now known as *Yersinia pestis* (named for one of the Hong Kong researchers; although sometimes still designated by its older name, *Pasteurella pestis*). The disease was essentially an epizootic, that is, an animal plague of burrowing rodents and rats, transmitted from rat to rat, and then from rat to human by fleas (*Xenopsylla cheopis*). Once infected, symptoms appear within a little less than a week: high fever, pains in limbs, and buboes, or swellings in armpit or groin. The individual case mortality is about 60 per cent. A more severe form ensues when the bacilli settle in the lungs and then spreads by droplet infection directly from individual to individual (bypassing the rat-flea-human chain); that form of pneumonic plague proves virtually always fatal.

This epidemiological chain-of-events dominated the history of plague for generations, even though nagging questions always persisted about how much of it was actually true or verifiable. For one thing, the disappearance of plague in the eighteenth century, and its gradual weakening even before then, always caused head-scratching. Although one might attribute the end of plague to better sanitation or other factors, including the replacement of one species of rat by another or increased governmental efforts to enforce *cordons sanitaires* and quarantines, no single interpretation alone offers a persuasive solution. It may make more sense to attribute the disappearance of plague to a series of events, including perhaps even a modification in the disease itself. More damaging is that on closer examination the modern appearance of plague has been hard to reconcile with the historical record. Indeed, scholars have raised serious questions about each aspect of the traditional story. Many historians would agree with the author of a 2003 article that ‘[w]hatever the precise nature of the disease that hides behind pestilence and pest in premodern Europe, it cannot be identified with modern bubonic plague’. More recently, however, DNA evidence has come to light in plague pits in Marseilles suggesting that the medieval plague and bubonic plague either were identical or at least co-existed. While it now (2014) seems that most historians find acceptable the idea that early modern plague was indeed bubonic plague (mixed with other forms of the disease and with other diseases too), the jury is still out and the debate continues. Such controversies alert us to the problems associated with retrospective diagnoses. Modern medical historians are chary of diagnosing diseases in the past for several reasons, primarily because the medieval and early modern language of symptoms is so unlike contemporary ones. Moreover, trying to shoehorn early modern perceptions into modern categories often obscures more than it reveals, as is the case with the frightening epidemiological novelty of the sixteenth century, the ‘Great Pox’ or syphilis. Other medical historians tread a middle path and argue that, while some diseases and their appearances frustrate our ability to know and name, others, like smallpox, can be more reliably identified.
The Great Pox excellently exemplifies the impact of a disease generally considered new in the sixteenth century. In addition, it, like smallpox, illustrates the effect of disease in a virgin population, that is, one with no experience of the disease; everyone was susceptible and no one possessed immunity. From its initial appearance in the mid-1490s, it bore the name of the French Pox or the *mal Francese*. This previously unknown affliction struck the troops of the French army during its Italian campaign of 1495–96, horrifying the afflicted and those who observed them alike. One famous author, who had suffered since 1498, wrote later that ‘the disease loosed its first arrow into my Priapic gland [penis] which ... became so swollen that both hands could scarcely circle it’.

Additionally alarming symptoms later manifested themselves: pustules filled with purulent matter, dreadful shooting pains in the limbs, rotting noses, gaping mouths empty of teeth, and ‘joints stripped of their very flesh’.

Was this the disease that we now call syphilis? Perhaps, indeed probably, although it seemed somewhat different, more virulent at the time than modern syphilis which is spread by venereal infection (or the exchange of blood or other fluids) and is a chronic disease that manifests years of latency even if untreated. Early modern syphilis seemed to spread much more rapidly—as one would expect in a virgin population—and even by casual contact. Could the reasons for these marked peculiarities lie in the fact that the disease was actually an importation from the New World? Certainly, there is a striking temporal coincidence between the return of Columbus’s ships to Europe and the outbreak of the Great Pox, and this coincidence led people at the time, and ever since, to postulate its Columbian origin. Several authors quickly leaped to that conclusion: the French disease was an American one carried back to Europe in the bodies of Columbus’s sailors. Others disagree: the unitarian theory, for instance, maintains that syphilis had always been present in the Old World (and these proponents cite the documented presence of other related diseases such as bejel or endemic syphilis, yaws, and pinta). They then attribute the apparent sudden and vicious outbreak in the 1490s to larger historical forces and especially the almost constant warfare of the period. While definite proof still eludes us (bone evidence is ambiguous), it seems that the Columbians have made the best case to date.

No matter what its origins, however, the Great Pox proved a cataclysmic, even a transformative, event. Its demographic impact never approached that of plague; mortality was much lower and the disease’s course protracted. The Great Pox, however, deeply affected the European psyche and influenced social and cultural habits in a number of ways. Unlike plague, syphilis was increasingly viewed as incurable and a persistent affliction, as reflected in the saying ‘A night with Venus, a lifetime with Mercury’, referring to the most common treatments: mercury salves, mercury pills, or mercury fumigations. Plague had already begun to inculcate a greater fear and a harsher attitude
to beggars and vagrants who appeared to spread the disease. Syphilis had the same impact as visible sores could resemble syphilitic lesions. Pronounced misogyny and a greater disapprobation of casual sexuality, as well as the introduction of harsher penalties for licentious women (prostitutes but also women of perceived loose morals), were other results and cities closed brothels and public bathhouses to try to halt the pox’s spread.

Plague and syphilis may have often seemed new diseases in early modern Europe, baffling to contemporaries and hard to categorize, but another great killer—the viral disease of smallpox—was familiar since antiquity; the Persian physician known in the West as Rhazes (866–925) had accurately described it. Smallpox was, therefore, virtually endemic on all three Old World continents and regarded as a ‘river that all must cross’. It was, by the sixteenth century, and probably before, a biological rite of passage and mostly, if by no means exclusively, a childhood disease. Smallpox certainly struck adults and the list of its eminent victims is long and includes William II, the stadholder of the Dutch Republic in 1650, Louis-Philippe (Louis I) of Spain in 1724, and Louis XV of France in 1774. Still, most people contracted smallpox in childhood and then either survived the attack—and thus gained perfect immunity for life—or succumbed. For the many who did not die (case mortality varied according to the particular type and its severity, from the ordinary with 30 per cent fatalities to 50–75 per cent in the far more deadly confluent type), they often experienced serious scarring or blindness. As no effective treatments existed for smallpox, survival depended on whether one fell ill with a mild or severe form of the disease.

Smallpox’s demographic weight proved heaviest in the sixteenth, seventeenth, and eighteenth centuries; thereafter, the methods of inoculation and subsequently vaccination significantly lessened its occurrence. If by the sixteenth century, smallpox in Europe usually threatened mostly children, the situation differed considerably in the New World. When smallpox crossed the Atlantic Ocean, it struck the virgin populations there with devastating fury; it literally decimated the indigenous populations of North and South America and, along with other European diseases, such as influenza, accounted for what some have termed an ‘American holocaust’.

If plague, syphilis, and smallpox can count as the ‘Big Three’ diseases of the early modern world, they were by no means the only ones that occurred epidemically. Another disease that swept away children with frightening symptoms was diphtheria or malignant throat; the sufferer often suffocated from the formation of a false membrane in the throat. Diphtheria, however, first appears noticeable in the seventeenth century. Diseases categorized as ‘fevers’, such as malaria, typhoid, and typhus (the latter two were often confused and a reliable way of separating them did not exist until the 1880s), repeatedly ravaged populations, as did epidemics of the bloody flux or dysentery. Influenza, too, was...
probably exceedingly common from about the fourteenth century onwards. While it only rarely killed as efficiently as plague or smallpox, it caused significant morbidity (sickness). Deaths tended to occur mostly among the very young, the very old, or the weak and malnourished. Still, there seem to have been massive outbreaks that were considerably more lethal, as in England in 1557–59. Other widespread and often frighteningly mortal outbreaks of disease are unsolved puzzles. Historians, demographers, and epidemiologists have remained perplexed as to exactly what was the sweating sickness or English sweat that first appeared in London in 1485–86; it produced ‘a grete swetying and stynking’ and killed with remarkable speed and efficiency.\(^8\)

**Medical Knowledge**

The range of subjects that can be handled under the rubric of medical knowledge is vast. The term could apply to academic medicine or medical science (the latter is, however, anachronistic for the early modern world) but it equally fits the more mundane knowledge of herbs, household remedies, and folklore, as well as magic and alchemy. (This observation also pertains to the practice of medicine treated in the following section.) No clear boundaries existed between what might be called academic knowledge, that transmitted in a formal manner at university or school or through a formalized system of apprenticeship, and that acquired more informally, by word-of-mouth or through hands-on experience. Moreover, while one can certainly speak of progress in the accumulation of knowledge related to medicine, especially in the fields of anatomy, physiology, and pharmacology in this period (in addition to other discoveries in the realm of what we might today call basic science), few had any immediate effect on medical practice and medical therapies and even less, with some significant exceptions, on medical efficacy. Surgery was an exception that will be treated separately later.

Until the sixteenth century, the theoretical framework of western medicine remained Galenic. More properly called the Hippocratic-Galenic tradition, it dated back to the works of the Hippocratic authors (about seventy treatises, written at various times by Hippocrates, his students, and disciples) from the fifth and fourth centuries BCE and then codified and expanded by the Greco-Roman physician, Galen of Pergamun (129–c. 199 CE). Almost this entire medical corpus was, however, lost in late antiquity to the west, although it was preserved in the eastern Roman empire and the Muslim world. In the thirteenth century, only very little of Galen was available for teaching; by the sixteenth century, far more Galen had resurfaced and could be consulted first in Greek and then Latin translations. This sixteenth-century ‘modern’ Galenism persisted and shaped medical theory and university teaching for at least another century, and perhaps longer.
The Galenic understanding of how the human body worked differed considerably from modern ideas. Nonetheless, the system was logical and it proved flexible enough to assimilate new knowledge gained, for example, from Renaissance anatomy. While the whole was quite complex, two ideas were central: (1) the humoral system and the concomitant idea that health depended on the equilibrium of the humours and that illness resulted from disturbances, imbalances, or corruptions of them and (2) the system of naturals, the non-naturals, and the contra-naturals. The four humours—phlegm, blood, black bile, and red or yellow bile—corresponded to the four ancient elements of earth, air, fire, and water; these also made up part of the naturals and included the parts of the body and a spiritus that animated the whole. If the humours became deranged, they needed to be adjusted by bloodletting, cupping, or producing evacuations of sweat, faeces, urine, or vomit. The non-naturals were behavioural and environmental and comprised air, sleep and waking, food and drink, rest and exercise, excretion and retention, and the passions (including sex). Critically important in this system was the perception that a spectrum existed between health and illness, and each individual was located at a unique point on that spectrum. This idea also determined that treatments and medications had to be individualized and carefully calculated for each person due to his or her unique humoral make-up.

Not until the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries did other systems begin to challenge modern Galenism with some success; Galenic tenets, however, by no means disappeared entirely. These newer ideas included Paracelsianism or chemical medicine (iatrochemistry); iatromechanism that, in its most pronounced form, regarded ‘man as a machine’; and then vitalism, which differed from the first two in postulating the existence of a necessary spirit or soul that made life possible. Paracelsus (1493–1541) not only disapproved of Galenic medicine; he vigorously attacked and refuted it. He based his system of medicine on the utter rejection of Galenism as ‘dead knowledge’ and offered a natural philosophy resting on older alchemical traditions and chemical principles. In particular, he dismissed humoral theories and believed that diseases were specific; he viewed each disease as a real thing with an independent existence. In his practice and theories, he advocated the use of chemical remedies especially mercury, arsenic, and antimony. Paracelsus castigated as useless and dangerous the ‘medicine of the schools’, that is, the Galenism taught in Latin at universities. He wrote in the vernacular German and was as much a religious radical as a medical one. Once sneered at as cross-grained, cranky, and a muddle-headed mystic, Paracelsus is now recognized as a major figure. Several rulers retained Paracelsian or chemical physicians at their courts and chemical remedies in the seventeenth century quickly became part of the standard medical pharmacopeia.9
In addition, Paracelsus deeply influenced others, including Joan Baptista van Helmont (1577–1644), who conceived of human physical processes, such as respiration and digestion, as essentially chemical in nature. His followers agreed that chemical processes, like fermentation, effervescence, and putrefaction, formed the basis of all physiology. The iatrochemists, as these medical theorists and physicians are often known, however, were not alone in challenging Galenism. Whereas the iatrochemists professed one way to view the human body, that is, as a set of chemical reactions, the iatromathematicians and iatromechanists advanced another: they maintained that the laws of physics determined all motion in nature, including the functions of the human body. By separating the soul from the body, René Descartes (1596–1650) suggested that the body was measurable. Hermann Boerhaave (1668–1738), the great teacher at the University of Leiden, envisioned the human body as a hydraulic machine composed of ‘membranous pipes or vessels’ operating according to mechanical principles. In his work on *Man a Machine* (1747), Julien La Mettrie argued that thought and even the soul were nothing more than organized matter. Others, however, felt that none of these theories solved the basic riddle of purpose. What, after all, animated the body? Georg Stahl (1659–1734), at the University of Halle, for example, along with the French physician, François Boissier de Sauvages (1706–67), spoke of some vital force, or life-principle, critical to human existence. Still, one should not see these theories as rigorously structured schools of thought with proponents and opponents who engaged in a life-and-death struggle with the others; there was much intellectual to-and-froing among them. Some rejected theories entirely and refused to speculate, finding, like the Englishman, Thomas Sydenham (1624–89), all theories equally false and pernicious.

The most empirical branch of medicine, and the one that built up the most impressive store of knowledge, was anatomy. Over the course of centuries, generations of anatomists slowly pieced together a remarkable, and remarkably accurate, picture of the ‘fabric of the human body’, as the Flemish/Italian anatomist, Andreas Vesalius (1514–64) titled his famous work. Vesalius is often cast in the role of a daring pioneer and a visionary who overcame the prejudices against human dissection, corrected the errors of the ancients, and led medicine into a brave new world of observation and empiricism. Little of this is true in undiluted form, despite Vesalius’s undeniable contributions. Human dissection had already revived in the thirteenth century, although it remained a fairly rare occurrence. Vesalius, however, was able to dissect far more bodies and thus created the basis for his *De Humani Corporis Fabrica* (1543). After Vesalius, anatomy became the ‘queen of the sciences’ and a fundamental part in the university training of physicians.

Following Vesalius’s lead, a number of anatomists produced other whole-body anatomies that often implicitly or explicitly criticized him. Thus, the ‘Renaissance anatomy project’ always had many strands and was by no means a monolithic programme. Several other
anatomists turned to minute examinations of particular organs or systems. Bartolomeo Eustachi (c. 1500–74), for instance, concentrated on the kidney and the ear; he gave his name to the Eustachian tube. Likewise critical counts the work of Hieronymous Fabricius ad Aquapendente (1533–1619) who discovered the ‘little doors’—valves—in the veins.

The work of Aquapendente fed directly into one of the iconic anatomical discoveries of the late Renaissance, perhaps of all time: William Harvey’s (1578–1657) explanation of the pulmonary circulation of the blood. Harvey’s discovery, like the work of Vesalius, has often been cast as a momentous breakthrough and a singular contribution. But, as Vesalius fulfilled the Galenic precept of ‘seeing for one’s self’, Harvey, too, built on the work of predecessors, including Aquapendente, but also Realdo Colombo (1516–59) who observed the movement of blood from the right to the left ventricle through the lungs of animals he had vivisected. In producing his great discovery, Harvey both observed and cogitated. He also believed in something like Providence in the form of a personified Nature who, to allow the filtering of blood through the lungs, found herself ‘forced to make the extra provision of a right ventricle’. Thus, as this mixture of old and new suggests, one must be careful not to draw unbroken lines of medical or scientific progress that reach from the Renaissance to today or believe that all early modern ‘scientists’ agreed on the project in which they were engaged; they did not. Moreover, one of the most significant medical innovations was not a medical discovery at all but resulted from the popularization of an ancient folk practice common in many parts of the world, including the Levant: smallpox inoculation. Introduced into Europe by Lady Mary Wortley Montagu (1689–1762) and the physicians Emmanuel Timoni (c. 1670–1718) and Giacomo Pylarini (1659–1718), who had learned of it in the Ottoman Empire in the early eighteenth century, inoculation or variolation soon became widespread and may have significantly reduced European mortality rates at least among children. Inoculation imparted a true case of smallpox, albeit usually a mild one, and thus endowed the inoculee with permanent immunity. It was supplanted at the end of the eighteenth century by the safer procedure of vaccination that, unlike inoculation, could not infect others with smallpox.

While the iatrochemists, iatromechanists, and vitalists all contributed to transforming Galenic concepts of the working of the human body and actuated some significant modifications in those perceptions, less changed in learned and laity concepts of how diseases spread. Over a very long stretch of time, from antiquity until the end of the early modern period (at the very least), two ideas competed and combined to explain the transmission of disease. Either diseases passed from person to person directly or arose and moved through the atmosphere. Scholars have labelled these two explanations contagionism and miasmism (or anti-contagionism) and have often discussed them as contrasting and competing systems. In fact, however, epidemiological thought can be
'usefully understood as a series of shifting rearrangements of these thematic building blocks'. Attempts to prevent disease combined measures dictated by both. To forestall plague, for example, one might quarantine sufferers but also purify the air by shooting off cannon and fumigating clothes and bedding. Just as important, too, were religious preventives, such as prayers, supplications, processions, and calls to repent.

The generation of medical theories and medical knowledge is one thing, how it was disseminated another. Academic medical training occurred at universities throughout the early modern period. Although some medical instruction always took place in hospitals, not until the eighteenth century did bedside teaching become routine. Teaching at medieval and early modern universities remained overwhelmingly textual and aural. Typically, professors ‘professed’, or lectured, and students had to memorize extensively. Similar to how religion came to be catechized in the age of confessionalism, a question-and-answer method dominated. A professor set a particular question: ‘What is the rete mirabile?’ He would then expect a set answer, in Latin, of course. Galenic texts dominated at least until the sixteenth century. One striking innovation in the 1500s was the increasing availability of printed books for students and teachers alike, as well as, more gradually, for an educated laity in either Latin or the vernacular. Still, it would be wrong to imagine that no hands-on or practical training took place even in the medieval system. Some professors took favoured students (or those who paid) on visits to patients; such training, however, did not form an official part of the curriculum.

If the education of physicians remained mostly textual, other medical practitioners learned through apprenticeship systems, that is, by doing; yet these forms were rarely devoid of either theoretical training or book-learning. Surgery divided into two basic skill-sets controlled by different men: surgeons who performed major operations and those (often called barber-surgeons) who were only licensed and allowed to perform minor operations, such as blood-letting, as well as barbering. They were usually organized into separate guilds. That distinction, as one might suppose, seldom held up entirely. Both groups, however, learned their craft in an apprenticeship system, serving first as apprentices and then as journeymen-surgeons before receiving their master’s certificate; training lasted from five to ten years. Technically, cities or states licensed surgeons and forbade them to practise internal medicine; not surprisingly, many trespassed these boundaries. Apothecaries, too, trained in similarly organized apprenticeship systems. In continental Europe apothecaries were generally not permitted to practise medicine and were limited to compounding and distributing medications; in England, however, they often functioned as something like general practitioners. Everywhere they competed with physicians by prescribing and treating as well as providing simple and compound medicines.
Surgery counts as the success story of early modern medicine. Whereas physicians and medicine held out little hope for most patients, surgeons often cured, albeit at the frequent expense of considerable pain and risk of death by infection. Surgeons almost never cut into the cavities of the human body, but were especially adroit in other operations including amputations and reconstructive surgery. Most famous among the non-Latinate surgeons was Ambroise Paré (1510–90) who first apprenticed as a barber-surgeon and then became a military surgeon. He devised new ways to treat wounds, substituted ligature for cauterization of amputated limbs, and also developed a method of podalic version, that is, turning a baby in the womb to deliver it safely. Other surgeons pioneered other operations that were often highly successful: the French family Colet perfected a method of lithotomy (the surgical removal of bladder stones) and Gaspare Tagliacozzi (1549–99) refined the secret of the Sicilian Branca family for rhinoplasty. Early operators (few of whom officially trained as surgeons) frequently possessed special skills; oculists successfully ‘couch’d cataracts to restore sight; dentists drew teeth; and bone-setters righted fractured limbs. Many of these were peripatetics who journeyed from place to place seeking work; some were more sedentary; many had licences to practise and can by no means be relegated to the category of ignorant or deceitful quacks.

Midwives, too, overwhelmingly learned their craft by doing, but usually not within the framework of a regulated guild system. Most were licensed in cities; in rural areas the arrangement proceeded far more informally. Knowledge usually passed from midwife to a prospective midwife while attending at a birth. Midwives were sometimes relatives, mothers and daughters, aunts and nieces, but by no means invariably. They also tended to be older women, past childbearing age who had also given birth, and frequently of quite low social status. Midwifery ordinances or church officials (who licensed midwives in rural England) frequently specified just these requirements. In theory, midwives were to be literate, but surely many, especially in small towns and villages, were not. Still, many examples exist of well-educated midwives who came from more elevated social circles, who attended anatomical lectures, and who published well-respected midwifery texts. Indeed, the Office of Midwives at the Hôtel-Dieu hospital in Paris provided for the education of midwives within the medical establishment as early as the seventeenth century. Several prominent midwives produced their own midwifery manuals, such as that of the seventeenth-century court-midwife, Justine Siegemund (1636–1705). Siegemund also had never borne children, a fairly unusual characteristic she shared with another famous midwife, Madame du Coudray (1712–92) who, in eighteenth-century France, was commissioned by the royal government to travel about the nation training midwives and accoucheurs (male surgeon-midwives). The rise of the male midwife really took off about the middle of the eighteenth century and thus breaks the boundaries
of our time period, but the phenomenon had already begun around 1700 and was associated with the use of new instruments such as obstetrical forceps.

To restrict medical knowledge and medical learning, however, to those who were educated in a university or school system, or trained in a guild or guild-like system, vastly underestimates the ways in which medical knowledge was generated, acquired, and transferred in the early modern world. It suggests that two separate worlds of knowledge—formal and informal, or popular and learned—existed, were isolated from one another, and that each proved hostile to the other. Much as healing and medical care began at home, so, too, did the transmission—and the production—of medical knowledge occur in households. Unsurprisingly, women assumed a central role here. Recent work in the history of science has emphasized the criticality of ‘sites of science’ that were neither laboratories, nor universities, nor hospitals. Rather a great deal of science, it seems, was done in neighbourhoods, coffee houses, courts, markets, villages, and homes. What holds true for science is perhaps even more valid for medicine. Here the overlap between medical knowledge and medical practice merged into virtual indistinguishability. Medical care formed an essential part of many women’s household duties and that was often as true for a duchess as for an artisan’s or farmer’s wife. Medical lore and medical recipes circulated in household journals and recipe books and passed through diaries and correspondence; these communicative ties did not exclude men. Herbal remedies were common and households produced large quantities of elixirs and tonics for use in the home and neighbourhoods. Some women concocted far more elaborate remedies themselves, running virtual laboratories or distilleries as they were generally known. One such enterpriser was the Elizabethan gentlewoman Grace Mildmay (c. 1552–1620) whose knowledge extended to the compounding of Paracelsian chemical compounds. Many of the ‘little secrets’ of reproduction were also generated at home and spread through female networks.

**Medical Practice**

The practice of medicine in early modern Europe was never solely the bailiwick of physicians or other licensed and accredited practitioners, such as surgeons and apothecaries. Whereas at one time scholars tended to see most areas in Europe (outside of major cities) as medical deserts, that phrase originally referred to the paucity of university-trained physicians, not all those who practised medicine. In fact, the number of medical practitioners was vast if we use the definition that social historians of medicine prefer: any individual whose occupation is basically concerned with the care of the sick. Yet even this expansive umbrella does not cover all those who engaged in medicine in early modern Europe.
In a quite real sense, everyone practised medicine; the range of self-help and self-medication was enormous. To this profusion one must add the assistance sought from, and provided by, close family members, relatives, and neighbours. Equally active in medical care were clergymen and members of the gentry or nobility, again frequently women although also men. Certainly any estimate of the number of practitioners depends greatly on the definition used. Even if one only considers the university-trained or licensed, the numbers fluctuate wildly. It is, therefore, impossible to determine whether early modern Europe as a whole was well or poorly supplied with accredited practitioners and it is perhaps prudent to focus on individual areas and periods for the most accurate numbers. For instance, Groningen, a town in the northern part of the Dutch Republic, had about 20,000 people in the sixteenth century and about fourteen physicians. There were fifty-three in the seventeenth century and then thirty in the eighteenth. The English town of Norwich had about one practitioner for every 200 inhabitants. Almost everywhere the numbers increased rather dramatically in the eighteenth century. ‘It now appears’, according to one historian of France, ‘that by the end of the Old Regime the majority of Frenchmen may have been in a position to consult an authorized healer’.

Scholars sometimes describe the substantial increase in the availability of medical practitioners as representing an increasing medicalization. Medicalization, however, has multiple meanings. It can be used to designate growing numbers, but it also describes a tendency for physicians to become regarded as experts in areas that were once not their purview: childbirth and child-rearing are two of these, as is the treatment of the mentally ill. Another way to assess the impact of the vast array of medical practitioners available is to set them within the structure of a medical marketplace where many types of practitioners (physicians included) competed with all others for work. This has formed the most popular interpretive model since its introduction in the mid-1980s to explain the profusion of medical practitioners and the issue of how patients chose among them. While it is very difficult to generalize about medical preference, about the reasons why someone selected one practitioner over another in any given situation, sufferers, while medically promiscuous, were not medical naïfs; most weighed their options carefully and, if willing to consult a series of practitioners serially or consecutively, could appraise chances of cures and consider the appropriateness of one healer over another for particular ailments or afflictions. Moreover, the ill did not inevitably suffer in silence or submission. Like most of us today, they desired health or a return to productive life greatly and sought cures eagerly and doggedly. They were often willing to go to enormous lengths, and considerable (even, objectively viewed, excessive) expense, to obtain both. While some were surely more willing to resign themselves to lives of torment and to accept illness as providential, that attitude did not typify early modern people. The boundaries between prevention and cure were equally fluid and people often adhered to regimens that they felt suited them. The vast range of self-help manuals that poured off
the presses beginning in the sixteenth century swelled to a veritable flood in the eighteenth; they were eagerly snapped up. Works such as Luigi Cornaro’s *Sure and Certain Methods of Attaining a Long and Healthy Life* (that appeared in twelve editions and several languages from 1558–1724), the wildly popular *Aristotle’s Masterpiece* (first published in England in 1684 and repeatedly reissued through the mid-nineteenth century), or George Cheyne’s extremely influential *An Essay on Health and Long Life* (first edition 1724) found places in the homes of the literate with enough money to purchase them. Wider audiences purchased cheaper editions and perused shorter pieces in periodicals; the latter devoted ever more space to advice on health.\(^{21}\)

Yet if everyone it seems was willing to turn to secular healers in illness, religion and magic continued to play a large role in medicine. In times of pestilence, of course, prayers, penance, and processions were major weapons in society’s epidemiological armoury. When ill, people often turned to religious assistance or magical cures, but not blindly. Afflictions believed to be caused by the *maleficium* (evil or black magic) were best countered by beneficent (white) magic, but not all diseases fell into that category. The same was true of religion; many people relied on the comfort of prayer and the sustenance of faith during illness but did not actively seek religious healing. Afflictions like epilepsy or certain mental disturbances, those which could be taken as a type of possession, for instance, could be alleviated by exorcism conducted by a priest or minister (although Protestant theologians were considerably more sceptical of exorcism than Catholics). The mad were treated as frequently by clerics as by physicians.\(^{22}\) The combination of religion and medicine therefore both persisted and evolved. The leader of early Methodism, John Wesley (1703–91), linked religion with the popular health movement of the eighteenth century; he created his own brand of ‘physick’ and presented it in a widely reprinted volume on *Primitive Physick, Or an Easy and Natural Method of Curing Most Diseases* (1744).

It is very difficult to differentiate between religion and magic in the early modern world.\(^{23}\) Because of the widespread belief that terrestrial and celestial affairs were intimately joined and that the movement of the planets and stars could affect individual human beings, astrology formed an important predictive and diagnostic aspect of medicine. One could also consult the stars for cures. This whole complex subject can be usefully illustrated on the example of Richard Napier (1559–1634). Napier was an Anglican cleric who maintained a large medical practice in rural Buckinghamshire. His medicine blended religion, astrology, and natural cures. He treated literally hundreds of patients for ailments that we would today divide into physical and mental. More purely magical cures involved amulets, potions, and spells, but these, too, were frequently combined with natural medicines and treatments. These healers, often known as cunning-
folk, were believed to control supernatural forces; they also, however, used roots and herbs as well as poultices and plasters in their cures.

### Institutions of Medical Care

The landscape of early modern Europe was populated with many institutions that provided care to the sick. Some of these—like hospitals, poorhouses, and asylums—had walls; others, like outdoor medical and poor relief, confraternities, and religious orders, did not. All made up central parts of health care and medical provision.

Perhaps no other branch of the history of medicine has received as much attention as the history of hospitals. In older histories, scholars frequently highlighted the progress of reform and laid out a clear path to the modern hospital. Such grand narratives often spanned centuries. Two approaches dominated: either a triumphalist one that made physicians the heroes in a rise-of-the-modern-hospital epic or a much darker vision produced by, among others, Michel Foucault (1926–84), who argued that the rise of the modern asylum and, for that matter, of modern medicine, betokened a defeat for the freedom of the individual much as Thomas Szasz criticized the whole idea of mental illness.

Historical analyses of hospitals often rely on the trope of increasing medicalization. According to this narrative, medieval and early modern hospitals until the era of reform (roughly beginning in the eighteenth century) provided care not cure and served as the last miserable refuges for those lacking all other resources, mostly the poor and abandoned. The provision of medical care was not their primary objective. Rather, they were just as involved in ‘saving souls’ as in ‘mending bodies’. Another interpretation ran together with this one: hospitals were ‘gateways to death’ and ‘terrible ulcer[s] on the body politic’. These neat interpretations, however, mask the fact that the history of hospitals is extremely complex; one can identify, for instance, early modern hospitals that boasted extremely good records in dispensing medical care and that offered medical training.

The origins of the hospital as we know it today are rooted in early Christianity. Throughout the medieval and early modern periods, hospitals retained their mission of saving souls. All had strong religious associations; chapels, altars, and cloisters were ubiquitous, while nuns and monks provided staffing. The bonds between church and hospital, lay and clerical participation, remained tightly drawn. Hospitals often bore the names of saints or titles that suggested the charitable side of their mission, called in Spanish _templos de piedad_ (temples of piety and compassion), for example. Similar
religious expressions characterized hospitals city governments founded and which expressed civic pride in concrete form. Beginning in the high Middle Ages, dynamic commercial centres set up a number of such hospitals: there were ones in many northern Italian cities, but also in places like York, Augsburg, and Lübeck to name just a handful.

Because so many hospitals existed and because they often differed substantially, many present-day historians stress the need to consider context and acknowledge peculiarities as well as similarities. One historian has recently observed that ‘the generic hospital is an abstraction. In reality, there are only particular hospitals’. Here the emphasis will be on examining not individual hospitals but types of hospitals. Moreover, the functions hospitals fulfilled in a society also differed and went beyond medical care or cure: they were concurrently landowners, employers, and investment bankers, while simultaneously manifesting civic accomplishments and collective piety. The division followed here—into general hospitals, specialized hospitals (including military hospitals), and madhouses or asylums—is therefore arbitrary if heuristically useful.

(p. 109) General hospital is a particularly misleading term, partly because of its modern connotation. In early modern Europe these were hospitals inherited from the medieval world that explicitly bore the dual purposes of care and cure. They usually accepted the sick residents of a city and often catered mostly, if never exclusively, to the sick-poor. The great Florentine hospital of Santa Maria Nuova admitted patients from virtually every urban social class; the accommodations differed, of course. Poorer inmates often moved in and out of these places with oscillations in the weather or economic bad times and the function of refuge never fully disappeared. For these hospitals, one can document a shift over time from serving as a shelter for the poor (and sick-poor) to admitting only the acutely ill, that is, those regarded as curable; few hospitals admitted those suffering from pestilential diseases such as plague or smallpox. They were run and staffed, usually quite capably, by religious orders, although often laymen and laywomen administered the hospital and oversaw finances. The provision of medical care in these institutions ranged from the non-existent to the quite substantial. Over the course of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, as cities and territories began to establish other charitable institutions such as orphanages, poorhouses, workhouses, lying-in hospitals for parturient women, and even homes for the elderly, hospitals tended to become more and more medicalized; that is, they stopped admitting purely care cases, expanded their medical staffs, and excluded patients suffering from fevers (‘fever’ patients had made up 60.6 per cent of all patients in the San Paolo hospital in Florence in 1567–68) or distempers (like smallpox) and pregnant women. The older picture of hospitals as places where one went to die (or where one was killed off by a combination of neglect and barbaric treatment) or, alternatively, where one remained for interminable stays as a care case, has been successfully modified if not totally refuted. Probing studies of patient statistics
demonstrate that time spent in these hospitals, while longer than today, was by no means extremely protracted. Seventy per cent of the patients at Santa Maria Nuova remained fewer than thirty days while almost 40 per cent fewer than ten. Death rates, too, appear relatively low and certainly nothing like the very negative picture reformers of the mid- to late eighteenth century projected as typical. By the mid-eighteenth century, mortality and cure rates in the best-run hospitals were acceptably low. At the Royal Infirmary in Edinburgh, mortality varied between 4.7 per cent to 10.5 per cent. Of patients at the Bristol Infirmary 86.5 per cent left listed as ‘cured’ and a further 2.6 per cent as ‘relieved’.²⁷

Besides these all-purpose large hospitals, other types developed over the course of the early modern period. Leprosaria, or lazarettos, came into beginning in the early Middle Ages. The fear of contagion mandated that most leprosaria be set outside city limits. By the sixteenth century, these very many leprosaria were no longer needed as leprosy had mostly disappeared from Europe. Henceforth these institutions assumed a variety of new roles, caring for plague victims or quarantining incoming travellers, for instance. In the wake of several plague epidemics, cities often set up plague hospitals separate from other ones. Hospitals called incurabili, that is, for incurables, arose in the wake of the Great Pox as most hospitals refused to admit its sufferers. Collective or individual piety often motivated these establishments. Religiously devoted laymen and laywomen in Italy who belonged to confraternities known as Companies of Divine Love created a sizeable number. Jakob Fugger of Augsburg, who famously endowed the Fuggerei (a housing venture for the Catholic poor of his city), also built a pox hospital known as the Wood House (because guaiacum wood was preferred for treatments there). Another sort of special hospital arose somewhat later and became common in the eighteenth century: the lying-in hospital. Mostly intended for poor women, or illegitimate mothers, these small facilities or wards in larger institutions provided care for parturient mothers and assistance in childbirth. Usually midwives attended the labouring woman in childbirth, but gradually over the course of the eighteenth century, such hospitals and wards became teaching facilities for male midwives and physicians as well as for midwives.

Military hospitals, too, fit the category of specialized institutions. Military or veterans’ hospitals were not established in Europe until the late sixteenth century; Spain founded one of the first in 1570 in Malines (in today’s Belgium). Other hospitals and veterans’ homes soon followed and by the middle of the eighteenth century there were a great number of these. Louis XIV constructed the Invalides in Paris in 1670, while the Greenwich hospital for naval veterans opened in 1696. Frederick II of Prussia, known as ‘the Great’, set up permanent military hospitals in six garrison towns and organized a field hospital system to supplement the famous Charité in Berlin his father had created in 1725. Not only did the numbers of military hospitals rise rapidly in the seventeenth and
eighteenth centuries; they also tended to be among the very best hospitals of the time. That fine record was flanked by efforts to improve military medicine by setting up schools for field surgeons, creating a corps of inspector-generals, raising the pay for all military medical personnel, and integrating medical men into the normal ranks of non-commissioned and commissioned officers.

Madhouses existed since the Middle Ages; one excellent example is St. Mary Bethlehem established in London in 1247. Its notorious name—Bedlam—with all the images thus conjured up, speaks for the way in which madhouses have tended to be viewed both by contemporaries and later scholars: as horrors. As we have already seen, the mad, however, did not always suffer incarceration; families often tended them at home. In the early modern period, because the treatment of the mad had not yet been medicalized, several institutions handled those disturbed in their wits. They might simply be locked up in jail-like structures, sometimes known as mad-towers, where they were forcibly restrained and sometimes brutally mistreated. Already in the seventeenth century, one can document the growth of a business in treating the mad. Private persons offered their services to ‘mind the mad’, sometimes professing the ability to cure, sometimes merely to care for, those their relatives could no longer handle or no longer wished to have at home. Many of these places provided good, gentle care; others were run by men and women who were exploitive and cruel. Not until the mid- to late eighteenth century did physicians intervene more actively in the treatment of the mad. Some of the most important innovations in treatment involved not medicine per se but something we might term behavioural modification in the form of moral treatment. Several physicians began to remove the chains and harsh restraints from their mad patients (most famously, Philippe Pinel (1745–1826) at the Paris hospital for mentally disturbed women, the Salpêtrière, and Vincenzo Chiarugi (1759–1820) at the Bonifacio Hospital in Florence) and apply a regime of medical treatments combined with what Chiarugi called his ‘talking cure’. Not only physicians innovated. The Quaker community in York, England set up an institution, the Retreat, to shelter Friends (Quakers) that sought to remove from the patient’s mind the ‘false impressions’ that distressed them. Caretakers there treated patients as badly behaved children. Inmates worked in the asylum’s gardens and fields, were restrained gently, and then only in extreme circumstances.

Besides these institutions with walls, several other foundations and organizations assisted the sick and the sick-poor ‘outside’. With the realization that illness formed a major underlying cause of poverty came efforts to treat patients before their ailments incapacitated and impoverished them. An early example of this attitude found expression in medieval and early modern confraternities: Catholic foundations that promoted works of piety and charity. These could be connected with a guild. Such confraternities distributed monetary aid to the needy or paid for medical assistance. Individual wealthy
men, and especially women, also often provided funds for charitable medical aid. In addition, secular groups, inspired by civic commitment and motives of social reform, undertook similar tasks, although these usually dated from the late seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. The Amsterdam anatomist and burgomaster, Nicolaes Tulp (1593–1674), drafted a plan to pay medical practitioners to treat the city’s poor. Many civic poor relief systems, too, allowed a modicum of assistance—monetary or material—to the sick-poor. More elaborate forms of such care, often known as domiciliary or home-care, developed somewhat later; Hamburg’s philanthropically engaged and civic minded citizens, for example, created an extensive system in the 1770s and 1780s. A similarly engaged ‘friendly society’ existed in Barcelona and dispensaries also offered domiciliary care.

Dispensaries—facilities that treated patients without hospitalizing them—often existed in conjunction with hospitals. Perhaps the very first was set up in Paris in 1630 by the physician Théophraste Renaudot (1586–1653). His bureau d’adresse mediated jobs and out-patient treatment for the sick-poor. The College of Physicians in London organized something similar in the late seventeenth century and, by the end of the century, several dispensaries functioned throughout England and continental Europe.

This whole impressive panoply of medical institutions that catered to Europe’s population was glued together by a range of motives that blended medical concerns with charitable and religious ones. Medical care, therefore, existed as much in the province of civic engagement and civic pride, religious motivations, and charitable impulses as of state or government actions, and involved citizens as much as physicians, surgeons, apothecaries, and midwives.

The Health of the People

‘Health of the people’ is not the same as public health. Public health may well be an anachronistic phrase when applied to early modern Europe where no precise idea of a public existed or certainly not in the sense in which we employ the term today. The phrase ‘health of the people’ therefore includes a miscellany of early modern efforts to deal with health and disease in society. Modern public health initiatives really only took off near the close of the eighteenth century. Yet, early attempts to provide pure drinking water, remove nuisances, clean streets, and ensure the safety of foods began much earlier and can be traced to antiquity. Still, instead of considering these developments as the origin of a well-articulated programme of public health, it makes more sense to speak of a series of sporadic, uncoordinated, and, at times, contradictory
measures that gradually induced people and governments to understand that health must become a broad societal concern.

Scholars have often credited plague with inaugurating the first real public health measures. The reactions to plague were, however, multifarious and as much religious as medical and governmental in nature. While it took the repeated experience of several waves of plague before governments and societies understood the need for more permanent measures to prevent its return, the 1347–51 epidemic generated some initiatives that later became common, and accepted, features of urban life. For example, in March 1348, the Great Council of Venice selected three of its own members ‘to consider diligently all possible ways to preserve public health and avoid the corruption of the environment’.

These ad hoc measures, such as the various plague ordinances promulgated in several places, still tended to be renewed and reissued only when plague threatened. They therefore embodied early forms of crisis management. Likewise, rules setting up quarantines and prohibiting the free passage of people and goods also appeared sporadically to be applied, lifted, and then forgotten until need again arose. The line from these early attempts to preserve a community under biological threat to a full-blown form of ‘sanitary engineering’ or the establishment of public health departments (or Boards of Health) that evolved in the mid-nineteenth century was by no means straight nor the results predetermined.

Moreover, while epidemics and the prevention of them took a significant part in the elaboration of what may be considered a health infrastructure, these were not the only noteworthy factors. To be complete, a survey of communal health must also consider town and state physicians as government officials; a more vigorous regulation of medical practitioners; and the rise of ‘the bookkeeping of the state’. These evolved by no means smoothly but rather in a stop-and-go manner.

Town physicians began to appear in Europe in isolated instances in the late Middle Ages. Generally considered the first of these was Ugo Borgognoni of Lucca (d.1252–58). Medieval towns contracted with practitioners to ensure the presence of a physician and paid them a salary. They were not officially charged (or not usually at least) with anything that really resembled public health. As towns grew larger and more affluent, and as more medical practitioners settled in them, the practice of contracting in this manner began to disappear. In the fifteenth century, the Dutch city of Hoorn lured a physician named Albert Dircxzoon to it by paying him a salary, offering him citizenship, and allowing him tax relief. In 1600, there were three such stadsdoctors (city doctors); thereafter the system declined. Still, in some places, as in many German towns, the urban Medicus became a more or less permanent feature. At first hired under the same conditions as the stadsdoctor, they soon became regular functionaries in the urban
administration, often called upon to treat the poor, offer judgements on the quality of food and drink, and conduct forensic examinations such as post-mortems, viewing wounds, and the like. These men received regular salaries and were often supported by city surgeons and city midwives.

Outside of towns, these matters remained for a very long time more haphazardly organized. Not until the eighteenth century in most places did anyone launch extensive efforts to provide health care or supervision of medically related circumstances in the countryside. This situation did not mean, of course, that no one practised medicine in rural areas; that was hardly the case. Yet the reach of governments was limited and only particularly alarming events—epidemics and epizootics including economically devastating cattle plagues—drew officials concerned with health into rural areas. In the eighteenth century, however, several governments began to extend their efforts to create a territorial network of medical practitioners by hiring and salarying physicians, surgeons, and midwives to provide care as well as to monitor local conditions as an early warning system. Still, a more extended and governmentally administered health framework really only evolved in the mid- to late eighteenth century.

Attempts to regulate medical practice were older. While one goal of such regulation indeed sought the maintenance of standards and expressed a desire to control bad practices, other objectives assumed equal importance: to limit competition and to preserve traditional methods of education, by apprenticeship, for example. Cities began to establish corporations or guilds of medical practitioners in the late Middle Ages (a College of Physicians for university-trained physicians existed in Venice by 1316). The exclusivity of these organizations varied considerably. In some places, physicians, surgeons, and even apothecaries combined in one group; in other places, two or more separate corporations existed. Sometimes relations between corporations were cordial; sometimes bitterly hostile. All drafted rules defining membership. Often the efforts of these corporations to regulate their markets and their members dovetailed with efforts of governments to determine who was legitimately empowered to practise. Many oculists, lithotomists, corn-cutters, and bonesetters followed their trades quite legally under licences granted for specific times and places. The word charlatan, which we now associate with bad medicine or quackery, did not necessarily bear that connotation in early modern Europe. Italian cities and states licensed them as licit practitioners after testing and evaluating their skills. Still, the tendency was, over time, to tighten up the rules about who might engage in which form of medicine and surgery. Most obvious was the movement to bar women from medicine and surgery but not midwifery and even the rise of the male midwife did not dislodge women practitioners from the birth chamber. The gradual exclusion of women had actually begun already in the late Middle Ages; it gained steam in the early modern world. Still, the prohibition was never complete. The
widows of surgeons, barber-surgeons, and apothecaries (p. 114) frequently were permitted to continue their spouses’ practices. How often wives, sisters, and daughters assisted their menfolk is unknown but surely quite common.

The history of modern public health, like the history of epidemiology, inextricably entwines with numbers and statistics. Virtually no historical account of plague fails to use numbers to impress readers with the gravity of the situation. The idea that numbers and statistics tell an important, or even a true, story and allow us to evaluate phenomena in some scientifically rigorous fashion, however, is fairly recent. Possessing a statistical sense relevant to our own health and that of our families is even newer. In the Middle Ages, and even before, governments occasionally attempted to ‘number the people’, often for tax purposes. Plague changed the parameters. Cities began to collect numbers on deaths due to the pestilence and then recorded them in ‘bills of mortality’. Milan may have led the way here with its record of plague deaths from 1452, but other cities soon followed; increasingly, these compilations were published, often weekly. While at first these bills only noted deaths from plague, by the early seventeenth century they also registered other causes of death. Such numbers were more frequently and more easily collected in cities than elsewhere and, while the process of collection proceeded apace, the idea of using these numbers in a predictive manner, or of deriving meaningful statistical probabilities from them, lagged. The purposeful analysis of data had to await what eventually became known as the ‘science of large numbers’. While some sense of odds, especially in games of chance, always existed, the mathematical method of probability was first broached in the mid-seventeenth century by Pierre de Fermat, Blaise Pascal, and Christiaan Huygens, to be further elaborated in the eighteenth century. One first step was taken by William Petty (1623–87) who assembled large amounts of numerical information on England’s economic resources and its population. He also coined the term political arithmetic to describe these compilations. John Graunt (1620–74) then correlated deaths with age in his Natural Observations on the Bills of Mortality (1662). Graunt as well as other political arithmeticians, such as the German pastor Johann Süßmilch (1707–67), worked to demonstrate the ‘grim regularity’ of death statistics thus suggesting providential patterns in mortality and, for that matter, fertility. These political arithmeticians were very much concerned with what they perceived as population decline. Later proto-demographers, like Thomas Malthus (1766–1834), expressed different concerns; they worried about the excess of population that would quickly outrun the food supply producing famine, misery, and death. The science of probability also eventually allowed for the production of more accurate actuarial tables that made the calculation of life expectancy possible and simultaneously put life insurance on a sounder mathematical basis.
Governments began to use statistics and numbers more frequently in matters of health even in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. When thinking about their own health and their own families, people seemed far less able to assimilate the sense of statistical chances. Even when the numbers clearly showed that smallpox inoculation was a far safer procedure than allowing children to ‘take the pox’ naturally, parents hesitated, being unwilling, as one put it, to ‘sacrifice their own children on the altar of science’.

(p. 115) Conclusion

Historians of medicine have often portrayed the early modern period as an age of rupture and a momentous break with the ‘bad old days’ of the medieval world, as the term medical Renaissance indicates. In some fields, anatomy for example, this interpretation seems justified. Nonetheless, any survey of the early modern medical world must acknowledge great debts to the Middle Ages and also simultaneously stress that the developments of the fifteenth through the mid-eighteenth centuries did not necessarily clear an unobstructed path to medical modernity. Still, it is neither useful nor prudent to make the early modern period seem more strange or alien that it necessarily was. There were innovations in health policies, advances in the understanding of human anatomy and physiology, and insights into the etiology of disease. Perhaps most important of all was the growing conviction that health, disease, and medicine concerned all members of society and all governments.

Bibliography


Notes:

(1.) See, for example, Steven Shapin, *The Scientific Revolution* (Chicago, 1996) and many articles in Katherine Park and Lorraine Daston, eds., *The Cambridge History of Science* Vol. 3: *Early Modern Science* (Cambridge, 2006), especially the introduction to this volume.


(5.) Peter Christiansen, ‘ “In These Perilous Times”: Plague and Plague Policies in Early Modern Denmark’, *Medical History*, 47 (2003), 416. The most persistent sceptic of the argument that the ‘plague’ of the early modern period, and especially of the 1347–50 incursion, was indeed bubonic plague is Samuel K. Cohn, Jr., *The Black Death Transformed: Disease and Culture in Early Renaissance Europe* (Oxford, 2002) and *Cultures of Plague: Medical Thinking at the End of the Renaissance* (Oxford, 2010). For a

(6.) The most complete study of the ‘Great Pox’ is that of Jon Arrizabalaga, John Henderson, and Roger French, *The Great Pox: The French Disease in Renaissance Europe* (New Haven, CT, 1997). The authors note that most considered it ‘unknown to any doctor’, although some disagreed (24).


(9.) Charles Webster, *Paracelsus, Magic and Mission at the End of Time* (New Haven, CT, 2008), offers a major reinterpretation of Paracelsus.


(11.) Although ‘knowledge was not only increased in some quantitative fashion during this period: it was also qualitatively transformed’ (11), nonetheless, it is equally ‘no longer clear that there was any coherent enterprise in the early modern period that can be identified with modern science, or that the transformations … were as explosive and discontinuous’ as once assumed. Park and Daston, *Early Modern Science*, 13.


(20.) Harold Cook, in *The Decline of the Old Medical Regime in Stuart London* (Ithaca, 1986), coined the term ‘medical marketplace’ to describe seventeenth-century English medicine. This idea has come to dominate the way in which people have talked about medical practice and competition in the early modern world and has been expanded far beyond Cook’s original definition. Margaret Pelling (with Frances White) critiques the concept and argues that the relationships between practitioners, and practitioners and patients are rather more complex than the model seems to suggest in *Medical Conflicts in Early Modern London: Patronage, Physicians, and Irregular Practitioners, 1550–1640* (Oxford, 2003). For eighteenth-century England, Mary E. Fissell observed that ‘someone who fell ill… found a profusion of health care providers eager for his or her custom’. *Patients, Power, and the Poor in Eighteenth-Century Bristol* (Cambridge, 1991), 37.

(22.) In two excellent examinations of madness in the sixteenth century, H. C. Erik Midelfort shows that madness was only slowly medicalized and that even rulers who ‘ran mad’ might not be treated by a physician. Mad Princes of Renaissance Germany (Charlottesville, 1996) and A History of Madness in Sixteenth-Century Germany (Stanford, 1999).

(23.) Anthropologists remind us that modern secular thought often assumes that what ‘we’ do is religion and what ‘others’ do is magic.


(25.) Louis-Sébastian Mercier so referred to the Bicêtre in Paris; Mercier quoted in Brockliss and Jones, Medical World, 719. For a more extensive evaluation of the ‘Black Legend’ of hospitals, see Brockliss and Jones, Medical World, 717–725.

(26.) Risse, Mending Bodies, Saving Souls, 4.


(30.) Crisis management remained the Leitmotif long after the first incursions of plague in the mid-fourteenth century; see Alexandra Parma Cook and Noble David Cook, The Plague Files: Crisis Management in Sixteenth-Century Seville (Baton Rouge, 2009).

(31.) David Gentilcore, Medical Charlatanism in Early Modern Italy (Oxford, 2006).

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Historical Demography

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Abstract and Keywords

This chapter examines the major contours of population change in early modern European history. Rates of population growth, or decline, are explained by documenting the underlying trends in fertility, mortality, and nuptiality as they shifted across both time and space. Particular attention is paid to the population collapse at the start of our study, the 'crisis of the seventeenth century' and to the 'demographic transition' that dominates the end of the period. In considering both history and historiography, the chapter surveys the quantitative and theoretical bases upon which the discipline of historical demography rests, and suggests reasons for its strong links to economic history. Finally, the demographic model proposed by Thomas Malthus and widely utilized by historical demographers is called into question for both its own logic as well as for the inconsistencies with the historical data amassed over the past half century.

Keywords: Demographic transition, fertility control, family reconstitution, European marriage pattern, Malthus, diminishing returns, seventeenth-century crisis

Historical demography, the study of past population dynamics, is a field of inquiry that hardly existed prior to the middle of the twentieth century.* Following the devastations of two world wars, the harrowing influenza epidemic of 1918–19, and a long decade of global depression wedged in besides, the capacity for populations to recover their numbers was suddenly of much immediate interest. The 1950s pioneering work of the Frenchman Louis Henry allowed for the first time an estimate of a region’s population back into the seventeenth century, even in the absence of explicit census data. The clever techniques that he and his collaborators developed for the reconstruction of past population data turned demographic anecdotes into the serious quantitative study of...
fertility, mortality, nuptiality, migration, and corollary rates of growth, that continues to be the hallmark of the field today. In 1964, with the founding of the Cambridge Group for the History of Population and Social Structure, his techniques were further refined into a process called ‘family reconstitution’. This, when coupled with concomitant advances in high-powered computing, revolutionized the study of historical demography, allowing for the first estimate of the trajectory of a national population to be published in 1981. Suddenly, historians knew as much or more about the population dynamics of the early modern English countryside (the data for urban places being less tractable for the techniques in question) as they did about their own century.

Family reconstitution is only possible, however, where appropriate data, namely parish registers, exist with which to work. So the making of historical demography as a field was itself dependent on the historical events that had first dictated the collection and storage of the needed data, most immediately the Reformation and the Catholic response in the Council of Trent. But the interpretation of the quantitative results of family reconstitution is also an endeavour that is especially susceptible to the problems of dividing time into measurable, yet still meaningful, units. The statistical analysis of highly variable time-trend data—for example, fertility, mortality, and rates of natural increase—is acutely sensitive to the selection of starting and ending points; even small differences can radically change the appearance of one’s findings. The selection of an appropriate time scale for different types of questions is likewise critical. Some phenomena are best captured by attention to short-term fluctuations, whereas others require a longer (and probably smoother) view, particularly if we want to tease out long-term secular change from any underlying long-term (sometimes deceptively so) cyclical processes. But as John Maynard Keynes so famously quipped in 1923 in *A Tract on Monetary Reform*, ‘in the long run we are all dead’, reminding even demographers that at the level of the household, the most important events are those that either add or subtract members in the here and now. Hence, any discussion of the key issues in historical demography has to start with the dual problems of periodization and relevant time scale.

When E. H. Carr asked ‘What is History?’ in 1967, the answer was simple, if not exactly straightforward. In the ‘commonsense view’, history is the narrative of human experience and the explanation of why or how things change or stay the same. But both narratives and explanations of change (or stasis) over time require organizing principles if they are to be comprehensible at all. Another commonsense critique of the discipline, especially as it is taught to undergraduate students—that ‘history is just one damn thing after another’—is especially charged in regard to the historical demographer’s need to accumulate substantial runs of discrete facts. If for no other reason than simply to break up the long span of events into digestible parts, historians are forced to rely on conventions of periodization; that is, they must make a priori decisions about when and
where to start and end their stories or their analyses. Ideally, these break points should be either a matter of convenience—not informative in their own right about the conclusions of historical scholarship—or they should be selected deliberately and precisely on the basis of their historical coherence. But, alas, the former strategy turns out to be impossible, and the latter a tautology. Analysis cannot exist independent of the choice of boundaries: hence the professional anxiety about periodization well in evidence in volumes such as this *Handbook*.

Not surprisingly, phenomena characterized by the most dramatic change evoke the greatest anxiety for historians in regards to boundary setting. For that reason, the periodization of what we call ‘early modern Europe’ remains a terrible ‘muddle’, to quote from the evocative title of a review essay on this subject written by Randolph Starn in 2002.\(^3\) However we slice it, the early modern period has to account for a number of truly momentous changes. Most fundamentally, it is the locus of the transition to modernity, thus encompassing a number of possible readings depending on the particular flash points of the sub-field under study: pre-industrial to industrial; classical political economy to neo-classical growth theories; a natural-fertility regime to demographic transition; Renaissance to Enlightenment; superstition to scientific method; agrarian economy to the ‘age of steam’; or as two economists put it most recently while theorizing about fertility control, the ‘transition from Malthus to Solow’.\(^4\) Surely, all these developments did in fact transpire in some meaningful sense; they are facts, even if vague \textit{(p. 121)} ones. Our world—in the industrialized West, anyway—is demonstrably different from the earlier one. But how do we assign a date to ‘earlier’ and more vexing yet, how do we explain the move from one set of realities to the other?
The Demographic Transition

One of the most dramatic changes in the social life of contemporary Europeans from that of their pre-nineteenth-century ancestors has been the steep fall in the number of children the typical married couple can expect to rear over their lifespan. Nowhere in Europe today does total fertility (TFR) exceed the rate for replacement (that is, approximately 2.1 or enough children born to every woman to replace two parents plus a small margin to account for the slightly male-weighted sex ratio at birth). Indeed, in much of Europe, especially in the east and south, TFR is now well below replacement, with the consequence that a number of national populations have actually been shrinking. Yet even as recently as the early part of the last century, populations in those same
regions of Europe that are now in decline still exhibited high marital fertility, relatively low ages at marriage for women, and almost universal female nuptiality—all strong indicators of a ‘traditional’ society in the discourse of historical demographers. The world of our pre-nineteenth-century ancestors was also characterized by a typically much greater threat of premature death than we face today, with mortality rates that Michael W. Flinn characterized in his now classic study of the European population in the early modern period as ‘high and highly variable’. The development that simultaneously relieved Europe from the burden of bearing many children and suffering early deaths is, of course, the so-called ‘demographic transition’, a phenomenon that was most spectacularly accompanied by overall population growth rates unprecedented in all of human history.

The trajectory of Figure 4.1 only makes sense if we posit a particular chronology to the two aspects of the demographic transition: first there was a secular fall in mortality, particularly in infant and child mortality, followed with a time lag of varying durations by a dramatic fall in fertility. The mechanism(s) that generated that sequence are not so easily deduced from a simple reading of the numbers that lie behind Figure 4.1, however. The search for those mechanisms constitutes one of the main tasks of the discipline of historical demography.

How did such a dramatic shift in behaviour and experience come to pass? What cultural or socio-economic forces were at work that contributed to such radically altered demographic norms? Was this phenomenon the product of an expansion of opportunity and choice, or a sign of something else? Is there even a biological norm, a ‘natural’ demographic regime that we should expect to prevail in the absence of other intervening forces, or is all demographic behaviour of necessity embedded in cultural, economic, and social contexts? These questions have excited the curiosity of historians, economists, and public officials alike, not to mention the frequent ire of social commentators and religious leaders, ever since the features of the demographic transition began to emerge. They are especially critical questions for the early modern historian as the demographic transition is in many important respects a key feature demarcating the border between pre-modern and modern, both in scholarly and public discourse. Hence a critical component of any description of the demographic experience of early modern Europe has to be setting the stage for the transition that we know with the benefit of hindsight would come to dominate its future. As such, it is worth saying a bit more about it before we turn backwards to our main subject.

Two broad categories of explanation have dominated the literature focused on the demographic transition. Roughly these can be characterized as falling under the rubrics of ‘innovation’ and ‘adaptation’. Those who advocate innovation, most prominently the collaborators behind the European Fertility Project run out of the Office of Population
Research at Princeton University under the leadership of Ansley Coale, have argued that the most dynamic forces for change have been cultural. In particular they cite the geographic diffusion of knowledge about effective contraceptive techniques and a growing cultural attitude of acceptance for a separation between procreation and sex, something that had not been permissible in the West since at least the time of Augustine in the fourth century and likely from the very beginnings of Christianity. Critics of the European Fertility Project, most prominently Timothy Guinnane and John Brown, have argued instead that the most important forces behind the demographic transition are socio-economic in nature. They contend that despite individual variations in motive and circumstance, communities as a whole make vital decisions about if and when grown children will marry on the basis of economic opportunities, or conversely the costs associated with the same. This in turn will impact fertility through the mechanism that most societies in the past employed of punitive social norms against childbearing outside of matrimony. Even in the post-contraceptive period, they argue, fertility decisions still rest primarily on an economic valuation of the costs and benefits of bearing an additional child.

In contrast, the theorists who argue for innovation cite as evidence the complex of new attitudes about religion, the autonomy of the individual, the espoused equality between the sexes, and the relationship between humans and their environment that arose out of Enlightenment ideals—in short they privilege ideas—as the prime catalyst behind new cultural norms about the family. In particular they have embedded these notions into what has been articulated as a broader theory of ‘modernization’, a concept associated with processes of urbanization, rising literacy, declining religiosity, and the increasing diversification of the workforce. The advocates of adaptation also acknowledge the critical importance of changes in the composition of the workforce, levels of (female, especially) literacy, and increasingly urban populations. But in each of these specific phenomena they find reason to argue for new conditions that affected the supply of and demand for children. In urban industrial societies the cost of children rises substantially as housing becomes more expensive and women working outside of the household must contract specially for childcare provision. If married couples live far away from their families of origin childcare becomes even more expensive as kin networks cannot supplement paid care. At the same time, the demand for children falls as they are now occupied full time by schooling and there is no locally relevant work for them to perform as had been the case when their families lived on a farm where simple chores were plentiful. Even marriage itself may become more expensive as the price of land rises, and prolonged schooling delays entry into full adulthood.

It is worth noting at this juncture the irony that for the innovation and the adaptation theorists alike, the mechanisms in contention all concern fertility behaviour, and in
particular its limitation. However, the simple model of demographic transition clearly posits that mortality is the variable that moves first. It is not that historians have ignored the question of what factor(s) precipitated the great decline in mortality that ushered in the modern world; far from it. Theories abound, about sanitation infrastructure, medical discoveries, technological advances in food production and other goods necessary for survival, the prevalence of violence, household hygiene, social and/or public policy, and the underlying virulence of diseases themselves, to name just the most important. But the quest to understand mortality decline has unfolded as something of a data puzzle rather than a fierce battle of competing fundamental beliefs about the deep agents of social change. Tracking mortality changes has been a mostly cooperative search for evidence that can implicate the malevolent forces at work that harmed our ancestors so much more powerfully than ourselves. Although scholars have disagreed about which of the improvements listed above were the most felicitous in their contribution to the decline of mortality, none of the resulting debates have elicited anywhere near the same intensity of ideological fervour that the problem of fertility decline has. The primacy of fertility control over against mortality decline, and the degree to which either or both are endogenous to the demographic system itself, are issues to which we must attend when we turn to the early modern period itself.

The Population Contours of Early Modern Europe

Our first task is simply to document the demographic experience of early modern Europe, a historical category that encompasses more than three centuries and a peninsular landmass of nearly 10 million square kilometres. At the start of our period (Table 4.1), Europe (from Ireland to Russia west of the Urals, and from the northern shore of the Mediterranean to Scandinavia) had a population of approximately 68 million; by 1750 that number had more than doubled to approximately 143 million. Thus, over a period of 350 years Europe experienced an annualized average growth rate of only 0.32 per cent. Of course, these totals mask a great deal of chronological and spatial variation, not to mention variability in how differential rates of growth were achieved; herein lies our particular interest.
### Table 4.1 Europe's population 1300–1800 (000)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Region</th>
<th>1300</th>
<th>1400</th>
<th>1500</th>
<th>1600</th>
<th>1700</th>
<th>1750</th>
<th>1800</th>
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<td>2,400</td>
<td>2,900</td>
<td>3,600</td>
<td>5,250</td>
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<tr>
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<td>2,700</td>
<td>3,500</td>
<td>4,450</td>
<td>5,450</td>
<td>6,300</td>
<td>9,250</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scotland</td>
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<td>700</td>
<td>800</td>
<td>1,000</td>
<td>1,200</td>
<td>1,260</td>
<td>1,630</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ireland</td>
<td>1,400</td>
<td>700</td>
<td>800</td>
<td>1,000</td>
<td>1,900</td>
<td>3,120</td>
<td>5,200</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Netherlands</td>
<td>800</td>
<td>600</td>
<td>950</td>
<td>1,500</td>
<td>1,950</td>
<td>1,950</td>
<td>2,100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Belgium</td>
<td>1,400</td>
<td>1,200</td>
<td>1,300</td>
<td>1,300</td>
<td>1,900</td>
<td>2,300</td>
<td>2,900</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>France</td>
<td>16,000</td>
<td>12,000</td>
<td>15,000</td>
<td>18,500</td>
<td>21,500</td>
<td>24,600</td>
<td>29,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>8,000</td>
<td>9,000</td>
<td>13,300</td>
<td>13,500</td>
<td>15,500</td>
<td>18,100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>4,500</td>
<td>5,000</td>
<td>6,800</td>
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<td>9,300</td>
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<td>1,200</td>
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<td>1,000</td>
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<td>1,700</td>
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<td>12,800</td>
<td>15,500</td>
<td>18,300</td>
<td>24,300</td>
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<tr>
<td>Germany</td>
<td>13,000</td>
<td>8,000</td>
<td>11,000</td>
<td>16,200</td>
<td>14,100</td>
<td>17,500</td>
<td>24,500</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Poland</td>
<td>2,000</td>
<td>1,500</td>
<td>2,000</td>
<td>2,500</td>
<td>2,800</td>
<td>3,700</td>
<td>4,300</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Balkans</td>
<td>6,000</td>
<td>5,000</td>
<td>5,500</td>
<td>7,000</td>
<td>8,550</td>
<td>9,900</td>
<td>12,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Russia (European)</td>
<td>15,000</td>
<td>11,000</td>
<td>15,000</td>
<td>16,000</td>
<td>13,000</td>
<td>22,000</td>
<td>35,000</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Historical Demography

| EUROPE | 93,700 | 67,850 | 84,850 | 107,050 | 114,850 | 143,230 | 188,630 |

Based upon Table 6 in Paolo Malanima, *Pre-Modern European Economy: One Thousand Years (10th–19th Centuries)* (Leiden, 2009), 9.

Did the European population grow evenly across east and west, north and south, mountain and plain, coast and interior, village, town, and capital city alike? Or did it tilt toward favoured locales or eco-zones? Was it accompanied by increasing density in a limited number of urban agglomerations? And if such places grew, did they do so under their own steam as it were, by natural growth, or rather by importing surplus persons born in the countryside? Was mortality high, but accompanied by an even higher fertility; or were both sometimes low, allowing for steady growth but with little pressure? How variable were these factors, both across time and space? If mortality was high, what factors triggered it? If fertility was low, what mechanisms limited it in the age before reliable contraception? Answers to these questions are the basic object of our inquiry.

The broad contours of European population development from the Black Death (1348–51) to 1750 are generally agreed upon, even if individual scholars continue to dispute some of the numbers for specific sub-regions or time periods. Not surprisingly, this is especially the case where the estimates must rest on less complete data than is to be desired. Generally, demographic data are less secure for the earlier periods than the later, and for the eastern and southern parts of Europe than for the north and west, with the notable exception of Italy for which the data are often quite strong. In the first decade of the fourteenth century, prior to the depredations of the greatest famine known at least in western European history (1315–17) and the devastation associated with the arrival of bubonic plague into Europe in 1348, population was at a peak that would not be attained again until the close of the sixteenth century. Most scholars agree that the Black Death and subsequent outbreaks of plague killed between one-third and one-half of the population, with pockets of even greater loss counterbalanced by a few places that escaped unscathed. Little data exists that allows us to measure mortality in the fifteenth century, but the limited evidence we do have for several English populations suggests that it continued to be high, and highly variable, until the final decades of the 1400s. Perhaps as early as 1490 and certainly by the beginning of the sixteenth century all of Europe, including the far north and European Russia, moved into a long century of catch-up growth. Whether this was driven primarily by increases in fertility or falls in mortality, or both, is difficult to say given the extreme paucity of evidence before the parish registration system began in large parts of Europe during the second half of the century. Not surprisingly, those who see fertility control as the prime mover of the early modern demographic system, especially as in the case of the Cambridge Group in
regards to England, are most likely to theorize a loosening up of constraints on fertility to explain the onset of the ‘long sixteenth-century’ boom. Conversely, those who subscribe to the high pressure model of late medieval population dynamics are more inclined to see the sixteenth-century boom as evidence that mortality was lessening in its severity.10

Regardless of its source, however, there is no doubt that the sixteenth century witnessed a full recovery from the setbacks of the fourteenth and early fifteenth centuries, more or less all across Europe. The previously sparsely populated northern Low Countries actually experienced a near doubling of their population over this century, a harbinger of the demographic vitality and general prosperity in store for them in the next. Urbanization also made great strides over this century, and not just in the Low Countries although that region was uniquely dense in its settlement.11 Capital cities, ports, and other central nodes in trading networks enjoyed substantial growth too, in no small measure by attracting migrants from their surrounding hinterlands. Already in this period, there is evidence of an urban mortality penalty, undoubtedly produced by the easier transmission of disease from person to person in densely populated places.

The upswing of the sixteenth century was not to last, however. By the second decade of the seventeenth century population growth had slowed nearly everywhere; and as the weather grew colder, and social dislocation of various sorts intensified (a subject of detailed examination later in this chapter), population growth stopped more or less altogether. Indeed, in the especially unfortunate zones of the German lands and central Europe the ravages of the Thirty Years’ War (1618–48) actually caused population losses on a significant scale, erasing nearly half of the gains achieved in the previous century. The only parts of Europe to escape the population reversals of the seventeenth century were the newly independent Dutch Republic which managed to actually grow at an annualized rate of 0.3 per cent, and England which also grew, if not quite as impressively at 0.2 per cent. In the case of England for which we have the most complete data we know that a decline in fertility owing to later or foregone marriages was a more important factor in the slowdown than were spikes in mortality. However, that was almost certainly not the case for much of Europe, for which as in many other parts of the world for which we have evidence, the climate deterioration spelled agrarian disaster, with its attendant famines or epidemics.

Finally, in the last decades of the period under consideration in these volumes, population began to grow again everywhere with the notable exception of the Dutch Republic—a victim of military struggle with a much larger France and economic competition with an exceptionally vital England then on the cusp of radically changing itself and the rest of the world for the foreseeable future. By this point, annual mortality rates which had been ‘high and highly variable’ as the Middle Ages drew to a close were now much less volatile and their trend line was broadly downward in direction. Fertility, even in those places
where it had long been kept in check by what John Hajnal styled the European Marriage Pattern (characterized by relatively high rates of 10–15 per cent remaining permanently celibate, delayed marriage for women to the mid or later twenties, and small age discrepancies between spouses), had not yet begun the steep fall it would take as part of the demographic transition ahead. In the newly favourable conditions that gradually re-emerged by the last decades of the seventeenth century and the beginning of the eighteenth, population not only recovered any losses of the preceding period, but for the first time in history began to exceed the very gradual population growth that had been achieved even under the best of circumstances in the past. To take England for example, in the fifty years between 1700 and 1750, the population increased at what was then an incredible rate of 1 per cent a year, five times its rate during the chronological seventeenth century. This was surely the dawn of a new world.

**Theories of Population Change**

As significant as it was for historical demographers to have been able to secure the evidence needed to document the narrative of population change just outlined above, such data are not interesting simply for their own sake. What is truly of historical interest is how these patterns came to be the way they were; and even more crucially, what impact they had in turn on the social structure of various societies of early modern Europe, most obviously, of course, the trajectory of their economies. Not only are the answers to these questions of particular interest for this period that anticipated the demographic transition and the advent of modernity, but the very quest to understand, or even to predict demographic variation is itself a product of this same period. Actually, it was only at the very end of the early modern period—just after the boundary date for this volume—that the first systematic theory of population dynamics was articulated. In 1798 the Reverend Thomas Robert Malthus, a Fellow of Jesus College, Cambridge and a curate in the Church of England, published the first version of his famous *Essay on the Principle of Population*. While there is much that one might say about the emendations and subtle changes in Malthus’s own thinking across the six versions of his *Essay* (updated for the last time in 1826), for our purposes here it will suffice to make explicit the basic tenets of his theory as it made its way into all subsequent discourse about population dynamics.¹²

Malthus was a student of classical economics, and as such subscribed to the belief that land is the most fundamental and also the most constrained of all the productive resources, one moreover subject to diminishing returns. In this context all growth is of necessity limited by the availability of land not yet under exploitation. If either population or consumption per capita were to rise, additional production could only be forthcoming with the application of additional labour and capital to ever less productive land reserves.
That in turn must lead inexorably to a fall in both returns to capital and wages. Indeed, Malthus is often associated with the so-called ‘iron law of wages’, a theory that predicts that over the long run wages will always revert to the level necessary for the subsistence of the worker. In such a world anything that limits the growth of population raises the standard of living, even if that something is epidemic disease, famine, or warfare, the mainstays of Malthus’s so-called ‘positive check’. Similarly counter-intuitive, policies intended to support the poor in times of distress can only serve to depress their wages further if those policies allow the poor to persevere in making improvidential marriages. Additional children must inevitably follow given the incapacity for restraint within marriage that Malthus believed to be the natural state of mankind. In a nutshell, then, the Malthusian population model presumes a world in which agricultural production can only expand arithmetically, while population unchecked will expand exponentially.

More than anything else, it was the iron law of wages and the tolerance for the corrective suffering of the poor that earned economics the sobriquet ‘the dismal science’ from nineteenth-century commentators. But it was Malthus’s alternative mechanism of the ‘preventive check’—that is, limitations on fertility effected through limitations on nuptiality—that most fully captured the imaginations of the new historical demographers who emerged on the scene in the 1960s and 1970s, armed as they were with an ever-more sophisticated arsenal of quantitative techniques and a previously unimaginable computing capacity for the analysis of long runs of data. While their efforts were first directed to the documentation of the seemingly frequent, and always tragic, visitations of the Malthusian positive checks over the long period leading up to the Industrial Revolution, the discovery of anomalous quantitative results increasingly brought into question a simple reading of Malthusian theory backwards onto the early modern period.

The most immediate problem for the Malthusian orthodoxy is that of the modern world itself. For there has been population growth of unprecedented scope, simultaneous with the most formidable enrichment the world has ever known, an enrichment that may not have been equally distributed, but nonetheless did more to raise the living standards of the poor than any redistribution of eighteenth-century prosperity could have done. This glaring contradiction within the theory, however, was easily enough resolved. The Industrial Revolution itself was said to have changed the rules of the game. It removed for us, or for the West anyway, the constraints natural to an ‘organic economy’ to allow the capture of the previously locked-up-for-millennia storage bank of the sun’s energy in the form of seemingly boundless fossil fuel reserves. Hence, the Reverend Malthus became the prophet of an age that was already passing before his own eyes although he could not see it. Nonetheless, for the reading of the past he retained his seat of honour, widely hailed as the most perceptive (or at least the most useful) of the theorists.
In this regard the legacy of the Black Death looms large. For the one clear case of a dramatic rise in wages following a dramatic fall in population in every place it can be measured, occurred in the aftermath of that catastrophic event. If the fourteenth century were our only data point, the Malthusian law of wages would seem secure. But it is not our only data point, of course, and therein lies an additional problem. As the data available for analysis have become more abundant, and the quantitative techniques for examining them more sophisticated, the discrepancies with the expected Malthusian homeostatic regularities have grown harder to reconcile. Where we can measure it with some accuracy in the English data, mortality does not correlate very well with spikes in food prices, not even with the addition of time-lagged variables and sophisticated regression techniques. Similarly, wages do not seem to rise following mortality crises (with the already noted exception of the Black Death), nor fall very easily either. Real wages on the other hand were extremely volatile because they were so sensitive to fluctuations in the price level, suggesting that prices served as the main shock absorber in the early modern economy. Fertility also fails to respond in any discernible way to changes in real income. As George Grantham has so neatly summarized this literature, ‘convergence to the Malthusian steady state occurred on the time scale of centuries, not generations, which suggests a weak Malthusian constraint at best’.14

The Crisis of the Seventeenth Century

One way to parse these discrepancies between the regressions and the theory is to focus our lens on one particularly salient episode towards the end of our period when the data are at their most complete, and the narrative record speaks of precisely the kind of events that one might associate with the dismal science of the positive check: the so-called ‘crisis of the seventeenth century’. The initial articulation of the crisis came from Eric Hobsbawm in 1954 in the pages of Past & Present. He used it in an effort to explain the commercial collapse and retrenchment of productive capacity in both the agricultural and industrial sectors of the European economy from the 1620s through the 1640s. Hobsbawm, however, had a larger agenda—to breathe fresh life into what had become a rather stale debate between Marxist historians about the proper way to understand the European economy in its transition from feudalism to capitalism. But the crisis concept was quickly adopted by an eclectic mix of other (that is, non-Marxist and non-economic) historians and transformed into a true ‘general’ crisis of the seventeenth century. As such, it has lived on ever since. Although widely decried as too general to be believable, too wrong in its specifics to carry validity, and even too vague to mean much of anything at all, it remains, nonetheless, an indispensable organizing principle for the division of
historical time, as even a passing glance at the recent literature centred in early modern Europe reveals.\textsuperscript{15}

A crisis, by definition, is ideally suited to explaining a transition, even if it can do so only metaphorically; its clear chronological necessity resonates perfectly with the kind of narrative analysis that is at the core of the historical enterprise. A crisis must first arise out of some kind of a steady state (the stresses and strains of which are often as unnoticed as they are resisted), which is made acute in a moment of critical alteration (or decision), all of which is followed by a resolution to a new steady state. What is a better term than \textit{crisis} to describe changes as momentous as those that ushered in the modern world? Historians’ recourse to the crisis concept for the seventeenth century across the various sub-fields of their discipline may not be surprising after all. As the contributions to two recent journal special issues that revisited the topic make clear, the language of crisis was attractive to cultural, demographic, economic, intellectual, political, and social historians alike.\textsuperscript{16}

Despite the obvious temptation, however, we cannot rely on the crisis concept to do all of the desired work on its own. To be explanatory of observed change, a crisis must have comprehensible origins. There must be a way to account for the disruption of the prior steady state—either by invoking an easily identifiable exogenous shock from outside the system or by explaining it as a result of complex endogenous forces emanating out of what might have been only an illusory steady state preceding it. The complication lies in the details, all of which vary considerably for each of the sub-fields that have adopted the crisis of the seventeenth century as an explanandum for the emergence of modernity in its various registers. These problems are especially acute for the field of historical demography.

At first glance, it might seem that historical demography would have a much greater affinity for a crisis-centred explanatory mechanism than other sub-fields in history. After all, this discipline has long been acquainted with subsistence crises and mortality crises more generally, both ancient and modern. The classic features of the \textit{crise de type ancien} are well known from the pioneering work of François Simiand and Ernest Labrousse and that of their many followers among multiple generations of \textit{Annaliste} historians and historical demographers. They follow from the Malthusian ‘natural’ limits to an agricultural system characterized by a fixed supply of land and a static agricultural technology, subject to diminishing returns to capital and labour. Any sizable expansion of the population had to be accompanied by commensurate deteriorations in the standard of living. As the classic price scissors (with their dual blades of stagnant nominal wages and rising grain prices) began to close, mortality could not do otherwise than to escalate.\textsuperscript{17}
Population crises of the modern variety are more complex. In an ironic twist not lost on the demographers who study them, modern population crises are increasingly understood as coming in one of two contradictory flavours. On the one hand are the spectacular manifestations of human disaster that follow from resource-entitlement failures of a kind most fully described in Amartya Sen’s work, and on the other, are the problems associated with aging populations that result from decades of below-replacement fertility behaviour. The first kind of crisis manifests itself exclusively in the poverty-stricken global South, whereas the latter type occupies headlines and policy prescriptions across the global North.

With an intellectual pedigree such as the one just described, how could the field of historical demography not warm easily and widely to a concept so well suited to its own preoccupations as the crisis of the seventeenth century? To quickly review the basic chronology, it was after a long period of population collapse and subsequent stagnation, precipitated by the Black Death, that the population of Europe began to grow again in the early sixteenth century. This growth proved to be both sustained and substantial enough to make good most of the losses incurred during the late Middle Ages. However, the expansion came to an abrupt halt after the first two decades of the seventeenth century, with admittedly a great deal of regional variation in the actual severity of the population decline. It was only with the gradual cessation of widespread plague visitations during the long seventeenth century—the last western European outbreak occurred in 1720 in Marseilles, to be followed by a final outbreak in Moscow in the early 1770s—that the devastations of the mid-seventeenth century came to an end. By the middle of the eighteenth century, most of Europe was well on its way to a full recovery. But none of these developments would have been inconsistent with the broad outlines of population movements over a long pre-industrial past. The unprecedented population growth of the late eighteenth, and especially the nineteenth, century still lay in an as-yet unimaginable future.

Is this scenario enough to constitute a crisis of a fundamental nature—that is, a set of circumstances capable of creating a whole new population dynamic and not simply the cyclical fluctuation of population numbers routinely evidenced over long periods of human history? Or, perhaps more to the point, was the widespread population growth of the sixteenth century responsible in some direct way for the economic, social, political, military, and biological perturbations of the seventeenth century? Should we think of the other elements of the general crisis of the seventeenth century as materially influenced by the population pressure that had accumulated during the long sixteenth-century expansionary run, as a crisis of the kind predicted by Malthus and consistent with the interpretation advanced by M. M. Postan of the calamitous fourteenth century as well?
As recent historical work increasingly shows, it is clearly not the case that sixteenth-century population pressure produced a straightforward kind of Malthusian crisis (or climacteric). To the extent that the Malthusian mechanism was at work, it was through channels other than a direct link from living standards to either mortality or fertility. Furthermore, a complete justification for the use of the term crisis implies that a lasting change of regime must have ensued, not simply a cyclical return to experience as before. Only in hindsight does the eighteenth-century recovery appear distinctive from that of the sixteenth century. Certainly no contemporary could have predicted the shape of the demographic transition on the basis of lived experience, even after the take-off had begun in the last quarter of the century.

If anything, the eighteenth-century recovery was likely to have been less urban-intensive than the sixteenth-century expansion had been; an increasing share of urban workers engaged in non-farm labour would have seemed of greater importance at the time than the mere accumulation of people. Not until the nineteenth century do we find evidence of a change in population growth that is sui generis rather than just a difference in degree. Nothing about the eighteenth-century expansion would have indicated in advance that population would be able to keep on rising without eventually triggering the seemingly inevitable return of limiting mortality episodes.

The critical problem for historical demographers who want to adopt the crisis of the seventeenth century as a central organizing principle for their analysis is how to fit a system most often described by self-equilibrating, homeostatic mechanisms into a concept that by definition should include, first, acute disruption and then some kind of entirely new experience. We need to remember that Hobsbawm’s original formulation of the crisis was as a fundamentally economic phenomenon, precipitated by outmoded production strategies favouring the manufacture and exchange of luxury goods for which the market was ultimately too limited to facilitate new modes of capitalist production. A massive trade slump and a concomitant realignment of productive capacity, coupled with a rapid expansion of slave economies in the New World, facilitated the emergence, on the other side of the crisis, of newly dominant bourgeois (and capitalist) players, notably the Dutch and the English. Their rise came directly at the expense of the old landed nobility.

One key marker of the complete success of this transfer of power between social groups and their national embodiments lay precisely in the ability of the Dutch Republic, and to a lesser extent England, to stave off the population losses suffered elsewhere during the middle decades of the seventeenth century. Yet any causal role for demographic change in Hobsbawm’s original model was secondary at best. Hence, despite the seeming logic of an easy fit between the pre-industrial demographic experience (marked as it was by
highly variable fluctuations in mortality, and, to a lesser extent, fertility) to a crisis model, this effort has not in fact been without its sceptics.

Nevertheless, many scholars who were attracted by the explanatory possibilities of 'crisis' for the seventeenth century began to conceive of it as a fundamentally demographic phenomenon in its own right. Not only was the retrenchment of population seen to be a key component of the crisis, but demographic losses themselves were construed as causal in the many disruptions to other parts of the social system. That the seventeenth century became in the scholarship of the 1960s and 1970s the locus of the last great Malthusian crisis of the traditional sort is ironic, since, as many have already noted, this dating places the end of the Malthusian system a full century before Malthus had even had a chance to articulate his famous proposition about the relationship between population and the resource capacity of the land. But the seventeenth century bears the distinction of witnessing—at least in western Europe—the last old-style contraction, a crise de type ancien, as described earlier. In this reading, the most important features of the seventeenth-century crisis were the sequence of harvest failures until the 1660s, the virulent resurgence of plague and other epidemic diseases, and the outbreak of continent-wide violent struggle, most notably in the deadly grip of the Thirty Years’ War.\(^\text{19}\)

This last feature of the old-style mortality crisis—the sword-wielding, red horseman of war—may be the hardest to fit squarely into a conventional Malthusian narrative of population collapse in the wake of resource depletion. Indeed, Myron Gutmann, in his extremely thoughtful examination of the effects of war on the rural population of the southern Low Countries from the sixteenth to eighteenth centuries, ultimately treats the demographic impact of military activity as secondary to what he sees as an ‘independent economic determinant.’\(^\text{20}\) His extensive documentation of the highly variable recovery experiences of different regions in response to similar military losses is supportive of this conclusion. Indeed, even in central Europe, where the worst ravages of the Thirty Years’ War occurred, war-related fatalities differed significantly across regions, as did the speed of recovery.

Nonetheless, the impact of decades of violent conflict was far from trivial. Although these numbers remain contested, war mortality rates seem to have been, on average, about 30 per cent for urban areas and 40 per cent for rural ones throughout the relevant period: figures which reveal the intense devastation of the countryside by marauding armies, and the significance of migration from the countryside into the towns during wartime. Moreover, as with other manifestations of seventeenth-century demographic collapse—such as climate-driven harvest shortfalls and episodes of epidemic disease visitation—the depletion in population caused by the Thirty Years’ War is now regarded as a significant contributor to the overall crisis of these years. Sheilagh Ogilvie, in a
review essay on Germany and the seventeenth-century crisis, argued that the war ‘forced all European states to place intolerable pressures on their subjects. The German crisis, in short, exported disorder to the whole of Europe.’ By this kind of reasoning, the various mortality episodes become not just the inevitable consequence of economic contraction and political upheaval; they become the arguably semi-independent variables driving other aspects of the system.

The fullest exposition of this line of reasoning can be found in Jack Goldstone’s monumental *Revolution and Rebellion in the Early Modern World*. Although his Malthusian commitments are hardly orthodox (his model does not adopt the basic logic of the classical economists, which posits land scarcity as the inevitable break on growth), demographic change sits at the heart of his analysis, providing the first movement that other phenomena follow. Goldstone himself identifies his approach to population dynamics as ‘post-Malthusian and nonlinear’.

Two important features distinguish Goldstone’s theory from that of the strict Malthusians. First, Goldstone articulates a theory of independent mortality movements that are not only in origin exogenous; they also swamp in importance any movements in fertility. Mortality crises were dominated by largely independent patterns of epidemic disease or triggered by an exogenous deterioration in the climate, which became unsuitable in many places for arable agriculture. Goldstone argues that ‘the rule for early modern populations was simple: when mortality was low, the population grew; when mortality was high, the population declined or stagnated. Fertility control merely affected the rate of growth or decline.’ Second, he argues that even small changes in population could have large social effects because what mattered most to the dynamics of a system was not the absolute size of any growth or decline, but the relative change in the size of those groups already in a marginal position, however that position might be defined for any given episode.

But for Goldstone, it is not enough to merely reject the homeostatic, fully equilibrating mechanisms of Malthus’s original formulation. He also proposes that once population dynamics are set in motion, they become the agents of change for the other features of complex social systems. His analysis strives to find ‘the distributional effects as societies adjusted, whether badly or well, to changes in the relative balance of food and people. These changes—in prices and in the welfare of different sectors of society—are the politically important effects of population change.’

Armed with this goal as well as with a theory of population dynamics driven by exogenous, and highly influential, mortality episodes, Goldstone discovers a truly general crisis of the (long) seventeenth century, although he never actually identifies his framework as such. His model can explain the political rumblings of western European
The Contradictions of the Malthusian Paradigm

Demographic events, most especially mortality spikes, can never really serve as independent variables if one adopts a strict Malthusian worldview. The homeostatic equilibrating mechanism built into the iron logic of the ‘law of population’ rests on a
circular chain of reactions that link fertility, mortality, and living standards. Hence the near impossibility of sorting out the direction of causal relationships, no matter how sophisticated the statistical techniques brought to bear on actual historical data. The temporal ebb and flow of this system is not readily captured by a comparative statics exercise, not least because the time scale needed for the different links to recalibrate themselves is not itself consistent.

This problem, though pointed out and acknowledged on numerous occasions, is also routinely ignored. The strongest notes of concern have been raised by David Weir and George Grantham, working primarily on French historical data, and by Ronald Lee, Michael Anderson, and, most recently, John Hatcher and Estaban Nicolini, all of whom largely concentrate on English sources across the medieval and early modern periods. As Lee and Anderson note, the problem lies fundamentally in the ‘endogeneity of all observed variables in the Malthusian system (fertility, mortality, population size and real wages)’, leading to what Weir describes as the ‘peculiarly a-historical character of any equilibrium analysis’.  

Yet, as already noted, the broad sweep of the European demographic experience before the nineteenth century appears to fit the Malthusian model readily enough, especially when response times are calculated in centuries, rather than in the decades of individual lifetimes. The well-documented long swings of population growth and decline, coupled with episodes of devastation that are consonant with the dreary predictions of the Malthusian positive check, make for a compelling reading. In such a narrative, the seventeenth century fits as easily as any other downturn to the logic of necessary contraction. Harvest failure, plague, and war all contributed their part, even if in varying doses across the European landscape. On the other side of the crisis, the eighteenth-century population expansion can serve then as the final bridge between the increasingly obsolete Malthusian past, and a new era inaugurated by a releasing of the old technological constraints on the returns to labour, capital, and/or land. Thus, population growth in the new, post-Malthusian, era could be not only positive as in past phases of expansion, but also accelerating, at least until slowed by other forces new to the mechanisms of regulation, all on the fertility side of the equation.

This story would have been all well and good had the evidence emerging gradually from the several large, multi-authored demographic projects of the 1980s been able to confirm, with sufficient conviction, the master narrative of mortality spikes following periods of dearth—whether demarcated by a subsistence crisis of the classic variety in the agrarian economy or by a fall in real wages, either farming or proto-industrial. The groundwork for the resulting shift in stress away from the importance of mortality for regulating the homeostatic system had already been laid in a number of studies that tried (and failed) to substantiate the hypothesized link between food prices and mortality—a
link that supposedly worked directly via famine or, more obliquely, through famine-induced disease vectors. There can be no doubt that people suffered when the harvest was short, but it became increasingly clear that they did not actually starve to death nearly as often as everyone once assumed. No amount of rigorous statistical testing has been able to discover any consistently strong relationship between harvest failures and mortality crises using data from western Europe.29

Even more damning for a traditional Malthusian reading was the appearance in 1987 of Massimo Livi-Bacci’s *Population and Nutrition*. Livi-Bacci effectively severed the remaining strong arm of the positive check, the link between nutrition and epidemic disease.30 He found almost no medical or historical statistical evidence connecting the major disease sources of mortality crises and the nutritional state of individuals exposed to those diseases. The more recent work of scholars such as Robert Fogel offers another way to theorize the link between access to food and mortality experience—the study of human height as a window into human nutrition.31 But now the mechanism is no longer focused on famine and its corollary, crisis mortality, but on high ‘normal’ mortality as influenced by the long-term nutritional status of populations. As such, it is a much more subtle mechanism than the old-style subsistence crisis had been. Chronic malnourishment, as marked by stunting and poor teeth, leads to chronic high mortality. Although both condition and outcome are subject to long swings across time, neither is correlated closely with food prices or real wages in the short run.

**The Substitution of the Preventive Check**

But to backtrack some, before Fogel and others set about the task of extracting statistical representations of human health in the past from height records, other scholars had turned their attention away from the mortality mechanism altogether. They favoured instead the other leg of the Malthusian dyad, the so-called preventive (or more morally charged, prudential) check. Incidentally, Malthus did not believe that this mechanism, which worked by limiting fertility, was operative on nearly enough occasions, owing to the lusts and desires of the common man. Nevertheless, he surmised that when real wages fell and living standards were poor, fewer children would be born than would have been the case otherwise. Moreover, because this mechanism, if successfully applied, obviated the need for the positive check of an increase in mortality, societies that relied on fertility control came to be characterized as ‘low-pressure’ regimes, as opposed to their vile cousins the ‘high-pressure’ regimes, which featured young and universal marriage for women, high fertility, and consequent high mortality. On the basis of only limited evidence, most of it hearsay, Malthus had identified China as the quintessential
example of a high-pressure regime, the standard of human misery to which all European
societies, however deficient themselves, could be compared favourably.32

Indeed, Wrigley and Schofield successfully adopted the low-pressure mechanism as the
framework for their massive compilation of English demographic experience throughout
the early modern era. Their Population History of England, 1541–1871, based on the
family reconstitution of 404 English parishes published in 1981, famously emphasized the
power of fertility response over and against mortality, thereby making England the early
harbinger of the demographic transition yet to come. The initial presentation of their
research findings expressed some caution about their capacity to identify the relative
strength of the two mechanisms fully. Indeed they actually never succeeded in finding
any meaningful statistical link between real wages and fertility, nor any direct evidence
of the vital connection (p. 137) between real-wage trends and a change in age at first
marriage or the related phenomenon, the proportion of those who remained permanently
celibate—both serious challenges to the mechanisms of the Malthusian preventive check.
Nonetheless, the Cambridge Group project has increasingly come to be identified almost
exclusively with their strong commitment to the total efficacy of the preventive check, at
least for what they see as a happily exceptional England. This position has solidified so
strongly into orthodoxy that recent attempts to explain the transition from the high-
pressure regime of the late Middle Ages (the age of plague run rampant) to their low-
pressure regime of early modern England speculate (with no direct evidence of fertility
behaviour as support) that even the earlier period must have been characterized by
fertility limitation.33

The importance of this effort to rewrite the traditional narrative of the late medieval
trough can be better understood when we consider the problem that this period creates
for the strength of the broader Malthusian case. As Hatcher so aptly notes, ‘We all know
[that] the fifteenth century was a time when low and falling population coexisted with
high and rising living standards.’ This, of course, is not to be expected in a Malthusian
world, at least not for very long. Surely, more than a century is too long to constitute a
plausible exception?34

Whatever reservations scholars might have about the adequacy of the Cambridge Group’s
sample—the statistical analysis of the data, the accuracy of the starting assumptions, or
the logic of the model—in the final analysis, the Cambridge Group clearly moved the
English experience increasingly out of the orbit of the general-crisis literature. Although
these scholars did not abandon the master Malthusian narrative, they softened it
considerably by placing their emphasis on the response mechanism of marriage
limitation, in the process making England so exceptional as to be no longer a plausible
example of a European-wide phenomenon characterized by crisis. Gone were the
temporally sharp fluctuations of the harvest year by year, or even the relatively longer-
term episodes of distress associated with epidemic diseases or rampaging armies. In their place were long swings in the relative abundance or scarcity of household niches and hence in the ease or restriction of household formation via marriage. These trends were dictated by long swings in population growth or stagnation resulting from relatively modest changes in marriage rates and female ages at first marriage. As population grew, household formation became more restricted, allowing population growth to retard again commensurately. But this view no longer carried the feel of the old-style demographic crisis. After all, a life of permanent celibacy is a far cry from a life wracked by spikes in the death toll, and it is clearly preferable to premature mortality.

### The European Marriage Pattern

The English experience identified in the *Population History of England* and its later companion volume, *English Population History from Family Reconstitution*, is not the only project that seems to make notions of a seventeenth-century demographic crisis obsolete, at least for the purposes of exploring historical demography. Another considerable body of work explores the so-called European Marriage Pattern (EMP), calling into question a periodization schema by dint of a fundamental break in the early modern period.

The EMP concept was first introduced by John Hajnal in the 1960s as part of a hypothesis about western European exceptionalism. He argued that west of a line running from St. Petersburg to Trieste marriages were late and non-universal. South and east of that line marriages followed the pattern one would expect of an agrarian society with early and universal marriage for women. Furthermore, to accommodate youthful brides, new couples were typically welcomed into the already established households of the bride’s father-in-law. In contrast to this dominant agrarian pattern, but consistent with the nuptiality-fertility-led dynamic framework adopted by Wrigley and Schofield and the Cambridge Group, Hajnal identified northwestern Europe in particular as uniquely characterized by relatively late ages at first marriage for both women and men, as well as by relatively high rates of permanent celibacy ranging between approximately 10 per cent and 30 per cent depending on specific time and place.35

As noted elsewhere in this volume, this West–East characterization is too simplistic to adequately capture the full regional diversity of experience that historical demographers of the Iberian peninsula, Italy, and parts of central Europe have demonstrated, particularly as one moves forward in time towards the nineteenth century.36 Even within the Northwest, first age at marriage fluctuated across a range, sometimes higher and sometimes lower, rather than just exhibiting a single centuries-long pattern.
Nevertheless, there is broad evidence that suggests that delayed marriage was more likely to occur in the British Isles, the Low Countries, and to a lesser extent parts of France and Germany, than it was further east or south, and, moreover, that this pattern emerged during earlier centuries. Sometimes the age at first marriage was remarkably high indeed (26 or even 27 for women and slightly higher for men), even by contemporary standards. Despite the presence of local variation and temporal fluctuations, there can be little doubt that fertility was held back in all those moments where marriage was restricted.

Mary Hartman’s book, *The Household and the Making of Europe*, views this marriage pattern as the single most salient fact about European social history. Hartman argues that the relatively late age of first marriage for women, and the resulting closeness in age between marriage partners, led to a radically different dynamic between the sexes, with social and economic consequences that bear directly on the unique path taken by Europe to modernization. Furthermore, she postulates that this pattern was certainly in place by the high Middle Ages, perhaps finding its roots already in the period of population collapse in late antiquity. From that point forward, the general experience of late and non-universal marriage was more important than any of the relatively minor cyclical fluctuations in the actual average age at marriage for brides. In her schema, the Malthusian response of nuptiality to changes in the standard of living (earlier and more pervasive marriage in prosperous times and later and less pervasive marriage when real wages declined) is trumped by a household-formation strategy that limited the baseline nuptiality of European society relative to all others, regardless of fluctuations in economic opportunity. This marriage pattern also made European households less stable across the generations than those of other agricultural societies, leading, according to Hartman, to the mass behaviours of ‘long-range planning, risk-taking, personal responsibility, and independence’.37

If the EMP was as consequential as has been argued in the literature, surely we ought also to be able to explain from whence it sprung. Various cultural arguments have been put forward, not surprisingly, most importantly that it was the result of the so-called ‘girl power’ that arose from Christian notions of mutuality in the selection of marriage partners.38 Recently, in a provocative article by Voigtländer and Voth the argument is brought full circle as they attribute the EMP to a demographic phenomenon in the first place.39 Specifically they argue that the EMP emerges only after the Black Death, and primarily in the northwest of Europe, in response to the fundamental labour market changes brought on by the massive decline in the labour force in the middle decades of the fourteenth century. Without sufficient workers to cultivate the arable, great swathes of land were converted to pasture, and stocked with ever-greater numbers of farm animals. Because women have a comparative advantage in the care of farm animals, this
land conversion not only conserved scarce male labour, but simultaneously induced previously under-utilized female labour to join the labour force, giving them both more power in their personal relationships, and a greater incentive to delay marriage while they worked in farm service. In short, more pasture meant more animals, and thus more women working and a new marriage pattern—all via the mechanisms of utility-maximizing behaviour. This effect was particularly strong in the northwest where the soil was intrinsically less productive of arable in the first place than was the case for eastern Europe, and where wages rose more steeply than further east or south. Needless to say, the fact that access to marriage remained limited even as wage rates continued to rise runs counter to the main Malthusian logic we have explored in earlier sections of this chapter.

The Voigtländer and Voth thesis, like Hartman’s, and like Wrigley and Schofield’s characterization of a centuries-long pattern of a low-pressure demographic regime for England (certainly for the entire early modern period, but possibly extending back into the late Middle Ages as well), stresses continuity over change. It is particularly inhospitable to theories that explain the transition to modernity by looking to the various (all acute) crises already outlined for the middle decades of the seventeenth century. Instead, explanations must rely on something much more subtle, such as the long and slow accumulation of the inadvertent benefits of a household-formation strategy that yielded a higher number of comparatively equal marital partnerships and lower mortality burdens to bring England, and western Europe more generally, into the modern age.

It is ironic that the recent historiography of the demographic contribution to ‘the great divergence’ has polarized into two diametrically opposed positions, both of which take as their guiding principle a belief in the remarkable longevity of certain social relationships. In the case of Clark, all of human history before 1800 succumbed to the stable, even if cyclical, constraints of a Malthusian population mechanism. In Hartman’s view of western Europe in general, and the Cambridge Group’s view of England in particular, the long period from the Middle Ages to the present is characterized by a household-formation strategy that is precociously ‘modern’ in its basic features, and fortuitously benign in its effects. Both of these schemes involve the claim that the result of this modern and benign behaviour was nothing short of the economic transformation of the West. As Hartman puts it succinctly towards the close of her book, ‘Late-marriage households were critical sites for change, including economic change that radiated into the wider society.’

Nonetheless, as Hartman herself acknowledges, this argument does not answer questions about the comparative rate of development within Europe. Hence, despite her frustration with the standard question of why ‘industrial transformation first occurred in England’, her analysis cannot easily account for why inheritance systems privileged family
patrimonies longer in France than in England—a question to which she does not ascribe great importance. It suggests, however, that even within the broad framework of a persistently unusual and strongly consequential household-formation strategy, such as that found in western Europe, a more nuanced narrative of events is needed to determine the causal trajectory of Europe’s transition to modernity. It seems likely that the seventeenth-century crisis may yet have a role to play in this analysis.\textsuperscript{41}

Conclusions

The many strands of work in historical demography that have emerged during the past half century have left no single, definitive narrative of European population behaviour across the early modern period. Surely, there were subsistence crises of the ancient variety, triggered by population pressure on food supplies, but there were also a great many mortality episodes driven by forces exogenous to population size. According to Geoffrey Parker, the deteriorating climate, engendered by the violence and frequency of seventeenth-century volcanic activity and the frequency of El Nino events, was the most important of these forces.\textsuperscript{42} Moreover, the capacity to rebound from these episodes of population decline varied substantially across time and place, as did the capacity for expansion during periods when living standards were high. Finally, the important contribution of marriage behaviour to the demographic equation seems to have been remarkably different for western Europe than for other agricultural societies; it fluctuated over a relatively small range in comparison to the gap between western Europe and all other areas (including not just East Asia, but much of central and eastern Europe as well). If marriage patterns were crucial, as Hartman proposes for cultural reasons and Voigtländer and Voth do for economic ones, but still broadly similar across western Europe for many centuries, what role could nuptiality have actually played in generating the shorter-term demographic variation discernible across the individual case studies that make up the landscape of early modern Europe? In short, what does it mean to posit a demographic crisis as one of the core elements in a generalized crisis of the seventeenth century if we have trouble even finding a moment of critical change among the demographic indicators themselves?

Be that as it may, historical demography continues to rely on the crisis concept for its broad narrative about fundamental changes in life expectancy and household formation, even if its narrow particulars do not explain any given set of demographic data particularly well. But the crisis concept must be made as sensible and as rigorous as possible if demographers are going to use it. We need to explain the relatively low long-term growth rate of populations prior to the seventeenth century and the relatively much faster rate of population growth from 1750 to the present—two fundamentally different
population experiences, even if the crisis between them was not especially consistent in any of its demographic details.

Further Reading


Flinn, Michael W. The European Demographic System, 1500–1820 (Baltimore, 1981).


Malanima, Paolo. Pre-Modern European Economy: One Thousand Years (10th–19th Centuries) (Leiden, 2009).


Parker, Geoffrey. Global Crisis: War, Climate Change and Catastrophe in the Seventeenth Century (New Haven, CT, 2013).


**Notes:**

(*) Large sections of this chapter first appeared in Anne E. McCants, ‘Historical Demography and the Crisis of the Seventeenth Century’, *Journal of Interdisciplinary History*, 40 (2009), 195–214. I am grateful to the editors and publishers of this journal for allowing me to reprint these here.


(8.) For purposes of this calculation 1400 has been taken as the starting date as it represents the status of the population after the substantial losses associated with the Black Death and subsequent outbreaks of plague from 1348 onwards. Population figures from Paolo Malanima, *Pre-Modern European Economy: One Thousand Years (10th–19th Centuries)* (Leiden, 2009), 9.

(9.) The basic data needed to chart the major developments were gleaned in a burst of demographic research beginning in the 1960s and 1970s, and are well summarized in Flinn, *European Demographic System*.
This debate has been nicely reviewed by Mark Bailey in a prize-winning essay: ‘Demographic Decline in Late Medieval England: Some Thoughts on Recent Research’, *The Economic History Review*, 49:1 (1996), 1–19.


American Historical Review, 113:4 (2008), 1029–1099; *Journal of Interdisciplinary History* 40:2 (2009–10), 145–303; see Donald Cuthbert Coleman, ‘Protoindustrialization: A Concept Too Many’, *Economic History Review*, 36:3 (1983), 446 for a trenchant critique of economic historians’ use of deliberately vague metaphors as the explanatory mechanisms for many of their most important objects of study, including this very transition denoted by the Marxists between feudalism and capitalism. Randolph Starn, in a relatively early contribution to the crisis debate in ‘Historians and “Crisis”’, *Past & Present*, 52 (1971), 3–22, offers a number of other plausible reasons why historians may have been so eager to adopt the terminology of a crisis, most of which cast the intellectual underpinnings of a turn to social–scientific discourse among historians in an unfavourable light (13–16).


(19.) Perhaps the most famous and influential statement of the crisis as Malthusian in the traditional sense can be found in Emmanuel le Roy Ladurie, The Peasants of Languedoc, trans. John Day (Champaign, IL, 1977; orig. pub. 1966, in French). But this was also the master narrative of Carlo Cipolla’s widely referenced Economic History of World Population (Harmondsworth, 1962).


(21.) The study of German demography during the period of the Thirty Years’ War remains clouded by the Nazi associations of Günther Franz, its most famous early practitioner. Nonetheless, recent work reviewing both his sources and his methodology suggests that his statistical conclusions may not be altogether wrong, although they cannot yet be broken down sufficiently by region. See John Theibault, ‘Demography of the Thirty Years War Re-revisited: Günter Franz and his Critics’, German History, XV (1997), 1–21, and Sheilagh Ogilvie, ‘Germany and the Seventeenth-Century Crisis’, Historical Journal, XXXV (1992), 417–441.


(23.) Goldstone, Revolution and Rebellion, 33–34, 28.

(24.) Goldstone, Revolution and Rebellion, 32.


(26.) It is interesting in this regard that Clark himself notes the failure of high Dutch wages to either stimulate fertility or reduce mortality, as the theory would predict. He finds similar irregularities in the English data as well, but neither case deters him in his belief in the efficacy of the Malthusian mechanisms; Clark, A Farewell to Alms, 102–103.


(29.) The most important attempts to link mortality and food prices were those by Andrew Appleby whose untimely death cut his work regrettably short. See, for example, Famine in Tudor and Stuart England (Stanford, 1977); Wrigley and Schofield, Population History of England, 1541–1871 (New York, 1989), esp. ch. 10.


(32.) It is worth noting further that simply the fact of lowering fertility would itself contribute to lower mortality given the continuing disproportionate importance of infant mortality in driving overall calculations of life expectancy.

(33.) Wrigley and Schofield, Population History, 421. For an excellent review and trenchant critique see Bailey, ‘Demographic Decline in Late Medieval England’, 1–19.

(34.) Hatcher, ‘Understanding the Population History’, 95. It is worth noting that the problem of circularity is at the core of this critique. If population were being held in check by some force acting from outside the closed Malthusian system, it would be possible for low population to be accompanied by high and rising living standards, without the latter being immediately translated back into a rising population.


(36.) See chapter 12, below: Mikołaj Szołtysek—‘Households and Family Systems’.


(39.) Voigtländner and Voth, ‘How the West “Invented” Fertility Restriction’, 2228.


(41.) Hartmann, *Household*, 234.

(42.) Geoffrey Parker, *Global Crisis: War, Climate Change and Catastrophe in the Seventeenth Century* (New Haven, CT, 2013), 684.

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Abstract and Keywords

The appearance of mechanical clocks has long been regarded as a decisive development for the emergence of the modern world. At the turn of the fourteenth century an escapement mechanism was developed from monastic alarms. The invention of an automatic hour-striking mechanism originated in Northern Italy about two generations later. Thereafter large turret clocks in all major cities sounded twenty-four hours of equal length for the urban population, and gradually rendered obsolete the unequal hours tolled from churches and abbeys. The introduction of the pendulum and the balance spring during the seventeenth century brought about a quantum leap in precision time keeping. The rise of highly differentiated clockwork manufacture enabled private individuals to acquire timepieces showing minutes and seconds. Industrial production processes, sports, and deep sea navigation benefited in many ways. Careful employment of time and punctuality became high-ranking social values.

Keywords: Clocks, watches, horological revolution, timing, scheduling, working hours, leisure, calendar reform

'Time' has been among the most frequently used nouns in many languages ever since the early modern era, and its meanings cover numerous concepts, debates, social attitudes, and technical developments. Aristotle’s concept of time as an eternal, uniform, and cyclical motion susceptible to the enumerating activity of the mind was paradigmatic in the field of natural philosophy. His approach was illustrated in the fourteenth century by Nicole Oresme (d. 1382) when he—and many others—likened the movement of the universe to a huge mechanical clock. Almost a millennium earlier, Saint Augustine (d. 430) had described the experience of time as a three-fold activity of the mind: memory, attention, and expectation, and he is therefore considered as a founder of subjective
concepts of time. He clearly expounded the Christian view of time as created simultaneously with the world. According to this perspective, historical time is a linear process which began with the Creation and would end with the Last Judgement. The Crucifixion was regarded as a unique event, evidence of the pre-history of Salvation.

Europe’s age of exploration and discovery informed Europeans about chronologies long established in foreign cultures. This encouraged scholars to seek to synchronize histories of these areas, and opened the way to the development of schemes of a universal history. The notion of the universe as a perfect celestial clock was rendered obsolete by astronomical observation and improved instrument measurement during the early modern era. Isaac Newton’s idea of an absolute, true, mathematical time moving eternally, homogeneously, and completely independently of any motion and of any observation was to prove formative for the philosophical conception of time. Time measured and divided by years, days, and hours Newton called relative time. The concept of history as a linear movement towards Salvation gave way to ideas of historical progress and an unlimited future.

Philosophical clarification was stimulated and accompanied by technological progress. The history of clockwork and of famous clockmakers has fascinated scholars of technology as well as clock collectors, and the research literature is vast. Collecting sources and dates concerning early mechanical clockwork and public clocks has been a collective effort, in progress for decades. The social history of time reckoning began with Gustav Bilfinger’s internationally influential work in 1892.¹ He was the first to examine the use of clock time in various contexts, and he demonstrated that its diffusion was brought about by the need for temporal coordination within cities.

The study of time by historians has advanced notably since the 1960s. Jacques Le Goff discussed the changes in time consciousness in the early years of European modernity.² He coined the very popular catchwords of ‘church time’ and ‘merchant time’ to describe the use of early clocks and the transition to clock time, though the binary divide embedded in this terminology has been criticized on empirical grounds. Shortly thereafter, using Marx’s and Engels’s excerpts from English factory reports, E. P. Thompson explored the importance of clocks and schedules for implementing modern industrial discipline, and pointed to the alienation of the workers produced by the loss of autonomous control over their personal time.³ Innumerable publications have elaborated this point. David Landes subsequently offered a comprehensive modern account of the ‘horological revolution’ in early modern history.⁴
The Advent of Mechanical Clocks

Early modern debates on the nature of time were greatly influenced by technical advances in the field of time measurement. Modern scholarship regards the appearance of the mechanical clock at the beginning of the fourteenth century as a major technological breakthrough and as one of the innovations upon which the West’s path to modernity was based. The use of clock time (by which is meant the reckoning in equal hours as the twenty-fourth part of the full day) profoundly changed attitudes towards time. It facilitated modern ways of organizing daily lives, and became a means and symbol of time discipline and enhanced productivity.

The first decisive step was the development of the verge-and-foliot escapement, an oscillating device, which could transform the momentum of a weight-driven rotating axle into regulated stop-and-go movement. This mechanism was probably an offspring of medieval monastic alarms, driven by water-clocks and provided with various bell-ringing devices with repeating strikes.

The new escapement mechanism does not seem to have been developed before the 1270s at the earliest. In 1271, Robertus Anglicus (Robert the Englishman), who was teaching astronomy at the University of Paris, talked about problems of reckoning with the equal hours used by astronomers, and on this occasion he remarked that the clockmakers (artifices horologiorum) up to that point had been trying in vain to construct a wheel that turned precisely in accordance with the equinoctial cycle, the movement of the equinox around the earth during a full day. If they managed to succeed, there would be a reliable clock (horologium) more suitable for determining the equal hours than any other astronomical instrument.

During the next few decades, new clocks were developed which were made from iron, and were heavier and more expensive. From 1300 onwards, moreover, references to clocks outside religious houses became more frequent. Cathedral chapters built great clocks which drove astronomical gearings, mechanical processions, and musical automata. Cities installed large bells to ring the hours, and hired clock-keepers to tend them. Clocks and clockmakers also appeared at the courts of great rulers. Then in 1336 there was a technological sensation: Galvano Fiamma, a Dominican friar, reported a remarkable new development in Milan during the rule of the usurper Duke Azzo Visconti:

In the spire there are many bells, and there is a clock [horologium] which is admirable because it is a very large bell [tyntinnabulum] that strikes a bell [campana] twenty-four times according to the 24 hours of the day and night in such a manner that it gives one strike in the first hour, two strokes in the second,
three in the third, four in the fourth, in this way distinguishing the various hours. This is exceedingly necessary for people of all estates.\(^6\)

The information in the Milan chronicle refers not to the escapement mechanism, then already familiar, but to another mechanically much more complicated invention: the mechanism for automatic hour striking. On the clock’s hour wheel, a pin is attached which releases the weight-driven count wheel (locking wheel) with the bell hammer mechanism. After the chiming starts, another locking lever slides along the perimeter of the count wheel with dents at unequal distances. The length of the segment between the dents corresponds to the number of hourly strokes. When the lever drops into a dent, the striking stops.

The enthusiastic wording of the Milan chronicle is repeated by a considerable number of later entries from urban chronicles all over Europe. They all refer to a wonderful automat moving or striking by itself, doing the work of the bell keeper automatically. In fact the hour-striking clock has been described at the first true automat in Europe and the locking wheel as a precursor of the computer, the perforated Hollerith cards—punched cards, containing information necessary to control automated machinery or used in data processing—being an intermediate stage.

From this point onwards there was a rapid and well-documented diffusion of public clocks (‘clock’, ‘grosse horloge’, ‘zytglocke’) which struck the hour. In September 1353 the celebrated poet Petrarch (Francesco Petrarca) provides a clue to the whereabouts of a second innovation. In a letter from Milan, Petrarch complains about the loquacity of a visitor who was wasting his day, until finally he was released and could dismiss the visitor by the sound of the public clock (the first instance of an horologium publicum), which had been invented only recently and by which almost all of the cities in Northern Italy now measured the time of the day.\(^7\)

By the beginning of the fifteenth century every European town of some size between Santiago de Compostela and Moscow took pride in having provided a public clock for its inhabitants. During the next hundred years, smaller settlements followed, sometimes on the initiative of authorities who aimed at a comprehensive coverage of their territories with public clocks. Refusals to install or to contribute to an installation were rare. The public clock became a symbol of the well-ordered city.

Before the end of the fourteenth century chamber clocks and transportable clocks were being used. The biographer of the architect of Florence’s cathedral cupola, Filippo Brunelleschi (1377–1446), reports that Brunelleschi, a trained goldsmith, had built clocks and alarms in his youth and that he also experimented with different kinds of main-springs.\(^8\) A wound-up steel spring releases its energy in any position and even when
the instrument is in motion. The disadvantage was that the spring releases its force very unevenly, and at some unknown point in time compensating devices, the ‘snail’ (chain fusee wheel) or the rare ‘stackfreed’ (cam mechanism), were developed. Miniaturization of clocks became a fashionable trend, and soon timepieces that individuals could wear or carry were coming into vogue.

A preoccupation with the gearing of astronomical devices led some astronomers to construct mechanisms which not only demonstrated the movement of the sun, the moon, and the constellations of the zodiac, but also the irregular movements of the planets. The first example of these extremely sophisticated and very rare planetary clocks was the astronomical clock constructed by Richard of Wallingford, abbot of the Benedictine abbey of St. Albans, Hertfordshire, and described in his *Tractatus Horologii Astronomici* (1327). Giovanni Dondi’s Astrarium, completed in 1365, was considered to be a wonder of the world. Since his father Jacopo Dondi had built an astronomical clock in the tower of Padua’s Palazzo Capitanato the suffix ‘dell’Orologio’ was conferred upon the family. Whether these complicated mechanisms functioned effectively for any extended period of time, however, is doubtful.

The accuracy of public clocks was modest, though sufficient for urban purposes for decades to come. A deviation of twenty minutes a day was normal rather than exceptional. Affluent cities built sumptuous clock towers and provided their public clocks with astronomical and calendrical indications on the dials, mechanized bellstrikers (*Jaquemarts*), figure processions, or automated musical bellwork (*carillons*). A public clock was a prestigious urban accessory. Occasionally princes supported its installation by giving financial aid or by sending expert clockmakers. Within the towns no particular social group took the initiative. Nowhere did merchants appear prominently as supporters or financiers. Clerical institutions, cathedrals, or abbeys did not oppose their introduction. Jacques Le Goff’s ‘church time’ was not defended by the ecclesiastical authorities; they simply adjusted the ringing of the canonical hours to the modern way of reckoning time. The ‘merchants’ time’, by which Le Goff meant the growing preoccupation with time issues in the commercial sphere (monetization, long-distance trade, international markets, double-entry bookkeeping, banking, insurance), required knowledge of calendars and dates of fairs and feasts. Measuring the time of the day and dividing it in equal hours became important with the regulation of working hours, and in this case patrons and labourers both favoured precise points in and spans of time.

Since the potential benefits of public clocks could not be known beforehand, one cannot speak of a foregoing demand for clocks and equal hours, but in fact it took some time before many groups and institutions learned to use them in ordering and coordinating their activities. At the beginning of the fifteenth century an anonymous author, assuming...
the guise of an English friar, talked about astrology, of which he, of course, disapproved because the stars helped men to discern the times. His proposition was that monastic clocks (horlege) and clocks in cities large and small (clokkes) did not rule the inhabitants, but that urban dwellers ruled themselves by the clock. By implication, he set town and country apart as two different ‘chronotopes’.

The new clocks with verge-and-foliot escapement and the automatic hour striking with a count wheel could only with considerable difficulty be adapted to strike the seasonal hours which were of varying length throughout the year. Therefore the diffusion of the public clocks was followed by the adoption of modern hours in secular society. Modern hours of equal lengths, familiar to astronomers, were conceived as the twenty-fourth part of the full day, not as a unit of sixty minutes. Smaller units were reached by subdividing the hour not by counting minutes, which clocks could indicate only much later. The hourglass appeared in the earlier fourteenth century, simultaneously with the mechanical clock. It measured periods of time of equal length, that is to say, hours and fractions or multiples of hours. Hourglasses were reliable, cheap, and silent keepers of time periods independent of clock time. Early inventories mention hourglasses as parts of nautical equipment, while early pictorial representations show them in study rooms.

Dials and clock hands on public clocks were added subsequently, though they long remained relatively rare. The signals of the churches calling for services and prayers provided the civil day with a simple, sufficiently accurate time frame. Secular signals for specific purposes, particular institutions or groups constituted a complex soundscape unique to each individual location. The urban soundscape was enlarged and differentiated by the new signal of the clock-bell or hour-bell. From a more practical point of view, the strikes of the public clock and the adoption of modern hours made all bell signals which addressed particular groups or were reminders of particular tasks redundant. But tradition and the adherence to familiar chimes only produced a very gradual and seldom noticed fading away of their sound.

Three years after the appearance of the Milan striking-clock, the Archduke Azzo Visconti died on 14 August 1339 in the ‘twentieth hour’. In noting his death, the Annales Mediolanenses for the very first time employed ‘modern hours’, that is twenty-four hours of equal length, hitherto reserved for astronomical contexts. Since the modern hours were independent of both daylight and the changing seasons, they could not be determined except by time-keeping instruments. Almost all records of newly installed public clocks throughout Europe were immediately followed by the provision of daytime indications in modern hours. The fact that early references come overwhelmingly from the Italian peninsula thus confirms that the striking automat were invented in Northern Italy. The substitution of the canonical hours and their bell signals in urban life, however, was to be a slow process which extended over almost two centuries.
Hour-striking practices initially differed widely. The Italian style (known as ‘Italian hours’) began about half an hour after sunset and counted hours of equal length from I to XXIV the next evening. Outside the peninsula the Italian style was used in Bohemia, Poland, and Silesia until the eighteenth century. This followed the hours of sunlight but relied on calendrical expertise and, with its 300 bell strokes a day, put considerable stress on the mechanism and ropes. One solution was to divide the day into four periods of six hours, an arrangement which is still to be seen on older dials in Italy. In Nuremberg and some places in Franconia daytime was divided into a varying number of equal hours, according to the season. This style also relied on the hours of sunshine, but tables had to be employed to adjust the hour-striking clocks every fortnight. Northern Europe developed the style of counting and striking by two sets of twelve hours beginning at midnight which ultimately would be widely adopted. This abstract solution is independent of daylight, and the seasons, and clocks could be easily regulated at noon with the help of a sundial.

**Modern Hours—Ordering Time**

In written historical records, clock time often appears in serial sources—chronicles, notarial records, diaries, colophons of dated manuscripts—shortly after the date of the installation of the first public clock. In London’s Westminster Palace the great clock was installed in 1369. At least from 1376 onwards the Royal court, Parliament, and the Guildhall employed clock times on various occasions. The transition to modern hours in European cities was followed by a series of important changes in the way time was utilized. Within a century certain ‘communities of practice’ within the town walls adopted new techniques of organizing their own time by means of the clock and the use of modern hours. From the late fourteenth century onwards, councils and law courts lamented the consequent explosion of municipal administrative business, a growing workload of issues to decide and cases to resolve, especially for merchants and artisans who aspired to these honorary posts within the local urban administration when they were first established. In many instances control had only recently been wrested away from the old ruling oligarchies, sometimes by means of violent struggles. From the fourteenth century onwards, however, it is evident that in many cities the town committees, largely staffed by laypeople, had become a burden on those who were involved in governing. More and more the citizen volunteers simply stayed away.

One solution to deal with such absence was to pay allowances for attendance; another was to reorganize the timing and to tighten up the schedule of meetings. This might be done, for example, by removing the traditional link between meeting times and the services of the city’s main church, so that a council session could take place without
having to wait for the end of Mass. Urban statutes of the traditional type had often laid

down that the Council session was to start after Mass; their new successors prescribed

that it should begin at a specific time such as eight o’clock. The provision for stricter

schedules was accompanied by a requirement that allowances were to be withdrawn if

the member had not taken his place after a quarter of an hour, measured by an

hourglass. There are thousands of regulations of this type in the period up to the

eighteenth century. Public clock time provided the abstract and rigid overall structure;

the use of hourglasses provided some flexibility within that structure, for example by

permitting the allocation of \(\text{(p. 151)}\) specified amounts of time to certain items on the

agenda. Public clocks not only allowed different tasks to be separated, they even made it

possible to coordinate these tasks beyond the range within which the main clock bell was

audible—provided, of course, that the second or third clocks ran with a reasonable

degree of synchronicity. In this way, and for the first time, coordination was no longer

spatially confined.

Markets were also affected by the new clock time. The town market was by definition a

public space where at certain times people could provide themselves with supplies.

Fixing the location together with the beginning and end of the market either by ringing

bells or by visual signs were traditional ways to permit access by the general public, to

assure equal opportunities, to control the prices and the quality of the commodities, and

eventually to levy taxes and other dues. Buying and selling was restricted to specified

market times and fixed locations to avoid advance buying on the roads to the towns and

clandestine dealings with wholesalers and regrators (individuals who would buy goods

from traders and then re-sell them at an inflated price at the same market). Clock time

regulations, which were very common from the fourteenth to the eighteenth century,

were also used to separate privileged local consumers from foreign retailers, who were

often placed at a disadvantage.\(^\text{15}\) Particular, strict timing regulated the sale of fresh fish.

School hours were always connected to the urban schedule because teachers often

served as clerks to the council or sacristans in the Church. In addition the pupils were

expected to sing at church services and funerals. There was thus not only an imperative

to coordinate religious services and council meetings; these individuals also had to fix the

time for funerals, which might (for example) take place at two o’clock in the afternoon.

One immediate consequence was that the public schools very quickly developed strict

timetables. But this new type of scheduling also changed teaching methods. If a new

subject or field of study was added to the curriculum, a certain period of time was simply

allocated to it. In other words, the relative importance of a subject was no longer

measured by the amount or content of particular texts, but by the allocation of more or

fewer hours.
The explanation is partly to be found in Humanist discussions on how to deal with a growing volume of knowledge and learning. Humanist educators developed the idea of allocating equal time periods for Greek and Latin texts, together with the notion of strict timetabling to control progress on individual studies. Universities with their time honoured ‘ordines legendi’, a sequence of books divided into chapters and sections, were slow in switching to the modern forms of scheduling, and began to use clocks and modern hours only in the late fifteenth century. In this way learning and education became closely linked to the ordering of time. It explains why in the visual arts from the fifteenth century onwards you will hardly find a scene of learning or a study without an hourglass or a clock. In a similar way, clock times are found in many court regulations as a means of structuring administrative and ceremonial operations within these complex organizations.

From the late fifteenth century onwards, church ordinances began to contain an increasing number of regulations scheduling the services on Sundays and weekdays for particular times and also limiting the duration of sermons. Numerous Protestant ordinances, after the sixteenth-century Reformation, set out a variety of reasons for the tightening of service schedules. Limiting sermons was declared to be necessary: because city officials should not be kept from their meetings, because servants and workers should not be diverted from their duties, because pregnant women should not be burdened, because heating material should be saved, because preachers should use plain language and not indulge themselves in ancient histories, strange quotations, learned metaphors, foreign languages, and so forth. Sermons were in this way regulated and, since nobody was able to control the content of sermons by reformed ex-Catholics or even suspected sectarians, the danger of dissenting content could be minimized by prescribing a restricted time which could be monitored by the congregation. By scheduling and allocating measured periods of time, many different and eventually conflicting aims could be pursued by very simple means. Any single aim could possibly be pursued by other means, but being unrelated to reasons and content, time periods turned out to be sub-optimal but very effective forms of time organization. The extent to which all these provisions greatly advanced the provision of tower-clocks and hourglasses for church pulpits is clearly apparent.

**Labour Time**

The adoption of clock time brought about effective innovations in the area of labour time. The traditional unit for organizing work was the period from sunrise to sunset. Controversy surrounded the precise duration of the working day from the late thirteenth century onwards, and particularly during the decades following the demographic
catastrophe of the Black Death in the mid-fourteenth century, as Jacques Le Goff has rightly argued.\textsuperscript{16} In these ‘golden days’ for working people and especially wage earners, with a general shortage of labour, they demanded higher wages, went on strike, or simply ran away. Salaries were difficult to adjust, usually being fixed by long-standing custom or by royal ordinances, and so employers instead sought to regulate the working day more strictly. One means adopted was the installation of particular bells or bell signals to mark the beginning and the end of the working day (\textit{campana laboris}, \textit{Marangona}, \textit{cloche des ouvriers}, \textit{campana cementariorum} in York). In this way labour time was disconnected from the often unreliable church bells, the sheer number of which sometimes caused disputes about the meaning of a particular bell signal.

A more effective way of regulating working hours was to fix them by clock time.\textsuperscript{17} The adoption of fixed hours, which were unambiguous, did not immediately change the importance of the hours of daylight as the normal working day extended over twelve to fourteen hours on average,\textsuperscript{18} but in the long run it facilitated negotiations concerning the extent of working hours. It enabled the working day to be separated from the hours of daylight, for example, by shortening the workday during the summer months. In English labour legislation, following a number of local regulations, a prescription with clock time appeared for the first time in the statute of 1495 (11 Henry VII, cap. 22.4; cf. 1514/15 6 Henry VIII, cap. 3 and 1563 5 Eliz. cap. 4), where it was laid down that during the summer months, workmen, servants, husbandmen, and agricultural workers should start at 5 am and remain at work till 7 or 8 pm. Breaks should take no more than two to two-and-a-half hours of that time. During the winter the shorter hours of daylight limited their working hours in the accustomed if imprecise way: they were to be ‘at their work in the springing of the day and depart not until the night of the same day’. Although not always obeyed, it was the case that a fixed working day of twelve to thirteen hours now became the rule in national and local statutes. In all likelihood the actual labour involved never followed a regular routine.\textsuperscript{19}

In the longer perspective, clock time disconnected the working hours from the natural day and made them subject to discussions and negotiations. In 1748 the servants of the Hammermen of Glasgow formed a society, a precursor of later unions, and petitioned for shorter hours. Specifically they asked to be allowed to leave their work at 7pm instead of 8pm, arguing that otherwise they had no time to go to school, and would thus be deprived of the benefits of education. Their masters refused, declaring that shorter hours would raise the price of work, and servants, instead of employing their leisure time in the evening in acquiring useful knowledge, would squander it in ‘vagueing’ (wandering around on the streets), or in tippling and drinking.\textsuperscript{20} During the eighteenth century, working hours came to be progressively reduced, and in some trades something like a ten-hour day was achieved.\textsuperscript{21} The rules for working hours appear very rigid, but one
should remember that steady employment throughout the year for dependent labourers was the exception rather than the rule. Saint Monday was observed all over Europe, holidays on religious festivals were common, and the irregularity of the working year was normal until the middle of the nineteenth century.

Hourglasses were widely used for regulating breaks and mealtimes. This is significant because, during the later Middle Ages, overtime meant working without a meal break. In this context the notion of hourly wages, which initially were skipped mealtimes, was developed—an important step towards the perception that time could be a commodity. There were occasions where wage earners demanded clock time regulations or the use of hourglasses to control their breaks. Early examples of such demands can be found in the records of the building administration of Milan cathedral. Here, they went even a step further and calculated the production costs of a single marble block in terms of the working hours spent on it. We must remember, however, that hourly wages were extremely rare before the eighteenth century.

The significance of the use of clockwork and reckoning with equal hours for a fair distribution of labour in society was recognized by Thomas More. In his *Utopia*, written in 1516, he reported that the Utopians worked only six hours a day and still provided society with everything it needed. They were able to do so by setting the idle, primarily the clergy and aristocracy, to work and by dividing the day into twenty-four equal hours. A normal working day with a round number of hours reappeared in the utopian socialism of the nineteenth century. Robert Owen had put forward the demand for a ten-hour day in 1810, and actually instituted it in his socialist enterprise at New Lanark. By 1817 he had formulated the goal of the eight-hour day and coined the successful slogan 'Eight hours labour, eight hours recreation’. The tripartite division of the day was a very old time pattern found in many exemplary biographies. Only mechanical clocks and clock time, however, made possible discussions, disputes, and negotiations concerning the length of the working day, a possibility that had its origins in late medieval Europe, but was accomplished only several centuries later.

As Edward P. Thompson pointed out, independent peasants, as well as independent craftsmen, rarely worked on a clock-timed schedule, but according to the varying tasks and demands of the agrarian year, of market conditions, or the state of the order book. This is not the romantic view of a simple rural life structured by the cycle of the seasons, the weather, and the needs of the livestock, and frequently interrupted by fairs and feasts. The agrarian year and the rural day show a rather complex temporal structure of daily tasks and long-term planning dictates. As early as the mid-seventeenth century, Gervase Markham would describe the demanding day of a ploughman in terms of a clock-timed schedule.
Time’s Temporality and Iconography

Notwithstanding their complexity, a firmly secular approach distinguished Renaissance concepts of time from their medieval predecessors. Intellectuals were deeply concerned with the awareness of the temporality and the transience of worldly things. Time was often conceived as a destructive power and fame as a desirable way to overcome it. Time was also precious, constantly slipping away and, sensing an ever-present urgency, man had to make the best possible use of his allotted span.

Renaissance artists developed a very rich iconography of Time, which remained popular until the end of the eighteenth century. Petrarch’s Trionfi were particularly influential in numerous pictorial representations of Time as Chronos, the god of time in ancient mythology. He appears as a winged old man with a long, grey beard holding a scythe and an hourglass. Depictions of Kairos—from a Greek word meaning the right or opportune moment—represent him as a young man with a pronounced forelock to be grasped if an opportunity arises. Elements of Fortuna iconography are often conflated. A more positive conception of time was conveyed by illustrations depicting an ancient motto, ‘Truth is the daughter of time’ (Veritas filia temporis), which were employed in frontispieces of historiographical works.

The Horological Revolution

By the ‘horological revolution’ scholars mean the rapid advances in the development of clockwork technology during the long eighteenth century. In 1657 Christiaan Huygens introduced the pendulum as a regulator. Henceforth the accuracy of pendulum clocks fluctuated by only a few seconds per day, a quantum leap in precision time keeping. Around 1675 Huygens and Robert Hooke introduced the spiral balance spring as a regulator, thereby making possible reliable portable watches which deviated by only a few minutes a day. When Huguenot watchmakers fled from France after the Revocation of the Edict of Nantes in 1685, England became the centre of European clock and watchmaking. During the first half of the eighteenth century Britain produced about 100,000 timepieces, half of Europe’s total output. Technical improvements, such as the repeating mechanism pioneered by Edward Barlow and Daniel Quare before 1700, became features much sought after by the affluent. Already in 1728 Chambers Cyclopedia justly stated, ‘As it was England that Watches had their first rise, so ‘tis there, too, they have arriv’d at their greatest Perfection.’ Minute numbers and minute hands now appeared on clock dials. In 1751 Benjamin Franklin summarized the development: ‘The
Sub-Dividing Hours into Minutes, and Minutes into Seconds, by those curious Machines, is not older than the Days of our Fathers, but now brought to a surprising Nicety.'

The search for precision had reached its zenith in 1714 when the British government established the Board of Longitude, offering ‘the highest bounty of all, naming a prize equal to a king’s ransom’ for accurately determining longitude at sea, an essential aid in oceanic navigation. In 1773, the English clockmaker John Harrison won the prize with his marine chronometers. Trials during long-distance sea voyages showed them to be accurate within fractions of a second a day. Sports, particularly horse-racing, revealed a new craze for speed, stimulated by the precision timepieces now available. As early as the seventeenth century, races were timed in fractions of minutes. By the early decades of the eighteenth century, running times in seconds and the use of stopwatches were being reported. The prestige of the less precise public clocks was gradually undermined by the availability to private individuals of chronometers of this kind, since with their help anyone could easily determine that the sun was not a perfect time standard. Owing to the inclination of the earth’s axis and its elliptical orbit, the duration of ‘true solar local time’, until then exclusively used and observed by the passage of the sun through the local north–south axis, varied. Once recognized, its use was seen as problematical, and in large cities (Geneva, 1780; London, 1790; Berlin, 1810; Paris, 1816) new public clocks were regulated according to ‘solar mean time’. The difference between the two local times (respectively -14.3 minutes and 6.4 minutes) was published in tables with the ‘equation of time’. The new fascination with precision time keeping and with punctuality is obvious.

Division of labour and early systems of mass production now brought domestic clocks and watches within the financial reach of the middle classes, who were particularly numerous in England. Pendulum clocks with second hands and pocket watches with minute hands became commonplace. Private timing and recording of an individual’s day spread rapidly, while attention to the bells of public clocks disappeared. In 1698 the French traveller Henri Misson noted, ‘Clocks. There are not a great many large [that is, tower] Clocks in London, so that you have little Advantage by them in your houses, but the Art is so common here, and so much in Vogue, That almost every Body has a Watch, and but few private Families are without a Pendulum.’ Novels and the now popular diaries and journals, which recorded the personal daily use of time, all reveal that clocks and watches were no longer luxury items but common accessories of everyday life. Records of daily schedules giving clock times and even minutes now became quite common. Inventories and police records of thefts both reveal that watches had become precious items of personal property. In a study of household inventories in London and throughout England more generally, Lorna Weatherill discovered the considerable diffusion of clocks among heads of households: ‘A higher proportion of men owned clocks than women, reflecting their need to coordinate with people beyond the household, whereas women’s
time scheduling was often more “task-orientated”. Although some arrogant writers denied that clocks and watches were needed by country people, because their days were regulated by the sun and the beasts, clocks and watches were quite common in rural inventories. Cissie Fairchild demonstrated the proliferation of watches among the Parisian lower classes, and in particular their preference for gold watches instead of cheap pinchbeck and silver ones. In his criticism of the excesses in the outward appearance of apprentices, William Maitland particularly mentioned ‘Cloath, Linen, Perriwigs, Gold and Silver Watches.’ On the continent in Zürich a sumptuary law of 1739 banned the wearing of silver watches with fobs (Sack-Uhren) by women and of massive gold watches by both sexes. The proliferation of timepieces of all kinds was evident at the very end of the eighteenth century when an attempt was made to tax them. In 1796, in order to raise revenue for the war with France, William Pitt the Younger tried to introduce a tax on gold and silver watches (37 Geo III c. 108), but because of the disastrous effects on the clock and watchmaking industries this measure was repealed two years later.

**Time and Money**

‘Remember that time is money.’ The famous sentence in Benjamin Franklin’s *Advice to a Young Tradesman* (1748), often considered as a key principle of the spirit of capitalism, was neither original, nor was it meant as a modern strict time–money equation. Franklin voices the usual maxims found in numerous contemporaneous manuals for apprentices. There, time is incessantly debated, but not yet as a measurable commodity. The Puritan conception of time was heavily influenced by Richard Baxter’s *Christian Directory* (1673): To whom belongs the time? Primarily, time belongs to God and is to be used in his service, as it is a precious gift of God. On Judgement Day everybody must give account for his use of time. But God has delegated the power of disposal of time to worldly authorities, to fathers and to masters. So spending time in leisure activities, such as festivals and fairs like Saint Monday, Shrove Tuesday and so forth, and even theatres, is a form of theft, a defrauding of the master. The Biblical verse ‘The hand of the diligent maketh Rich’ (Proverbs, X.4) is quoted again and again, but more and more these texts push God into the background. The value of discipline, self-control, and constant self-evaluation, are the main objectives in this vast body of conduct books. Idleness was (p. 157) considered as Satan’s gateway to the soul. This is the background of the Puritan abhorrence of wasted time and of precious time being misspent. Economic reasons and disciplinary aspects for the diligent use of time certainly became increasingly prominent, but time as monetary measure of work was still a
century away, and so ‘time is money’ remained figurative speech in the middle of the eighteenth century.

Communication and Acceleration

During the final decades of the fourteenth century, Milan’s Visconti dukes had organized a relay system with mounted couriers who changed horses at certain stations (known as postae) and rode day and night to deliver the messages they carried. To ensure and to monitor the speed with which these letters were transmitted, the departure time was recorded, together with the time at which various stations along the way were reached, on a time sheet. Urgency was emphasized by a standard injunction to couriers: ‘Haste, haste, haste, haste, fly by day and night, losing no time’ (‘Cito, cito, cito volando di et nocte senza perdere tempo’). Simultaneously, in Prussia the Teutonic Order perfected a system of dockets (Stundenpässe) to achieve the same purpose. One prerequisite for such relay systems was the availability of clocks at all relay stations and, of course, a degree of literacy on the part of the riders or postmasters who were expected to read and record the times at particular stages. The organization established in the Duchy of Milan was subsequently extended to almost the whole of Europe in the course of the sixteenth century by Northern Italian postmasters of the Tassis (Taxis) family. We do not know if the Visconti couriers had been operated on a regular basis and if they could be used by individuals outside the ducal entourage. The Imperial post, however, run by the Taxis company across southern, western, and central Europe, was open to everyone in return for a simple charge (porto).

The privileges granted to the Taxis family by the Holy Roman Emperor for the first time specified minimum speeds and fixed periods of rest. The consequence was that, from 1500 onwards, measurable progress was evident not merely in speed and frequency, but also in the number of way stations, the extent of newly constructed paved roads, and the number of road maps and postal schedules. A cascade of innovations, amounting to a veritable communications revolution, were the consequence of the organization of this postal system and the infrastructure which supported it: news, printed newspapers, all kinds of goods and, finally, travellers all circulated by mail-coaches, with speeds and journey times more and more controlled by clock time. In Italy and the Dutch Republic horse-drawn barges provided scheduled passenger services. The names given to the coaches reveal their purpose: the Flying Coach, the Diligence (‘stage coach’), the Eilwagen (‘express coach’), the Schnellpost (‘express mail’), and so forth.

One practical consequence of the increased speed of travel was that local times, adjusted to the sun or to local mean times, with seasonal variations eliminated, came to be called
in question and eventually undermined altogether. As early as 1825 a ‘standard clock’ (*Normaluhr*) was installed at the main Prussian post office in Berlin, in order to standardize the time between Königsberg (in East Prussia) and Cleves (in the distant Prussian Rhineland). Couriers, mail coaches, and subsequently engine drivers on the new railways were now required to carry portable timepieces with the official standard time to every corner of the realm. Regional time zones were established to synchronize local times along railway tracks, though it proved an extended process. In England, Greenwich Mean Time was introduced as standard railway time between 1840 and 1855, and in 1880 it became unified standard time for the whole of Great Britain. Germany followed suit in 1893. The old public clocks on municipal buildings or church towers definitely lost chronometrical and social prestige, when measured against the modern clocks at post offices and railway stations, both of which, with their newsstands and restaurants, became the meeting places of the liberal bourgeoisie during the nineteenth century.

**Factory Time**

With the transition to industrial production from the end of the eighteenth century onwards, struggles over the organization of time and the number of hours which workers were expected to spend in the new factories attracted public attention. The factory codes combined traditional authoritarian–patriarchal elements of urban and domestic time systems with new goals in the economy of time. Hatred for the factory bell and the conviction that factory owners ‘falsified’ clocks (by making them run faster or more slowly) can be found from the earliest reporting about the factories, which Marx and Engels summarized in detail, to the memoirs of workers today. The measurement and control of time appear here as a prerogative of owners and managers that was widely abused, and against which workers learned to defend themselves only slowly and with difficulty. According to older English and Swiss factory legislation, factory clocks had to be set by the public clock. Occasionally factory owners even prohibited workers from bringing private timepieces into the factories. As late as 1907, it was reported that Apulian rural workers pooled their money to buy a clock as a countercheck on the prescribed working times. Clocks were instruments of dominance, yet simultaneously could become a means of subverting it.

Profound changes became visible as early as the eighteenth century with respect to the precision of the units of calculation employed in paying for work and calculating fines for missed time. In the ‘Law Book’ (drawn up before 1700) for the ‘Crowley Ironworks’, at the time the largest in Europe, we find a detailed time regulation of almost pathological perfectionism, in practice all but unrealizable. The working time of ‘office workers’ was to be supervised from the office of a ‘monitor’ and recorded to the precise hour and the
minute in a ‘time sheet’, with the numbers written out in words to prevent subsequent alterations. The office had a special clock, with a ‘minute dial’, which was to be the only authoritative one. Its function as the standard clock was underlined by the fact that only the monitor was allowed to operate the bell for the workers. To accommodate the many individual stages in the production process, the grounds of the works were extensive, and not all activities of the ‘office workers’ could be supervised from one location. For that reason—and this, too, was quite new—these workers were supposed to keep a detailed record of where they went and what they did, in which they themselves were expected to record the time not spent for the benefit of the works (‘loitering hours’). The time that was recorded in the office (‘Monitors’ Neat Time’) and the time spent outside minus any breaks (‘Corrected Extra Time’) should then be added together and paid by the hours and minutes.

This painstakingly precise Law Book went far beyond what was normal during the eighteenth century, as far as time controls were concerned. In various ‘model factories’, which were probably atypical but much written about because of the new experience of highly divided labour, considerable efforts were made to control working time involving the use of ‘time clocks’, a device which at first had been employed to supervise night watchmen in the towns. In the porcelain factories of the English entrepreneur Josiah Wedgwood, which the workers called ‘bell-works’ after the introduction of the factory bell, primitive forms of time cards were used and employees were expected to ‘clock in’. Shortly before 1800, the factories hired a man who was made to promise to make sure not to get caught observing the work activities with the help of a stopwatch.

In the workshops and factories of the early nineteenth century, it was often natural circumstances—such as the uneven operation of water-driven machines—as well as economic problems—such as unevenly distributed workloads—which prevented work from becoming completely regularized and intensified. The steam engine and favourable economic circumstances subsequently made possible the headlong industrial surge, while at the same time the new forms of factory-industrial working times—which, for a small segment of the workforce, even eliminated the distinction between day and night, summer and winter—were introduced. Since then, working time has been one of the dominant themes of economic and social policy, in two respects. For employers, the rational use of working time, ‘the economy of time’, has been paramount, though its external control has remained a major topic with great symbolic significance. The workers, too, discovered the topic of working time and in the nineteenth century made the working day into the subject of political struggle. The often described road to the shortening of working time led, at a different pace, under varying political constellations, and in various countries, to the normal working day and accordingly to leisure time as a measured and contested quantity. Working time has remained a prominent theme, and
the discussions over working hours are keeping people aware of the significance of measured time.

In his classic study of its effects on emerging industrial society, Edward P. Thompson concluded that the experience of time in pre-industrial societies was dominated by an intrinsic and irregular ‘task time’ bound to particular activities, whereas factory work was connected with the extrinsic, impersonal, and regular time of the clock. One result was the separation of work and free time, what might be called leisure. But before the late nineteenth century this contrast between ‘task time’ and ‘clock time’ affected only a minority of the working population. In ‘The Invention of Leisure’, Peter Burke has described the emergence of a European ‘leisure system’ since the Renaissance, that is to say long before the rise of industrial capitalism. At least among the leisure classes he points to a growing interest in ways of passing time and in ‘pastimes’ (passé-temps, passatempo, Zeitvertreib) as practices to avoid boredom (la noia, l’ennui, Langeweile). He concludes that ‘by the eighteenth century there was a general trend towards the formalization, regularization and institutionalization of activities which were coming to be seen more and more as “leisure”; similarly, there was a shift towards relatively fixed hours of “free time” rather than mere “pause[s] between bouts of work” or time that was left over after tasks were completed … The significant change was for the hours or days of free time to come to be considered a right, like the weekend today.’

Calendar Times

Protestantism reshaped the late medieval festive calendar but retained many of the old recurring festivals. In England, the religious calendar of the established Anglican Church encompassed a shrinking part of the population as dissent and parish wakes, feasts and saints’ days led to a variety of calendar customs. These sharpened the awareness of the factitiousness of calendar times, which were proliferated by—sometimes controversial—official commemorations (for example, gunpowder plot day, martyrdom of King Charles I, restoration of Charles II, and so forth). The reform introduced by Pope Gregory XIII to the Catholic world (1582) modified the Roman Julian calendar by changing the mean length of the year and reorganizing the leap years and altering the calculation of the date of Easter in order to bring that date to the time agreed on by the Council of Nicaea in 325, in this way fixing the vernal equinox at 21 March. With the introduction of the Gregorian reform by civil authorities in different countries at separate times, ten calendar days were obliterated. Many Protestant countries refused to adopt the reform, because they feared this ‘popish innovation’ would become part of a Counter-Reformation offensive. Mainly because this difference in the calendar had come to be regarded as an obstacle to international commerce, the British government reformed dating in the
Calendar (New Style) Act 1750. Henceforth the legal year was to begin on 1 January instead of 25 March, and since at that time it was necessary to correct eleven days, the day following 2 September 1752 should be styled 14 September 1752. The introduction of the ‘New Style’ dating was non-controversial, though William Hogarth in his famous satirical picture ‘An Election Entertainment’ depicted a riotous election campaign in Oxfordshire in 1754 which shows a placard with an inscription ‘Give us our eleven days!’ It became one of the sources for the legendary calendar riots, which never actually happened.45

Further Reading


Le Goff, Jacques. ‘Merchant’s Time and Church’s Time in the Middle Ages’ (1960), in Time, Work and Culture in the Middle Ages, trans. A. Goldhammer (Chicago, IL, 1980), 29–42.


Sherman, Stuart. Telling Time: Clocks, Diaries, and English Diurnal Form, 1600–1785 (Chicago, IL, 1997).

Notes:

(1.) Gustav Bilfinger, *Die mittelalterlichen Horen und die modernen Stunden. Ein Beitrag zur Kulturgeschichte* (Stuttgart, 1892).


(7.) *Epistolarum de rebus familiaribus et Variae*, ed. Giuseppe Fracassetti, vol. 3 (Florence, 1863), Var. 44, 419.


(14.) *Annales Mediolanenses Anonymi*, Muratori Rerum Italicarum Scriptores, 16, 1730, col. 710.


(17.) Working hours at the building site of York Minster in 1368 were fixed by the bells of St. Mary’s Abbey; the breaks should extend over ‘spacium dimidiae Lente’, that is, the walking time of about half an hour. Two years later in 1370 working time should last ‘als lang als yai may se skilfully for till wyrke’ or until ‘itte be hegh none smytyn by ye clocke’—according to the *Middle English Dictionary* the first English record for ‘clock’. A break should last ‘ovyr ye space of ye tyme of an houre’; Jaime Raine, ed., *The Fabric Rolls of York Minster with an Appendix of Illustrative Documents* (Surtees Soc. 35) (Durham, 1859), 171–173, 181–182.

(18.) cf. the table with the working hours of London Trades, in Robert Campbell, *The London Tradesman: Being a Compendious View of All the Trades, Professions, ...* (London, 1747), 331–340.


(23.) *The Complete Works of St. Thomas More*, ed. Edward S. Surtz S.J. and Jack H. Hexter, vol. 4 (New Haven, 1965), 126; cf. Tommaso Campanella, ‘City of the Sun’ published in 1623: ‘But in the City of the Sun, while duty and work are distributed among all, it only falls to each one to work for about four hours every day. The remaining hours are spent in learning joyously, in debating, in reading, in reciting, in writing, in walking, in exercising the mind and body, and with play’, lat.: F. Thomae Campanellae, Appendix, *Politicae Civitas Solis* (Frankfurt/M., 1623), 435.


(28.) *Poor Richard’s Almanac Improved*, Jan. 1751.


(30.) ‘It was agreed that three Stop Watches should be set together, and in case a Dispute should happen between two of them, the Wager should be decided by the Third, which was done accordingly, but by the Motion of riding they varied so much, that by one he won by three Minutes, by another by 45 Seconds, and the Third by 16 Seconds’, *Ipswich Journal*, 6 February 1731; for more examples, Reginald Heber, *An Historical List of Horse-matches Run and of Plates and Prizes Run for in Great-Britain and Ireland*, vols 1–18 (London, 1752–69); cf. Maria Kloeren, *Sport und Rekord. Kultursoziologische Untersuchungen zum England des 16. bis 18. Jahrhunderts* (‘Kölner Anglistische Arbeiten’, 23), (Leipzig, 1935), 215ff.

Time

(32.) For example, Samuel Pepys, *Diary*, 13 May 1665: ‘But, Lord! to see how much of my old folly and childishnesse hangs upon me still that I cannot forbear carrying my watch in my hand in the coach all this afternoon, and seeing what o’clock it is one hundred times; and am apt to think with myself, how could I be so long without one; though I remember since, I had one, and found it a trouble, and resolved to carry one no more about me while I lived.’

23 October 1665: ‘Up, and walked to Greenwich, taking pleasure to walk with my minute watch in my hand, by which I am now come to see the distances of my way from Woolwich to Greenwich. And did find myself come within two minutes constantly to the same place at the end of each quarter of an hour.’


(37.) ‘Remember that time is money. He that can earn ten shillings a day by his labour, and goes abroad, or sits idle one half of that day, though he spends but sixpence during his diversion or idleness, it ought not to be reckoned the only expense; he hath really spent or thrown away five shillings besides … In short, the way to wealth, if you desire it, is as plain as the way to market. It depends chiefly on two words, industry and frugality; i.e. waste neither time nor money, but make the best use of both.’


(London, 1616). ‘For time is the measure of business, as money is of wares; and business is bought at a dear hand, where there is small dispatch.’ Francis Bacon, Of Dispatch (1620), in The Essays Or Counsels, Civil And Moral, in The Works of Francis Bacon, ed. James Spedding, vol IX (Boston, 1882), 162. ‘Her Husband was a Shoe-maker, and an excellent Crafts-man; but never minded how the Minutes passed. In vain did his Wife inculcate to him, That Time is Money: …’; The Free-Thinker, 21 (18 May 1719), 84–85.

(40.) Samuel Richardson, The Apprentice’s Vade Mecum (London, 1734), 9, 15, 27.


(44.) David Cressy, Bonfires and Bells: National Memory and the Calendar in Elizabethan and Stuart England (Berkeley, 1989).


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This chapter examines the two principal ways in which ‘communications’ in early modern Europe have been interpreted. It first looks at the traditional road and river system, shown to be as much an obstacle to as a means of travel, and discusses the limited improvements between the fourteenth and eighteenth centuries. The shortcomings of the infrastructure, however, did not prevent extensive travelling at all social levels, sometimes over extremely long distances. It then examines the creation of an efficient postal system during the sixteenth century, which facilitated the transmission of news and subsequently people too. Above all, this network provided the foundation of the printed newspapers, which began to appear during the seventeenth century and would eventually transform communications completely. Nevertheless, the oral transmission of news and information remained vital until the very end of the ancien régime and far beyond, in towns as in the countryside.

Keywords: Canals, communications, handwritten newsletters, oral communications, newspapers, postal system, roads, rivers, travel

Movement of people, goods, and information has long been recognized to be formative for societies in the past, as in the present. Leading social and economic theorists during the later nineteenth and earlier twentieth centuries were certainly aware of its importance, despite saying little about it directly, while local antiquarians, economic historians, and historical geographers have all studied transport links from their contrasting perspectives. Yet it was not until the period between the two World Wars that North American scholars put forward the notion of a ‘communications revolution’ after 1750, which they linked to industrialization, with canals, metalled roads, the invention of
the telegraph and steam engine, and the advent of railways. The much-enhanced speed and reliability of communications were viewed as central to this transformation.

During the third quarter of the twentieth century, influenced by the modernization theories then in vogue, attention was focused on the converse of this: the long-established obstacles to rapid, efficient, and above all reliable movement of people and goods, which became central to the study of pre-industrial Europe and were believed to have contributed to its extreme localism and apparent backwardness. This approach was particularly associated with the *Annales* school in France, following the lead of Fernand Braudel who memorably characterized distance as ‘the first enemy’, only vanquished during the second half of the nineteenth century.\(^2\) The incomplete integration of the economy and the intense localism of society were attributed to poor communications, which became a focal point of the massive regional theses produced by *Annales* scholarship.\(^3\)

The movement of people and goods has usually dominated studies of ‘communications’. More recently, however, information and especially printed media have come to the fore, viewed as an aspect of cultural history. Here the invention of moveable type printing by Johannes Gutenberg in the mid-fifteenth century, and the importance claimed for this, have been seminal.\(^4\) This approach has been strengthened by the influential notion of a ‘public sphere’ advanced by the German sociologist Jürgen Habermas\(^ (p. 166)\) and even by the writings of the Canadian media theorist Marshall McLuhan, though their theories are now viewed with considerable scepticism.

Another German scholar, Wolfgang Behringer, has recently advanced a case for a ‘communications revolution’, located not after 1750, but during the early modern period.\(^5\) Its central elements were a notable increase in the speed, ease, and reliability with which information and, to a lesser extent, people moved around Europe and particularly its western half. This was accomplished without the kind of major infrastructural changes evident after 1750. Some new roads were certainly built and many others repaired and improved; more use was made of passenger-carrying carriages and other wheeled vehicles; a relatively small number of canals were dug; a surprisingly efficient postal network was established; and Europe’s earliest printed newspapers appeared. But the early modern ‘communications revolution’ was largely accomplished within the established parameters, familiar since the Middle Ages. During a period when remarkable feats of oceanic navigation were opening up contacts with other continents, travel and transport remained deeply traditional within Europe itself.

The recent concern with print is obviously rooted in a search for the origins of modern mass media and its dramatic transformation during the past generation, as the Gutenberg era appeared to be giving way to an age of purely electronic communications. This
approach can mislead as well as illuminate, however. Unlike communications in the
digital age, information and ideas could only circulate during earlier centuries by means
of the movement of people. In an age when messages were more likely to be delivered
orally than by letter, physical mobility and communications more generally were very
closely linked. This is why the topics of travel and communications, however this term is
construed, are so intimately linked. In the late twelfth century, an anonymous
ecclesiastical official had remarked that 'You who are travelling the roads, tell us what
you have heard'. Travellers were the principal source of information, expected when
they stayed overnight to repay hospitality by passing on such news as they had heard on
their journeys. The movement of information, as of goods, still relied upon the labour of
humans and animals, and remained subject to long-established constraints.

The Infrastructure of Travel

Foreign visitors to China during the Ming dynasty (1368–1644) were invariably impressed
by its internal communications. An extensive network of roads, sometimes paved but
more often gravelled with sand or earth banking at the side, linked the major and
secondary cities and towns. The Grand Canal—in fact a series of short canals joining up
existing waterways—served as an artery in the eastern regions, linking the old capital,
Nanjing, with the new, Beijing (Peking), and the Yangtze river Delta with northern
China. This network was relatively well maintained, though road surfaces continually
deteriorated due to the weather and the volume of traffic. Local magistrates organized
regular repairs to carriageways and bridges, employing tax revenues and an imposed
labour system (corvée) to do so while, remarkably, private individuals sometimes
paid for improvements. A state-run courier network carried visitors, administrators, and
official communications along this network, with relay stations providing food, shelter,
and fresh horses. These were located a day’s travelling apart: 35–45 kilometres on
average, though less in difficult terrain. A subsidiary network of post houses completed
China’s remarkably integrated communications system. It had originated under the T’ang
(618–888) and Sung (960–1279), but was notably extended and improved under the Ming
dynasty, and ultimately depended upon the state and its agents.

European observers were aware of this network and of the equally efficient
communications systems maintained by the Aztec and Inca empires in Central and South
America, overthrown by Spanish conquerors during the earlier sixteenth century. All
three appeared more remarkable given the poor state of Europe’s own infrastructure. In
The Wealth of Nations (1776), Adam Smith, urging the importance of good
communications—which would widen the potential market—for economic progress, did
not fail to point to the obvious contrast. ‘In China ... [he wrote] the high-roads, and still
more the navigable canals ... exceed very much everything of the same kind which is known in Europe. The difference was particularly striking because of the contrasting physical geographies of the European continent and the lands of the Ming dynasty. With the obvious exception of the Alps, Europe was less divided by major mountain ranges than China, particularly in its Inner Asian provinces; it had a series of great rivers running north and south, and to a lesser extent east and west, to facilitate transport; yet its communications system would remain inferior to its Chinese counterpart until after 1750.

There had been a period when Europe, or more precisely its southern and western regions, had benefited from an impressive system of well-maintained routes. During the Roman era, military roads had crisscrossed the continent. These had sometimes even been paved, though more often consisted of gravel, but they seem to have largely disappeared after the end of the Western empire in the fifth century. In the few areas where they survived, it had been due to local authorities carrying out essential maintenance, as in the northern Italian peninsula. Elsewhere the fate of the Roman network remains obscure. With the emergence of different economic and political centres during the early Middle Ages, new patterns of communication evolved, while such medium- and long-distance trade as had been conducted at this time had mainly been on rivers and even by sea.

Europe’s road network, together with the bridges (sometimes built of stone) and ferries integral to it, had largely been created by the economic expansion of the long thirteenth century, and it would survive until around 1800. In medieval and early modern Europe, the term ‘road’ carried a rather different meaning than today. Unlike their Roman or Chinese counterparts, these routes were not usually gravelled, far less paved. They were tracks across the landscape, little different from the surrounding terrain. Only in parts of early modern England and the Low Countries were they likely to be marked out by trees or hedges. Unlike Roman roads, which had been strictly linear and could involve steep gradients, these trails would often run along the floor of a river valley, which it was easier for primitive wheeled vehicles to negotiate than sharp inclines. They ran from village to village, town to town, hamlet to mill, castle to priory, abbey to grange, bridge to bridge or ferry, and so on. Stones and other way-markers might at most be available to guide the traveller, but often not even that.

Such routes were created not by engineers and labourers, but by regular use, and they were seldom adequately maintained, certainly away from leading towns and the routes connecting them. Their development had been very uneven, subject to periods of regression as well as expansion, which might prove temporary, and dependent upon specific commercial and local needs as well as military demands and political ambitions. The principal fixed points were the bridges and ferries across rivers, together with the
monasteries and hospices which initially provided overnight hospitality, and subsequently the inns and other hostelries where food and shelter were available for travellers, their horses and pack-animals. The appearance of such overnight stops during the later twelfth and thirteenth centuries itself testified to the growing volume of traffic on Europe’s routes. It underlined that roads depended on people and regularly spaced settlements to provide food, shelter, fresh horses, a forge, and carriers prepared to transport goods and travellers.

The maintenance of this network—as it had done since the Roman era—traditionally fell on the local population, whose obligations were sometimes codified. Legislation in England between 1555 and 1586, for example, made parishes responsible for upkeep. In Denmark similar laws were passed in 1547 and 1558, obliging peasants to maintain local roads and bridges. Since such efforts enjoyed limited success, maintenance was a ubiquitous problem. The short sections which were paved—outside a town or near a bridge or ferry—presented difficulties of their own. Lacking foundations or effective drainage, the road surface quickly deteriorated. Repairs took the form of piling gravel or stones onto the damaged carriageway, raising the road’s level in a way which could be problematical for the surrounding land or houses, but did little to make it better able to resist rain or bear the weight of traffic. It was not until John Loudon McAdam in the early nineteenth century used tar to bind small stones together (thus inventing Tarmac[adam]), that surfaces ceased to be porous and so better able to resist traffic and weather.

These trails constituted as much an obstacle as a means to travel. They were always likely to be rendered impassable by inclement weather, particularly autumn and winter rains and spring floods, and quickly became rutted with regular use. When the track deterioriated, a new route was opened up right next to the old until it in turn became passable only with difficulty. There could be a series of trails running close to one another, if not actually side-by-side, all leading to the same destination. Travellers would select one according to the season of the year, the weather, local advice, and their own instincts. Early modern landscape paintings provide the best impression of these tracks, which were barely distinct from the surrounding countryside. In this way a network of routes of varying condition, width, and importance had developed by the earlier fourteenth century, and it would survive with surprisingly few modifications until the end of the ancien régime.

It had been created by economic and demographic growth, and particularly the intensification of international commerce. One important symptom had been the reinvigoration of maritime trade from the Mediterranean to the North Sea through the English Channel shortly before 1300. Another was the opening up of two new passes over the Alps, the Simplon and Saint Gothard, during the first half of the thirteenth century. Hitherto the principal routes from Italy to France—exactly as in the Roman era—had
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crossed the Great-St.-Bernard and Mont Cenis, which led eventually to the major fairs of Champagne. The new passes instead facilitated communications with central and northern Europe, and extended its trading networks. The Alps long remained a significant barrier, passable only with pack horses for commercial traffic: the first wheeled vehicle crossed the Brenner as late as 1772, while a metalled road would only be completed in 1867.\(^{12}\)

Trade had been the principal reason for the noted expansion of communications, but far from the only one.\(^{13}\) Monks and other ecclesiastics were regular travellers, as they moved between religious houses, and they had been joined during the central Middle Ages by an increasing number of pilgrims journeying to Rome, to the Holy Land, and to sites within Europe such as Santiago de Compostela. This latter destination was the only shrine to which a separate route—or rather a series of routes—developed, the ‘Way of St. James’ leading into north-west Spain. Everywhere travel for religious purposes was on the increase, and it would remain buoyant until the sixteenth-century Reformation and Counter-Reformation. Armies travelling to fight within Europe, or to crusade in the Holy Land, added to the traffic. Students attending foreign universities constituted another mobile, if much smaller, group, as medieval higher education became increasingly international. The growing ambitions of monarchs, together with the enlarged territories over which they sought to exercise their authority, and especially their legal jurisdiction, added to the numbers travelling during the later Middle Ages, as messengers, envoys, or administrators.

Europe’s road network was far from uniformly distributed. It was thickest in areas of high population density, significant urbanization and commercial activity, and reasonable political stability: regions such as northern France and the Low Countries, parts of the Holy Roman Empire, and the northern half of the Italian peninsula. Though continuity from the Roman era was particularly evident there, the good condition of the roads was primarily due to the regular maintenance carried out by the communes and, to a lesser extent, local territorial rulers. North-western and northern Europe had been opened up by an extended series of routes established by the Hanseatic trading towns.\(^{14}\) The Hanse, a powerful commercial association headed by Bremen, Hamburg, and Lübeck, had risen to prominence during the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries. It is remembered principally for its maritime trading network around the Baltic and into the North Sea, and this was certainly important. But its commercial scope was even more extensive on land, extending south into the Low Countries, the Rhineland and southern Germany, and east as far as Novgorod and Smolensk.

In the continent’s eastern half, routes were fewer and less well established, and river transport relatively more important. A series of trails, regularly followed by merchants, led from Poland through Lithuania into Russia. During the later Middle Ages,
Prague occupied a nodal point in central Europe’s communications system, while the Danube, Vistula, and Dnieper were important arteries. Yet first the Mongol and then the Ottoman advance created political instability, which together with the lower level of commerce inhibited the development of a large-scale network on its eastern and south-eastern fringe.

The role of rivers was everywhere significant, and many journeys involved a mixture of road and waterborne travel. Water transport was particularly important for the movement of bulky goods, for which it always enjoyed significant practical and, sometimes, cost advantages. Around 1700, the French fortifications expert and social commentator, the Marshal-duc de Vauban, famously declared that on a navigable stretch of water, six men and four horses (to pull one or more barges) could transport a cargo which on land would require 200 men and 400 draught animals. While his precise figures can be questioned, his wider contention was compelling: bulky goods were much easier and cheaper to move by water. Polish timber, for example, was floated down the Vistula and other great rivers to the country’s ports, cutting transportation costs dramatically. Paris was largely supplied with firewood and timber for construction by floating it down the Seine. In coastal areas, moreover, particularly in western Europe, small vessels transported passengers and goods.

Rivers and other waterways had drawbacks of their own. They were subject to the seasons and to changes in the weather. In southern Europe in particular rivers might dry up in the summer, while everywhere floods were a permanent danger. Waterways were liable to silt up, involving regular dredging to make them navigable, and natural hazards such as rapids were a further potential obstacle. While sails could be utilized on some rivers, most waterways required boats to be pulled by men or horses, and this involved keeping the towpath in good repair. Travelling downstream was significantly easier, and it was quite common for barges and other boats to be broken up at their destination, this being viewed as cheaper than an expensive return journey upstream, which could usually only be accomplished through the costly hire of men or animals to tow the vessels.

The Experience of Travel
The manifest shortcomings of the transport infrastructure might suggest that traditional society was overwhelmingly immobile, with relatively few people moving very far from home, but this would a misconception. Considerable obstacles undoubtedly existed, which slowed, delayed, and disrupted journeys, but they did not prevent individual mobility at all levels of society. The ability to travel, however, was not uniformly available, either socially or geographically. The most important constraints were gender,
social standing, and wealth, together with the region of the continent in which you lived or wished to travel. Significantly more men travelled than women, whose journeys usually traversed much shorter distances, while a gradient existed with journeys more difficult the further north and east a traveller went.

Between the fourteenth and the eighteenth centuries, the numbers travelling, sometimes very considerable distances, increased, probably significantly. Though evidence of individual journeys is often scanty, the occasional glimpses that do emerge highlight their remarkable scale. In 1510 the future Protestant reformer Martin Luther, together with a fellow Augustinian monk, walked from Erfurt in Bavaria to Rome and back: a distance of over 750 miles in each direction, which took two months to complete. Two centuries later, in 1705 the composer Johann Sebastian Bach, then a young organist in the Thuringian town of Arnstadt, walked around 250 miles in each direction across Germany to Lübeck, in order to meet the musical icon Dieterich Buxtehude. Both journeys were undertaken on foot, and that remained the overwhelming mode of travel until the nineteenth century; horses or the handful of primitive wheeled vehicles available were largely reserved for the better off.

Though specific evidence can be elusive, significant numbers of ordinary people were clearly moving across considerable distances, in search of adventure, work, or relief from poverty during frequent periods of dearth, within what remained a subsistence economy. Their numbers were boosted both by pressure upon resources resulting from demographic growth, during the long sixteenth century and again during the eighteenth century, and by the periodic shortages produced by the ‘Little Ice Age’. Everywhere towns attracted large numbers of migrants in search of employment, opportunity, or simply a way out of poverty and destitution; urban poor-relief and police records reveal the huge distances some had travelled. England was an unusually compact and well-integrated society, yet it is still surprising to realize that by the later seventeenth century at least one in six Englishmen had lived in the capital, London, at some point in their life. Certain types of migration took place regularly and even annually. Poor hill farmers from the Cévennes migrated to the plains of Languedoc and Provence to harvest the grain; their counterparts in the Auvergne and Gascony travelled to Spain in search of paid work.

Travel was expensive everywhere. Journeys on horseback or, eventually, in a coach were beyond the resources of most people, as was the hire of a guide or a passage on a riverboat. On water, as on land, the cost and inconvenience of tolls were considerable, as goods were liable to be unpacked and travellers delayed. Their scale was remarkable, and inevitably increased by Europe’s political fragmentation. During the early modern period there were more than thirty toll stations on the Rhine alone, and no fewer than eighteen
on the Seine between Paris and the sea, a distance of around 100 kilometres.\textsuperscript{21} In parts of Europe their numbers were continually increasing. Instead of being levied by local authorities for the upkeep of bridges and roads—their original purpose—tolls became a source of much-needed income for secular and religious authorities as well as private individuals. In the Kingdom of Naples, according to one contemporary estimate, their number rose from twenty-nine (1469) to seventy-five (1570) and to an astonishing 800 shortly before 1700, as the region’s powerful nobility exacted—or more accurately extorted—payments from travellers.\textsuperscript{22} Across much of Europe, tolls would remain until the end of the ancien régime, despite a growing recognition that they obstructed trade and economic development, and early efforts at reform. In France and Naples they were not abolished until the 1790s, while in Germany their removal only began after 1819.

The brigands and other robbers, army deserters, and (after the ending of wars) discharged soldiers who preyed on anyone travelling were a more immediate threat; at times particular routes and even whole regions had to be avoided. Large areas of the countryside were covered in forests, especially in the northern half of Europe, though their extent declined during this period. Wise travellers avoided forests or mountainous regions wherever possible, as these were recognized to be particularly dangerous. As late as 1712, it was decided to build a paved road through a royal forest in Normandy, in the hope of reducing the number of ‘robberies and murders to which travelers are exposed’.\textsuperscript{23} Some journeys were made in groups for reasons of economy and safety, sometimes with an armed escort, while commercial traffic formed convoys for protection.

A series of significant technological changes can be identified, though initially their impact upon the ease and cost of travel was modest. In the central Middle Ages, a new harness which fitted around an animal’s neck made it easier to use oxen and bullocks to pull primitive four-wheeled carts, increasing the loads that could be carried; around the same time, axles which could keep wheels parallel became common, though they often broke under the weight. In the later medieval period, more use was made of animals to transport goods: horses in France, mules in Spain, cattle in the Italian peninsula, a combination of all three in England. From the final quarter of the fifteenth century, carts began to be equipped with moveable front-axles, enhancing manoeuvrability. Finally, ‘coaches’—if the earliest vehicles carrying passengers merit that name—became more common from around the middle of the sixteenth century. The earliest were simply farm carts equipped with seats. By the seventeenth century primitive coaches, with straps providing suspension, were appearing; though far from comfortable for passengers and frequently the object of complaints, these were a significant improvement on what had gone before.
The Creation of Postal Networks

During the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, an extensive network of post routes and relay stations was created. It was fostered by two wider trends: increased long-distance trade, and more official correspondence, as governments began to operate through written instructions and reports, and to collect information upon which to make decisions. Though its specific origins remain obscure, it seems likely that it began in Visconti Milan shortly before 1400, when the word ‘post’ was first used to describe the organized delivery of letters. In the earlier fifteenth century, postal routes had multiplied within the Italian peninsula, and during the next hundred years the network would be extended across the western half of Europe. No fundamental technological change brought about its growth, which rested instead upon wide-ranging organizational improvements.

(p. 173) The postal network resulted from the creation of a wide-ranging Habsburg empire, and a parallel dynastic and commercial achievement by the Taxis family, one of Italy’s leading postal entrepreneurs. In 1490 Emperor Maximilian I (1493–1519), while still heir apparent, became ruler of the Tyrol. Aware of the importance of good communications between the scattered Habsburg possessions, he invited the Taxis company to establish a reliable service between his new capital, Innsbruck, and Brussels, the political heart of the Burgundian possessions and, by 1501, also the centre of the Taxis network. Subsequently, this route was reconfigured to run from Antwerp to Venice: both major trading centres, which advanced the merging of communications and news. When Maximilian’s son Philip became—briefly—Spanish king (1502–06), the Iberian peninsula and the Spanish territories in southern Italy were incorporated. The English and French rulers immediately emulated this Habsburg initiative. England’s first Tudor king set up post routes to the Channel port of Dover and to the north-east town of Berwick-upon-Tweed, on the border with Scotland. France’s network was more extensive, and briefly threatened to rival that of the emperor.
Extensive changes followed the advent of Maximilian’s grandson Charles V to the Spanish (1516) and then the Imperial (1519) thrones. Agreements with successive Habsburg generations enabled the Taxis family to create a wide-ranging postal monopoly. It established relay stations stretching across the Low Countries, Germany, and the Archduchy of Austria, and subsequently extended these routes into the Bohemian Lands and Hungary. Couriers could even be sent across France during peacetime. By the end of the 1510s, the spine of this comprehensive network stretched from Naples north through the Italian peninsula and over the Alps to north-western and central Europe. Extensions ran south to the Iberian peninsula and east to Vienna and the Austrian Habsburg Lands and, in the course of time, it incorporated smaller towns (Map 6.1).

The relay stations enabled mounted couriers to achieve speeds unthinkable in earlier generations, when individual messengers had travelled on foot or sometimes on horseback. Minimum guaranteed speeds (periodically increased) were prescribed, and enforced through time dockets. The great southern German trading city of Augsburg emerged as a nodal point, and during the 1530s a weekly service to Antwerp (1534) and Venice (1536) was established. The overriding aim was increased speed: fresh horses and, usually, new riders too, were waiting at each stage, with the result that mail could be conveyed by a succession of couriers who travelled day and night, and were encouraged by bonus payments to improve upon the prescribed times for particular sections. The most important innovation was the replacement of runners carrying messages and letters by couriers on horseback.
Costs were considerable, and at first fell entirely upon the imperial treasury, which was unable to bear them. The solution adopted was two-fold. In a key agreement signed in 1516 at Taxis instigation, what had hitherto been a private network carrying official correspondence was opened up to individuals such as merchants, bankers, and nobles able to afford the fees, generating additional income. Simultaneously the operators of the relay stations, inns, and post offices shouldered a significant proportion of the costs of infrastructure. The network was franchised and partially privatized while remaining under Taxis and therefore Habsburg control. Inns, post offices, and relay stations were permitted to display the company symbols, a post horn and the double-headed imperial eagle (a privilege granted to the Taxis family in 1516). Their owners could retain their profits, but were expected to invest by buying horses and hiring riders.

Taxis entrepreneurial flair solved the major problem which had hitherto bedevilled all postal systems: costs which quickly became unsustainable. Couriers could be provided to carry word of major events, but a network for routine mail had proved beyond the resources of the leading western European monarchies. This was why the ambitious national system established by France’s Louis XI (1461–83) had been severely cut back after his death. The result of Taxis business acumen was the creation of ‘the first public communications system in Europe’. A wide-ranging network of post offices was established at which, for a fixed price—the so-called porto: indicative of its Italian origins—private letters could be entrusted to the imperial couriers. The speed and reliability made this postal system attractive to merchants, who were sending an increasing volume of correspondence. It also encouraged the growth of individual letter writing as a form of social contact. By contrast it would be another hundred years before the French postal network was opened to non-official mail: travellers might hire horses at relay stations, but not send letters.

The Taxis network was finalized shortly before 1600, when an imperial postal monopoly was proclaimed, labelled the Reichspost (1597). Improvements such as the marking of existing routes, the building of new paved roads, and the repair of bridges further enhanced the speed couriers could achieve. The family of Thurn und Taxis (as it became) prospered spectacularly through its control of this network, acquiring noble status and the territorial power (primarily in Swabia, Bavaria, and Bohemia) to support this, and then rising to the apex of the imperial aristocracy, becoming princes of the Holy Roman Empire. Their identification with and support of the Habsburg dynasty were complete. When, after the War of the Spanish Succession (1701–14), the Southern Netherlands was transferred from Spanish to Austrian rule, the family moved the company’s headquarters from Brussels to Frankfurt-am-Main and began to present itself as more of a German aristocratic dynasty than hitherto, serving in the institutions of the Empire and intermarrying with other German aristocratic lineages. After the Peace of
Westphalia (1648) one or two of Germany’s leading rulers began to create postal networks of their own, producing some fragmentation during the later seventeenth century. Yet the Thurn und Taxis family not merely retained control over the Reichspost until the empire’s abolition in 1806, but prolonged their stewardship of Germany’s postal system until Unification.

Everywhere, postal systems continued to expand. England’s weekly royal network had been opened up to private individuals in the mid-1630s; by the end of the seventeenth century almost a million letters a year were being carried by the ‘penny post’, which operated within a radius of ten miles of central London. Between the 1580s and the 1790s there was a five-fold rise in the number of relay stations in France and Germany, while more and more post offices were opened and the number of riders, horses, and, eventually, coaches employed continually increased. The Taxis network lagged behind its competitors in only one respect. During the seventeenth century Poland–Lithuania and the Spanish Monarchy as well as England would all open the networks they had created to travellers, with the introduction of passenger-carrying coaches, and this would have far-reaching implications. The Reichspost did not do this until around 1700.

The establishment of an official network, and its subsequent opening to wealthy private travellers, was a widespread pattern. It was apparent in Muscovy/Russia, which possessed a remarkably efficient network, though it included far fewer routes. The country’s ever-increasing size, low population density, physical geography, and extreme climate were all potential barriers to travel, though it did possess certain compensating advantages. Above all, the extensive, broad, and placid rivers could be used in winter for rapid journeys on sledges (between one third and one half faster than on land) and, when ice-free, for conveying goods and passengers by boat. Travel downstream could be both easy and surprisingly fast: up to 85 kilometres a day. But seasonal variations were considerable, and many rivers had shallows, sandbanks, waterfalls, and rapids which had to be by-passed. Travel upstream was significantly slower, though during the sixteenth century teams of haulers (burlaki) drawn from peasants living nearby, were organized on the Volga to aid such journeys.

The postal network which developed from the late fifteenth century was almost certainly a legacy of the Mongol period in Russian history, and in fact had earlier been modelled by the Tartars upon China’s fabled system. During Ivan III’s reign (1462–1505), as Muscovy expanded, a postal relay system (iam) had been established to advance centralized political control. The first route extended from the capital, Moscow, to Novgorod, as it was incorporated into the Muscovite realm. Relay stations were established approximately 40 kilometres apart, each with a postmaster, a handful of buildings where travellers could rest and obtain food and fresh horses, and a number of
guides and drivers (iamshchiki) who were expected to conduct voyagers along the next stage of the route and to maintain replacement horses, imported from the steppe. Originally a tax, by Ivan III’s reign the iam had evolved into a service obligation upon peasants, many drafted from their home districts, sometimes far distant.

The system was extended into Muscovy’s new possessions. Its routes largely followed the river systems, in order to facilitate waterborne travel in both winter and summer, and to avoid the difficulties and real dangers of travelling through the dense forests covering the country. By the later seventeenth century, the iam network radiated out from Moscow to all of Russia’s frontiers. Initially restricted to officials and government couriers, it came to be opened to private individuals willing to pay a fee. The permit this secured theoretically ensured that travellers would receive shelter and fresh horses, though they were accorded a lower priority than those on official business. The framework for the country’s public postal system, established shortly before 1700, was provided by this network. Though the web of communications in European Russia was far less dense than in countries further west, it operated relatively efficiently and impressed diplomats and foreign visitors.

State initiative was equally important in seventeenth-century Sweden, which remained poor and possessed only a fragmentary mercantile and urban sector. A courier-based system had been created to carry royal letters only after the 1550s. Sweden’s greatly enlarged political ambitions during the seventeenth century, as it conquered a Baltic empire, created an urgent need for information and secure communications at home and abroad. It was the principal reason for the establishment of the Swedish Post Office in 1636 and for the creation of a network of post routes radiating out from the capital, Stockholm. Swedish peasants traditionally were required to provide horses for royal messengers or for nobles travelling on official business, an obligation found increasingly burdensome. Abolished in 1636, it was replaced by a responsibility on peasant-farmers to transport mail bags to the next stage of the relay, undertaken by post-boys employed for that purpose. In return the farmers were freed from other royal obligations, which had multiplied due to Sweden’s growing international commitments. Horses, which elsewhere carried the mail, were only utilized on the key land route from Stockholm to Hamburg, Sweden’s gateway to the European mainland. This fragmentary and rather basic postal system was a response to the new requirements of the Swedish imperial state. An attempt to merge the network with inns throughout the country in 1718, with the aim that the stagecoaches being introduced should carry both fare-paying passengers and post, was very quickly recognized to be unrealistic and so abandoned.
News Before Newspapers

By providing the communications infrastructure, postal routes speeded up the distribution of news and, after 1600, this in turn facilitated the beginnings of printed newspapers. 'News' at this time possessed a distinct and quite specific meaning. It consisted of what was newly known: information about nearby and more distant events during preceding weeks and months, rather than the present-day sense of stories reaching the media about recent politics and personalities, which were strictly controlled by public authority in early modern Europe. Its principal source was traditional: the correspondence of churchmen, merchants, scholars and, from the second half of the fifteenth century, diplomats within the Italian peninsula at least. Speedy and accurate news was obviously vital for both governments and merchants, and possessed quite literally a market value, evident in the high levels of remuneration couriers enjoyed and the large bonuses available for faster journeys.

This need had fostered the development of handwritten newsletters, precursors of later newspapers. These were produced by individuals or by small agencies, which circulated them around subscribers for an annual fee. Generated by teams of copyists, the newsletters were generally known as avvisi—'advices' or 'announcements', a term reflecting their Italian origins—and consisted of brief reports from the agency's correspondents. Such manuscript summaries of political and military events increased in size and sophistication during the early modern period, and were an important stage in the process by which news moved from the private to a more public arena. Originally, merchants had circulated information orally or passed on letters of interest to their fellow traders, and this was one important source of the avvisi.

The Republic of Venice and, more generally, the northern Italian region occupied a key location, linked to Europe north of the Alps by regular postal services. Venice became an important centre for the circulation of information by agencies, which were paid relatively large sums. By the third quarter of the seventeenth century the most prominent of these, Giovanni Quorli's bureau, regularly sent out handwritten newsletters to some sixty individuals—merchants, high churchmen, government officials, and aristocrats—scattered across western and central Europe, though this seems to have been a relatively high number of subscribers. Initially sent out twice a month, such digests subsequently became weekly. Even in south-eastern Europe, menaced by the Ottoman advance, similar if rather smaller networks existed. In this region, diplomats were a more important source than merchants, while informal transmission of news in private correspondence was probably more significant than agency digests. Handwritten newsletters were not eclipsed by the advent of printed newspapers. On the contrary: they continued
because they still possessed important advantages. They could actually speed up the diffusion of information, avoided printing costs and official censorship, and were more selective in their readership. These survived at least until the French Revolution, though from the early seventeenth century they did so alongside the novel medium of printed newsheets.

The Beginnings of the Newspaper

Ever since the advent of moveable type printing in the mid-fifteenth century, flysheets, pamphlets, and other publications focusing upon a single event or issue had appeared. These were often inspired by particular occasions presenting commercial opportunities. One example was the so-called ‘fair reports’ (Messrelationen) which, beginning in the 1580s, were published bi-annually to coincide with the Frankfurt-am-Main fair. Originally dealing with events within the Holy Roman Empire during the previous six months, their coverage was extended to the whole of Europe, thereby significantly increasing sales. Significant events representing a commercial opportunity were also commemorated in print. The response of the nascent Italian publishing industry to the Ottoman capture of Negroponte in 1470 was an instructive early example. Located on an island in the Aegean Sea, Negroponte was both a commercial entrepôt and a military base for Venice, and its fall directly threatened the Republic itself as well as highlighting the continuing Ottoman advance after the conquest of Constantinople (1453). During the early 1470s its seizure inspired almost a dozen publications, in addition to poetry ballads, as publishers and authors sought to cash in. The sixteenth-century Protestant Reformation greatly stimulated the publication of brief texts of this kind, particularly in Germany: the so-called Neue Zeitungen, which were pamphlets of between four and eight pages in length and contained news of a recent event. These had begun to appear during the 1500s, and became particularly common from the 1530s onwards. In France significant numbers of similar ‘news pamphlets’ were published at this period: over 400 between 1494 and 1559.

Publications of this kind continued throughout the early modern period, but they were quite distinct from printed newsheets. Above all, they were occasional and lacked the regularity of newspapers, which appeared monthly, fortnightly, weekly and, eventually, even daily, and so were the forerunners of the modern press. Europe’s first weekly newspaper began publication in 1605 in Strassburg. This was shortly after the Rhineland city had been integrated into the postal network, thereby ensuring a regular supply of information. Styled the Relation, its proprietor Johann Carolus already ran an agency producing handwritten newsletters. Recognizing an opportunity, he bought a printing shop and began to issue printed copies of these. His initiative was widely imitated, as
entrepreneurs in many German cities began to publish regular summaries of the news provided by their correspondents. The crucial continuity from the world of handwritten newsletters was clear in the title adopted by the second paper to be established (in Wolfenbüttel in 1608): the *Aviso*. These early newspapers were anything between two and eight small pages in size, and consisted of numerous short reports listed under their geographical origin.

Seventeenth-century Germany witnessed an explosion of titles, particularly during its final decades: it has been calculated that as many as 200 newspapers were established at this time, with as many as 70,000 individual issues which have survived. Though many quickly failed, appearing for only a few months, a significant number survived and even flourished; the frequency of publication increased; and, by shortly before 1700, every sizeable German town together with Prague and Vienna possessed its own newspaper, often appearing more than once a week. Average circulation has been calculated to be 350–400 copies per issue, while it has been estimated that there were as many as 250,000 readers spread across the Holy Roman Empire by the end of the seventeenth century.

An identical trend is evident in the neighbouring Low Countries and in England. The first printed newspaper (*Coranto*) appeared in the great commercial city of Amsterdam in 1618; a generation later no fewer than eight weekly papers, and one bi-weekly one, were being published in the city and newspapers could be purchased on four days of the week. Other Dutch towns quickly followed, responding to the demand for news among the Republic’s mercantile community. Antwerp, the *entrepôt* of the Southern Netherlands, secured its first newspaper in 1620, and England the very next year, though it was prohibited from publishing domestic news. The collapse of censorship during the political upheavals of the 1640s in the British Isles, however, facilitated a noted development of the newspaper press, which again flourished impressively in the more liberal publishing regime after the Revolution of 1688–89. The early development of newspapers was primarily in the northern half of Europe, though by the 1640s the Italian peninsula too was beginning to share in the vogue for printed news. Around fifty newspapers were being published in Europe as a whole by mid-century.

The earliest newspapers everywhere grew organically out of manuscript newsletters, but they differed in one crucial respect: rather than being restricted to a small number of individuals able to afford the annual subscription, they were relatively inexpensive and easily available, being sold by street pedlars and booksellers. Inevitably, they were primarily an urban phenomenon. Newspapers were attractive to the growing number of printing shops: they took up spare capacity, provided a regular source of income (assuming they survived for any length of time), and were relatively easy and quick to produce. Their contents were purely informative: short, formulaic, factual entries, usually...
no more than fifty words in length, identified by the location of the correspondent who had provided it. More extended, and less neutral, discussions of particular episodes continued to be the subject of occasional pamphlets or articles in the monthly journals which began to appear from the 1650s onwards. Until the later eighteenth century, however, newspapers almost entirely lacked editorial commentary.

While the postal system was crucial for the provision of news, and the printing industry central to publishing it, near continuous warfare and political upheavals throughout Europe were the most immediate stimulus to the establishment of newspapers at this time. Merchants, government ministers, officials, and diplomats urgently needed reliable and reasonably up-to-date information, which they derived largely from the press: indeed, many ambassadors filled their dispatches with reports copied verbatim from newspapers. The content of newspapers was dominated by politics and warfare: around two-thirds of available space, and more during wartime.

Natural catastrophes such as floods and earthquakes received some mention, while Europe’s monarchical courts secured increasing attention, with announcements of royal marriages, births, and deaths.

The successful establishment of newspapers in urban north-west Europe reflected the mercantile nature of these communities and the existence of a ready, if still relatively small, market for up-to-date news. Governments everywhere were happy to benefit from the information they provided, realized that they could more easily be supervised than handwritten newsletters, and also saw their potential for official communications and news management. In large areas of Europe, however, the role of monarchical régimes in the actual production of newspapers was far greater, and the resulting publications quasi-official in tone: as they were in France, the Spanish Monarchy, Denmark, Sweden, Poland–Lithuania, and Muscovy–Russia.

After the intense religious and civil strife between the 1560s and the 1620s, the French monarchy was especially anxious to control rumours and pamphlets, which it believed had contributed to the upheavals. In 1631, during Cardinal Richelieu’s ministry, the official Gazette was founded. Guaranteed a monopoly position and published several times each month, it consisted of one or two pages of reports, once again overwhelmingly political in tone. The Gazette was a large-scale operation. Reprinted by licence in a growing number of French provincial towns, between 7,000 and 10,000 copies of each issue were printed, with between 1,500 and 2,000 distributed in Paris alone, by the end of the seventeenth century. It long retained its monopoly on information provided by the monarchical government. A daily newspaper did not begin to appear in Paris until 1777.

Efforts to establish official newspapers enjoyed far less success elsewhere. The Polish Mercury began publication in 1661 in the two leading cities, Cracow and Warsaw, but
soon failed. Developments in the Spanish Monarchy were equally faltering. While there were important, if inevitably shadowy agencies, which provided handwritten newsletters, several attempts to publish an officially inspired *Gaceta* enjoyed very limited success. Denmark had a regular German-language newspaper from 1634; it would be 1666 before a Danish counterpart appeared, with one distinctive feature: its reports were all presented in verse! The very close connection between the postal system and early newspapers was particularly clear in Sweden, where the Stockholm postmaster simply combined all the foreign news he received into the weekly *Ordinari Post-Tijender*, published continuously from 1645.

Monarchical initiative was equally decisive in Muscovy–Russia, where a newspaper only began to be published during the earlier eighteenth century. Printing had been known there since the 1550s, but during the next century and a half, fewer than 500 titles had been published and 95 per cent of these were religious in nature. The Orthodox patriarch controlled the main press in Moscow, while all the paper needed had to be imported. Manuscript newsletters—the so-called *Kuranty*—were produced intermittently during the seventeenth century, primarily by translating German and Dutch newspapers. Official translators in the Diplomatic Chancellery undertook this task; the earliest surviving digest dates from 1600. But the circulation of such information was strictly circumscribed: the *Kuranty* seem to have been read aloud to the ruler and the boyar advisers, and then preserved in secret in the Chancellery archives. Once again the contents were overwhelmingly political: they consisted of treaties, pamphlets, and newspaper reports. As elsewhere, however, they provided a template for Russia’s first newspaper, the official *Vedomosti*. Founded by Peter the Great in 1703, this appeared regularly if not on a specific schedule, and continued until the Russian Revolution of 1917. Dominated by military, political, and court material, it resembled early newspapers in many European countries, though by the early eighteenth century the latter were appearing more frequently.

These newssheets included material from more than their own correspondents or provided by government. They also copied and, where necessary, translated articles from their rivals and counterparts. There was inevitably a great deal of recycling of news and interdependence between titles, much of it unacknowledged. This magnified the fundamental problem of reliability, where sources of information were relatively few, and it was one aspect of early newspapers which attracted particular criticism. There was widespread criticism of the way in which information, traditionally considered a ‘mystery of state’, part of the *arcana imperii* and so reserved to the political elite, was now available to anyone who could read and afford to buy a newspaper or who heard its contents being read aloud or discussed. One of the most vocal critics, the German Ahasver Fritsch, was unhappy that printed newspapers ‘get into the hands of everyone’,
creating a widespread ‘news addiction’ and ‘a horrible curiosity of certain people to read and hear new things’, and many contemporaries found his prescription of strict censorship attractive.51

**Improvements in Infrastructure**

*Map 6.2* Mid-sixteenth century road network in the Iberian peninsula

During the final centuries of the _ancien régime_ efforts were made to improve the infrastructure of travel, and these did contribute to some increase in speed, regularity, and reliability, particularly by the eighteenth century. Monarchs built paved highways between important locations, such as their capital and a royal palace, and eventually opened these to public travel. Denmark’s system of private royal roads constructed during the century after 1550, which connected the capital, Copenhagen, to a series of royal castles and manors, was one of the most interesting initiatives. Built by crown peasants, these were barred by locked gates in order to maintain them in good condition, and would only be opened to public access after the 1670s.52 With the completion of the _Reconquista_, sixteenth-century Spain saw significant road construction, together with a notable reconfiguration of the network of routes, as new centres of political and economic importance emerged (Map 6.2). In France the key route between Paris and Orléans was developed into a major artery. Everywhere the increased numbers travelling encouraged the opening of inns on the principal routes; being forced to seek private hospitality was becoming a thing of the past, except in parts of northern and eastern Europe. The earliest travel guides began to be published during the sixteenth century; by the eighteenth century better maps were becoming available, as cartography improved. Eventually efforts were made to erect roadside signposts, to help travellers
find their way more easily; in England legislation facilitating this was not introduced until the very end of the seventeenth century. Efforts were also made to make rivers more navigable, while a few canals were dug, though the high cost was everywhere a real obstacle and those actually completed extended over relatively short distances.

The most fundamental innovation was the establishment of post coach networks during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries; those in France, England, and Germany were the most extensive. This period saw the elaboration of an extensive network in France, while by 1715 in England there were almost a thousand coach services in operation, connecting most provincial towns. Hitherto travellers had been obliged to make their own arrangements, seeking food, accommodation, and fresh horses along the way. A small number of skilled horsemen rode alongside the postal couriers, or more accurately tried to keep up with them, but most journeys were necessarily conducted at a more sedate pace. The arrival of timetabled services of post coaches made travelling significantly easier and journeys more predictable as well as faster. The introduction of the so-called ‘flying coach’ in 1671 cut the journey between London and Oxford from a minimum of two days to only thirteen hours. Mail-coach routes everywhere brought about significant reductions in travel times. The journey across Germany, from Hamburg in the north-west to Augsburg in the south, which had taken postal couriers around thirty days at the beginning of the sixteenth century, could be accomplished in as little as five days by the 1820s. Yet fares were expensive, and probably beyond the pockets of all except a minority of Europe’s population.

The Dutch Republic alone possessed anything comparable to the mass transportation systems of later centuries: the passenger barges (trekschuiten) which plied along its canal system, carrying hundreds of thousands of people annually between leading towns at relatively modest fares. Together with a reliable and interconnected mail-coach service, these endowed the country with a remarkably integrated transport network. Between the early 1630s and the mid-1660s, around thirty Dutch cities cooperated to provide the momentum and funding to develop a network of navigable canals complete with towpaths in the central regions. Pulled by horses and averaging 7 kilometres an hour, barges maintained a regular and timetabled service linking the principal urban centres: except, of course, when the canals froze over. Eclipsed only by the nineteenth-century arrival of the railways, the passenger barges were much admired by foreign visitors, but they were unique in ancien régime Europe.
expensive and difficult to complete. One of the most renowned was the Canal du Midi in southern France, built at great expense and with surprising speed between 1666 and 1681. An impressive 240 kilometres (150 miles) long and with over 100 locks, its purpose was to connect the Atlantic and the Mediterranean, via the river Garonne and the Canal de Garonne, and so facilitate commerce, particularly the trade in grain. Though it invariably impressed travellers, its actual economic impact seems to have been slight, and certainly far less than anticipated by Louis XIV’s financial and economic minister, Jean-Baptiste Colbert. Major canal construction was beyond the resources of all except the largest states, and even for these it was usually an extended process.

The efforts of Russia’s dynamic ruler, Peter the Great, during the earlier eighteenth century, provide a good illustration. After a phase of canal building in southern Russia, his energies concentrated on developing water routes to the fast growing though relatively isolated new capital, St. Petersburg. This had been established on the Gulf of Finland in 1703, but the supply of food, fuel, and raw materials from the interior was always difficult. Aware of the potential of water transport, Peter threw the considerable human resources of his state into the task of digging canals to facilitate bulk transportation to his new capital. Though his achievements were not insignificant, the immense task was only completed a century later.

Growing state involvement in creating transportation infrastructure was a feature of the final century of the ancien régime all across Europe. Once again Russia provides an excellent example both of what was possible and of the obstacles to be surmounted. The exposed position of its new capital, St. Petersburg, demanded the creation of a road linking it to Moscow, yet the northern third of this route—north of Novgorod—was thinly populated, swamp ridden, and snowbound for up to seven months annually. The difficulties facing the engineers were enormous. Peter’s solution was characteristically authoritarian: whole villages of state peasants were forcibly re-settled along the road. It underlined that a route demanded settlements to provide horses, food, and shelter, rather than simply a highway along which travellers could journey. The eventual road was around 40 per cent longer than the distance between the two cities as the crow flies, revealing the obstacles successfully overcome.

Improvements in travel infrastructure could only be achieved with the involvement of central government, able to mobilize resources on a scale far beyond the local authorities who, traditionally, had maintained the network. The creation of the Dutch canal system by urban investment or, during the eighteenth century, the creation of England’s turnpike roads by private trusts, able to charge a toll in return for improving an existing road or building a new one, were exceptional. Much of the road building undertaken was inspired by the needs of monarchical government. During the seventeenth century France, which contemporaries believed possessed the best network in Europe, developed a
series of paved highways radiating out from Paris in each direction for up to 100 kilometres in order to facilitate the supply of the capital’s fast-growing population. It also created a dense system of military roads in northern and north-eastern France, in order to connect the areas annexed at this time to the capital and to facilitate the movement of supplies and reinforcements there.

Military exigency became a further reason for road building. The military roads in the Central and Western Highlands of Scotland built by General George Wade during the 1720s and 1730s were one of the best examples. After the Jacobite Rising of 1715, Britain’s Hanoverian government determined to create a series of military barracks at key points in the Highlands, to improve security, and to link these by military roads. Largely completed by Wade, the network was extended after a second major Jacobite rising in 1745. A growing conviction that improved communications would bring about economic development was the other principal motivation for road construction. All over Europe, governments began to build highways during the final decades of the eighteenth century, believing this would enhance prosperity.

The two countries where most was achieved were England and France. Turnpike trusts had existed in England since the later seventeenth century, but investment to improve roads had been provided primarily by local landowners and their achievements had been relatively modest and largely confined to the southern half of the country. A change in the structure of trusts enabled merchants to contribute funding, and this led to a spectacular expansion, particularly during the 1750s and 1760s. This growth both extended the turnpike network into the Midlands and then the North of England, and dramatically increased the number of roads. On the other side of the Channel, state involvement was more important. Seventeenth-century ministers, and especially Colbert, had appreciated the need to improve the road and internal waterway networks, but their efforts had been short-lived due to the low priority successive rulers gave to the task. This changed during the eighteenth century, as the state assumed direct responsibility for the country’s major highways and committed far more resources to their improvement and extension.

Central to this was the responsibility imposed upon peasants living in the immediate neighbourhood of the principal routes to provide compulsory labour on road building for between twelve and forty days a year: a considerable burden upon rural society. This was the celebrated Corvée, finalized in 1738. While it was in one sense a systematization of the traditional obligation upon rural communities to maintain routes in their area, it was now applied more rigorously and with greater central direction, and it provided the basis of the extensive programme undertaken during the third quarter of the eighteenth century. Directed by skilled engineers trained in the ‘École des Ponts et Chaussées’, established in 1750, superficially impressive results were achieved which undoubtedly reduced travel times between many of the leading urban centres. Yet this achievement
was limited to the major routes. The less important roads, and those between one village and the next, remained in their traditional condition, likely to be an obstacle to travellers. This highlighted the continuing problems of road and river transport everywhere on the eve of the French Revolution. In France as elsewhere, real improvements would only come about in the nineteenth century, when metalled roads created far better surfaces for coaches and the steam engine inaugurated an era of mechanized traction.

**Perspectives**

By 1750 travel in Europe was easier, more reliable, and sometimes significantly faster, while printed media and especially newspapers communicated information more swiftly and widely. Whether this amounted to a ‘communications revolution’ is a matter of semantic choice; many will feel that ‘transformation’ more accurately conveys a sense of the evolutionary changes which took place. The two principal trends surveyed in this chapter, however, were more closely linked than might be appreciated at first sight. Studies of state integration and nation-building, taking their cue from Benedict Anderson’s *Imagined Communities*, have reified the impact of printed media. The increasing ease with which newspapers, pamphlets, and books actually circulated around protean national states due to improved communications has been less studied. Recognition both of these improvements, and of their real limitations, is essential in order to achieve a full understanding of state- and nation-building before the French Revolution.

Roads, canals, and navigable rivers, moreover, isolated as well as connected communities and whole regions: the web of transport links was still too thinly spread to avoid the creation of commercial and informational black holes. Though France’s network was extensive, there were few roads in the great central region of the Midi even by the earlier nineteenth century. The extent of information which penetrated even remote communities—whether by word of mouth or by letter—was still surprising, and qualifies facile generalizations about isolation.

Recognition of real progress in communications in every sense of the term, however, must be accompanied by awareness of the continuing importance and, probably, dominance of the traditional oral mode of transmitting information. Early modern Europe was a society where more and more people possessed the ability to read, but majority—far less universal—literacy remained in the distant future. This was particularly true in the continent’s eastern half, and everywhere outside urban settlements. It also qualifies any theory resting upon the assumed valency of the printed word. Although both travel and communication had undoubtedly been transformed since
the fourteenth century, their profound and enduring influence upon Europe’s social, economic, and political evolution is most readily appreciated only with the benefit of hindsight.

**Further Reading**


Dooley, Brendan, ed. *The Dissemination of News and the Emergence of Contemporaneity in Early Modern Europe* (Farnham, 2010).


*German History*, 24(iii) (2006): Special Issue on ‘Communications Revolutions’.

*L’Homme et la route en Europe occidentale au Moyen Âge et aux Temps modernes* (Auch, 1982).


Notes:

(1.) Wolfgang Behringer, ‘Introduction: Communication in Historiography’, *German History*, 24 (2006), 325–332, is a convenient brief guide. I am very grateful to Thomas Munck and Julia Smith, who both commented on a draft of this article at short notice and made valuable suggestions for its improvement.


(3.) For example, Bartolomé Bennassar, *Valladolid au Siècle d’Or: Une ville de Castille et sa campagne au XVIe siècle* (Paris, 1967), ch. 3.

(4.) See vol. 1, ch. 8 for a fuller account of this.


(11.) For example, 'Windmills', by the seventeenth-century artist Jan Breughel of Velours, reproduced in Braudel, *Structures of Everyday Life*, 414.


(13.) Berings, ‘Transport and Communication’ is a notably informative survey.


Travel and Communications


(25.) Migliavacca and Bottani, *Simone Tasso*, 44–53, for this contract.

(26.) Behringer, ‘Communications Revolutions’, 342.

(27.) Behringer, *Im Zeichen des Merkur*, 512–549, for details.

(28.) Behringer, *Thurn und Taxis*, chs. 4 and 5.


(35.) See the tables in the pioneering study by Pierre Sardella, Nouvelles et speculations à Venise au début du XVle siècle (Paris, 1949), 50f.


(40.) Andrew Pettegree, The Invention of News: How the World Came to Know About Itself (New Haven, CT, 2014), 70ff. Neue Zeitung meant, at this period, ‘new tidings’ or ‘new report’; in present-day German Zeitung is the term for newspaper.

(41.) Pettegree, Invention of News, 79.


(44.) Pettegree, Invention of News, 185.


(49.) Ingrid Maier and Wouter Pilger, ‘Second-hand Translation for Tsar Aleksej Mixajlovic—A Glimpse into the “Newspaper Workshop” at Posol’skij Prikaz’, *Russian Linguistics*, 25 (2001), 209–242. These newsletters were called Kuranty at the time, and only subsequently styled Vesti-Kuranty.


(51.) Dooley and Baron, eds., *Politics of Information*, 137, 275. Fritsch was a legal official in Thuringia; his *Discursus de Novellarum, quas vocant Neue Zeitunge hodierno usu et abusu* (‘Treatise on the Present Use and Misuse of the News, called (new) Newspapers’; Jena, 1676) was the most outspoken seventeenth-century attack on the new role of the press.


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(56.) Behringer, ‘Communications Revolution’, 364.


(59.) Randolph, ‘Russian Route’; Randolph, ‘Singing Coachman’.

(60.) Figures in Randolph, ‘Russian Route’, 85.

(61.) This is most obviously apparent from the maps of the network in Pawson, *Transport and Economy*, 137 [1720]; 139 [1730]; 140 [1750]; and 151 [1770].


(63.) Apparent from the table in Arbelot, ‘La grande mutation’, 790.


(68.) Robert Darnton in particular has insisted on this: see his ‘An Early Information Society’, 1–35.
(69.) For more on this, see vol. 1, ch. 7.

Hamish Scott

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Abstract and Keywords

This chapter examines two crucial and interlocked processes in early modern European history: (1) the growth and standardization of vernacular languages as vehicles of printed communication and learning, partially parallel to the rise and fall of scholarly Latin; and (2) the expansion of literacy in European cultures. It dwells on temporal and geographic continuities and differentials in both processes, on their interrelations, and on the relevant impacts of the consolidation of governmental power and new intellectual movements. Regional, social, economic, and cultural variations are discussed, taking on board varieties of geography, wealth, class, profession, creed, and gender, and suggesting that modernization of languages and literacies was not a simple process of ‘progress’. The chapter also considers recent debates and research, pointing out that a fine-tuned approach to the historical context is crucial for any theory of language and literacy.

Keywords: Language, literacy, authors, vernaculars, Latin, scholarship, Renaissance, Enlightenment, print, book

Introduction

This chapter approaches its two key themes, languages and literacy in early modern Europe, by examining the evolving relationships between them. Our story has a double backbone: it involved the gradual recession of Latin, creatively used by a small minority of educated men across Europe, and the growth of a far broader reading public, parallel to the rise of modern national languages. These languages, in turn, often eclipsed regional dialects and became the primary tools of centralized governments. Rulers and
officials, alongside individual men and women of letters, further enhanced and
consolidated the national languages, which became tools of education, serving the broad
spectrum between political consolidation and freedom of expression.

Many historical processes converged to ignite early modern Europe’s turn from Latin to vernaculars, and from a tiny minority of literate men (and even fewer women) to a massive reading public. Some of these factors were material and economic, such as the increasing availability and use of paper, the rapid spread of Johannes Gutenberg’s moveable type printing press, and the growing urban markets for text-based information and recreation. Other factors were political, significantly the rise of centralized states relying on bureaucracies, documentation, and propaganda. Important religious and intellectual shifts also correlated to the rise of vernacular literacy: the Renaissance, especially the humanists’ creative fascination with languages ancient and modern, and the Reformation, with the expansion of preaching and individual access to scriptures and faith. Put together, these transformations were the building blocks of Europe’s move into modernity. But were they the causes or the outcomes of vernacular literacy? In some cases, such as the revolution of print, the effect of technology on culture is quite visible. In other cases, notably Martin Luther’s resonant call for expansive Bible-reading, ideas affected social norms. But generally, as is history’s wont, material, cultural, and political changes affected each other in a plethora of complex patterns.¹

Recent research on shifts in the uses of languages, reading, and writing during the early modern centuries points away from clear-cut definitions and simplistic narratives. Thus, any linear image of Latin’s gradual demise and the parallel growth of European vernaculars requires some amendment. As we shall see, Latin literacy flourished in early modern times prior to its gradual (but not absolute) decline, and lent crucial scaffolding to the rise of vernacular scholarship and education.

As to the growth of literacy, the concept itself has recently taken the plural form, with some scholars preferring to speak of ‘literacies’ in their attempt to pinpoint the intricate relationships between chronology, geography, social standing, education, religion, gender, and several other variants affecting reading and writing capabilities. Crucial questions are emerging: Who counts as a ‘reader’? What did readers read, across their numerous social and cultural divides? What level of writing is proof of the ability to write? How did books and other texts move between languages and cultures, and how important were translations? Did vernacular literacy promote or hinder cosmopolitan horizons and national consolidation? How did the rising national languages affect politics, both within and outside the emerging modern states?

The following discussion presents some of the most important aspects of our present knowledge. By weighing the interfaces of Europe’s linguistic evolution and its histories of
literacy, it offers a bird’s-eye view of one of the most crucial, as well as controversial, aspects of our journey to modernity.

Languages

In the year 1500 the vast majority of Europe’s educated men read Latin, and most of its learned texts, in manuscript and print, were in that language. By 1800 the number of literate persons, including women, had grown dramatically, and most books were composed and read in modern European languages. French had replaced Latin as the cosmopolitan tongue of elite literacy, English was on the rise among continental readers, and German acquired new poetic, scientific, and philosophical scopes. These and other vernaculars had been consolidated by religious reformers, literary authors, and governments as standard speech, what would later be dubbed ‘national languages’. Surpassing Latin, they became the chief conveyors of both administrative and cultural communication in their respective lands. At the same time, and for partially similar reasons, these triumphant vernaculars overrode regional variants and dialects, although in many cases the ‘national language’ itself had stemmed from a particular province.

Moreover, in the eighteenth century vernaculars were cultivated and deployed—by Enlightenment thinkers and by state administrations—as tools for the formation of national identity. To take one poignant example, German authors and educators self-consciously strove to distinguish and distance modern German (itself an offspring of Eastern Upper and Eastern Central German dialects) from the foreign influences of Latin and French, as well as from regional dialects. In this case, the linguistic ‘war of independence’ was three-fold, with the new High German facing both elite and grassroots competitors, and combatting the old and new contenders for a ‘universal language’ as well as its own local varieties.

Closer examination of this broad picture, however, reveals many nuances. Europe’s transformation into a continent of national communities using vernaculars was neither linear nor uniform. Latin’s demise is a complex story: religion and politics intervened with the convergence of vernaculars, while the gradual rise of ‘national languages’ as tools of communication and communal identities preceded modern nation states by some distance. Even pre-nationalist sentiments of hostility towards neighbouring peoples were sometimes displayed in the strengthening of vernaculars, with or without religious sentiments involved. Thus, for instance, the Czech religious reformer Jan Hus modernized the Czech language as a vehicle for the liturgy, but also based his efforts on anti-German sentiments.2
The causal explanations for Europe’s profound shift of languages and literacy are many and varied. It was influenced—not necessarily in this order—by economic interests, religious transmutation, governmental policy, social aspirations, and cultural quests. Many aspects of this process belong in the realm of unintended consequences. No single leader or act, not even Martin Luther’s celebrated German translations of the Bible (1522 and 1534), can account for the momentous transformation of European literacy from a thin-spread network of Latinists in 1450 to fast-growing national publics of vernacular literates in 1800.

Latin

It would be simplistic to assert that early modern literate Europeans flatly abandoned Latin in favour of modern languages. In the early part of our period, Renaissance humanists revived it, celebrated it, and transformed it. For thinkers and scientists, its lexicon and outreach were as yet irreplaceable. The Catholic Church reasserted Latin’s vital role as its liturgical and theological tongue during and after the Reformation. The upper echelons of most European societies cherished Latin for three reasons: it was a good marker of social standing, it was a useful tool of discreet conversation with their peers at home and abroad, and the treasures of its great library were unsurpassed. Last but not least, on top of its scholarly, scientific, sacred, social, cosmopolitan, and aesthetic functions, Latin endured as an exquisite realm of poetic creativity throughout the era. It remained the principal language in which international treaties were drawn up until the earlier eighteenth century, and continued serving administrative bodies, as above all the Hungarian Diet, until around 1800. While Hungary’s various vernaculars were often mutually exclusive, and German usage signalled a specific political preference, Latin remained the neutral and comprehensive language of government and constitution.3

It was the language of well-bred or well-educated men, rather than women or commoners. There were, of course, exceptions to this rule: some lowly traders, artisans, and even peasants had a degree of Latin literacy, and some elite women were accomplished Latinists. Two characters in Henry Fielding’s Tom Jones (1749) provide us with examples for both categories, and both of them evidently had real-life equivalents. Benjamin, the affable barber, possessed ‘scraps of Latin, some of which [he] applied properly enough, though it did not savour of profound literature, seemed yet to indicate something superior to a common barber’. Jenny Jones, on the other hand, ‘obtained a competent skill in the Latin language, and was, perhaps, as good a scholar as most of the young men of quality of the age’.4 In general, however, Latin provided its male and upscale practitioners with the twin advantages of universality and exclusivity. They used it to cross linguistic boundaries while remaining conversant with their own kind.
This was no longer the Latin of ancient Romans or of medieval monks. As early as the twelfth century Spanish and Italian translators began rendering Greek classics from Arabic into Latin, heralding the Renaissance and the creative recovery of a scholarly, poetic, purged, and refined neoclassical Latin. For the Humanists, Latin and, somewhat later, Greek, were the mainstays of the ‘good and liberal arts’. Erasmus of Rotterdam memorably said that ‘within these two literatures is contained all the knowledge which we recognize as of vital importance to mankind’. The renewed studia humanitatis of the Renaissance were geared to raise broad-minded laymen, not only priests, doctors, or lawyers. While secular schools existed in some places long before the Renaissance, this broad-minded schooling incorporated a novel view of education, embracing the liberal arts as routes for human perfection. Literacy was seen as promoting freedom, and this grand ideal persisted as a mainstay of elite education between the Renaissance and the French Revolution. A reader—a Latin reader, to begin with, but also readers of vernacular by the eighteenth century—was conceived as a fully human being. The new humanist schools did not only cater to commerce-orientated laymen, but also offered a new upper class upbringing that amounted to a ‘reeducation of the nobility’.

Neoclassical Latin was strikingly creative. ‘Erudite, allusive, and polished to a high gloss’, Anthony Grafton wrote, ‘Neo-Latin poetry amounted to a subtle form of scholarship, dense with implicit interpretations of the ancients.’ Alongside its numerous Italian practitioners it was brought to the north of Europe by such masters as Erasmus and Thomas More. Sixteenth-century schools and universities thrived on it. But students did not remain at the high end of this vivid linguistic realm: everyday themes, current affairs, jokes, sexuality, gossip, and wordplay were rife in this energetic and socially sheltered arena of early modern letters.

In all of these respects, early modern Latin was not only a remnant of Europe’s past but also one of its modernizing forces. But this important corrective must not blind us to the fact that by the mid-eighteenth century, at the latest, the Latin scaffolding gave way, barring several exceptions, to the triumphant vernaculars in most European cultures, in most fields of learning, and in most literary genres. The reading public, and even scholars and scientists, became too numerous and too variegated to remain comfortably within the exclusive, formalist, and pedagogically demanding Latinist fold. Luther and his disciples may have chatted in Latin, but they translated the Bible into multi-fold vernaculars for a far wider public. Galileo Galilei preferred to write his ground-breaking scientific works mostly in Italian, and Thomas Hobbes compiled his masterpiece, Leviathan (1651), in English. To be sure, numerous scientific and philosophical texts were compiled in Latin well into the eighteenth, and even into the nineteenth centuries. Hobbes himself wrote his early philosophical works in Latin and produced a Latin translation of Leviathan in 1668. Even such late and personal texts as his autobiographies were written in Latin
verse and prose. There were many reasons for men of letters to remain staunch Latinists: exclusivity, scientific interlocution, elegance, and simple fondness. Nevertheless, by the end of the seventeenth century Europe’s republic of letters increasingly adopted and acknowledged French as its lingua franca. French, however, never accomplished Latin’s earlier level of monopoly. By the mid-eighteenth century other vernaculars, notably English and German, were keen and able to compete.9

Latin, especially in its neoclassical splendour, was thus a genuine modernizing force in Europe’s upper-scale cultural scene. It inspired rulers to consolidate their own vernacular in order to create a uniform language of governance, and authors to match their vernaculars to the loveliness and sophistication of Latin. Elite schools and universities did not part with it, but their graduates went on to help build the cultural edifices of modern languages. Latin’s early modern rise and subsequent decline suggest that the evolution of European languages and literacy was not a single-tracked story.

**Vernaculars**

All men and women in Europe used at least one vernacular language for their everyday speech, and thus when we speak of ‘the rise of vernaculars’ we refer to the overtaking of Latin, in governmental or cultural usage, by standardized versions of local languages. Indeed, lay poetry had flourished in many parts of Europe during the late Middle Ages, most significantly in Italy, France, and Spain. As early as the thirteenth century, and in some places even earlier, poets began to write (rather than merely recite) their works in vernaculars. While medieval audiences, typically assembled in villages and in feudal courts, mostly consumed oral lore, the developing towns and cities of late medieval and early modern Europe produced new types of audiences. Town dwellers and ‘middling sorts’, lay and literate, appreciated written texts compiled in their vernacular tongues.

During the hundred years that followed Gutenberg’s introduction of his printing press in the mid-fifteenth century, books became relatively cheaper—their publication cost was between one fifth and one eighth of parchment manuscript production—and far more easily obtainable, meeting the needs of an expanding readership. Only a small part of Europe’s population was able to benefit from the printing revolution in its early phase, but a growth of printed output—not a linear one, but in leaps and bounds—has remained a constant of European history ever since. Both the spread of vernacular writing and the uses of print were unevenly spread, with parts of western and central Europe preceding the east. During different periods and in different cities, print output dramatically varied. In many parts of western and central Europe, for example, the Reformation and its resulting wars of religion encouraged intensive printing of Bibles, other devotional
texts, and political pamphlets. Such peaks were apparent in the late sixteenth century. The English Civil War engendered parallel textual warfare in the 1640s and 1650s. Since print runs varied greatly, the number of different titles published in a particular year must be balanced out by the number of copies per edition. But, as a general rule, political and ideological upheavals—and later, in the eighteenth century, the rise of literary bestsellers and fashionable authors—clearly affected the tides and ebbs of printing in the regions involved.¹⁰

In the long run, printing crucially affected the success of core literary, religious, and scholarly texts compiled in vernacular languages between the fourteenth and the seventeenth centuries, including the Italian poetry of Dante, Petrarch, and Boccaccio, the French of Rabelais and Calvin, the German of Sebastian Brant and Luther, the Spanish of Fernando de Rojas and Cervantes, and the English of Chaucer, Shakespeare, and the King James Bible.¹¹

In other European languages, including Portuguese, Dutch, Swedish, Polish, Danish, Hungarian, and Russian, poetic works and Biblical translations similarly affected—to varying degrees—the emerging reading publics. Notable early vernacular authors include, for instance, the Pole Jan Kochanowski (1530–84), the Dutch Phillips van Marnix (1538–98), the Portuguese Gil Vincente (c. 1465–1536), and the Dane Ludvig Holberg (1684–1754). Many of these writers and their peers used more than one vernacular language. In Hungary, Bálint Balassy (1554–94) brought lyrical, lay-themed Hungarian poetry to a new peak, translating and adapting Italian poetry and conversant in Latin, Italian, German, Polish, Turkish, Slovak, Croatian, and Romanian.¹² The grand masters, surrounded by a plethora of lesser-known authors, were able to draw on the rising numbers of lay literate audiences, and at the same time helped to educate and inspire new generations of readers.

Early modern book markets were nurtured by print and magnified by vernaculars. In German lands, where Latin was an elite language divorced from the Germanic tongues as well as from everyday life, the Lutheran turn to the vernacular vastly augmented the scope of the reading public. The absolute numbers of books published in French, Italian, and English rose dramatically during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, and their consumption by ever-growing circles of readers fed the magic circle of book production and literacy.

The economic aspect of the rise of European vernaculars is not limited to the appearance of print and its resultant book market. Lawrence Stone has influentially suggested that a revolution of education took place in England in the sixteenth century, creating new opportunities to answer the demands of a rising middle class.¹³ This claim has been contested by other historians, who pointed out that neither print nor literacy advanced
within the matrix of a smooth linear ascent. Moreover, the ‘middle class’ itself is a porous and debatable unit of analysis. Many readers remain under the radar of the history of print, being clients of script rather than print, and of cheap, non-bookish ‘job-printing’ rather than highbrow literary texts. Nevertheless, in many urban parts of western and central Europe trade and manufacture grew alongside the number of people able to read and enjoy literary texts. In England, Scotland, and the Netherlands—and to a lesser degree elsewhere—schools opened in towns and villages, and teaching no longer focused on Latin alone (even though the numbers of Latin students, as we have seen, increased as well). Boys training to become artisans and merchants, bankers and clerks, required schooling and texts in their vernacular languages. At the top echelon of education, universities prospered and new ones were established, notably in sixteenth-century Spain and in the eighteenth-century German lands. Interestingly, England’s two universities experienced a period of stagnation in the eighteenth century, demonstrating the equivocal nature of narratives of progress. Nor did literacy and education always necessitate official or local institutions of learning. Among the largely rural population of Scandinavian countries, and also in the mountainous regions of the Alps and the Pyrenees, high rates of literacy were obtained by home schooling and peripatetic teachers.

Many people spoke more than one vernacular language. In numerous localities, residents were able to speak the local dialect (along with one or two neighbouring dialects) alongside an emerging standardized language. Princes were encouraged to learn the tongues of their subjects, and scholars read, translated, and sometimes wrote in several vernaculars. At the top end of the social ladder, Emperor Maximilian I (1508–19) boasted an acquaintance with German, Latin, Bohemian, French, Flemish, Spanish, Italian, and even English. Far more effectively, the multilingual merchant and pioneering English printer William Caxton (1415–92) compiled, probably during his sojourn in Bruges, the Dialogues in French and English, enhancing a tradition of bilingual merchant lore for a growing audience of linguistic go-betweens.

The Reformation, followed by the religious wars of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, was a powerful engine of the growth of vernaculars. Protestants, beginning with Luther himself, promoted the translation of the Old and New Testaments from Latin into local tongues, thereby enhancing the literary scope of their languages and laying the ground for modern poetic and scholarly works. Bibles became legible, obtainable, and even affordable to numerous literate or semi-literate households. By the sixteenth century, many Protestant families habitually read the Bible at home, thereby joining the Jews, both Sephardis and Ashkenazis, who in many parts of Europe kept a long-standing tradition of familial textuality. Such home schooling, whether intentional or incidental, augmented the opportunities of girls to become literate.
Political change, too, affected the diffusion of prominent vernaculars. Monarchical and princely courts in Italy, France, Spain, the German principalities, and elsewhere were keen to unify written languages to facilitate government, administration, and tax levying. In France, a pioneer in both territorial and linguistic consolidation, the Ordonnance de Villers-Cotterêts of 1539 provided the basis for the hegemony of the langue d’oïl (the French of the court and of northern France) at the expense of the langue d’oc, which had hitherto been widespread in the south. All official transactions now had to be conducted ‘en langaige maternel françois et non autrement’ (‘in the French mother tongue and not otherwise’). Such formulations could aim to exclude Latin on the one hand and regional or cross-border dialects, such as Breton, Provençal, Catalan, and Basque, on the other.

The consolidation of meta-regional languages was thus the outcome of several interacting factors: the technology of print and its growing market, urbanization and its demand for practical literacy, Protestantism and its rebellion against Latin liturgy, and modern state-building requiring linguistic standardization. Publishers, pastors, and state officials all had an interest in standardizing the written (and, by extension, the spoken) languages within sovereign states and astride expansive territories.

There were spiritual incentives, too. The humanist ideal of man—literate, well read, and free—lingered well beyond the Renaissance and travelled well beyond the sphere of Latin literacy. The great standard bearers of vernacular literature, from Miguel de Cervantes’s *Don Quixote* (1605) to Voltaire’s *Candide* (1759), celebrated their readers’ literacy, imagination, and independence of mind, even if the very same qualities often brought disaster upon their hapless protagonists. Literature became a central power for social change, affecting politics, fostering the emergence of an articulate public sphere, and drawing an ever greater number of men and women into reading new texts, often in the early modern lingua franca, French, but increasingly in their respective vernaculars.

‘National languages’ often emerged from one successful variant, a regional dialect stronger or better placed than others due to its political or cultural prominence. Standard Italian partially derived from Tuscan dialect, thanks primarily to its literary distinction. Modern German, as we have seen, grew from the Eastern Upper and Eastern Central German dialects of the Middle Ages and early modern era, including the weighty input of Luther, who wrote in the language of Saxon officials. But, like those towns that became capital cities, these elevated dialects claimed nationwide monopoly and geographic neutrality. As in the French case noted earlier, these claims were often legally enforced.
Regional Languages and Dialects

How can a language be discerned from a dialect? In geographical terms, dialects are often seen as geographically circumscribed, often neighbouring their linguistic relatives. Two dialects belong to the same circumscribed language if they can be reciprocally understood, at least in part. However, pre-modern linguistic landscapes were often inhabited by many dialects that did not add up to a single language; and not all dialects that we tend to place under the same linguistic roof are mutually comprehensible. In the Holy Roman Empire, for example, regional variations were difficult to bridge across the vast German-speaking lands.

A different criterion presents the hierarchy of language and dialects in terms of power politics. ‘A language’, sociolinguist Max Weinreich famously quipped, ‘is a dialect with an army and a navy’. Yet many languages nurtured national literatures without the benefit of nation states. Weinreich’s own mother tongue and scholarly interest, Yiddish, might be seen as a dialect of medieval and early modern German; yet it did not follow the pattern of territorially circumscribed dialects, being broadly dispersed and including several dialects of its own. This was equally true of the ancient written languages, Latin, Greek, and Hebrew. Even if deemed dead, they were still languages; and their death was a relative matter, since they still inspired creativity and were even spoken on a daily basis in classrooms and houses of worship. Living languages, such as Norwegian and Hungarian, did not inhabit a sovereign national territory, yet experienced a surge of creativity during the early modern period.

The distinctions between dialects, languages unlinked to sovereignty, and those ‘with an army and a navy’ are thus quite porous. The consolidation of a dominant linguistic variation into a ‘national language’ was a gradual accomplishment. In France, the langue d’oïl, and specifically the Paris regional dialect, monopolized administrative and literary speech, first in the north of France and then in the south, pushing out the Occitan langue d’oc which had already achieved a similar primacy over southern dialects and developed as a rich language of government and culture. But the collapse of the southern contender to ‘the French mother tongue’, as the Ordonnance de Villers-Cotterêts put it, did not eradicate the grassroots dialects. Many of them survived tenaciously for centuries to come: Breton, Provençal, Norman, Picard, and others.

In the Italian peninsula, the victorious Tuscan dialect became the backbone of future standard Italian largely due to the poetic achievements of Dante Alighieri, Francesco Petrarca (Petrarch), Giovanni Boccaccio, Niccoló Machiavelli, and their peers. However, Tuscan triumphed in the bastions of literacy and government long before it became familiar to ordinary dwellers of other Italian states and regions. Several regional dialects
survived and even flourished, including those of Piedmont, Lombardy, Naples, and Venice. Political separatism, habit, and pride kept them afloat, in both oral and written forms. Yet it was a Venetian scholar, Pietro Bembo, whose Prose della volgar lingua (1525) crowned the language of Petrarch and Boccaccio as the penultimate models for future Italian writing, and Venice’s prominent printing houses took heed.

Regional languages began struggling for their survival during the eighteenth century. In Wales, where English had been the language of government for centuries, Welsh remained the sole or primary spoken tongue of four-fifths of the population. In order to enhance its stature as a written language, reformer Gryffith Jones launched a system of ‘circulating schools’, inducing not just popular acquaintance with the indigenous tongue but also one of the highest literacy rates in Europe.

Toward ‘National Languages’

The leading vernaculars of Europe, those consciously consolidated by rulers and writers to create a uniform literacy, were the chief opponents of Latin as the language of government and culture. The Protestant Bibles were most important early tools of linguistic standardization, with Luther’s German model followed by English, French, and Dutch Bibles as well as (non-Catholic) Polish, Spanish, Czech, Hungarian, Swedish, and numerous other vernacular translations. While humanists on both sides of the sixteenth-century religious divide promoted such translations, the Catholic Church gradually adjusted its linguistic policy to the Protestant challenge. Vernacular Bibles were translated and published for the benefit of the Catholic faithful, authorized, and sometimes initiated by the clerical establishment. Such were a Dutch translation in 1528, a French one in 1530, and a Polish edition in 1561.

Ruling languages were not always spoken by society at large. In Norway (which was part of a composite monarchy ruled from Copenhagen), officials and merchants spoke Danish. In Russia, Church Slavonic was used to greet travellers and overrode the three major divisions of Great Russian, Ukrainian, and Belorussian. But particular variants successfully claimed primacy over their competitors in most linguistic areas and set out to become the ‘national languages’, most notably the Tuscan brand of Italian. No lesser dignitary than Machiavelli advocated the triumph of his native Florentine variant and aimed to ‘disabuse those who are so ungrateful for the benefits they have received from our city that they are content to confound her language with those of Milan, Venice, and the Romagna, and with all the filthy usages of Lombardy’.
Eighteenth-century thinkers began considering the leading vernaculars in terms of a ‘national language’, although there had been some earlier pioneers. Many Enlightenment thinkers took pride in their native tongue, observed its transformation into a national cultural asset and a tool of collective identity, and committed themselves to aid the process. On a theoretical level, some leading figures offered new insight into the linguistic basis of nationhood. They also acknowledged the historical dimension of languages and cultures and analysed their transformations over time, place, and economic and political vicissitudes. Among them were Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz (1646–1716), Giambattista Vico (1668–1744), Denis Diderot (1713–84), Jean-Baptiste le Rond d’Alembert (1717–83), Adam Ferguson (1723–1816), and Johann Gottfried Herder (1744–1803). This cosmopolitan cluster of German, Italian, French, and Scottish thinkers (among others) was no longer linked by a ubiquitous Latin, but its members formed a network of mutual influences and shared concerns within and beyond their respective languages. By the time of the French Revolution and the era of Romanticism, especially in its German variety, national languages came to be seen as indicators and sources of national prowess and historical grandeur. French had led the way, but other languages were now defining their own stature and tenacity by rebelling against its monopoly among the higher classes of readers. Thus, Goethe’s protagonist in The Sorrows of Young Werther (1774) fled the feigned, francophone aristocracy to commune with commoners and with nature; and while sufficiently cosmopolitan to employ Homer and English poets as leverage, the fresh poetic German of Goethe was the chief medium of Werther’s bid for freedom.

While writers and intellectuals wielded the soft power of cultural politics, governments assertively discriminated in favour of national languages against local languages and dialects. Thus, upon the foundation of the French Republic in 1792 only native speakers of French were allowed to vote in the referendum, while speakers of minority dialects were kept away under suspicion of disloyalty. The victorious vernacular was now fully identified with the nation (as in the German notion of Sprachnation), and the nation became fully equated with the state. A notable example is provided by the Austrian Habsburg emperor Joseph II, whose ordinance of 1784 made the German language the sole official instrument of government. Earlier, in 1781, Joseph instructed the imperial education commission to allot substantial funding to primary schooling, disseminating the basic skills of literacy and numeracy, alongside the large sums already given to high schools and universities.

Class difference played an important role in linguistic variegation, and this factor did not adhere to geographical boundaries. In city and countryside members of different social echelons spoke differently, at times to the point of mutual unintelligibility, even when speaking the same language. Yet some social hierarchies were steeper than others. The
Venetian ambassador to London was positively impressed by the uniformity of lower class and upper class English in the capital, in contrast to the great chasm between plebeian and patrician Italian speakers. Such gaps often reflected the level of literacy, because written language tended to affect spoken language, and its spread ushered in greater uniformity.\textsuperscript{30}

**Literacy Reassessed**

According to a simple definition, literacy is the capacity to read and write, namely to make passive or active use of written text. A literate person can understand and use language in its written form. But early modern Europe, the scene of dramatic linguistic shifts and evolving linguistic skills across many political, social, cultural, and religious divides, demands a subtler approach.

The history of literacy has become, in recent decades, a focal topic stemming from the history of books and reading. More broadly, it belongs to a juncture of social, economic, and intellectual history, alongside historical sociolinguistics. For example, social historians in the twentieth century have been concerned with the geography, wealth, class, profession, creed, and gender of readers; economic historians dwelled on the growing book market and the link between literacy and the affordability of published texts; intellectual historians have looked at the authorship, intended readership, and emerging audiences of books, pamphlets, and periodicals; and sociolinguists increasingly recognized the importance of historical context for any theory of language. The latest studies into linguistic changes and literacies have attempted to combine aspects of all these fields.\textsuperscript{31}

It is not easy to map the early modern European populations who were able to read and/or write: numerous men and women were readers without leaving any evidence of this to posterity. Reading, as Roger Chartier memorably put it, ‘only rarely leaves traces’, and ‘is scattered in an infinity of singular acts’.\textsuperscript{32} Of course, scholars and writers, alongside other active and well-informed readers, reported their reading habits and scopes in their own written legacy. They quoted from books they read, exchanged letters about their reading experiences or confided them to their diaries. Many private libraries of the well bred and well educated survived, or at least their inventory lists did. But a history of literacy cannot content itself merely with the libraries, bibliographies, and intellectual contexts of great minds and prominent authors, almost invariably male. New research has turned to what Heide Brayman Hackel calls ‘less extraordinary minds’, whose gradual entrance into the expanding space of Europe’s reading public is changing our
understanding of literacy itself. Documents have been unearthed disclosing the literate skills and habits of merchants and artisans, well to do farmers, servants, and peasants.

The task becomes even more complicated if we take into account that not all men and women who were familiar with an alphabet could actually read. Some were able to identify rudimentary words or phrases but could not read books. In some Catholic regions the Church promoted basic Latin literacy among the Mass-attending populace, who nevertheless remained illiterate in their own vernacular. Among Protestants, some congregations listed members who were able to confirm their faith by reading the holy books and catechisms. Likewise, by no means could all readers write. Being able to sign one’s own name was once considered a benchmark of literacy; but how accurate is it? We know of numerous readers who could not write their names, while others, evidently fewer, learned to sign but not to read. At the other pole of literacy studies, some scholars have argued—in the context of the build-up towards the French Revolution—that literacy implies a critical attitude toward texts and traditions. Within this wide spectrum of interpretations, the question remains: who counts as literate?

In the terms suggested by Brian Street, the older model of ‘autonomous literacy’, measuring individuals’ technical literate skills independently of their social context, has recently been challenged by ‘new literacy studies’ where ideological and political contexts must be taken on board. All specific occurrences of reading and writing belong within the broader contours of societies and cultures. Thus, the striking example of female peasant poets in the eighteenth century discloses not only the individual literacy of talented women of modest backgrounds, but also the gradual entrance of women and the lower classes into the circles of poetic performance and printed exposure.

Recent scholarly findings and debates have refined the focal question to include not only ‘who counts as literate?’ but also ‘where’ and ‘when’. The literate population of a fifteenth-century Alpine village may require other measures of literacy from those useful for an eighteenth-century town on the Baltic Sea. There are numerous gradations of literacy. Throughout our period, basic alphabetical skills did not always promote the ability to read (let alone write) any texts (let alone books). Many people could discern certain letters or words by their shape alone. We might also ask whether literacy must apply to letters alone. Numeracy, for example, can be seen as an aspect of literacy. And what about the reading of maps, the ability to read musical notes, or the ‘reading’ of narrative imagery such as the serial paintings of ‘modern moral subjects’ by William Hogarth (1697–1764)? Does skill with cards and dice belong in the realm of literacy? Illiterate persons could evidently decipher cultural symbols and systems of representation other than letters. Our present discussion, however, focuses on the sphere of letters and written texts.
The bird’s-eye trends are striking: between the sixteenth and the eighteenth centuries the number of published texts rose significantly. While in 1530 the number of items printed in England was 142, by 1640 the annual output of the printing presses had grown to 870 items. Correspondingly, according to one count, by 1640 no less than 80 per cent of London’s male and 29 per cent of its female inhabitants were literate.

Despite variants and qualifications, in general it is safe to say that literate Europeans formed an ever-expanding club. A notable leap is visible in the late seventeenth century. By that time, vernacular languages (led by French) overtook Latin in the book market, and the numbers of readers expanded in approximate parallel. At roughly the same time, market regulations imposed by some governments allowed publishers to work more freely, facilitating distribution. Some states stepped up their encouragement of primary schooling. In the Kingdom of Sweden, which incorporated Finland and some of the Baltic states, a law issued by the Church in 1686 made literacy mandatory, and by 1800 almost the whole population was able to read.

However, as opposed to London’s high percentage, in the mid-seventeenth century only 30 per cent of all English men were able to read, and many of the Swedish readers, primarily female ones, were still unable to write well into the nineteenth century. Such regional variegations are only part of the large-scale divergences found throughout the continent. Northern and northwestern Europe became literate faster than the south and the east, cities faster than villages, while considerable variation was evident in middle-sized towns.

A different problem with the quantification of literacy concerns members of ethnic or linguistic minorities, whose literacy went under the official radar. For example, Jewish men in central and eastern Europe were often able to read Hebrew, but unable to sign their names or display any other proof of literacy in the ruling vernacular, thus remaining undetected by official records. At the other extreme, an erudite Jewish woman such as Glikl of Hameln evidently read German as well as Yiddish and possibly Hebrew. It is difficult to measure the embrace of vernacular languages by Jews in early modern Europe. In Italy, where Jews had relatively more recourse to the mainstream culture, Italian literacy grew among Jewish men and Hebrew literacy appeared to decline by the middle of the seventeenth century. But, unlike Latin, Hebrew remained the primary language of orthodox education and liturgy among Jewish communities everywhere.

Reading and writing capabilities did not dovetail, and writing too is subject to numerous regional variants. While in 1686 less than 30 per cent of French men and 14 per cent of French women could sign their names on marriage certificates, a century later the rates had climbed to 48 per cent for men and 27 per cent for women. In the German lands literacy rates are often placed lower than in northern France, the Netherlands, England,
and Sweden, at around 10 per cent in 1700 and up to 25 per cent by 1800. However, name signing on marriage documents raised the threshold to over 50 per cent in 1780.\textsuperscript{44} We shall return to the issue of signature as evidence of literacy below.

Literacy was a profoundly political phenomenon. Its promotion was often a political decision, even when its underpinnings were theological. Protestant leaders, especially Calvinists, encouraged it in order to multiply their adherents through the spread of independent Bible reading. In Reformation Scotland, John Knox requested a school in every parish, and that ambitious goal was all but accomplished by the eighteenth century. As Peter Burke put it, ‘the godly had more faith in literacy, which they saw as a step on the road to salvation’, but at the same time used it as a tool of political strategy and national consciousness preceding modern nationalism.\textsuperscript{45} As we have seen, the humanists took literacy to spell freedom rather than salvation. But did education promote political dissent or compliance? Keith Thomas suggested that, at least in England, the latter case is more convincing. ‘[W]ritten literacy was the literacy of the educated classes; it was almost impossible to acquire it without also absorbing the values and social attitudes of polite metropolitan culture... The printed word thus either educated an imitative audience in accepted views or confirmed a passive one in a position of cultural inferiority.’\textsuperscript{46} This, however, is only one side of the political coin. During the English Civil War in the mid-seventeenth century, and more dramatically before and during the French Revolution, massive audiences radicalized their political dissent through the reading of political tracts, pamphlets, and—in the latter case—newspapers and journals. Indeed, the political impacts of print overstepped literacy, as printed materials were shared in assemblies or coffee houses, read aloud, and discussed.\textsuperscript{47}

Despite the growing recognition of the importance of schooling for an ascending civilization of commerce, governments were not always keen on the expanding appetites of their literate subjects. Books had been censored since the Middle Ages, first by the Church and then by lay rulers, and censorship survived the emergence of print culture and sustained its hold over its products for several centuries. Russian Czars, notably Peter the Great, sought to limit their literate subjects, who were a small minority in any case, to the realm of obedient bureaucracy rather than freethinking cosmopolitanism; accordingly, Russian printing presses produced far more bureaucratic documents than books or journals, and private publishing was kept in check. Russian intellectual life developed despite these restrictions, not thanks to official support.\textsuperscript{48} In eighteenth-century France too, despite its impressive array of lay critical intellectuals, officials deftly spied on both writers and readers, punishing for the consumption of suspect texts as well as their production. In his essay on the liberty of the press, Voltaire advised the powers that be not to fear books. ‘Rome has not been vanquished by books’, nor was the Roman Catholic faith during the Reformation. It was the bad deeds of the powerful, rather than
the writings of the oppressed, which eventually brought their collapse. ‘Let us read and let us dance’, he concluded, ‘these two amusements that will never do harm to the world.’

A Variety of Literacies?

Female literacy, of increased interest to many scholars in recent years, is a useful basis for exploring different types of literacy, rather than mere differences in numbers. ‘As a group’, writes Heidi Brayman Hackel, ‘women represent the single largest category of new and various readers during the [early modern] period ... [F]emale readers are at once disproportionately invisible as readers in the historical record and overwhelmingly the subjects of contemporary polemics about literacy.’ Recent study has shown the connections between female literacy, the decline of Latin, and the rise of vernaculars. This process had powerful political repercussions, involving the rise of nation states and the early modern race for empire. Does female literacy require different measurements, and perhaps even different definitions of the concept itself?

One finding illustrating the need to redefine literacy, mainly but not solely in the context of female readership, is that many women who were unable to sign their names could nevertheless read. Thus, quantitative studies relying on signatures provide only partial ratios of reading abilities. For example, while one study places female illiteracy in Norfolk and Suffolk at around 95 per cent in 1580 and still at a staggering 82 per cent in 1700, other findings for northwestern Europe indicate a rather lower rate of illiteracy among the nobility and higher urban classes. Conversely, the high rate of Dutch literacy in the late eighteenth century was demonstrated by the 64 per cent of women (compared to 85 per cent of men) who signed their names on marriage licences in 1780. Even these figures may be underrepresenting the level of reading capabilities, especially those of women who were not encouraged to wield the pen. On the other hand, many people able to scribble their names on an official or commercial document may have been otherwise illiterate.

Rates and types of literacy varied wildly between big city, small town, and country, along Protestant–Catholic divides, and, perhaps most pointedly, between social classes. In eighteenth-century Koblenz, the higher bourgeoisie enjoyed a literacy rate of 95 per cent, while less than half of all day labourers were able to sign their names. Nor was the literacy of a middle-class housewife akin to that of a young aristocrat, a politically alert artisan, or a well-to-do peasant. Some readers, mostly female, devoured novels and ‘poems of feeling’ in the privacy of their homes while others, mainly male, consumed coffee house newspapers in company, switching between reading out loud, listening, and
arguing. Others needed access to legal and accounting documents, and still others frolicked with Latin verses. Our literacy percentages include many a man and a woman painstakingly deciphering words or numeric figures one by one, eyes squinting with effort, finger slowly proceeding on the page.

Social class and economic status provide another differential. Reading for pleasure and entertainment, with or without the added bonus of instruction, became prominent in the eighteenth century, but in earlier times it was often the privilege of wealthy and leisured men. Even the Enlightenment was often blind to the vast differences among readers. When Lady Mary Wortley Montagu wrote to her daughter, the Countess of Bute, that ‘No entertainment is so cheap as reading’, she was either oblivious or neglectful of the multitudes of readers unable to afford as many books as they wished. Similarly blind, the philosopher Montesquieu wrote that he has ‘never known any trouble that an hour’s reading didn’t assuage’, while female servants were poring over novels and shedding tears, due to the weak candlelight, to the heroine’s woes, or to their own intimate acquaintance with similar pain. For them, reading did not assuage trouble but refine it. Most of them are obscure to us; only a few were able to leave testimony of their reading, and even fewer were able to become writers themselves.

Enlightenment literacy emphasized the sceptical and critical aspects of reading. While earlier erudite readers sometimes shared these values, they became more widespread, even popularized, thanks to broad circulation of newspapers and journals and the rising fame of such genres as political satire. Readers were encouraged to be selective and to acquire a critical distance from the text. ‘Examine how you humour is inclin’d, and which the ruling passion of your mind; then, seek a poet who your way do’s bend, and chuse an author as you chuse a friend’, so advised an Irish poet, the Earl of Roscommon, to translators of poetry. By extension, his advice applied to an increasingly sophisticated reading public.

Literacies varied along other axes too. German historian Rolf Engelsing has suggested that a ‘reading revolution’ took place around 1750. Until then, most readers had access to few books, often including the scriptures, and they read them ‘intensively’, repeatedly, and in many cases aloud, among small audiences of family, friends, and servants. From the mid-eighteenth century, however, reading became ‘extensive’, with a novel type of male and female reader devouring as many books as they could find, seeking out new publications, becoming fond of novels and newspapers, and increasingly reading in private.
Interfaces of Languages and Literacies

‘In general,’ wrote Voltaire in his aforementioned essay on the liberty of the press, ‘we have as natural a right to make use of our pens as our language, at our peril, risk, and fortune.’ Voltaire may have used the word ‘language’ in this context to signify oral speech, but his equation of language and writing as natural rights deserving protection attests to the intimacy of our two subject matters in the expanding world of early modern European literacy.

The evolution of reading and writing is best seen in the context of Latin–vernacular relationships. Even in the era of its swansong, post-Renaissance neoclassical Latin affected literacy directly and indirectly. From the sixteenth to the eighteenth centuries every man of good breeding, anyone claiming the status of what the English called a gentleman, had to read some Latin. Its effects on modern vernacular literature were enormous. The revival of letters in Latin energized and inspired new writings in modern tongues, primarily in Italian, Spanish, and French. When Latin gradually fell to relative disuse, its fingerprints remained in the victorious vernaculars. It was a fate comparable to the legacy of ancient Greek on Roman literature and study.

The prominent languages of European literacy were those particular vernaculars that had won their own battles of linguistic supremacy in late medieval and early modern times. They overrode both Latin (as a written language) and regional dialects (mainly spoken, but also with a modest literary output). The newly prominent languages could serve as tools of national self-definition, not only through their triumph over Latin and dialects, but also because an increasing number of men and women were now able to read them, and solely them. As communities of speakers became communities of readers, the process of nation-building that Benedict Anderson has called ‘imagined communities’ was able to rely on masses of participants being able to read, and at times also write, the recently standardized ‘national language’.

The German case is perhaps the clearest example for the development of a standardized vernacular at the expense of both Latin and regional linguistic variations, evidently dovetailing with the rise of literacy. While different clocks were ticking for the alphabetization of different social classes (a factor often more decisive, as we have seen, than either gender or religion), the cumulative picture is nevertheless engrossing. ‘A rise in literacy,’ writes Helmut Walser Smith, ‘corresponded to [the] crucial transformation from Latin to German.’ Furthermore, in the late eighteenth century both these processes kindled a novel literary culture that was both national and broadly European. ‘Accompanying the shift from Latin to the vernacular and the rise in literacy was the
standardization of German and the creation of a modern German literature embedded in the wider currents of European Enlightenment.  

As the intercultural Latin scaffolding gave way, vernacular-based societies needed to employ translation in order to remain conversant with other European cultures, and increasingly also with non-European cultures. A growing number of readers, and by the eighteenth century probably the majority of them, could peruse only one language, their own. Translations allowed them to gain international and intercultural perspectives. This was no longer Latin’s circumspect upper crust cosmopolitanism, but a modern vista that inspired a medley of universalist ideals, national sentiments, and imperial aspirations.

Conclusion

The public and discreet charms of literacy, first in Latin and then overwhelmingly in the vernaculars, were a constant feature of early modern Europe. ‘One who could read’, as David Cressy put it, ‘was more likely to be at ease in a world which was increasingly dominated by written instruments and instructions, documented decisions, correspondence, record-keeping and the printed book.’ We may add to this list the ascending importance of self-guided piety, printed news, and the gradual lettering of urban landscapes with signposts, billboards, and commercial advertisements. In big cities, men, women, and children found themselves gradually surrounded by text.

Renaissance Latinists and their educated predecessors formed a ‘republic of letters’ that flourished well into the eighteenth century, by which time Latin was overtaken by French as the cosmopolitan tongue of the learned and refined. However, the heyday of French was perforce temporary, even though its diplomatic and meta-national functions lingered into the twentieth century. As readers and authors increasingly resided within their national vernaculars, and translations became prime movers of intercultural exchange, the need for a lingua franca temporarily dwindled. Of course, educated men and women in the age of the Enlightenment were often able to read, and even write, in two or more languages (Latin sometimes included, and French almost invariably). Nevertheless, by the late Enlightenment, on the threshold of Romanticism and nationalism, the French mantle was receding as the Latin did a century earlier.

The joint outcome of early modern Europe’s linguistic and educational transformations was a new type of modern reader, versed and often sated in his or her national language. Europe’s republic of letters became an array of ‘democracies of letters’, whose ever-growing publics mostly enjoyed a single-language literacy. At the same time,
Enlightenment thought became highly attentive to the linguistic aspects of human cognition, historical change, cultural differences, and ‘national character’.65

A modern, multilingual yet divisively lingual, nationalist Europe was steadily transcending the unique landscape of early modernity, where social, religious, and political barriers to literacy co-existed with a cosmopolitan interlocution. Latin, the elite universal language, lost its primacy, and French, the semi-elite lingua franca, could not take its place across a continent of popularized national(ist) discourses. Only during the twentieth century did English, in its globalized form, take over the role of a global tongue of literacy, catering to a globally conversant public. But, as our historical analysis may suggest, its current primacy is probably being undermined by novel transformations. Future history books, written in yet unfathomable languages, will map and explain the new sea changes that we are currently experiencing unawares.

Further Reading


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Notes:


(8.) Grafton, ‘Splendors’, 151-152.


(10.) See the section ‘Volume and Distribution’ in James Raven’s chapter in this volume, ch. 8.


(14.) See also the critique of progressive and uninterrupted ‘printedness’ in James Raven’s chapter in this volume, ch. 8.


(20.) Max Weinreich, ‘der yivo und di problemen fun undzer tsayt’, YIVO Bleter, 25-1 (January–February 1945), 13. Weinreich said that a student had offered him this insight during a lecture.

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(26.) Quoted by Hale, Renaissance Europe, 117.


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(43.) Melton, *Rise of the Public*, 82.


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(59.) Rolf Engelsing, *Der Bürger als Leser: Lesergeschichte in Deutschland, 1500–1800* (Stuttgart, 1974).

(60.) Voltaire, ‘Liberty of the Press’.


(64.) Oz-Salzberger, ‘Enlightenment’, 55.


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Abstract and Keywords

The introduction of printing by moveable type and the development of engraving and other intaglio processes from the mid-fifteenth century transformed the ways in which books and documents were published. Manuscripts had enjoyed European-wide circulation, but the print-led increase in the volume of publication, the accuracy and redesign of textual replication, its social penetration and the rapidity of its circulation encouraged new modes of social interaction and new methods in the construction and dissemination of knowledge. The printing revolution challenged political and religious authority, resulting in new attempts at intellectual censorship and the restraint of publication. Resurgent interest in historical bibliography has inspired dozens of studies of an early modern ‘print culture’. The novelty and effectiveness of the transmission of print, however, were tempered by technological and transport constraints that suggest fitful and uneven development, but one that was pan-European and essentially transnational in its character and significance.

Keywords: Book fairs, book trade, intaglio/engraving/woodcuts, jobbing-printing, letter-press/moveable type, libraries, newspapers, printers, publication, short-title catalogue (STC)
letterpress printer had probably heard of, if not seen, recent experiments in copperplate engraving in Germany and was certainly familiar with the block printing long used in Europe for trade marks on sacks and decorative designs on altar cloths (among other devices). The design of his press might well have been inspired by the wooden screw of local wine presses. The method Gutenberg used to cast his innovative type is uncertain, but it soon became standard to use cut punches in conjunction with cast moulds or matrices.

In letterpress printing, a font (or fount) of type comprised a set of all the characters of one size and design (notably roman, italic, and bold), usually cast in at least the necessary quantities to fill the compositor’s pair of cases, and including numerals and punctuation. An individual piece of type was called a sort. The face of any piece of type was the surface inked by the printer to impress its shape onto paper. Very different processes were involved in other means of printing. Woodcuts, using often crudely incised blocks, continued for centuries to accompany letterpress printing, particularly for ballads and chapbooks, and many woodcuts travelled between printers. The first illustrated book printed in France used woodcuts from Basle, and some of the first printing in Portugal used woodcuts and engravings from Germany. Intaglio printing, as it advanced from the 1430s, comprised several methods of working, but principally etching and engraving (usually on copper plates). In etching, a metal plate (also usually copper by the eighteenth century) was covered with a waxy ground, resistant to acid. Marks were made through the ground using a pointed etching needle or, additionally, an échoppe, a tool with a slanted oval section. The marks were turned into hollows by bathing the plate in acid. Once the remaining ground was cleaned off, ink was forced into the hollows of the plate and its surface wiped clean. The ink marks in the hollows made the print. Most intaglio printing, particularly for pictorial work, was first etched and then completed with a burin as in engraving, thus combining the relative cheapness of etching with the finish of engraving. It is often impossible to recover the exact history of the working on the plate, and for this reason such prints are often simply referred to as ‘engravings’.

The mid-fifteenth-century production of printed indulgences, missals, Bibles, and other religious artefacts proved very profitable. Secular printed texts followed almost immediately. Others were quick to copy Gutenberg and by 1470 printing presses worked in some fourteen European cities. Ten years later, 110 towns and cities published printed books. New market demands offered further practical possibilities for the printing of images (including maps, portraits, emblems, and elaborate script) by copperplate engraving, then of etching and, later, of half-tone mezzotint. The transformation in the character of books was well underway before Gutenberg’s enterprise, but print dramatically enhanced the changes: the extension of vernacular literature, the gradual
(but not entire) reconfiguration of production centres and personnel away from the clerical and monastic, the eclipse of bespoke publication and clientage by the speculative and the commercial, and the expansion of non-elite custom. The casting of new fonts based on handwritten script (and where, for example, early French Gothic bastarda type contrasted with Italian roman type) proceeded at a swift rate. Fonts for vernacular printing in Czech, for example, were cast from the 1470s (with influential diacritical marks), and the first books in Romanian and printed in cyrillic type date from a printing house in Brașov, Hungary in the 1520s. The most basic historical profile is of an unrelenting extension of printing presses across Europe and, surprisingly rapidly, their arrival in the colonies, even though the vast majority of reading material for the colonists of the New World continued to be imported from Europe. A printing press operated intermittently in Mexico City from 1539, in Lima from 1581, and in Boston, Massachusetts from 1638.

**Historical Perspectives**

‘Print culture’ has become a familiar expression in the writing of early modern European history. Yet it is an elusive concept. Charting the progress of printing, town by town across Europe has its challenges, but more problematic is the evaluation of the impact of that printing. Modernity, it is often asserted, arrived with gunpowder, the compass, and the printing press. The success of the introduction of printing by moveable type and also by engraving and other intaglio processes followed from the recovery of population after the Black Death, the greater movement of peoples, and a modest increase in discretionary and disposable income that broadened demand for consumables. Print undoubtedly transformed politics, religion, commerce, and intellectual, linguistic, and cultural life, but is it really possible to speak of a ‘print culture’ in early modern Europe when so much continued to depend on oral communication? Much of what was read was also persistently written not printed, especially in the form of graffiti, ledgers, and letters. Consequently, the history of books and writing before the introduction of print offers insight into cultural and communication practices that transcend the technological difference between script and print. Printing also encompassed the reproduction of cut, engraved, and printed images as much as of printed words. Above all, although printing fundamentally changed the appearance of the textual page, the replication, derivative forms, and transmission of that appearance depended upon the practitioners of printing and the financing and success of publication. A technologically inflected print culture was effected by a publication culture with a chronology inherently related to regional demographic, commercial, religious, and political history.
The most obvious perspective in the history of printing is that of transformation, of the revolutions brought to individual mental worlds as much as to collective politics, commerce, or devotion. As several generations of historians have demonstrated (with differing emphasis and insistence), printing encouraged and enabled both the organized transmission and the personal understanding (and misunderstanding) of new intellectual, political, and religious propositions from the Protestant Reformation and Catholic Counter-Reformation to secular Enlightenment and the American and French Revolutions. Nevertheless, change in the practice of communication is subtler than often appears. Emphasis on new technologies can disguise a broader historical context in which material objects (namely books changing from script to print) are socially highly specific. Relatively few people in fourteenth-century Europe engaged directly or extensively with written words and numbers. If needed at all, basic literacy and numeracy enabled labourers to mark down numbers of livestock or products, or create simple calendars. Some tradesmen and craftsmen required more advanced literacy or numeracy but their proficiency remained well below that of clerks and clerics, whose activities depended more perceptibly on counting, reading, and writing. Given that knowledge of Latin was often demanded, ‘literacies’ might be a better skill description than ‘literacy’. Even so, much was memorized and the oral continued to dominate the written. From northern and western to eastern and southern Europe, print is rightly associated with linguistic consolidation and with the orthographic and syntactic distinction and standardization that were key components in the formation of language. Before the coming of age in dictionaries and popular grammars in the mid- to late eighteenth century, however, popular linguistic development resulted as much from day-to-day verbal exchange between migratory peoples and from secular and religious oral performance as from the direct influence of written and printed texts. A limited elite enjoyed or endured reading manuscripts, some on parchment, some on paper. Roughly the same elite exchanged some degree of correspondence, both public and private (and one in which spelling, grammar, and language combination were acceptably variable). The majority of the population remained largely unaffected by the production of books. The reading of texts reached the ears of the illiterate, but only occasionally.

Materialities claimed a longue durée also. Gutenberg’s Bible enterprise created heavy tomes that in many ways resembled huge twelfth-century manuscript lectern Bibles. After the increased popularity of smaller hand-held Bibles in the fourteenth and early fifteenth centuries, lectionaries (large collected readings from Scripture) returned to favour. Lectionaries were read on many different occasions and certainly not simply in monastic refectories. Gutenberg and his rivals and successors exploited huge market opportunities in the Rhineland and Netherlands where the vast manuscript lectern Bibles were hugely expensive to produce. More than eighty editions of the Latin Bible were printed by letterpress before 1500. The early option to have the first printed Bibles
manufactured on vellum proved an unanticipated success, and one that highlights
continuities. Gutenberg’s Vulgate Bible with forty-two lines on each page, followed a
format made standard in thirteenth-century Paris. Books of hours, similarly growing in
popularity from the early fourteenth century, offered printers a physical template for
innovative design and decoration. With their selection of religious and liturgical texts,
these books commanded notable demand among monied and devout women and at least
in their simpler unilluminated form increased custom among those of modest wealth.
Such demand boosted the market for print, but it also encouraged different typographic
design paradigms, with clear differences, quite aside from the different sizes and formats
of books, between the layout of Latin and roman and of vernacular and gothic texts.

Contours and Continuities

At first, little appeared to change in the use of books following the introduction of
printing by moveable type and the increased use of woodcut illustration and intaglio
printing from the mid-fifteenth century. A Bible, psalter, or prayerbook might be
glimpsed in church or on the deathbed, and some, at least, read ABC hornbooks, the
occasional ballad or advertisement, and, according to one’s fate, papers and small
parchments referring to trials, military service, or the supply of food and other
necessities. For most men and women, however, knowledge related to the natural world,
to practical skills and handed-down lore, and depended more on observation, listening,
and memory than on material texts.

By 1750, the world had changed remarkably, and especially in urban communities. Now,
almost all men and women directly or indirectly encountered the multiple products of the
printing house. Print, however, must not be confused with or at least restricted to books
and what we usually think of as ‘publications’. By the mid-eighteenth century, only a
minority of Europe’s population confidently read pamphlets, newspapers, and books even
including Bibles, prayerbooks, and hymnbooks. An especially refined minority engaged
with works of great learning, fastidious devotion, or sophisticated entertainment. Yet in
these same years, almost no life was untouched by print. As much as books, it was the
diverse jobbing work of the printers that recast the production, material form, and
reception of everyday knowledge. Small pieces of printed paper (and sometimes other
material) reshaped intimate, private worlds and human relationships. Individuals and
groups were bound, freed, and defined by printed and filled-in forms of
understanding and obligation. People were baptized, married, and buried by forms and
documents; and the eighteenth-century business world—finance, commerce, and industry
—proceeded on a raft of printed and blank chits, certificates, and authorizations.
Between 1450 and 1750, therefore, the impact of print deepened and diversified, but the contours of this development over time were uneven and complicated by the very different contributory aspects of printing and publishing history. During these three centuries, technological and production constraints counterpointed developing market demands for printed staples (Bibles, prayerbooks, psalters, almanacs, religious and instructional primers, chapbooks, ballads, and prognostications) and for new and evolving types of production (legal, geographical, maritime, military and other secular guides and compendia, as well as early news books). Certain step-changes were a consequence of the unblocking of obstacles to market take-up: the reduction in civil war in western and central Europe after the 1650s, transport changes from the 1670s, and, in certain realms in the early eighteenth century, effective (if not always planned) changes to regulatory controls. Letterpress remained a constant, while evolving intaglio processes ensured a greater use of engraved images in the early sixteenth century and then to an even greater extent in the late seventeenth century. The expansion in the number and productive capacity of paper mills in France, Italy, the Low Countries, Spain, Scotland, and then England from the late seventeenth century was a further turning point (despite heavy taxation in some realms such as France), ensuring greater supply of quality paper and the establishment of many new printing houses. Many of these printers benefited from new experiments in font design and casting, further encouraging fresh forms of textual production.

The outpourings of agitators and the attacks and defences of printed pamphlet and propaganda warfare had sustained both urban and peripatetic, clandestine printers from the earliest years of the Reformation to the Thirty Years’ War and other civil wars of the seventeenth century. International peace remained rare and wars and skirmishes continued to interrupt long-distance book traffic, but within many states, the late seventeenth-century calming of civil and religious confrontations brought new if socially uneven market conditions. These offered new possibilities of spending on non-essential items among which books and print were increasingly prominent. Greater domestic stability, however, also encouraged new censorship and regulatory procedures. Many impositions appeared with claims that they were intended to prevent a return to the internecine horrors of recent times, but many also protected monopolistic trading by leading publishers (and notably in England where the Stationers’ Company technically policed all copyright registration). New restrictions, of both pre-publication censorship (as in France) and post-publication censorship (as in Britain), curtailed expression, dictated where production took place, and encouraged clandestine printing, but had no overall restraining effect on the expansion of the volume and the market for different kinds of printed material. As the distribution of printed material became easier, the networks of intellectual exchange that had flourished from the early sixteenth century and continued through the most difficult years of turmoil of the late sixteenth century...
and mid-seventeenth centuries, attained an unprecedented reach. Private publishing, financed by the patronage of individuals and institutions also increased, but was increasingly eclipsed by new forms of commercial popular literature spreading across Europe from an increasing number of production and distribution centres.

The confident surge in the volume of material published during the final third of the seventeenth century in most parts of Europe notably included periodical journals and newspapers (including financial journalism) and a range of texts in vernacular languages from travels, histories, and memoirs to playbooks, verse, and novels. This surge, which also comprised a huge extension of practical, small-item jobbing printing, responded to fundamental shifts in the economy of European states, the end of prolonged religious and civil strife, and a gentle late seventeenth-century demographic growth that quickened markedly from the 1740s. Most attention is often given to the innovations of western European printers and publishers, from early seventeenth-century corantos to the first daily newspaper in London in 1701, but the issue of new types of printed materials was Europe-wide. The first periodical printed in Czech appeared in 1658 and the first Jewish newspaper, *Gazeta de Amsterdam*, was published in Ladino in 1674. The first Yiddish newspaper, *Kurant*, appeared in 1686, and the first newspaper printed in Russia was published in St. Petersburg in 1702. At the same time, the traditional chapbook (*canards* and *livrets bleus* in France, *stampe popolari* in Italy, *pleigos sueltos* in Spain, and *lubki* in Russia) extended to something more substantial but still very much within the popular vernacular market (including *cordel* literature in Spain, the new *Volksbuch* of German lands, and the increasing popular religious literature, cookery and astrology books, and etiquette manuals of the French *Bibliothèque bleue*).

Certain continuities acted as constraints. The most notable immovable was the technology of the letter printing-press. The Gutenberg printing press and type introduced a technological regime that was to last until 1814. Changes affected typeface cutting, the making of paper and ink, and engraving and binding techniques. All these were important in reshaping printed products, but the basic hand operated printing press remained the only method of printing books, ballads, chapbooks, and derivative printed forms such as newspapers until the nineteenth century. Basic printing press processes and printing house practices changed little before the advent of steam-driven presses. Further restructuring of the book trade concerned distribution and changing forms of print such as news-sheets and periodicals, and it was people-led: population growth, greater market and economic activity, and the transformation of living practices. If Gutenberg had returned to Mainz in 1800 he could have resumed work in printing houses with virtually unchanged printing processes.

Paper-making similarly remained dependent on the collection of rags and on water-powered and manually operated mills, and (despite certain developments in the late
seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries in beating and other manufacturing
techniques) the main changes to the production of paper came with the increase in the
number of mills. Only after 1800 were the techniques, costs, and materials used in
making paper transformed by steam-driven technology and new machinery (notably the
Hollander beater), bleaches, rosins and finishing sizes, and, eventually, by the
substitution of rags (p. 220) by straw and then by wood-pulp fibre. Many mills, for
obvious water-based reasons, remained at some distance from publication centres, such
as the ancient mills of the Valle delle Cartiere of Toscolano Maderno near Verona and
Brescia which continued to supply quality paper for the great printing presses of Venice
(and elsewhere). Other paper mills were sited closer to presses, such as those in
Beaujolais and the Auvergne, not too far from the first printers of Lyons, and those at
Prądnik Czerwony, established near Cracow in about 1493.

Volume and Distribution

Charting the advance of the volume of publication is more challenging than identifying
the setting up of presses in different parts of the world. The counting of published titles
can be dangerous, as exponents of statistical bibliography found, from Daniel Mornet,
Robert Mandrou, and scholars of the Bibliothèque bleue to numerous contributors to
various national History of the Book series a couple of generations later. Many scholars
supply sombre health warnings to ‘bibliometrics’, but not everyone attends to them. The
enlargement of the book trade can be generally plotted by the increase in the publication
of separate titles, but estimates based on title counts are no sure indication of the total
volume of publication given the extreme variation in the size of print runs. Comparative
production figures range from the 100 (or fewer) copies of privately printed curiosities to
10,000-copy editions of popular dictionaries and grammars and even larger editions of
Bibles, missals, and prayerbooks. Archival evidence of printing house activity offers some
measure of the volume of production, but this is available only for a minority of titles.
Most printing accounts and business records are lost. Publishers and printers frequently
refreshed popular or poor-selling publications by the insertion of new title pages, a
practice that further confuses edition tallies. Title counts, which are nationally based and
for new publications, also ignore the continuing trade in all books, including imported
and second-hand books. If it were possible to produce a snapshot of all books and
magazines circulating in any given year, it would reveal a mix of new and old, foreign and
home-produced, finely bound, incomplete, and damaged.

The further caution is that the commissioning and transmission of texts through scribal
publication, well established by the fourteenth century, multiplied as a result of civic,
business, financial, and bureaucratic needs and with the increase in written
correspondence. The interaction of the scribal with the printed word and image is a critical feature of early modern Europe. Greater authority is often associated with the coming of print. The printed text and certificate seemingly offered greater authentication than the scribal, but in many cases actual authority was not given to a printed document until its blank parts were filled in by pen or it was signed and otherwise validated by written marks or words. The manufacture and use of registers and ledgers similarly expanded with the advance of printing, much, perhaps, as the use of paper has hugely (and apparently paradoxically) increased in the digital age. Both printed and scribal activity required the proliferation of paper mills and output from the late seventeenth century. In addition, increased demand for musical notation and specialist scripts resulted in new font design and the casting and printing of non-Western script and calligraphy.3

Nation states frame European and Western bibliographical studies (and continue to do so in eastern and central Europe where many bibliographical archives have become newly available or have received fresh attention in recent years). This is understandable in terms of literary and linguistic interests and of simple practicalities, but it remains a problem for historians. However much print is identified with the cultivation of different vernacular languages and with campaigns and protests that helped advance early modern state formation, in many other ways the nation is a misleading geographical unit for the history of print. The political (not always linguistic) unit was the obvious enabler for retrospective national bibliographies (published as short-title catalogues (STCs)), but books circulating within that unit were and are international commodities. It is also the case that some STCs are more advanced than others, compounding the national biases evident in historical treatments. Suggestive counts of titles published between 1550 and 1800 can be constructed by use of the online English Short Title Catalogue, The Short Title Catalogue Netherlands, and the companion Short Title Catalogus Vlaanderen, but French and German STCs are currently limited by chronological range and by the collections consulted.4 Nothing as accessible or comprehensive yet exists for those attempting to identify the titles of books and pamphlets originating from Spanish, Portuguese, or Italian territories.5 The failure of the majority of European STCs to include printed items that comprised only one sheet is a serious one: most chapbooks were printed from a single sheet, as well as ballads and many notable miscellanies that circulated in their tens of thousands across the continent.6

Compounding the imbalance between different national STC projects, are false perspectives created by political boundaries. Even national histories of book and print production need to be accounts of book exchange in and out, of the trade in books, of the different books in circulation and read at any one time, irrespective of where they were originally printed or sold. The identification of printing origins is beset by nightmarish
bibliographical problems. For example, the imprints of many editions declared that they were printed in the Netherlands when they were not, and many that were printed in the Netherlands stated that they were printed in France or Germany, or elsewhere. Despite appearances, many of the first editions of Voltaire in French were printed in London. Much seventeenth- and early eighteenth-century Danish printing originated from the Netherlands and north Germany. Even under censorship, the main sources of early Romanian-language printing were Wallachia and Moldavia, whose products travelled to Transylvania. Greek and Arabic printing also flourished in Wallachia in the early eighteenth century, while Romanian-language volumes appeared in Vienna and Buda. In these and many comparable cases across Europe, false imprints continue to offer enigmatic bibliographical puzzles.

The broader issue is the travel of books and print. Attention to the transnational requires consideration of the transmission of texts, of how bibliometrics might move from production to circulation. Across early modern Europe, the distribution of books, one of the mechanics of cultural transaction, underpins the ways in which frontiers for the written and printed word, vernacular or otherwise, were both created and breached. Distribution entailed both channels of confrontation and a lace of like minds, linking pulpits, lecterns, courts, churches, schoolrooms, libraries, and parlours. In the past thirty years or so, resurgent interest in the sociology of textual production, circulation, and reception has inspired dozens of new studies of literary transmission and popular culture in an early modern republic of letters and a European and transatlantic realm of imaginative and scientific literature stretching from Copenhagen to Constantinople, and from Cadiz to California. Continuing scholarship traces, for example, the Russian and Eastern destination of books from the Netherlands, Amsterdam and The Hague, and the German links forged with St. Petersburg and the Baltic towns.

By contrast with medieval, usually bespoke, textual transactions centred on monastic and university centres, late fifteenth-century stationers and printers used the great fairs of Europe as important trading and distribution centres for progressively commercial wares. The earliest record of a printer-publisher trading at the fair at Frankfurt-am-Main dates from 1478; other fairs operated recurrently at Paris, Lyon, Vienna, and Nuremberg, although early modern Parisian publishers relied on relatively local distribution and rarely sent representatives to the Frankfurt fair, unlike publishers in Venice and Antwerp. The Frankfurt fair contracted in the early seventeenth century and the Leipzig fair became less international (if, by the end of the century, still advertising the ‘Latin’ book trade in law, medicine, and theology). Competing urban centres and sharply increased vernacular printing by the end of the seventeenth century stimulated semi-national publishing regions and long-distance book-trading circuits with a deepening social penetration of print. Of many examples, Laurence Fontaine has traced the regular
routes of indefatigable small book pedlars through France, Savoy, and Italy. Basle and Lyon remained especially active, while Amsterdam’s publishing developed during the seventeenth century, also exemplifying the complex and sometimes unexpected currents of publishing history. There is, for example, clear evidence of supply by booksellers across the Low Countries of the increased demand for print from the Counter-Reformation Church. Not only did important Antwerp printers like the Moretuses and Verdussens print Roman liturgical books and vernacular devotional Catholic literature, but so too did printers in the Protestant North such as the Elzeviers, Blaeu, Schipper, de Lonne, and the Huguetan brothers.

Great cities boasting many printers and publishers by the end of the sixteenth century, led by Paris, Venice, Amsterdam, and Antwerp, were major distribution centres, but so also were other cities on major European crossroads. The Kobergers of Nuremberg kept stocks with distribution agents in Venice, Danzig, Hamburg, Basle, Frankfurt, Lübeck, Prague, Augsburg, Amsterdam, Vienna, Lyon, and a dozen more. As Anton Koberger had extolled in a printed advertisement that accompanied the more than 2,500 copies of his great Nuremberg Chronicle of 1493: ‘Speed now, Books, and make yourself known wherever the winds blow free.’ In what might be described as the ‘Hansa model’ of marketing books, merchants travelled to fairs and other marts selling to other wholesale merchants, employing numerous factors, licensed itinerant salesmen, and warehousing along leading and developing trade routes. Books, many exported as sheets and packed in barrels, travelled in a network connected to the great freight routes. Key overland routes included the Amsterdam to Breslau route and the Iter Italicum, the two-way route from Poland to Rome followed by clergy, diplomats, scholars, students, and books. Jan Pirożyński argued that the effect of the Iter Italicum book route limited the much vaunted influence of England, the Netherlands, and France in the Polish Renaissance.

The turning-point in international trading in books came with the lessening of structural constraints on distribution from the late seventeenth century, fundamental transport changes, and new financial organization interlinked with new social, urban formations. By the mid-eighteenth century almost every part of Europe was affected. Printing was introduced to Poland, in Cracow, as early as 1473 (by an itinerant Bavarian printer) and the presses printed some 7,000 editions in Cracow and many other towns of Poland-Lithuania in the sixteenth century. Even though the Polish book industry was less developed compared to the printing houses and publishing booksellers of Italy, the Netherlands, and France, Polish presses played a vital part in supplying print to central and eastern Europe. The earliest books in cyrillic type were printed in Cracow and then in the Balkans before the seventeenth-century ascendency of the Moscow Printing House, founded in about 1568 and then reopened and more effectively productive from 1614.
From the mid-sixteenth century, Poland further exemplified a production centre that also constituted an important market for books. Similar interplay developed in Hungary, Bohemia, and Moravia a little later (and where most early Hungarian books were printed in Cracow and Vienna). The Polish market is graphically reflected in surviving inventories of booksellers and merchants (and which include, of many examples of imported texts, thousands of Protestant books printed in Polish in Königsberg).\(^\text{15}\) Polish booksellers imported and distributed books that were produced in Europe’s leading printing domains.\(^\text{16}\) Demand that required similar importation advanced in Scandinavia, where, for example, the Danish printer Henrik Waldkirch (active 1598–1629) established important connections to the Frankfurt fair and to Basle.\(^\text{17}\) For all the attention to a golden age of English letters from Shakespeare to Milton, the English model was not dissimilar to the Scandinavian, being far from self-sufficient in printed and especially scholarly book production before the end of the seventeenth century.\(^\text{18}\) By 1750, much printing in Danish, German, and other languages in Denmark and Sweden was supported by a flourishing market for books printed in Danish and other languages in Hamburg, Paris, and London, a market that certainly encompassed many Norwegian towns.\(^\text{19}\)

In sustaining this pan-European development, booksellers’ catalogues, issued and used by both wholesalers and retailers, were originally the sole vehicles for notification and promotion of booksellers’ wares.\(^\text{20}\) By the late seventeenth century, the catalogues were very widely available, but were also only part of a broader commerce in print where distributional success limited as well as promoted new printing and publishing initiatives.\(^\text{21}\)

Correspondence networks also increased hugely, encouraging the printing and transport of printed texts but also long-distance scripted exchanges of knowledge. The network built by Henry Oldenburg (1619–77), first secretary to the Royal Society in London, for example, stretched from Breslau and Danzig to Styria, Carinthia, and the Balkans (as well as to remote extra-European settlements).\(^\text{22}\)

Publishers attended so closely to distribution because of the need in the commercial market to sell quickly. With major capital tied up in unsold expensive printed materials, it was usually necessary to sell as quickly as possible the whole edition in which so much was invested. The only adjustment concerned the use of back-lists, with volumes stored in depots at international fairs. When an especially urgent sale was required, discounting also proved critical. Although variations were marked, there seems no reason to quarrel with Peter Blayney’s conclusion that a 50 per cent mark-up might be considered acceptable at each stage of onward selling.\(^\text{23}\) The further consideration, however, was the business and credit transacted by exchange of wares between booksellers. In mainland Europe, the greatest of the international booksellers maintained permanent warehouses
at the fair cities of Leipzig and Frankfurt and swapped, page for page, printed materials of the same format with other publishing booksellers (a practice known as Tauschhandel). Established trading circuits in southern Germany extended their reach, much in the same way that the printers and publishers of Venice, dominant in Europe by 1500, developed far-reaching trading alliances and networks. As we know from his letters to Thomas Bodley, the London printer and bookseller John Bill not only issued his copies of Frankfurt catalogues but also travelled to the fair, then at the height of its fame as the central book mart in Europe. There is every reason to think that similar exchange practices, if on a more modest scale, operated between other leading booksellers.

It is also the case that any survey of commerce in print must recognize that sale (and commercial exchange) was not the only means of distribution. At times when large collections represented a great proportion of the overall book market, books travelled as gifts, as the pawns of religious contest, and as trophies of war. Royal deaths, for example, brought the dispersal of great libraries like the Corvina of Matthias of Hungary and the great collection of Zygmunt August of Poland. The Reconquista, the advance of the Ottomans, and the Reformation and Counter-Reformation caused widespread upheaval in the book market. Private, institutional, and monastic libraries, from Tunis to Pozsony, were pillaged or broken up and sold. Stockholm’s royal library gained hugely from the looting of the Thirty Years’ War, while the bibliographical price Sweden paid for the abdication of Queen Christina in 1654 was her eventual transference of thousands of manuscripts and books to the Vatican library. Much other pillaging during the Thirty Years’ War rejuvenated the exchange of ancient books and manuscripts. Crates of books crossed the mountains of western Europe and sailed down the Danube and the Rhine (and there are scores of other major redistributive examples). This does not, of course, diminish the impact of war or religious struggle on the sale of books. Few gluts or dearths after conflict or pillage have been without their commercial beneficiaries, and booksellers (and book-buyers) are certainly not excepted.

Scrutiny of book and print distribution, highlighting the political and the haphazard, offers important refinements to intellectual, religious, and linguistic histories. The mapping of book circuits offers a non-national perspective on ‘home’ markets as guild and state regulation eased and as international trading expanded at the very time that new national market development was even more pronounced. Distribution histories supply empirical evidence in the continuing debate about the envisaging of a ‘public’ and the development of widespread readerships. Many critics, such as the philosopher Gottfried Leibniz, feared the consequences of a great deluge of books, of literary devaluation by unbridled commercial publishing. Alarm at the popular helps to explain the obsession with order in architectural statements in both internal and external library design, and the contradictory tensions in Enlightenment Europe, seen at quite humble
levels as well as grand ones, between the worship of literature and the desire to set up boundaries to reading, to exclude those who could not be trusted to read properly.

Contemporary perceptions of change also caution against viewing the history of printing and publishing in terms of crude linear development. During the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries market growth and political circumstances allowed the unblocking of identified constraints to book circulation and production. Such advances succeeded a period of limited and unbalanced distribution during which most printing houses worked at under capacity and were largely reliant on jobbing printing to survive. This leads to another caution. In addition to the practical use and valuation of print as jobbing forms and documents, it is salutary to consider demand for print not as demand for reading but as demand for objects viewed as worthy of possession. Printing did introduce the luxury book edition that was not to be read. As pointed out by Eugenio Garin long ago, we have to give attention to the number of books shelved and not read; displayed and talked about, but not read; fought over and sent round Europe as booty, but not read. Histories of books and print must encompass all aspects of possession and exchange. Such commerce is not always edifying, but it is fundamental, and its study does offer chastening review.\textsuperscript{26}

**Implications of Production**

Notwithstanding the relative standstill in printing technology, printed output advanced and has to be explained in terms of increased numbers of presses, some in increasing concentrations. Early printing Leviathans commanded numerous presses such as those of the Aldine press of Aldus Manutius in Venice, of the Officina Plantiniana of the Plantin-Moretus family in Antwerp, and the Kobérgers in Seville. At its peak in 1574, the Plantin printing house maintained sixteen presses, with up to a dozen operating at any one time between the 1620s and 1730s.\textsuperscript{27} Following new market activity and in many regions a mini-consumer boom in the late seventeenth century,\textsuperscript{28} many other European printing houses increased the number of presses on-site. The Société Typographique de Neuchâtel undertook vast reprinting activities, and in Venice the Bassano Remondini firm undercut the publishing establishment from about 1740 with popular works whose protected printing privileges had expired. Such firms typify the broad commercialization and development of a consumer culture associated with eighteenth-century western Europe. The increased output and building expansion of several London, Paris, and Leipzig printing houses was remarkable, far outstripping the overall capacity of their forebears. On their own, many, if not most, printing houses were unable to complete very large or urgent printing and reprinting orders, calling upon other printers in the district to assist. In London, unlike many leading Continental centres, more than two printing
presses in a priming house continued to be unusual (and a single press was very
common), accentuating the eighteenth-century achievement of the firms of Samuel
Richardson and of William and then Andrew Strahan. These printers greatly increased
the number of presses in their rebuilt and much expanded printing houses in service to
the rapidly growing demand for commercial publishing. Certain efficiencies of scale were
further enabled by concurrent printing, that is the printing of an edition by the
simultaneous use of more than one press, often working in separate establishments, but
the productivity of each printing press remained much the same. The limitations of the
individual manual printing press endured.

These considerations highlight a further, little discussed aspect of printing house
regimes. At least until the economic developments of the late seventeenth century the
majority of presses never worked at full capacity. Early modern printing houses were
busy, noisy and dangerous places (many printers and apprentices suffered from lead
poisoning) but the demand, at least for book production, was not always sufficient to keep
them all working all of the time. Until the late seventeenth century most presses worked
at under-capacity or at least under very uneven work patterns in which surging demand
for a particular publication (and resultant shared work between printers) was offset by
long periods of reliance on jobbing work. For at least the first two centuries of printing,
demand for printed book publication would have proved insufficient to keep presses
working, even if the manually operated wooden printing presses had been remodelled to
increase productivity (and as eventually enabled by the iron presses after about 1800,
allowing the introduction of steam-driven presses after 1814). This was as true in London
and Paris as it was in Russia. In St. Petersburg and Moscow, for example, the number of
printed items published in the reign of Peter the Great (1682–1725) was more than
double that of all titles printed in Russia before 1682, but more than 60 per cent of this
new printing actually comprised state and legal documents. In London, despite
regulations restricting the number of presses and despite petitions from those eager to
set up new presses, the productive capacity of the city’s printing trade probably changed
little before the English Civil War. Analysis of the day-to-day economics of an early
modern printing house also confirms an important broader conclusion: print culture is
about more than books, about more even than periodicals and newspapers. It is about all
products of the press, of print considered in the widest remit.

Histories of publication as well as the compilers of short-title catalogues are prone to a
very particular oversight: the printing of items other than books. ‘Jobbing printing’ or just
‘jobbing’, ‘job-work’, or the printing of ‘small jobs’ (that is of one sheet or a fraction of
(p. 227) a sheet) was the financial mainstay of the vast majority of printers. Most
accounts of the development of printing with moveable type since the mid-fifteenth
century elucidate, in one way or another, the production of books, periodicals, and
newspapers.\textsuperscript{30} This was especially so in the seventeenth century. The early
Enlightenment age of \textit{illuminés} and \textit{philosophes} is the history of the book, of secular
versus religious print, of ancients versus moderns, of print bound in leather volumes, of
print issued in separate collectable parts, of print combining text and illustration in new
ways, of print offering instruction and entertainment, of print as ‘book’. What is almost
entirely ignored is the printer’s output of job-work, the myriad of quick, unromantic,
practical productions that were the bastion of the printer’s trade: without his or her
production of job-work the vast majority of printers would have failed.

Most printers from the fifteenth century to the nineteenth century and throughout
Europe depended on the regular income afforded by jobbing work. Printers printed
sheets not books. The sheet work that did not comprise pages for books and periodicals
ranged over many different sorts of commissions. These orders for certificates, blanks,
tickets, and much more besides provided crucial tie-over income in fallow times, valuable
training for apprentices and promotional displays of printers’ craftsmanship. Here, two
histories are concealed, neglected, and importantly related: that of jobbing printing in the
printing house, and that of jobbing printing in the economic and financial revolution of
the sixteenth to eighteenth centuries. It is now nearly forty years since Keith Maslen,
having immersed himself in the early eighteenth-century Bowyer printing ledgers, urged
bibliographers to go beyond W. W. Greg’s founding ‘apologia’ that their proper concern is
with ‘books as material objects’.\textsuperscript{31} Even Maslen, in his path-breaking essay, seems to
have regarded the study of jobbing—indispensable as he said it was—to be principally a
means of understanding better the production and reception of books (in terms of
concurrent printing and printing house practices, for example). His conclusion,
nonetheless, was that ‘jobbing printing can be used as an index of civilization’, a
conclusion yet to be illuminated by scholarly study.\textsuperscript{32}

Ranging from sales and auction posters to business and social stationery, jobbing printing
was crucial to the development of trade and finance. Commerce rather than religion often
provided the drive to numeracy and alphabetization, yet the social and economic impact
of jobbing printing remains relatively neglected by historians of ‘print culture’.\textsuperscript{33} We have
hundreds of accounts of the commercial and industrial revolution of Europe from Carlo
Cipolla onwards (and indeed before Cipolla) but nowhere in this is the printer given due
significance for lowering transaction costs by the provision of job work that ranged from
advertisements and receipts to thousands of different blank forms, legal and commercial.
Some recognition has been given to printers’ production of indulgences and religious and
ballad-type items, but very little to civic and business jobbing.\textsuperscript{34} The economic
transformation to which the printers’ products and services contributed was one of
astonishing range and complexity.
Arcane as it might seem, the history of the design and printing of forms is a history of the social construction of knowledge. The intellectual and cultural Enlightenment of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries is inherently associated with the exchange of learned letters (with certain collections later printed and published) and the production and reception of learned books. At exactly the same time, however, general mundane jobbing printing hugely advanced in volume, variety, and speed of production. Without the immensity of that jobbing printing, the economic, political, and administrative activities of the developed West and its colonies and empires could not have been shaped as they were.

By the mid-eighteenth century, paper was increasingly local in its manufacture rather than imported from a few noted centres and it was plentiful, if still relatively expensive. Paper mills provided the raw material for unparalleled activity from an unprecedented number of printing houses, including several printing rooms that now boasted multiple presses rather than the standard one. From these establishments, a huge number in the great cities but now also familiar businesses in small market towns, issued a mighty profusion of printed documents, lists, certificates, orders, notes, cards, records, minutes, inventories, indexes, memoranda, accounts, tallies, invoices, dockets, passports, receipts, tickets, vouchers, cheques, indentures, schedules, chits, rosters, timetables, muster-rolls, ledgers, tabulations, catalogues, affidavits, circulars, invitations, bulletins, advertisements, and log-books. Most of these forms and blanks required attention and many required filling in. All claimed to effect something—and most did. Men and women were married by print, taking a pen to blank forms, just as recruits and apprentices marked or signed blanks. Suspects and criminals were arraigned and sentences passed on forms; vagrants and travellers were moved on or allowed to rest by settlement papers and passes; merchants and richer tourists used passports; mariners and sea-captains and their clients depended on bills of lading, schedules, and pre-printed marine wills; the propertied were taxed by paper forms and protected themselves by printed contracts, inheritance documents, and insurance forms; rich and poor prayed on special occasions by reading from or listening to printed prayer sheets. Further examples abound.

The printing of so many thousands of different ‘blanks’ further complicates simple assertions about the primacy and authority of print. Numerous printed items ranging from receipt slips to certificates of residence and employment were forms left largely blank to be filled in by pen and ink. Final authority, it might be argued, resided less in the printedness of the form than in the empowering penned-in details and signature.
Reading and the Impact of Print

The history of blank forms exposes an ambivalent relationship between script and print that goes to the heart of the debate about the historical effect of printing, even though such debate is usually cast in more imposing intellectual contexts. Two histories in particular have influenced the modern history of the early modern book. In 1958, in *L’apparition du livre* (translated as *The Coming of the Book*), Henri-Jean Martin and Lucien Febvre chronicled the astonishing rapidity of a pan-European adoption of printing by towns, religious institutions, and universities. The otherness and abandonment of scribal culture was everywhere implicit in this magisterial account. Twenty years later, Elizabeth Eisenstein radically extended this narration of the modernizing impact of printing by arguing that the sixteenth-century press fomented intellectual, scientific, political, and religious revolution. The Eisenstein thesis, which has been as influential as the ‘communications circuitry’ model developed by Robert Darnton at about the same time, rested on three main propositions: that the printing press revolutionized first the volume of textual production, second, the speed of that production, and third, the nature of the text itself. The volume of printing was palpably far greater than the written output of scriptoria, as was the rapidity of printed manufacture that enabled faster dissemination and more effective—and vituperative—debate.

The third claim of the ‘technological determinist’ thesis was the most crucial and the most contentious. The reproductive quality of printing that effected the communications revolution resided in an unprecedented textual fixity that gave new authority to the published word and new certainty to debate. A reader in Prague might read and discuss a near identical text with a reader in Lisbon in possession of a copy of the same printed edition. No longer might the text vary according to the style and aptitude of the scribe and suffer from a real or presumed unverifiability and rely, as a result, on supportive oral transmission. This ‘communications shift’ further codified images, visual aids, and signs, leading to what Eisenstein described in a leading chapter title as the ‘features of print culture’. Standardizations, linguistic fixity, the revivification of scholarship and interest in ancient languages and the classics, and translation into vernacular languages—most significantly, translation of the Bible—all epitomized a printing revolution. Technology interacted with new forces in religion, politics, and science to produce (among vast and prolific publications) Lutheran and Calvinist tracts, Copernican treatises, and printed editions of Pliny, Galen, and Aristotle.

One observation, not generally made, is that the discussion between readers and authors encouraged by print, and sometimes continued by printed commentaries, might, more
often, be conveyed by written correspondence. Such letter writing greatly increased during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries and added to the interrelationship between script and print. The resultant intellectual ferment invites questioning of how print and script interacted with oral communication but also rests uneasily with social histories from below, where more precise study of the interaction with the printed word is required. Many microhistories, as they multiplied from the late 1970s, were essentially preoccupied with the written and printed text and with reading and interpretation. Self-evidently, the history of the reading of texts opens up the imaginative landscape, the *histoire des mentalités*.

Intimate social histories most effectively question emphasis on the ‘fixity’ of the printed text, and they do so by evaluating the experience of reading. While printing technology might allow texts to be replicated more quickly, in greater numbers, and with unprecedented technical stability, no meaning is given to a text until it is read. In this sense a text is an unstable cultural object. The different phases in the production, circulation, and reception of the text, as proposed by Robert Darnton, were subject to discussion and objection at about the same time as Eisenstein’s *Printing Press as an Agent of Change*, but the history of reading was the most contentious and important of the circuit stages. Scholars of media such as Harold Lasswell had already proposed five important questions of communication and its conveyance: the ‘Who (says) What (in) What Channel (to) Whom (with) What Effect?’ interrogations in the historical understanding of material texts (and other communication). Of Lasswell’s questions, the final two were by far the most challenging. The ‘to whom’ (the identity of readers) was difficult enough, demanding (among other things) the measurement of literacies and the economic constraints upon access to books and print that might be as great as the limits to reading skills and comprehension. Far more problematic was the evidential basis of ‘what effect?’, of ascertaining how and why reading was done. Questions of reading abilities and aptitudes relate to age, gender, social and economic circumstances, environment, and even light and posture, but the history of reading practice also requires an understanding of motivation. As is engagingly and repeatedly argued in recent histories of books, consumers revisited texts and effectively remade them by their different readings. Differences in interpretation were made not only between different people of different gender and different competences (affected by intelligence, education, skill, and incentive) but by the same person revisiting the text on different occasions, at different ages, for example, or for different reasons.

Distinguished studies have explored exactly how reading interpreted texts and made printing and the acquisition of books both dangerous and revelatory. Domenico Scandella (or ‘Menocchio’), sixteenth-century miller of Montereale in Friuli, resurfaced (via the Inquisition archives in Udine) as the twentieth-century hero of Carlo Ginzburg’s classic...
courtroom drama. An inspiration for dozens of analogous studies, Ginzburg invites us to understand the mediation of print between randomly acquired and often imperfect texts and a semi- or, more accurately, strangely literate and learned early modern artisan. Nevertheless, such memoirs and recorded encounters, so effective in recovering past mental states in all their vividness and idiosyncrasy, often outshine broader consequences of ‘printedness’ in society, politics, and the economy. General contours of this transformation are well established, but they benefit from restatement exactly in relation to the innovative perspectives of recent scholarship.

Beyond the squabble over fixity and the interpretation of reading practices, certain occurrences are evident, from the dissemination of humanist learning and the fine production of maps, charts, and reckoners to the creation of a vast informative literature of the street and field. In its replication of ballads, ABCs, chapbooks, and firebrand pamphlets and news-sheets, the printing press did prove a progressing force. Astronomy, botany, medicine, natural philosophy, and geography were obvious beneficiaries of the printing house and its attendants, the master printer, the highly skilled compositor, and the learned proof reader (sometimes in combination). Printing boosted use of vernacular languages and effectively standardized and determined them, directly changing literacies and boosting simple literacy levels (if not always creating a vast new population of readers, and not always leading orthographic codification: standard written Slovak, for example, did not develop until the 1780s). New knowledges were created and information exchange speeded up and diversified. The press indirectly changed popular understanding by reshaping the interplay between the written and the oral. Above all, the immediacy of the printed word was seen, heard, and feared.

As Reformers insisted, readers searched for salvation by means of the direct word of God. They searched in the vernacular and in defiance of the Vulgate, essentially the Latin of St. Jerome. The sixteenth-century domestication of the printed Bible in modern languages was new in extent but not in origins. Followers of John Wycliff in the late fourteenth century anticipated the central feature of Reform, investing the immediacy and intelligibility of the vernacular with a further authenticity derived from Greek and Hebrew and declared to be superior to the Vulgate. With revolutionary scale, print carried and personified truth (and later rationality) over superstition. In 1516, Desiderius Erasmus published his Latin edition of the New Testament to rival the Vulgate, and translated from the original Greek. Erasmus provided the basis for Luther’s German translation of the Bible. As many as eighteen editions of parts of the Bible in German were printed between 1466 and 1522, the date of Luther’s publication of the New Testament in German. The earlier German Bibles, often also adorned with large woodcuts, had been translated from the Vulgate (with sections rivalling the incomprehensibility of parts of the Wycliffe Bibles). More than fifty editions of Luther’s
Printing and Printedness

New Testament were printed between 1522 and 1529. Luther completed his entire Bible in German in the autumn of 1534, most of it translated from the 1494 Soncino Hebrew Bible. On the printed woodcut title page of the New Testament, God is depicted leaning over the text with the motto (as translated): ‘God’s word remains forever’. The New Testament was translated into French in 1523, Dutch in the same year, Danish in 1524, Swedish in 1526, and Finnish in 1548; the whole Bible was issued in Dutch in 1526, in French (from the Vulgate) in 1530, in Swedish in 1541, and in Danish in 1550. Printed paraphrastic and other commentaries poured forth. During Luther’s lifetime his own books and pamphlets were published in German in more than 3,700 editions.

Print in form, volume, and circulation thus vastly enhanced the effect of translation. Textual differences were often minute, but as daunting and high-profile claims about printed variants ensured, tiny differences in translation and emphasis supported momentous doctrinal dispute. Many productions were also magisterial printing house efforts, in which accuracy and the beauty of design proved significant attributes. The first polyglot Bible, by Francisco Ximenes de Cisneros, was finished in mid-1517 after three years of printing. Modelled on the Hexapla of Origen, this immense Complutensian Polyglot arranged the Greek, Vulgate, and Hebrew texts in six parallel columns, together with complex apparatus and keyed letters to notes. The Antwerp Polyglot was printed by Christophe Plantin in eight volumes in 1572, incorporating Syriac, as did the Paris Polyglot of 1645. The fourth such Bible, ‘the London Polyglot’, completed in 1654 by Brian Walton at the press of Thomas Roycroft, has been mooted as ‘arguably the most distinguished as well as substantial product of the British press in the [seventeenth] century’.42

Print filtered language but it also broadcast radical and seditious images. The prominence of images and decoration increased rather than diminished because of printing. In early printed books the intervention of scribes and illuminators remained crucial, further (p. 232) complicating the history of print-with-script. Rubrication, or the marking of initial capital letters and sometimes headings in red, proved too difficult to insert in early printed Bibles and compositors created blank spaces for later attention. To assist, Gutenberg printed eight sheets of instructions for scribes. Indents were similarly left for inscribed initials, before woodcuts found renewed favour, notably affecting the evolution of page design in almost every type of publication from Bibles to chapbooks. Bob Scribner championed the historical importance of visual and oral communication alongside printed words, which he believed to have been overestimated in the dissemination and impact of the Reformation. But he also insisted on the complexity of such media. Visual propaganda works at several levels; printed illustrations needed to be read as a system of signs whose semiotics required careful decoding.43 Luther’s 1522 New Testament paraded hundreds of woodcuts, mostly as formulaic initials, but at least...
the first 3,000 copies printed also included notoriously idolatrous images of the Pope. We still need to know more about why and how people read in the Reformation, but the visuals that accompanied the lettered text (and disclosing *sola scriptura*) were evidently powerful. Here were *livres sans frontières* with a geographical as well as an intellectual unboundedness that impelled authorities to invent bans on books and on the movement of printers.

The quest for illumination over ignorance was as public as it was private, and the reaction to the pernicious power of print was as much about its effect upon crowds and congregations as it was about individual readers and deviants. The threat of publicly supported doctrinal error, of a frenzy of ideas let loose, was still more alarming than individual error. The invasive, subversive, and heretical power of print provoked churches and states into punitive action, from the burning of books to the creation of lists of banned books and a battery of regulations and penalties against authors, publishers, distributors, and the printed words themselves. For four centuries after Gutenberg, the rate and manner of selling books continued to be curtailed by two different types of obstacle: by regulation imposed by church, state, and town government and guilds, and by the constraints of transport infrastructures.

It is certainly the case that the limits to book-trade development require emphasis, sometimes in order to temper anachronism by attention to checks and constraints. As David Cressy warned of allied research, ‘low literacy rates in the early modern period should not be taken as indicators of retardation or deprivation, awaiting rectification by progress’. Contraband books and literary undergrounds have been the subject of many distinguished studies, and their circuits have been described much more fully than the broader effects of legal and religious constraints. Relatively few historians, for example, have probed the obstacles to individual and institutional collection patterns. First, and most obviously, printing and pre-publication regulation was introduced by ecclesiastical and national authorities and by trade and guild regulation from within the industry. Censorship and policing, and to some extent guild authority, followed not an economic but a political time-frame, with varying effectiveness at different periods and locations. France, Spain, and Italian states including Venice variously adopted direct control over censorship and the policing of the press, and were subject to the constant attentions of the Church.

Post-publication policing took many forms. In reputation at least, the Index Librorum Prohibitorum, established by the Vatican in 1559, dominated censorship in Europe. The Index curtailed distribution, forced underground transmission, and remains an unavoidable part of any study of bookselling in the Catholic realms. Its influence contributed largely to the demise of the Frankfurt book fair, further undermined by a book commissioner sent by the Emperor and by a successive Book Commission that
suppressed Protestant publications. In the sixteenth century, Frankfurt handled about
twice the volume of books traded at Leipzig; by 1700 the figures were reversed.
Nonetheless, Leipzig was never to be as international in character as Frankfurt in its
most successful years, those of a consolidation of German book-trading regions.
Protestant realms developed similar censorship and introduced brutal curbs to the
publication and transport of print, especially across borders. In England, the Low
Countries, and northern Europe, press regulation was largely, although never entirely,
devolved to guilds or trade companies also maintaining commercial monopolies and
regulating employment conditions and entry to the trade. Confusion between or
conflation of a state policing and a private property protection role was evident in the
advancement of patent holders and formal and informal cartels. In the more corporatist
model, different crafts adopted different regulative and trading functions. The supremacy
of the Stationers’ Company in England in the late sixteenth and seventeenth centuries
can be compared with the mighty guild of Binders in northern Scandinavia where
bookselling largely comprised the sale of imported books, unbound. The binding trade
took responsibility for import and regulation of printing and publishing from 1620, during
the high-watermark of Swedish international power, until the second half of the
eighteenth century. The powerful binders in Lithuania and the Ukraine, who also
specialized in the crucial foreign book trade, exercised similar authority.46

Many early modern town governments also imposed limits to trade in books and
publications, although protection was often more from economic than ideological
concern. The distinction between wholesale and retail was often reinforced by civic laws
which forbade those who were not freemen of a town from selling by retail. For many
sixteenth- and seventeenth-century merchants, native and alien, and certainly including
the producers and sellers of books and print, the rounds of the fairs and markets held
outside the jurisdictions of the towns were increasingly successful sources of business. In
central and eastern Europe such constraints endured for a further century or more, with
many changes and interruptions during an often volatile political history.47

Alongside essentially trade regulation, the revolutionary possibilities of printed
knowledge provoked further restrictive controls following the Thirty Years’ War, the
Fronde, the English Civil War, and indeed almost every rebellion and war of the late
seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries. The French government developed a system
of pre-publication privileges (codified in 1723 which also often offered permissive critical
assessment).48 In contrast, in England the punitive Licensing Laws (technically, the
Printing Acts) operated for most years between 1662 and 1695 in conjunction with the
first and only appointment of a Licenser and ‘Surveyor’ of the press, charged with seizing
hidden presses and seditious literature.49 In many parts of Europe, effective

censoring, both before and after publication, remained with local rather than far-distant
Printing and Printedness

authorities. But print also encouraged a very different mode of revolution, as provocative
but not easily repressed by simple bans or restraints on publication and circulation. The
vastly increased geographical and social penetration of print created different modes of
textual engagement. Encounters with print spanned the development of specific methods
and fashions in book collection and the formation of libraries to different modes of
reading and the evolution of different cognitive processes. These are the years of great
Baroque libraries, and a rash of society, subscription, and then commercial circulating
libraries, new literary forms, especially newspapers and early journalism, novels and
periodical magazines and reviews, and, from the 1740s, an unprecedented surge in the
volume of publication.

None of the consequences of press productivity are simple or uncontested, particularly as
magnified during the eighteenth century. The press is profoundly implicated in the
alleged origins of modernity, the emergence of a ‘public sphere’, new forms of civic
humanism, sensibility and the perception of the self, the beginnings of ‘imagined
communities’ and new national identities, and above all, the origins of Revolution. All are
grounded one way or another in print, be it the ‘print capitalism’ invoked by Benedict
Anderson, or the print culture of the coffee houses that support the thesis of Jürgen
Habermas, or, in pre-Revolutionary France, the subversive, sensationalist posters of
Carla Hesse’s marketplaces and the scandalous libelles of Robert Darnton’s literary
undergrounds. Printed texts contribute prominently to cultural historians’ interest in
the ‘discursive’ and the ‘linguistic turn’ in which historical reality might be supposed to
begin with the language of historical actors, even if emphasis upon language was rightly
(yet sometimes insufficiently) contested by arguments about the interplay between print,
writing, and the oral.

Here lurks an argument that the different interpretations of the historical impact of print
echo contemporary preoccupations: from the Habermasian search for civic stability in a
broken post-Second World War Germany to the functioning of print-based education in
buttressing North American and Western democracy. The role of print was somewhat
simplistically associated with notions of ‘affective sensibility’ and the primacy of the
individual over the public, but more recently such associations have been extended to link
new forms of printed works, notably the novel with its individualism and its capacity for
empathy, to the encouragement of humanitarianism, toleration, and the re-inscribing of
natural rights as human rights. Accordingly, the sentiments of the Declaration of
Independence might be rooted in the sentiments and sensibilities nurtured by the novel
and especially by Pamela of 1740. Its author, the very influential Samuel Richardson, was
not only a printer by profession, but also an adept at understanding the moral freight of
print.
A further twenty-first-century elaboration of ‘printedness’ comes with the characterization of the early Enlightenment ‘as a media event’. Fresh questions have been asked about the historical understanding of the formal and material qualities of historical cultural expression, of what has been called ‘mediation’, of forms of thought brought about not only by oral, visual, and printed media but by all intervening agencies. New forms of knowledge and debate were sustained by ‘mediating’ or intervening structures and activities that supported a disinterested discourse and social responsiveness that derived from new sites of social activity and public places where print was readily available. Such sites notably included taverns and coffee houses (in many histories owing much to the theories of Habermas), but mediation also encompassed critical reviewing, literary commentaries, and indeed a great and increasing range of activities where printed words were edited or filtered for common consumption (in the publication of sermons, of anthologies, of memoirs, and much more besides). Continuing interest today in the nature of knowledge systems explains the success of ‘actor-network theory’, a fertile research approach that treats objects (such as printed items) as part of social networks. Historical understanding of the perception of media change at the time has similarly been sharpened, giving new (and overdue) reappraisal of the consciousness of the writers in their appropriation of print and publishing techniques. Marxian social critiques and poststructuralist theory, it is argued, elevated the critic above the writer in the determination of true discourse and ignored authorial commentary about the way in which words and text were conceived and disseminated. Historians have been probing seventeenth- and eighteenth-century perceptions that materials might in some ways be superior to people, and as a result have extended study of print to a broader concern about materialities and ‘things’. The history of printing thus takes its place among the ‘socialized technologies’ associated with the French philosopher of science, Bruno Latour. Such interest, it seems, is partly driven by interest in current social media. Attitudes to laptops, kindles, and mobile phones as modes of receiving information are both ambivalent and complex. How and in what ways have some come to think that machines and media have their own opinion and may even know more about ourselves than we do?

The important thing to stress is that these are not realities but ideas developed by people alarmed or awed by technology, and that past individuals might similarly have ceded consciousness and agency to communicating objects. Latour’s influential formulation of ‘quasi-objects’, of things ‘much more social, much more fabricated, much more collective than the “hard” parts of nature’ connects to early modern commentaries upon how print and books were made and how they evaluated their own material form, describing their physical origins and demanding that the text be read in a certain way. Here we might ask more about early modern parallels to modern technological change. The inspirational transformation derived from printing presses and moveable type proved so long-felt a
revolution that it spawned numerous awestruck histories and printer hagiographies across Europe in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries.\(^5\)\(^5\)

**Concluding Reflections**

As a result of printing, European books metamorphosed from elite luxuries into diverse, popular, and more generally available commodities. The distances travelled by books are not perhaps the surprise, given that by the fifteenth century, manuscript circulation was extraordinarily far-flung. For at least two centuries, cargoes of written books had travelled by land and water as part of increasingly sophisticated international trading networks, focused on urban, religious, and university centres.\(^5\)\(^6\) What astonishes is the rapid advance of the social as well as geographical penetration of print, enabled by the development of new production, trading, and transport techniques and initiatives. The commercial transformation responded not just to new technological, commercial, legal, and political opportunities but also to shifting incomes and to increasing and changing literacies. Material changes were stark and prodigious. To compare, for example, book collections or even the most readily available books of 1350 with those of 1750 is to compare worlds wonderfully apart. Technology, alone, however, did not drive that transformation, just as changes were unevenly paced over the four centuries, with checks and constraints as well as productive spurts and underlying, gradual advances.

An escalating cast of craftsmen and commercial operators mediated between the original writers and individual print-reading and meaning-creating consumers. By the end of this period private proprietary libraries with membership by subscription, together with commercial circulating libraries, offered new modes of access to print as well as new social spaces for reading and discussing ideas and gossip. The locales of printing and bookselling also remained known places for information exchange. Buyers, borrowers, and browsers swapped news that was learned, practical, and scurrilous. A growing market for print specifically created for women paralleled sharper divides between reading societies and libraries established with women in mind and those excluding women. But print also bridged gender distinction as much as it encouraged it. For all the emphasis at the end of this period upon magazines and practical, domestic books for women, so were both sexes drawn in to broadly based periodicals, religious publications, essays, playbooks, and travel guides (among others). Advancing publication combined, by the mid-eighteenth century, with the growth of a literary infrastructure of reviewing and criticism, spanning but also spawning confessional and political difference. The increase in the number and range of correspondence networks further supported the translation activates that underpinned many publishing ventures. The surviving correspondence of the London-based Pierre Des Maizeaux and the letters of Charles de la Motte, ‘correcteur
d'imprimerie’ for most Dutch printers in the early eighteenth century attest to expanding
and confident horizons.57 This triumph of print translated into profit. Many books proved
valuable commodities, and privileges, patents, and copyrights were granted and created
and sold to protect property interests in publishing more than they guarded the
intellectual or economic rights of authors or even, by the end of this period, the licensing
concerns of state and church. Conversely, many booksellers and publishers failed in a
high-risk industry where so much capital was tied up in expensive paper that, for the
unsuccessful, mouldered in the unsold editions stacked up in the warehouse.

'Print culture’ is therefore an inadequate and imprecise term. The impact of the printing
press is best seen as part of a broader history of human communication, in which the
nature of ‘printedness’ spans the intellectual, political, social, religious, and economic.

Printing required the transformation of book distribution systems to handle
printed editions. Rather than the glib assertion of the evolution of a ‘print culture’, it is
better to think of technologies introduced into particular social and political contexts, in
which printing amplified, enabled, and even transformed existing practices and
behaviours, not in isolation but in relation to other agencies and practices. There are
many cautions left to explore. Emphasis upon the technical efficiency of the printing
press, for example, must be qualified by emerging histories of printing house practices
that emphasize how costly and time-consuming was the casting of type and its
composition and recomposition for successive editions of the same book. Comparative
studies of early modern Asian printing practices and the intricate and correctable
xylography of China, Korea, and Japan will be rewarding, especially in study of the
interplay between the commercial and the intellectual, and between city production and
country distribution (but such research and analysis is in its infancy).58 In particular,
methods of dissemination invite further investigation. Comparisons with other parts of
the world offer a certain re-evaluation and finessing of the history of European book
transportation, distribution, and the means by which readers and clients received texts.
Distribution was as important for non-commercial as commercial publications, but
involved different originating motivations and effects. Chinese commercial printing
developed some two hundred years after the first known printing in China in the early
seventh century, and here, just as in Europe, non-commercial, private publication tended
to privilege questions of impact, of how an audience might react to a text, with
distribution as assured as the identity of the recipients; by comparison, in commercial
printing and publishing, distribution might determine the economic survival of the
originator producer in a more uncertain marketplace. Dissemination is crucial in both
scenarios, but economic imperatives are variable. As Ian Maclean has observed of the
early modern European book trade, ‘profit in this world did not necessarily mean surplus
profit or mercantile expansion’.59 This refines twenty-first-century models that privilege
business strategies and supply side economics over other early modern concerns, and
notably a concern for scholarly and intellectual goals that depended upon enduring forms of patronage, subsidy, and business enterprise restricted by social, political, and ideological objectives.

Arguments about ‘printedness’ also have their limits. One danger is the tendency to associate printing with inevitable progress. Print fostered intellectual freedom but also constricted and even imprisoned. A more organized world was not necessarily a more liberated world. Indeed, the collection of information, from civic and fiscal enumeration to the civil registration of familial (or what demographers call ‘vital’) events represented a new ordering, social arrangement, and control that linked intolerance with modernity, regimentation with progress. For some historians, like E. P. Thompson (in part echoing the sociological modernity thesis of Ferdinand Tönnies), this was the replacement of customary social bonds by a new, inherently more ruthless political—and print- and printed-form laden—economy of discipline, wage structures, and greatly more organized and centralized employment.  

Whatever the import of the replacement of the primarily oral and scribal by the primarily written and printed, there is no doubt that information creation, collection, distribution, storage, and retrieval was transformed from the mid-seventeenth century and especially during the eighteenth century. Avowedly international academic publications such as the Parisian Journal des savants (1665–1792), the Leipzig Acta eruditorum (1682–1782), and various Giornale de’letterati published in different Italian cities from 1668 effectively excerpted and advertised information. This was a knowledge shift in volume, velocity, and effect, of the generation and collection of information, of the circulation of information and of its deployment. Print reshaped practices and attitudes in a certificated, transactional, and ticketed age that encouraged and created order together with hierarchy and circumscription. Comparisons with the Internet age are helpful, in understanding a sense of the new and of greater participation, but also of media overload, devaluation, and intransigence. Yet without jobbing printing (that is, general mundane printing quite besides the production of books or even pamphlets, newspapers, and other full texts), the economic and political activities of early modern Europe and its colonies and empires could not have been shaped as they were. Individuals and groups were bound, freed, and defined by printed and filled-in forms of understanding and obligation. Printers’ jobbing work structured intimate, private worlds and human relationships.

The more usual understanding of print and ‘print culture’ relates to the publication of books and their derivatives. Books, pamphlets, and magazines transmit knowledge by physical form (or the message by the medium). Books share some of the characteristics of other material goods. Tactility, design, and ornamentation convey meaning even before a book is read. But books also carry texts whose reading conveys intellectual and
ideological significance. The connections supplied by print fall short of the interactive exchanges possible between people not parted by distance, but in many ways print offers the same connectedness provided by letters and other received communication. Manuscripts and printed books and periodicals extended and widened the reach of such exchange, and was subject to the mutations of colonialism, migration, exile, commerce, political independence, and nationalism.

The historical consequences of the invention and practice of printing with moveable type is a vast and largely incalculable subject: vast in its intellectual and social compass; incalculable in that the material contribution of printing can never be precisely calculated. It is, however, clear that printing offered a fundamental vehicle for the expression and conveyance of thought and that print determined the manner in which that thought was materially produced and consumed. Print challenged and channelled, in the same way that in the digital age, the Internet provides the opportunity but also the boundaries for new forms of social networking and textual formation and reception.

Further Reading


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Notes:


(3.) For the continuation of scribal transmission, see David McKitterick, Print, Manuscript and the Search for Order, 1450–1830 (Cambridge, 2005); Brian Richardson, Manuscript Culture in Renaissance Italy (Cambridge, 2009); and (where study of the interaction between script and print currently appears Anglocentric) Harold Love, Scribal Publication in Seventeenth-Century England (Oxford, 1993); Henry Woudhuysen, Sir Philip Sidney

(4.) The USTC (Universal Short-Title Catalogue) Project at the University of St. Andrews comprises 52,000 pre-1601 entries; see also Andrew Pettegree, Malcolm Walsby, and Alexander Wilkinson, eds., French Vernacular Books: Books Published in the French Language before 1601, 2 vols. (Leiden, 2007); Alexander S. Wilkinson, ‘Lost Books Printed in French before 1601’, The Library, 7th ser. 10(2) (June 2009), 188–205; CCFr (Catalogue Collectif de France) accessible via the website of the Bibliothèque Nationale de France; more advanced, but limited to pre-1701 imprints, is the German VD 16 and VD 17 (Verzeichnis der im deutschen Sprachraum erschienenen Drucke des 16./17. Jahrhunderts)—Bibliography of Books Printed in the German-Speaking Countries from 1501 to 1600 and from 1601 to 1700 respectively); VD 18 is in the planning stages.

(5.) The Biblioteca Nacional de España hosts an online STC of fifteenth- and sixteenth-century Spanish imprints; in Italy, EDIT 16 Censimento nazionale delle edizioni italiane del XVI secolo (an initiative of the Laboratorio per la bibliografia retrospettiva of the Istituto Centrale per il Catalogo Unico (ICCU)) is also ongoing; the Centre for the History of the Media at University College Dublin aims to publish a catalogue of all books printed in Spanish or Portuguese or printed in Spain, Portugal, Mexico, or Peru before 1601.

(6.) The VD 16 and VD 17, for example, are largely limited to collections of German and Austrian libraries, and so far exclude single-leaf items.


(16.) For the continuing union catalogue project see Maria Zychowiczowa, *Centralny katalog starych druków w Bibliotece Narodowej w Warszawie* (Warsaw, 1995).

(17.) Aleksander Frøland, *Dansk boghandels historie 1482 til 1945* (Copenhagen, 1974).


(28.) An exception was the Netherlands, according to Jan de Vries and Ad van der Woude, *The First Modern Economy: Success, Failure, and Perseverance of the Dutch Economy, 1500–1815* (Cambridge, 1997).


(38.) Lisa Jardine and Anthony Grafton. ‘“Studied For Action”: How Gabriel Harvey Read His Livy’, *Past and Present*, 129(1) (1990), 30–78.
(39.) Most notably, the influence of Michel de Certeau, trans., Stephen F. Rendall, *The Practice of Everyday Life* (Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1984), ch. 11 (‘Reading as Poaching’).


(43.) Scribner, *For the Sake of Simple Folk*.


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(53.) Clifford Siskin and William Warner, eds., *This is Enlightenment* (Chicago, 2010).


(59.) Maclean, *Scholarship, Commerce, Religion*, 5; cf. James Raven, ‘Book Distribution Networks in Early Modern Europe: The Case of the Western Fringe (La rete distributiva del libro)’, *Produzione e commercio della carta e del libro secc. XIII-XVIII, Istituto...


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A Revolution in Information?

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Abstract and Keywords

During the early modern period the volume of information gathered and the speed and extent of its diffusion increased massively, due to the combined impact of many factors, including printing and rising literacy rates, improved postal communication, mercantile and colonial expansion across the globe, and the growth of state governments and bureaucracies. This chapter surveys the growth of informational writing in various fields of knowledge, the collection and use of quantitative and qualitative surveys by states and churches, the collection and treatment of information (often kept secret) by imperial and commercial ventures, the rise of diplomacy and diplomatic records, and the rise of the news in multiple genres, including manuscript newsletters, printed pamphlets, newsbooks, and daily newspapers. As a result large new segments of the population became familiar with tools of information management such as alphabetical indexes, numbered lists, and the exercise of judgement required when confronting multiples conflicting sources.

Keywords: Literacy, numeracy, archives, information management, commercial globalization, news

The notion of a revolution in information in early modern Europe is a recent historiographical construct, inspired by the current use of the term to designate the transformations of the late twentieth century. The notion, first propounded in the 1960s, that we live in an ‘information age’ crucially defined by digital technologies for creating, storing, commoditizing, and disseminating information has motivated historians, especially since the late 1990s, to reflect on parallels with the past. Given the many definitions of ‘information’ and related concepts, we will use the term in a nontechnical way, as distinct from data (which requires further processing before it can be
meaningful) and from knowledge (which implies an individual knower). Information typically presents itself as discrete reports of supposedly truthful or useful facts or messages that can travel across time and place by being repeated and appropriated. Then as now information was conveyed and apprehended in countless combinations of intended and actual audiences, meanings, and effects, and in myriad forms, including gestures, rituals, objects, images, and words—spoken, sung, manuscript, and printed. Some of these elements cannot be recaptured, but many topics crucial to a history of information in the early modern period have been well studied under various auspices: printing and its impact, the growth of literacy and numeracy, the rise of record-keeping (for example, among merchants, rulers, and scholars), the dissemination and impact of news, the development of a postal network, the circulation of letters, rumours, and secrets.

The transformations in the cultures and technologies of information between the fourteenth and eighteenth centuries were considerable and their legacies are still visible today. But these changes were neither sudden nor linear and cannot easily be dissociated from the many other changes that characterized the early modern period. ‘Revolution’ applies only as a metaphor to emphasize the qualitative degree of change in these transformations, not their suddenness or speed. Most of the forms of information we discuss predated the early modern period in some form: reference books, libraries, catalogues and finding devices, institutional, legal, and mercantile record-keeping, and the circulation of news, orally and in writing, through the movements of soldiers and merchants, pilgrims and clerics, noblemen and vagabonds. Late medieval manuscripts could be produced commercially, in large numbers and for rapid distribution, serving functions we typically associate with printing. In Paris for example, in the wake of public disasters like the Black Death of 1348 or the Great Schism (1378–1417), the faculties of medicine and theology published manuscript tractatuli, mini treatises, in a single leaf format designed to be copied and disseminated fast and widely. Jean Gerson, Chancellor of the University of Paris, chose a tractatulus to diffuse his opinion of the victory of Joan of Arc at Orléans on 8 May 1429; his work had reached Rome a few weeks later and we have evidence of its circulation to England and Flanders too.

In the following centuries the volume of information gathered and the speed and extent of its diffusion increased massively, though not always consistently or linearly, due to the combined impact of technological, political, and socio-cultural factors. The rapid growth of information (including misinformation and disinformation) created new challenges in accessing, evaluating, and managing it. Indexes, finding devices, numbering systems, lists, and encyclopaedias, became common in most fields of knowledge. In commerce and politics information became a commodity that was bought and sold in many forms—oral,
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manuscript, and print—and information brokers emerged to carry out more or less formally defined duties as intermediaries. By the eighteenth century diplomats, merchants, colonial administrators, archivists, and librarians could refer to manuals that systematized their activities even if they were not fully professionalized by modern standards. News which had hitherto been the purview of elites relying on personal channels of information became available in print, starting with pamphlets developed in the first decades of printing, down to the daily newspapers of the eighteenth century. Letters and printed matter travelled between European cities with remarkable speed thanks to a postal service in place by the seventeenth century that promised delivery in three to seven days; and people and news circulated across the entire globe on the ships of the merchant companies that expanded Europe’s commercial and political reach.5

Information in Fields of Learning

In 1778 the Anglican essayist Vicesimus Knox praised the new genre of the public lecture which he assimilated to the sermon, observing: ‘Though books are easily procured, yet even in this age of information, there are thousands in the lower classes who cannot read’ and for whom a sermon or lecture was more effective.6 Knox’s expression ‘age of information’ was unique at the time (and hardly used again until the twentieth century), but the English term ‘information’ was not new in itself, in use from the fourteenth century initially in a narrow sense of instruction, legal report, or intelligence on a particular topic. In keeping with the broadening meaning of the term in the eighteenth century Knox equated ‘information’ with the easy availability of books in general, implicitly crediting the cumulative impact of printing. At the same time Knox noted the limited impact of printed matter on the illiterate, and reveals the limits of his own numeracy by our standards. In mentioning ‘thousands’ of illiterates Knox presumably meant to and did convey a sense of ‘very many’, but his figure was a serious underestimate of the number of illiterates at a time when London had a population of close to one million and literacy rates have been estimated at 60 per cent for men and 40 per cent for women in England c. 1750. Even granting that literacy rates in cities were higher than national averages, there were hundreds of thousands of illiterates in London in the late eighteenth century.7 Of course illiteracy did not preclude apprehension of written matter which one could hear being cried out in the streets, read aloud and discussed, informally and more formally, including in the public lectures and sermons that Knox hailed as so beneficial.

In the Middle Ages ‘literatus’ designated someone able to read Latin, a skill which conveyed status and special treatment in a court of law under the ‘benefit of clergy’.8 The
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*Oxford English Dictionary* dates the weaker modern meaning of ‘able to read and write’ to 1613. The term is still imprecise today, since reading and writing are different skills designated by a single term. Those two skills are inextricably linked for historians in any case who typically measure ability to read in the past by the ability to sign one’s name on an official document such as a registry of marriages or England’s Protestation oath in 1641–42. Other, indirect measures of literacy—the only ones available in the absence of serial records—include school attendance, book ownership (from inventories after death), or the numbers of books produced, which each pose challenges to persuasive conclusions. Rates of signing remain the most widely used measure of literacy, based on the general conclusion that early modern schools taught reading first then writing. Given this rigid sequence it is possible that some could read who had not yet learned to write or sign their name, but the reverse phenomenon which we see today in young children who can write their name before learning to read is assumed to be uncommon in early modern Europe. ‘Literacy’ is also fraught with ambiguity because it spans a range of reading skills, from the basic or pragmatic literacy implicit in the occasional use of formulaic written documents to the increasing levels of proficiency required to read printed matter in blackletter, or in roman type, or handwriting.\(^9\)

By any measure literacy rates between the fifteenth and eighteenth centuries rose dramatically, at least ten-fold from an estimated 5 per cent male literacy rate overall in the late fifteenth century to over 50 per cent. Such broad figures mask great variations across social and geographical contexts and periods of stagnant or even declining literacy rates.\(^10\) More detailed studies can provide figures for specific times and places. A few generalizations are possible here nonetheless: literacy was closely related to wealth and social standing—children from homes which did not require their labour were able to attend school. Literacy rates were higher in cities where written and printed materials were more commonly available and adults could learn to read from their peers. Male literacy rates were typically twice as high as female rates—schooling was considered less valuable for girls and in the sixteenth century ‘most of the literate women came from the nobility and upper bourgeoisie’. Certain Protestant contexts where reading was valued as an act of piety generated unusually high literacy rates, including near universal literacy achieved by men in eighteenth-century New England, by English Quakers in 1754, and in Sweden by 1700.\(^11\) There, a church decree of 1686 mandated annual examinations in each parish; adults who failed the test in reading and knowledge of the Bible were excluded from marriage and communion. As a result families were under great pressure to give their children the requisite skills and did so even in the absence of schools. In the aggregate, literacy levels were often equal between Protestant and Catholic contexts with similar social and urban distributions.\(^12\)
Rising rates of literacy were both fuelled by and in turn encouraged the production of books, notably through printing. Already by the mid-sixteenth century the learned complained about an overabundance of books. Jean Bodin observed in 1566 for example that in the field of history alone ‘the life of a man, however prolonged, is hardly sufficient for reading [all of them]’.\(^{13}\) Printing was an important proximate cause of the perception of an overabundance of books or *multitudo librorum*, but the technology does not suffice in itself to explain the uses made of it and the anxieties associated with it. Equally significant was a cultural attitude in the Renaissance which valued saving and stockpiling information of all kinds—printed books, manuscripts, natural specimens, works of art, or antiquarian remains—so that overload resulted. Sources of this info-lust or collecting mentality included a culture of display made possible by rising levels of wealth among urban elites, but also Renaissance humanism which generated great interest in all things ancient and at the same time a traumatic awareness of how many ancient texts had been permanently lost.\(^{14}\) For example Conrad Gessner composed his *Bibliotheca universalis* in 1545 listing all known works in Latin and Greek, both to aid in finding those works which were still lost and to guard against a devastating loss of texts in the future. Gesner hailed printing as a great help in the conservation of literature for posterity, as long as libraries were funded to preserve the printed books. He acknowledged the ‘confused and noxious multitude of books’ but also opined, quoting the ancient encyclopaedist Pliny the Elder, that ‘there is no book so bad that some good cannot be gotten of it’.\(^{15}\) Gessner emphasized exhaustive accumulation, including books which could be considered bad, lest any losses be regretted later, just as scholars in his day bemoaned the destruction of ancient texts which were not copied by medieval scribes.

To palliate the overabundance that resulted from a refusal to cull the stock of knowledge, various kinds of reference works excerpted or summarized the many other books one did not have the resources to buy or the time to read oneself. Latin *florilegia*, commonplace books and, after 1680, collections of book reviews, and dictionaries of arts and sciences in the vernaculars were all successful genres (even when they were large and expensive) which spread familiarity with alphabetized entries and indexes, tables of contents, and organizational charts (such as the branching diagrams made by followers of Peter Ramus in the sixteenth century and still favoured by d’Alembert in the preliminary discourse to the *Encyclopédie*).\(^{16}\) While humanism drove the accumulation of texts from and about antiquity, similar explosions of information occurred in almost every field of learning. Especially spectacular in natural history was the impact of reports of voyages to exotic lands and a new attention to the flora and fauna of familiar places. Starting in the late sixteenth century universities each competed to found a botanical garden, and for plants that were too difficult to cultivate, collections of dry specimens. In 1630 the best botanical work catalogued 6,000 plants whereas only eighty years earlier the most
comprehensive work of botany was an edition of the Greek *Dioscorides* with 500 specimens.\textsuperscript{17}

Across most areas of learning (for example, astronomy, antiquarianism, natural history, philology in multiple languages, and even the more secretive field of alchemy) scholars exchanged, gathered, and compared information through large and overlapping correspondence networks. Thousands of letters to hundreds of correspondents survive for countless learned men all over Europe, from Johannes Kepler in Prague to Henry Oldenburg in London, from Erasmus in the early sixteenth century to Voltaire in the eighteenth.\textsuperscript{18} Letters spread information of different kinds: personal observations and conclusions, bibliographical references, and reports from others relevant to the interests shared by the two correspondents, but also general political news (including local events and rumours, or fears of war, for example) and personal news about family and friends. Letters were often designed for further circulation by the addressee. For example correspondents to the Zurich reformer Heinrich Bullinger generally wrote in Latin but used German for passages which they asked Bullinger to read out loud to the city councillors (who knew no Latin), in the hope of swaying the city’s policy.\textsuperscript{19} Scientific or political news received by letter would be recirculated in other letters. Sometimes this circulation could extend beyond the circle of friends, with dangerous consequences. A letter that René Descartes sent to a friend discussing his interpretation of the Eucharist was sent on once too often when it ended up in the hands of an indignant Jesuit who precipitated the posthumous condemnation of Descartes’s views by the Catholic Church.\textsuperscript{20} Letters reached beyond the succession of personal contacts when collections of a scholar’s letters were printed, by himself, or posthumously by intellectual or genealogical heirs. These letters were typically edited before publication to remove material considered too personal or sensitive.\textsuperscript{21}

The Republic of Letters (*respublica literarum*) was a term in use from at least the sixteenth century to designate the community formed by the circulation through print, letter, travel, and conversation on many topics, with the ideal of transcending differences of national origin and religious affiliation in the shared pursuit of learning. In practice individual and national rivalries and religious differences shaped these interactions too, and the republic was also more diverse than its self-image suggested, including a network of women who found support from one another in and from the court of Elizabeth of Bohemia in exile in the Hague from the 1630s.\textsuperscript{22} At first this republic operated in Latin, even among scholars who shared a common vernacular, because the vernaculars were thought to lack the precision of expression and richness of vocabulary necessary for philosophical, theological, or scientific discussions.\textsuperscript{23} Through the efforts of vernacular literary authors, the support of princely patrons, and the formation of academies and other institutions that bypassed the Latin culture of the universities, by
the end of the seventeenth century many vernaculars had become established as languages of learning, with French commonly serving as a *lingua franca* among scholars who did not share a native language. The first learned periodicals founded in the late seventeenth century to circulate news and opinions about recent publications were mostly in the major vernaculars, with the *Acta Eruditorum* as the principal Latin holdout. This linguistic splintering soon spawned periodicals devoted to reporting on publications in foreign languages, like the *Bibliothèque britannique* which reported in French on recent English publications.\textsuperscript{24} 

The decline of Latin occurred later in some places and some fields (for example, in Germanic, central European and Nordic parts of Europe, and in the higher faculties of law, medicine, and theology), but throughout Europe the rise of the vernaculars by the eighteenth century had eroded the boundaries between those learned in Latin and those not, creating a much broader audience for informational writings of all kinds. In the meantime informational genres in the vernacular, which already existed in the late Middle Ages, had grown massively in many different genres and across a broad spectrum of learning. Almanacs containing calendrical and basic household and medical advice were printed in enough copies for 40 per cent of all the households in England.\textsuperscript{25} School primers, works of popular piety, and medical advice were best-selling genres in cheap formats, whose low survival rates today attest to their having been used unto destruction. How-to manuals offering tips in activities from gardening to fencing, and from letter-writing to cooking, ran the gamut from inexpensive, with woodblock illustrations, to expensive with copper-plate engravings. The uses to which they were put were not necessarily straightforward: a letter-writing manual could appeal to some readers not for its information but for the depiction it provided of fashionable society to those who did not participate in it.\textsuperscript{26} Manuscript remained an essential tool for the dissemination of vernacular information too, through letters, but also the sharing of medical recipes which many noble and educated women collected in notebooks for the use of their families and female heirs.\textsuperscript{27}

**Information in Government, Commerce, and Empire**

During the early modern period institutions of government, church, and commerce played a central role in generating information through increased and new forms of record-keeping.

Governments sought to quantify social phenomena in new ways. Already in the Middle Ages taxation and mustering soldiers for war required a basic account of population and property. For example the Domesday book commissioned by William the Conqueror in
1086 surveyed the landholdings of the England he had just conquered, but it remained a unique document which was neither updated nor imitated. The arrival of the plague in the mid-fourteenth century motivated numerical tallies of the dead in Italian city states; the impacts of war and famine were also bemoaned by contemporary writers in numerical terms, to good rhetorical effect even if the numbers were not accurate. In early sixteenth-century London an outbreak of plague first motivated systematic bills of mortality which then became standard, with weekly and annual compilations available in print. These formed the data for John Graunt’s 1662 *Observations on the Bills of Mortality* which offered the first statistical study of the city’s population.

During the seventeenth century the English government initiated other quantitative surveys—of the poor and the cost of maintaining them, of the population or property of various colonies (in Ireland and America), of the balance of trade, or the distribution of wealth for taxation purposes. The results were typically haphazard, based on extrapolation from a small amount of data or out of date information (for example the survey of wealth conducted by the early Tudors was still in use in the mid-seventeenth century). Furthermore the quantitative information did not actually form the basis of decisions about governance; Paul Slack concludes that in seventeenth-century England political factors rather than any numerical evidence determined decisions. Some were eager to base policy on numerical evidence (like William Petty), while others worried about ‘reducing policy to numbers’. More generally, throughout Europe few rulers were both able and willing to investigate their accounts and balance them by living within their revenues. Nonetheless in the eighteenth century political economy grew from the conviction that quantitative information about commerce and population was crucial to good governance, even if those outside government were often more interested in these results than those within it.

The rise of governmental counting was made possible by the spread of more efficient accounting and popular numeracy. Numeracy is even more problematic to define and measure than literacy, since basic counting is treated as part of normal cognitive function; counting beyond twenty and the manipulation of the arithmetic operations typically require instruction and can serve as a minimal definition of numeracy. While historians have not attempted to provide percentages in the same way, it is clear that numeracy lagged behind literacy, growing substantially only in the eighteenth century when arithmetic first started to be included in ordinary elementary education. Before then arithmetic was taught in commercial schools attended by those seeking to become merchants, navigators, or surveyors; gentlemen gradually realized the importance of these skills, also for military purposes, and could hire private instructors. The discipline of arithmetic was still new since European trade made the transition to Arabic numerals from Roman numerals and calculations by abacus only between 1450 and 1550. Though
Arabic numerals were widely known from the thirteenth century on, alternatives were in use into the seventeenth century, including the practice of keeping scores with marks on a chalkboard or by counting beans. At the high end the use of Arabic numerals was crucial to Italian and German bankers like the Fuggers who mastered international banking, using tools like double-entry bookkeeping first described in writing by the Italian Luca Pacioli in 1494. More ordinary merchants used numbers to honour contracts but rarely balanced their books, and businesses could founder from a basic lack of understanding of their financial situation. In the sixteenth century printed handbooks of arithmetic explained the four operations and the ‘Rule of three’ (or proportionality) but in convoluted ways. A plethora of different units and divisions (for money, distance, volume, and weight) complicated reckoning, and attempts at reform foundered on the strength of local custom and identity.

At the level of daily life ordinary men and women clearly managed their personal finances, and marginal notes in many books include sums and other arithmetic operations. It was not considered unusual for women to be numerate. In eighteenth-century kitchens, for example, cooks (who were more often women than men except in the greatest households) were expected to keep written tallies of their expenditures and supplies in order to reassure their employers of their honesty, since they were also well placed to skim off items from the pantry for their personal gain. In a big commercial centre like London the activities of mathematical practitioners, who were self-taught or educated at commercial schools, proved an important link between a vernacular mercantile culture and a Baconian programme of collaborative investigation into nature. This context and the demand for aids to arithmetic fuelled a number of useful inventions, such as logarithms (John Napier, 1614), the slide rule (William Oughtred, c. 1622), and calculating machines, such as the one Blaise Pascal devised in 1642 to help his father in his duties as tax collector in Normandy, which was then made available for sale in small numbers.

Among the learned disciplines mathematics gained new status in the late sixteenth century from its position as an ancillary field in the medieval hierarchy of the university, thanks to new claims about the unique kind of certainty offered by quantification. Natural philosophers like Christopher Clavius, Galileo, Kepler, and Descartes emphasized the role of mathematics in astronomy, physics, and the ‘mixed mathematical’ disciplines. They were motivated in their quest for mathematical laws of nature by the Biblical assertion that God had ‘ordered all things in measure, and number, and weight’ (Wisdom of Solomon 11:20). Newton’s *Principia* of 1687 confirmed this confidence in mathematization. Although few readers could follow the steps of his mathematical proofs by infinitesimal calculus, Newton used just three laws of motion to explain the movements of every object in the universe, from faraway planets to the phenomena of
A Revolution in Information?

everyday life. Newton’s laws marked the culmination of a century of efforts to devise a physics that could replace Aristotelianism and make sense of Copernicus’s heliocentric theory of 1543. The new physics was a mathematized discipline that inspired attempts to mathematize other disciplines in the following centuries, including various aspects of statecraft; it was also informed by astronomical observations from around the world, made possible by European global expansion for religious, commercial, and imperial purposes.  

Not all information-gathering by governments and churches was quantitative. The Reformation and Counter-Reformation Churches developed the first qualitative questionnaires, administered orally, in manuscript, or in print, to measure the effectiveness of religious reform. The English census of communicants of 1676, for example, served as a poll of religious opinion, though James II disregarded the evidence it provided that his policies would not be well received. The questionnaire became a versatile and widely used tool for collecting information for state and church administrations as well as scholarly research. In France Jean-Baptiste Colbert initiated tax reforms and mercantile policies based on extensive gathering of information from many sources, but after his brief tenure as chief minister, the French Crown discontinued most of his initiatives. Colbert started a survey of arts and trades in the country which produced images and descriptions which served as sources for Diderot’s Encyclopédie of 1751. Most successfully, he employed a network of archival researchers to find documents that Louis XIV could use to justify his policies, including his claim to the régale (the right to collect the revenues of a bishopric or archbishopric during a vacancy and to appoint to benefices in its gift) and to seize cities outside the French border which had once been French. Archives in which documents were not only stored but also retrievable were increasingly understood to be vital tools of government.  

Imperial expansion generated new methods and motives for collecting and using information and the overseas trading companies created structures for trading information as well as goods. The expansion of European trade along global routes, including the discovery of the Americas, resulted in the production of information that vacillated between the poles of classified and open. Royal Spanish cosmographers exemplified the practical application of advances in mathematics and humanism as well as the secrecy demanded by their state. Calling upon classical works such as Ptolemy’s Geography, they produced sophisticated ethnographic and geographic descriptions of the new territories conquered by the Iberian empires. Cosmography became a key component of Habsburg colonial statecraft, and state sponsorship of cosmographical projects boomed under the patronage of Philip II. The charts and reports produced by cosmographers using material from the Americas were initially closely guarded by the Spanish Crown. During the sixteenth century, the Reformation and anti-Habsburg
struggles throughout Europe led Philip II to classify all information that could be used against his massive empire. Despite his best efforts to control information flows from the centre of his ‘spider’s web’, information leaked or, as in the case of the Aztec-painted manuscript Codex Mendoza, was captured at sea to eventually be purchased by interested parties (in that case, the Englishman Richard Hakluyt).  

Unlike the Spanish expeditions, English colonial ventures were not run directly by the Crown, but through letters patent granted to individuals and companies. Richard Hakluyt (1553–1616) was among the first to argue for the importance of empire to the survival of England. Hakluyt watched the Spanish expand, read of French exploration in Canada, and dedicated his life to advocating for the English exploration of America. He gathered information about recent voyages and explorations, publishing translations of foreign language accounts, and disseminated geographical information to an eager public seeking both pleasure and profit. His accounts became indispensable guides for travellers from England: companies gave copies of his works to merchants planning to go abroad.  

Other global travellers who reported on exotic locations included Catholic missionaries from many orders. The Jesuits, who established houses across the globe from Southeast Asia and China to Canada and Latin America, were especially careful about managing reports sent annually to Rome from the foreign missions; they could be consulted and shared both within and outside the order or published in edited form. The Jesuit relations from New France, published annually starting in 1632, fostered an appreciative audience and callings like that of Marie de l’Incarnation who dreamed of martyrdom when she left France for Quebec to help establish the Ursuline order there. More generally the travel narrative had become a best-selling genre across Europe by the late seventeenth century, exposing readers to beliefs and social practices from around the world, fostering a new awareness of cultural difference and in some cases admiration for the ‘noble savage’.  

The great engines of colonial expansion outside Iberia were the trading companies formed by wealthy merchants pooling resources to undertake high-risk commercial expeditions. The first of these, the East India Company chartered in 1600 by Elizabeth I, negotiated the status of trading posts throughout South Asia as small extraterritorial bases where the Company performed the functions of government, and waged battles with rival ships as needed in order to protect its trade routes. The Dutch East India Company (Vereenigde Oostindische Compagnie or VOC) operated as a private company with close ties to the ruling elites in Amsterdam. Although the company was famous for its lack of interest in anything but profits, its regular voyages to the East Indies generated information about the people, places, plants, and goods they encountered on
land and sea (including other European powers). Above all the information about prices and commodities brought back from VOC ventures, combined with political news flowing in from diplomatic sources and the loose observation of policies about secrecy, made Amsterdam—also located at the centre of Europe’s trade routes from the Baltic and Rhineland corridor—into a crucial information hub. Information was shared face to face, and through brokers who traded in information, notably at the Amsterdam Exchange which served as an early stock market; some information was also printed in newspapers and merchant handbooks. The VOC also drew on its accumulating stock of records to estimate future prices and demand patterns for different commodities. This aggregate information spread beyond the closed meetings of the Company. Though the VOC declined in the eighteenth century, the techniques of information recording and aggregation remained a central part of capitalism thereafter.

News

Crucial to these developments in commerce, government, and empire-building, but also to the rise of literacy, was the increased speed, geographical reach, and quantity of the news in early modern Europe. Reliable information about recent events presented as new (or ‘news’) had long been of great moment for those making commercial, military, or political decisions. In the Middle Ages news conveyed by word of mouth or by letter could be fast and accurate, but few could afford such service. In the early modern period printing and improved routes of communication made possible an explosion of news, resulting in a variety of different genres and new kinds of employment to collect and distribute the news, and in new political debates about communication and secrecy and, by the eighteenth century especially, about public opinion.

Oral news networks predated and sustained the circulation of information during the early modern period. Monarchs issued proclamations which were disseminated by licensed criers, in a practice that continued throughout this period. Rituals, such as a mass of thanksgiving for the birth of an heir, were also used by kings to convey news. Louis XIV for example used Te Deum masses to announce his military victories. But oral and ceremonial news were increasingly complemented by news circulated in manuscript and in print, generated by merchants and states, and by printers seeking profit from the broad sale of a cheap imprint. ‘News’ included misinformation and disinformation too. For example news reports of the destitution triggered by the crash of the tulip bubble had little foundation in reality; the news licensed by rulers and institutions under their sway was often closer to propaganda.
For merchants, information guided investments. Antonio Morosini (1365–1434), a Venetian historian and merchant active in the early fifteenth century, received and sent information to business connections throughout the Mediterranean, including Alexandria. He shared news and received news in turn, working much of this information into his scholarly writing. His contemporary, the Prato Merchant Francesco Datini (1335–1410) received over 150,000 letters from informants all over Europe. Merchants maintained extensive networks of correspondence, and during the unstable early modern period, business, like governance, was becoming increasingly competitive. Obtaining more reliable information faster emerged as one of the best ways to stay ahead of rivals.\

Concurrent with the intensification of mercantile correspondence networks, states established new methods for organizing their international relations and gathering information from abroad. During the Middle Ages, ideas of state sovereignty were relatively inchoate and relations between princes were procedurally informal and often focused on symbolic rituals. During the Renaissance, new forms of international relations set the stage for the emergence of early modern diplomacy. After the papacy withdrew to Avignon in 1309, the power vacuum left in the Italian peninsula led to intense military rivalry between Italian states, in which survival often depended on knowing the plans of ‘allies’ and enemies alike. Instead of relying on medieval legates dispatched to send specific messages, the Renaissance Italian city states created professional ambassadors posted as permanent representatives of the state abroad. The special mission of ambassadors was to provide a continual flow of information. While ambassadors were in residence, they cultivated relationships meant to increase their effectiveness as information gathering agents—with spies, merchants, and ranking nobility. By providing regular, even daily, updates on political news, ambassadors gave their states the information they needed to protect their interests domestically and internationally.

Ambassadors were also essential to managing relationships with foreign powers. Venice is perhaps most famous for the reports produced by its early ambassadors on the Ottoman Empire. Beginning in 1454, Venice installed a permanent ambassador in Istanbul, the bailo, who maintained a large network of informants in the Ottoman capital, gleaning information from other consulates, expatriate Europeans, translators (called dragomans), and Ottoman subjects. Upon returning to Venice, they would augment their regular dispatches by delivering a summarizing document known as relazioni. By the late fifteenth century, information gathering was a regular part of ambassadorial duties. One Genoese author noted that ‘spying on the designs and secrets of princes is the very trade of ambassadors, and especially residents’. The volume of material produced by ambassadors abroad was impressive. One Venetian diplomat in Rome sent over 400 dispatches, some long and others brief, over just twelve months. To handle this influx of information, states had to improve archiving practices and expand
their bureaucracies. Over the course of the early modern period, Italian-style diplomacy became the standard for the whole of Europe. By the sixteenth century, nearly every state benefited from spies and diplomats working to further their interests. Though diplomatic information was meant to be secret (and was sometimes encrypted), it could be leaked and transformed at any stage of gathering and transmission by the many agents involved. Once it arrived at its destination, the Venetian government by an oligarchic senate was especially secretive, but political insiders also used leaks to achieve political goals, by spreading secrets within the ruling elite and more occasionally to the broader public.

Diplomatic letters and reports were all manuscript. So too were the first regular news-sheets for sale or avvisi. The avvisi were couched as personal letters containing recopied portions of correspondences, diplomatic reports, and hearsay, but they were produced in multiple copies for the closely intertwined political and mercantile information networks of the Italian peninsula. The genre emerged gradually over the course of the fifteenth century, and also reached clients spread across Europe. The Florentine merchant Benedetto Dei (1418–92) was one of the first to market news-letters for profit. After travelling extensively throughout Europe and North Africa, Dei began sending news to his numerous contacts for a small subscription fee. The news extracts were brief, and catered to the general interests of a wide readership, as the example from 1478 below illustrates:

I have news from Genoa that the Doge has knighted Batistino and sent away the [families of] Adorini and Raonesi …

I have news from Lyon, the trade fair has been very good; a lot of textiles have been sold and a good deal of money gained too …

I have news from France that nine ambassadors are coming to Italy with 200 horses to make peace for everyone.

Dei’s early manuscript newsletters circulated by subscription coincided with the first event to be reported in print almost contemporaneously with its occurrence—the Turkish sack of Negroponte in 1470.

The Aegean island of Negroponte held out for months before the Turks finally broke through its walls while a fleet of Venetian ships looked on. After entering the city, Turkish soldiers killed every male over the age of 15. The bloody massacre of Negroponte shocked Italy and Europe, conjuring the phantom of Ottoman invasion. News of the event circulated through the peninsula first through correspondence and oral networks. By 1472, at least twelve printed accounts of the event were marketed to audiences in both vernacular and polished humanist Latin. The shock of Negroponte’s fall...
captured public attention at every level, provoked responses that crossed the boundaries of language and genre, and set the close-knit worlds of Italian humanism, diplomacy, and book-publishing into productive motion. Printing did not create these reactions, nor make them possible; instead the well-established networks of information circulation in manuscript provided a fertile environment for the circulation of these early printed pamphlets. Pamphlets about Negroponte were not intended to convey new information about events to an otherwise ignorant public. Instead, the pamphlets were laden with polemical intentions; some were meant to raise support for a crusade and others were meant to memorialize or blame participants in the city’s fall. Unlike avvisi, which were produced and circulated on a regular schedule, pamphlets were produced in response to major events and controversies in places where a market for printed matter was already established.

The circumstances needed to sustain the production of printed news could prove shortlived. For example the port city of Rouen, Normandy briefly became a ‘news community’ after 1536, when tensions between Francis I of France and the Habsburg Emperor Charles V led to war. Jean L’Homme, an otherwise unknown publisher, began to print pamphlets with the latest diplomatic and political news. Between 1538 and 1544 he printed at least forty news pamphlets. The pamphlets appear to have been officially sanctioned and were fulsome in their praise of French victories, omitting mention of French reverses. After the war ended in 1544, the pamphlets ceased and Jean L’Homme and his press vanished; his imprints, like most cheap print, barely survive. Despite their ephemeral nature, pamphlets were uniquely important in reaching a wide readership, whereas most other news was closely guarded as privileged information by diplomats, merchants, and states. Their relatively cheap price, usually equivalent to a day’s wages for a labourer, meant that they were theoretically affordable for most readers; pedlars diffused them within and far outside the cities, selling them alongside their other wares. The earliest and undoubtedly the most famous pamphlet polemicist was Martin Luther, who printed hundreds of pamphlets in just a few short years during the 1520s. Pamphlets even appealed to the illiterate. As Robert Scribner and others have described, their imagery made their rhetoric accessible to a public far broader than the reading minority. Pamphlets could also be read aloud, spreading their contents beyond those who could read themselves. The success of Luther’s pamphlets (and of Catholic responses to them) had proven the marketability of the genre. So when religious controversy waned, printers produced pamphlets on prodigies of nature, such as comets, monstrous births, and rains of daggers and blood, presented as warnings of divine wrath. Pamphlet wars regularly erupted in periods of political turmoil—for example in Paris in the 1590s (under the League) and during the regencies of the seventeenth
century (1610–14 and the Fronde, 1648–53), in Venice during the Interdict 1606–07, and most spectacularly in England during the Civil War.

By the early seventeenth century irregularly printed news-sheets had become routine in many western European cities. German post-masters, like scribes in Italy, began to release manuscript and print versions of important diplomatic information. This eventually led to the emergence of the first regular ‘newspaper’ printed by Johann Carolus in Strasbourg. Carolus started by copying weekly avvisi for subscribers, but in 1605 he purchased ‘at a high and costly price’ a printing press to produce more copies of his avvisi faster and more cheaply. The early newspaper thus grew directly out of the manuscript newsletter at a time (on the eve of the Thirty Years’ War) when political developments would soon affect large swathes of the population. Intellectuals had little to no role in the production of news information. The paper, published as a pamphlet of eight pages, was not meant for opinion or ideas, but to apprise readers of current events; these were typically described in a brief enumeration with no background explanation, although with a bias in favour of those in power locally. Because of the fragmentation of the German-language area, hundreds of newspapers were printed there during the seventeenth century.

Newspapers next appeared in the Netherlands starting in 1618. Jan van Hilten’s Courante was a single-sided broadsheet with two columns of text which grew to a double-sided sheet by 1620. In nearby Spanish-controlled Antwerp Abraham Verhoeven was especially prolific: his Nieuwe Tijdinghen appeared as a sequentially numbered pamphlet, with an illustrated title page, roughly three times per week, but lasted only during 1620–29. Because of the Netherlands’ position on many trade routes, the Dutch newspapers circulated more broadly than the German ones; for example, by 1665, Dutch news was being regularly translated in Moscow for the Tsar. Amsterdam and other Dutch cities produced newspapers for the various communities of exiles located there and scattered elsewhere—including French Ligueurs and dévôts, Anglican royalists during the Civil War, or English, Irish, and Scottish Catholics. Although post-publication censorship existed in the Dutch Republic, it was exercised haphazardly and mostly on local political issues.

When Dutch corantos translated into English started to enter the English market in 1620, English authorities granted a monopoly or licence for one weekly newsbook to Nathaniel Butter and Nicholas Bourne who published the Corante, or newes from Italy, Germany, Spain, and France in the 1620s in pamphlet form; the conditions of the licence included submitting the text for approval prior to publication and making no reference to domestic affairs. In France a royal publication, Le Mercure français, appeared sporadically as a large volume from 1613. The first weekly newspaper was licensed by the Crown in 1631.
—the *Gazette* published by Théophraste Renaudot in Paris, with provincial editions, comprising mostly foreign news. In publishing a yearly compilation of the *Gazette* for 1631 (inviting a different kind of use from the initial serial publication, though no index was provided), Renaudot emphasized the practical utility of this information: ‘the merchant will no longer seek business in a besieged or ruined city, nor the soldier employment in countries where there is no war’. In these and other monarchies, the early newspaper was tightly controlled by royal licence and made no mention of local politics.

The exceptional breakdown of royal authority during the Civil War in England created the conditions for the appearance of partisan treatment of local news. Newsbooks started in November 1641 as weeklies, eight pages long, focused on domestic news. At first they reported on parliamentary proceedings, often transcribing speeches, but they soon became ‘bitter and aggressive instruments of literary and political faction’, until parliament regained control of the press in 1649 and licensed a limited number of them. During the 1650s the *Mercurius Politicus* edited by Marchamont Nedham was the main source of domestic and foreign news, under government scrutiny. It was closed at the Restoration, when newsbooks became ‘fewer and more conservative’. In 1666 the *Oxford Gazette* (later *London Gazette*) began what would be a 300-year-long run, starting in the format of a double-sided half-sheet printed on both sides; it began with an exclusive royal licence, which was short-lived since the Licensing Act lapsed between 1679 and 1685 and permanently after 1695. Among the new papers launched in 1695 were partisan papers like the Whig *Flying Post* and the Tory *Post Boy* whose names also suggested their distribution by post beyond London. The first daily newspaper, the *Daily Courant*, started in London in 1703 and around the same time the first newspapers in the English provinces (for example, the *Norwich Post*, 1701, and the *Bristol Post-Boy*, 1702, though the earliest issues of these do not survive) and in the American colonies (the *Boston News-Letter*, 1704).

The market for newspapers was strong enough in England by 1712 that most of them survived the Stamp Act which required them to be printed on stamped paper at an extra cost of one half-penny per sheet; this means of raising revenue was also designed to keep the price of newspapers out of reach of the poorest members of society. English newspapers remained especially contentious, each in the sway of a party. Although advertisements provided an important revenue stream (also dented by the Stamp Act), newsmen were often paid a pension by a political party or figure. For example the Walpole administration controlled five newspapers in the 1740s and by 1792 the government ‘had bought up half the press’. Elsewhere in Europe newspaper monopolies were more prevalent, limiting the editors’ ability to engage in political commentary; in many places newspapers continued to offer mainly foreign news and nothing to challenge...
the local authorities. Political debate happened instead (if at all) in pamphlets and other periodicals, such as weekly or monthly journals of political analysis. Given the constraints on print, the manuscript newsletter was valued as a medium that allowed freer (also customized and sometimes speedier) articulation of news and opinion, both in contexts where the press was controlled tightly (for example, France and Rome) and also where it was less so (England). Manuscript newsletters could also serve as agents of disinformation, as in the case of the circulation of false reports of a plan by Charles I to reform the government. Of course both print and manuscript also fuelled the oral exchange of news and rumour in all kinds of venues, from the home to the marketplace, the coffee house to the salon.

Historians have variously portrayed the newspaper as an agent of liberation from the ancien régime through the creation of a public sphere (following Jürgen Habermas, for example) or by contrast have emphasized the control of news by those in power. Others have reflected on how the newspaper may have encouraged new concepts of time and space, making the European continent seem smaller, and creating an awareness of the simultaneous experience of one event in many different places. With the spread of European business and imperial interests around the globe both East and West, European information and news networks began to encompass—and eventually define—the rest of the globe. Perhaps no event illustrates the expansion of European information networks better than accounts of the Ming–Qing conflict. The fall of Beijing in 1644 and the subsequent consolidation of Manchu control over the former territories of the Ming empire was a global drama that unfolded across diverse media, leading Sven Trakulhun to dub the event as a critical moment in Europe’s ‘media revolution’. Almost immediately after the sack of Beijing in 1644, the Dutch in Nagasaki, Formosa, and Batavia learned about the war in China and sent information to the Council of Seventeen in Amsterdam. The Jesuits were more directly involved in the human drama of the conquest, often as direct witnesses to the history unfolding around them. By 1647 the event was known in Europe, when the English newspaper Moderate Intelligencer proclaimed that China was now ‘another Germany ruined, two places that exceeded the world, and this is the wretched fruit of that thing called War …’. Other updates soon followed, but none had the impact of Martino Martini’s S.J. De bello tartarico historia, first printed in Antwerp in 1654, then in over twenty editions in most European vernaculars. The collapse of the Ming régime became a popular topic in literature, inspiring a handful of German romances and plays in Dutch and English. Much was written on the conflict and its implication for both trade and the fate of the Chinese. By the 1640s, information networks had developed fully enough for Europeans to ‘virtually witness’ the world around them. Events in China became current events, defining part of
what educated Europeans would have recognized as history in the making. Whether or not that seemed revolutionary to them is difficult to ascertain.

The growth of information in so many different areas of life, in different media and genres, between the fifteenth and eighteenth centuries, resulted in new challenges in managing large accumulations of manuscript and printed material and in assessing contradictory reports, analyses, and conclusions. Critical judgement, which humanist education was designed to cultivate in the offspring of the elite through the study of classical culture at the beginning of the period, became a skill that a much broader range of the European population put into practice, in making sense of the contradictions made visible in confronting multiple news sources, or the reports from faraway places which surprised expectations. Considering this period through the lens of an ‘information revolution’ which affected the production, distribution, and consumption of information offers a new lens through which to examine more familiar developments of the period, including printing, state-building, commercial and imperial growth, and the rise of a public sphere.

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Notes:


(3.) The subject of vastly increased information and its implications overlaps with other topics covered in this first volume: see especially, James Raven, ‘Print and Printedness’ (chapter 8) and Hamish Scott, ‘Travel and Communications’ (chapter 6).

(4.) Daniel Hobbins, Authorship and Publicity before Print: Jean Gerson and the Transformation of Late Medieval Learning (Philadelphia, 2009), 128, 150.


(10.) On areas of stagnation and decline, see David Cressy, Literacy and the Social Order: Reading and Writing in Tudor and Stuart England (Cambridge, 1980), ch. 7.


(12.) Houston, Literacy in Early Modern Europe, 159-160; Cressy, Literacy and the Social Order, 178; and Egil Johansson, ‘History of Literacy in Sweden’, in Harvey Graff et al., eds., Understanding Literacy in its Historical Contexts: Socio-Cultural History and the Legacy of Egil Johansson (Lund, 2009), 28–59.

(13.) ‘Nihilominus tot ac tam multa restant, ut iis legendis hominum vita quantumvis diuturna, vix sufficere possit.’ Jean Bodin, Methodus ad facilem historiarum cognitionem, ed. Sara Miglietti (Pisa, 2013), ch. 2, section 3, 104.

(14.) On collecting see Paula Findlen, Possessing Nature: Museums, Collecting, and Scientific Culture in Early Modern Italy (Berkeley, 1994); on the perception of overload:
Ann Blair, *Too Much To Know: Managing Scholarly Information Before the Modern Age* (New Haven, 2010), ch. 1 and 20–22, 64 on awareness of loss.

(15.) Conrad Gessner, *Bibliotheca universalis* (Zurich, 1545), sig. 3r-v.

(16.) Blair, *Too Much to Know*, ch. 3.


(24.) For an entry into scientific and learned journals see Thomas Broman, ‘Criticism and the Circulation of News: the Scholarly Press in the Late Seventeenth Century’, History of Science, 51(2) (2013), 125-150.

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(26.) Roger Chartier, Alain Boureau, and Cécile Dauphin, Correspondence: Models of Letter-writing from the Middle Ages to the Nineteenth Century, trans. Christopher Woodall (Princeton, 1997), 97-100.

(27.) See Alisha Rankin, Panacea’s Daughters: Noblewomen as Healers in Early Modern Germany (Chicago, 2013).


(32.) Houston, Literacy in Early Modern Europe, 164. Age-heaping or the tendency to round off numbers has also been used as a measure of low numeracy: Jörg Baten, Dorothee Crayen, and Kerstin Manzel, ‘Zahlenfähigkeit und Zahlendisziplin in Nord- und Westdeutschland, 16.–18. Jahrhundert’, Jahrbuch für Wirtschaftsgeschichte, 49(2) (2008), 217–229.

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A Revolution in Information?


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(62.) For further diplomatic contexts see Robyn Adams and Rosanna Cox, *Diplomacy and Early Modern Culture* (Houndsmills, 2011).


(64.) Quotation from Mario Infelise, ‘From Merchants’ Letters to Handwritten Political Avvisi’, in Francisco Bethencourt and Florike Edmond, eds., *Cultural Exchange in Early*
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(68.) Andrew Pettegree, The Book in the Renaissance (New Haven, 2010), ch. 7.

(69.) For a summary of these observations see McCusker, ‘The Demise of Distance’.


(73.) Paul Arblaster, From Ghent to Aix. How They Brought the News in the Habsburg Netherlands 1550-1700 (Leiden, 2014), 266.


(75.) Pettegree, Invention of News, 195.


(78.) Pettegree, *Invention of News*, 245 and on early forms of the penny post, 243–244.


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Economic and Social Trends

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This chapter traces major trends in economic and social history during recent decades. Grand narratives of a transition from feudalism to capitalism that described early modern societies as stagnant and prone to Malthusian crises have given way to analyses of episodic dynamism and social transformations. Expansion in the late fifteenth and sixteenth centuries turned into stagnation or contraction in the seventeenth and renewed expansion in the eighteenth century. Yet, despite the common trend, regional divergence between southern and eastern Europe on the one hand and northwestern Europe on the other increased over time. In explaining this variance attention has shifted towards a new culture of consumption and diverse productive formations to explain why people became more ‘industrious’, and why households consumed more varied and sometimes exotic products. These processes began in the northwestern Europe but slowly extended elsewhere.

Keywords: Climatic conditions, commercial expansion, consumption, industrious revolution, Malthusian crises, transition from feudalism to capitalism

The Study of Social and Economic History

The present state of the relationship between social history and economic history provides the essential starting point for this chapter. Until the 1980s, the disciplinary union of the two sub-fields was considered an obvious fact, evident in disciplinary research councils and other bodies, academic departments, and journals. Both subjects proposed and discussed primarily the validity of all-encompassing models of socio-economic
development during the early modern period. Historians inspired by Marxist notions of a transition from feudalism to capitalism as well as those who thought about the same processes within non-Marxist varieties of modernization paradigms conceived of the historical transformations in society and the economy as essential elements within an integrated *longue-durée* process.

Hence changes to work and family life, urban sociability or agrarian toil, the emergence of a bourgeois class, and social stratification were investigated with an understanding that they occurred within larger structural developments of the social order. The trends and cycles of urban and rural economies, the integration of markets, and the impact of European commercial expansion or proto-industries were investigated to confirm or disprove the existence of preconditions to the rise of capitalist economies in pre-modern Europe rather than as epiphenomena in their own right. True to their notion of studying the path from *pre-modern* to *modern* societies and economies, social and economic historians keenly embraced the label *early modern*, which seemed particularly appropriate for their purposes.

From the later 1970s these structural views of early modern society and economy were systematically undermined. On the one hand, the decline of Marxist paradigms in historical research precipitated a distrust of precisely the sort of macro-models that had underpinned the union of social and economic history. On the other, the cultural turn created new fields of study and profoundly rethought the place of the social and economic in the larger context of historical research. The fragmentation of a vision of the social and economic history of early modern Europe was reinforced by a methodological parting of the ways. Social historians generally felt more comfortable embracing the exciting new insights coming from cultural anthropology and linguistics. Several historians associated with the French *Annales* school, who had employed quantitative techniques as part of their early demographic research on long-term social change, now embraced enthusiastically the tools of cultural history. Roger Chartier’s important work on written culture is just one example. Economic historians more often embarked on what became known as the cliometric revolution, using advanced econometric techniques and formal economic modelling.

In recent decades movements such as micro-history and *Alltagsgeschichte* (‘history of everyday life’) at one side of the disciplinary field coincided with a quest for parsimonious, quantifiable macro-models at the other. There was a search for practices, representations, meanings, and material culture at one end, either in its more Anglophone form of an inquiry into symbols conducted in a Geertzian tradition, or in its more continental focus on *Lebensformen*, that is, the historical cultural anthropology of social formations. Social historians’ insistence on the cultural specificity of social...
institutions and practices was ill at ease with the comparative methods that had underpinned social and economic history since at least the early twentieth century. At the other end of the methodological spectrum, there were correlations, t-statistics, and rigorous economic models that gave new depths to the study of social and economic institutions that had previously been beyond the reach of testable hypotheses. These often implied a set of *ex ante* assumptions about human behaviour, however, that seemed indefensible to those who had begun to pay more attention to anthropological and linguistic historical research.

The traditional intellectual unit of social and economic history became increasingly fractured. However, reports of the death of either sub-field, social history or economic history, turned out to be premature. Instead the tension both between them and with the new approaches to cultural history has been extraordinarily productive in many ways. Rather than slowing down historical research it has dramatically improved both the understanding of the trends and cycles of economic transformation over the early modern period as well as the makeover of social structures and practices.

### Macro Trends and Cycles

Both Marxist and non-Marxist varieties of ‘modernization’ narratives of early modern European history assumed that the pre-modern economy was at its root economically and socially all but stagnant in the *longue durée*. A society’s output is produced by combining the inputs of land, labour, and capital using the available technology. It could thus expand by adding more of the factors of production (land, labour, and capital), that is, through *extensive* growth. Or it could grow by turning the same number of inputs into greater output with the help of more efficient technologies, for example by improving labour productivity through the concentration of workers in larger workshops. But such productivity improvements were precisely what, for most economic and social historians, constituted the transition from the pre-modern to the modern economy of the Industrial Revolution with its use of steam engines and factories. Economic growth in the pre-modern world was thought to only ever be extensive, an addition of land, labour, and/or capital. The central role fell to the relation between land and labour, or rather population. Once the optimum amount of available land was under the plough, an increase of productivity per person—what in today’s economic terminology would be called GDP per capita—was considered almost impossible. Society was understood to be fundamentally restrained by a Malthusian logic; that is to say population increases periodically tended to outrun the availability of cultivated land.
The consequence was painful crises that readjusted the population/land balance by means of demographic shocks of increased mortality and/or reduced fertility. European economies were thought to have experienced negligible technological progress in this period and the limited agrarian surplus circumscribed the development of the urban sector, which depended on food from the hinterland. Thus, capital accumulation and the emergence of urban social structures were also limited in scale. Feudal social formations differed only insofar as, across places and over time, they redistributed the modest surplus between lords and peasants, urban centres, and rural demesnes in varying degrees. Long run economic stasis limited the room for social change.

In this view it followed that the pre-modern European economy was mostly characterized by cycles of expansion and contraction or shifts between areas of economic gravity, and not by trend growth. The overall chronology of cycles of expansion and contraction seemed clear enough. The late fifteenth and sixteenth centuries were considered the recovery from the late medieval crisis (c. 1280–1340) and the dramatic demographic shock of the arrival of the plague in Europe from 1347–50. The epidemics provided an external shock to the land–labour ratio and more resources became available to the lucky survivors once the immediate dislocation of the ravages of the plague had passed. Increased commercialization went hand in hand with long-term demographic expansion. Plague and other infectious diseases remained endemic and continued to cause mortality crises. Still, demographic recovery tended to be remarkably swift after each episode.

The demographic expansion came to an end after 1600, however, during the ‘Iron Century’, a description coined by seventeenth-century contemporaries and made popular in the 1970s by Henry Kamen’s celebrated study. Political upheaval across most parts of Europe combined with demographic slowdown in much of northern Europe and reversal in the south. The so-called ‘crisis of the seventeenth century’ permanently completed the shifting of the centres of economic activity in Europe from the Mediterranean to northwest Europe. The Italian and Iberian peninsulas experienced economic stagnation at best, decline at worst. In German-speaking Europe the wars of the first half of the seventeenth century wreaked demographic and economic havoc. The southern Netherlands and their international entrepôt, Antwerp, had lost their pre-eminence to the northern Netherlands already in the 1580s and Amsterdam’s seventeenth-century rise was admired across the continent. On the other side of the North Sea, the eighteenth century saw the building up of momentum for modern, capitalist economic growth in the early industrializing regions in the north of England and in Scotland.

Since the economy of early modern Europe was described as a homeostatic system, the eighteenth-century shift to sustained per capita, or intensive growth could only be explained along a few possible paths, all of which involved in some way an external shock or change that broke the equilibrium. The first was an exogenous transformation of the
demographic regime. Social norms could change in such a way that fertility fell, allowing society’s great escape from under the Malthusian sword. A second one was a contribution to European growth derived from the commercial expansion of Europe beyond its geographical boundaries from the fifteenth century onwards. A third explanation posited that ultimately climate change was fundamental in explaining the cycles of expansion and contraction in early modern Europe. Let us look at each in turn.

**Demography**

In pathbreaking work during the 1980s British demographers demonstrated that the overall English population growth rates moved closely with food prices between the mid-sixteenth and the early nineteenth centuries. Fertility was reduced in times of economic hardship. Before 1700 much of the adjustment occurred through higher celibacy rates, and during the eighteenth century women delayed marriage; but both of these reduced the overall number of births. The reasons seemed to be a combination of social structure and changing mentalities. From an early stage the English economy moved more labourers out of agriculture and into services and manufacturing than most of its European neighbours (with the exception of the Netherlands). In connection with a more ‘individualist–collectivist’ orientation it was posited that individuals could not rely on their larger family for support, while collective support through the poor law after the late sixteenth century was mostly restricted to the elderly and the sick. In short, society had found ways to encourage fertility control, and as a result it remained permanently below the so-called Malthusian ceiling.

Changes to the demographic pattern resulted from what Schofield called ‘social ideology’, which mediated demographic behaviour. Cultural difference and family practices were the only way to explain the numerical trends. In the case of England this ‘social ideology’ allowed the operation of Malthusian preventive checks, which freed society from the curse of positive checks: that is to say, famine and premature death. But Wrigley, Schofield, and others implied that this also explained the difference between England and most other parts of Europe. Elsewhere, especially in the south, ‘familistic’ social formations would have placed less responsibility on individuals. Poor young adults could form families despite their precarious economic situations, raising the fertility rate to critical levels. Quantitative demographic research and a much closer concern for the family unit as a site of possible adaptations combined to chart a potential alternative to previous, more deterministic Malthusian models. Crucially they seemed to explain why northwest Europe could break out of pre-modern stasis.

Subsequent research by historical demographers of other parts of Europe has largely confirmed the view that European populations were more adept at keeping Malthusian
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dynamics in check than once thought. The French population turned out to be even more responsive to economic cycles in their demographic behaviour than the English. Recent research on Spain suggests that under-population rather than overpopulation was the dominant problem and the same seems to have been true for much of eastern Europe. Reis and Palma have argued that the Portuguese population was far from any Malthusian ceiling for almost two and a half centuries. There is no overall consensus on this topic, however. Greg Clark, for instance, has offered a striking re-statement of a quintessentially Malthusian view of the European economy that was only saved from stasis by the diffusion of English middle class values. Still, it is clear that preventive checks rather than positive ones were in operation in all parts of Europe during most of the early modern period. This confirmed the fundamental insight of the new demographic research; but it also meant that the northwest European demographic patterns were probably not distinct enough to explain the divergent social and economic trends in northwest Europe vis-à-vis southern and eastern Europe in the eighteenth century.

Commercial Expansion

With the Portuguese exploration of the west African coasts in the fifteenth century, the establishment of contact with the Americas after 1492 and a direct sea-lane to Asia in 1498, European commerce became fundamentally a global affair. Thus, global historians forcefully argue that at least from the early modern period onwards it is illusory if not misleading to write European history within the confines of the continent. Theories of unequal exchange, World Systems, and indeed postcolonial studies raised much needed attention to the fact that Europe’s economic and social—as well as cultural—developments were inevitably enmeshed with global ones. From Chinese technologies appropriated by Europeans, to Indian cotton cloths supplies, and African slaves transported by the Portuguese to French colonial Sainte-Domingue to produce sugar consumed by poor workers in European towns, commodity chains reached deep across the oceans. They altered power structures outside Europe and within, consumption habits, and the availability of foodstuffs. They made the difference between freedom and unfreedom for individuals and changed the ecological balance of whole continents: for instance what has been known as the ‘Columbian Exchange’ brought maize and potatoes to Europe and large draught animals to the Americas.

Nonetheless, historians have been divided over the impact of Europe’s commercial expansion and the imperial structures it extended across the Americas, Africa, Asia, and Oceania. Some argue that quantitative evidence for an imperial windfall gain is weak at most. At the other extreme, it is argued that imperial expansion was the handmaiden of Europe’s escape from poverty, while condemning large parts of the rest of
the world to immiseration. Much of the attention in global history has been on the impact of European interactions outside Europe. What is of importance here, by contrast, is to what extent either political might and colonial exploitation or indeed simple economic integration beyond Europe together with the availability of new raw materials, techniques, labour, and land made a difference to European social and economic development. A look at the European cityscapes in the later eighteenth century would have suggested that the new Atlantic and Pacific commercial world had profoundly transformed Europe. How else can the growth of Glasgow, Liverpool, and Bristol, Hamburg, Amsterdam, and Nantes, and Bordeaux, Bilbao, and Lisbon be explained? European urbanization patterns reflected the rise of Atlantic Europe and the relative stagnation of Mediterranean and eastern Europe.

For many historians imperial expansion was a means to syphon off a ‘colonial subsidy’ into European metropolises. The systematically unequal power relationship between conquerors and conquered translated into a variety of forms of exploitation. Direct looting, expropriations of land, forced labour of various kinds, and extractive taxation over time were combined with and partially gave way to structural imbalances. They created a form of global exchange that condemned colonies (and former colonies) on the periphery to the role of low cost producer of raw materials and foodstuffs that were systematically excluded from the gains of technological advances in manufacturing. However, not all metropolises benefited. Core countries such as Britain, the Netherlands, and France were the main winners of the new World System. Portugal and Spain supposedly ended up in a half-exploited, half-exploitative semi-periphery in which mineral imports brought riches to some but poverty to many. More recently historians have also returned to re-examine the mercantilist policies of European nations, and concluded that they created systematic commercial benefits for at least some of them, notably Britain.

From the sixteenth century onwards access to the Atlantic was associated with deep social transformations, what once would have been called the rise of the bourgeoisie, and with real economic benefits. Historians have argued that the accumulation of capital in the hands of a mercantile elite was crucial in providing stimulus for the non-agrarian economy. It transformed urban spaces, helped the development of more sophisticated forms of financing economic activity and, some would argue, provided the start-up capital for merchants who invested in new forms of putting-out systems of proto-industry that spread across Europe. It also allegedly fostered the influence of urban social strata that were less directly tied to the existing corporate order of Europe. The rise of an ocean-minded mercantile elite with competitive instincts in this narrative facilitated the shift of economic and social leadership from the Mediterranean to northwest Europe.
Quantitative studies, however, have had a surprisingly tough time finding hard evidence. Simple correlations between urbanization rates and exposure to the Atlantic economy predictably seemed to confirm the ‘Atlantic bonus’. But they do little to explain why that should be so. Early investors in some of the new trading companies for extra-European trade, notably those of the VOC, realized phenomenal rates of return for about a generation. But most research suggests now that there were few ‘super-profits’ to be made, and they were rarely sustainable for any period of time. This was true for the Asian trades, but also for the American ones, and in some periods even for the trade in slaves (as opposed to the operation of the plantations that bought the human cargo). At the same time, markets across the Atlantic and Pacific were only slowly becoming sufficiently integrated for prices (not to mention wages) to converge. From an economic point of view prices either side of the oceanic trade networks should have started to move in unison; that is, if pepper prices rose in Asia, they should also have risen in Lisbon. O’Rourke and Williamson found little evidence for such integration before the nineteenth century even if the volume of inter-continental trade increased, but others have challenged that view.

The evidence for a number of possible channels through which new long-distance trade contributed to social and economic change in Europe is hence surprisingly mixed. The impact is most visible in consumption patterns and material culture, which changed in fundamental ways. Imports of sugar, tea, cacao, cotton, tobacco, and coffee, what Sydney Mintz has called ‘food drugs’, dramatically increased. Sugar was an almost unaffordable luxury item in the early sixteenth century. By the 1780s every European consumed about two kilos per annum, in addition to a pound of coffee and a pound of tobacco. But consumption levels also differed greatly across Europe by this point. The British had already developed their (in)famous sweet tooth and consumed nine kilos of sugar per person, a good part of it to sweeten about a pound and a half of tea, while the Dutch enjoyed only half as much sugar but washed it down with close to three kilos of coffee. The account books of Spanish convents in the seventeenth century still recorded slightly apologetically the purchase of cacao for the patron’s feast; by the eighteenth century those outlays were no longer a reason for an implicit *mea culpa*.

The sociability and materiality of European life underwent slow but profound changes. Urban coffee houses offered a smoke-filled but sober alternative to alcohol-infused inns. Europeans simply were a little more sober a little more often thanks to the availability of non-alcoholic hot drinks that made it possible to consume water in difficult sanitary surroundings. But coffee houses also changed social and economic practices in Europe’s towns. Lloyds of London famously created a space for business with maritime insurance brokers choosing the coffee house as their public office. In the domestic sphere the utensils associated with the consumption of the new hot drinks, teapots or
**chocolateras**, became staples even in the most modest households. For bourgeois families the latest fashion in cotton prints became part of social respectability in England while Chinese silk became the basis of global tastes from Manila to Mexico City and Seville.

Did the qualitative changes of everyday practices have a quantitative economic impact at the society-wide level then? In an innovative attempt to compare the contribution that empire made to the real wage of European workers over the early modern period, Costa, Palma, and Reis suggest widely diverging trends reproduced in Figure 10.1. For example, as opposed to contemporaries’ fantasies, the sixteenth-century Asian imperial trade added little quantifiable benefit to Portugal’s domestic economy. France reaped no or very small benefits throughout the early modern period; the line for France in the graph all but coincides with the x axis. Spanish workers’ gains were moderate too. This is somewhat surprising in the first case but broadly in line with the traditional notion that in Spain the costs and benefits of empire almost cancelled each other out. Dutch skilled workers’ wages were significantly higher thanks to colonial trade but that contribution stagnated towards the later eighteenth century. At exactly the same time the returns from empire reaped by British skilled workers virtually exploded.

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**Figure 10.1** Share of skilled workers’ real wages attributable to empire, 1500–1800

Source: (Costa, et al. 2013)

There are more surprises. Portuguese skilled workers enjoyed real wages that were about a fifth or a quarter higher than they would have been without the Brazilian empire in the late eighteenth century, the highest share of all. But, the Brazilian gold rush and bullion extraction made only a modest contribution in Portugal (the same was true for silver in the case of Spain). Instead the plantation complex was the most powerful source of extractive rents in the Lusophone empire. Yet Portuguese extraction was not sufficiently powerful to make up for the considerably lower overall real wages in Portugal compared to England or the Netherlands in the eighteenth century. To put it another way: Portuguese skilled workers were able to consume considerably more thanks to imperial
exploitation of Brazil; but they still ended up being much worse off than their northwest European peers for much of the early modern period. In relatively small metropolitan economies such as Portugal and the Netherlands the potential impact of colonial trade was almost certainly larger than in bigger ones, but it was insufficient \( (p. 277) \) to reverse the diverging economic trends that had begun to open up in Europe by the eighteenth century at the latest.

There is another interesting way to think about the role of the expansion of long-distance trade, not just of the colonial kind. In a highly acclaimed book that seeks to chart the ‘Great Divergence’ between living standards and economic growth in Europe on the one hand and China on the other, Kenneth Pomeranz has not only suggested that Europe had little advantage on the most advanced parts of Asia before the late eighteenth century. He also explained Europe’s eventual overtaking of the Yangtze region with the ‘ghost acreage’ overseas that commercial expansion had brought. The argument is intriguing: the availability of supplies of foodstuffs and raw materials from outside the continent allowed European societies to invest more heavily in other sectors of the economy. Put simply, clothing Europe with wool would have required sheep to take up much of the land used for higher value purposes. Cotton cloth imports were a godsend. Sugar, cotton, and other ‘colonial’ products allowed Europe to escape the logic of stagnation not by controlling population but by expanding its ‘virtual’ agricultural land.

The balance of research on the impact of Europe’s commercial and imperial forays in the early modern period is more complicated than the simplistic models of extraction suggested. Phenomenal riches were indeed amassed in the hands of some European Pfeffersäcken, pepper sacks, as less fortunate contemporaries used to call sixteenth-century merchants in the German Hanseatic towns who got rich on the back of the Asian spice trade. But the search for a straightforward mechanism that translated imperial and commercial expansion into economic growth and the rise of a market-oriented society within Europe has produced more doubts than certainties. Mercantilist practices in Britain seem to have been more profitable for the metropolis than in France. The guild-based imperial trading systems of Portugal and Spain in the sixteenth century extracted fewer benefits than the joint-stock companies of the Dutch and the British, though in the case of the latter quite a few companies such as the Dutch West Indies Company were phenomenally unsuccessful. Gold and silver exercised contemporaries’ imagination but did relatively little for the metropolitan economy.

At the same time, European consumers of non-European foodstuffs, new textiles, spices, and art had their lives transformed in hitherto unimaginable ways. Commercial expansion relaxed some of the constraints within the European economy and helped to support urbanization. Social change accompanied the redistribution of income not only in favour of mercantile classes. The ability to specialize agricultural production by the use of the
most efficient crops also created rents in agrarian contexts. However, from an economic history point of view the impact was mostly in a dynamic process of self-reinforcing specialization that was underpinned by and itself underpinned ongoing socio-cultural changes to consumption and production within Europe. Simple extraction was rarely of long-run importance. Nor did the expansion of trade in the Atlantic, Indian Ocean, and Pacific end Europe’s trade via the Mediterranean: the old picture of a complete decline of Mediterranean trade has been revised as well. Throughout the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries Mediterranean commerce became increasingly integrated with the Atlantic and beyond, and its slower rates of expansion were partially explained by the depth of its markets as early as the sixteenth century.36

Climate

If there was a point of inflection in economic, social, and political terms within the period generally considered as the early modern, the seventeenth century is a good candidate. Political strife, uprisings, and wars of unprecedented number and scale were accompanied by misery, famine, and death. Demographic expansion in most parts of the continent turned into stagnation or decline. There were signs of social and economic strain from at least the last decade of the sixteenth century. By the middle of the seventeenth century the British Isles were convulsed in civil war and revolution, and the warring parties of the Thirty Years’ War left behind burnt and wasted landscapes across the German-speaking territories. About one third of the population was killed by war and its unholy fellows, famine and epidemics. No sooner had the peace of Westphalia (1648) been signed when the Fronde rebellions began in France. Portugal, Catalonia, and Naples rose in revolt against the Spanish Habsburgs. These and many other revolts—Geoffrey Parker has counted twenty-four revolts between 1635 and 1666 alone—were symptoms of a ‘General Crisis of the Seventeenth Century’, as many historians have claimed.37

Originally, research into the seventeenth-century crisis offered a variety of possible explanations. From a Marxist standpoint feudalism sowed the seeds of its own demise and the economic misery of the seventeenth century was part of a process that would eventually lead to political change. No matter however if read in an interpretation that privileged feudal extraction and the loss of their means of production for small tenants or as a broader economic malaise, the most accepted view is that there was a series of ‘distribution crises’ caused by the expansion of European states. As administrations grew in size and complexity in European polities of all kinds, monarchies and city states, demands for taxation to finance the state and its military activities set off a backlash from the nobility and urban rentiers as well as small producers.38 The result was a contest for urban and corporate rights, the privileges of the nobility and church, which ended in
different socio-political equilibria across Europe. But many studies of the diverse conflicts that were subsumed under the label ‘general crisis’ also pointed out that socio-political conflicts very often seemed to come to a violent end because they coincided with agricultural crises.

That raised the question whether nature was partly responsible for what seemed to be an extraordinary number of contemporary claims of harsh winters, unseasonably cold summers, and agricultural crises? In what has come to be known as ‘the Little Ice Age’ of the seventeenth century, temperatures allegedly dropped on average by perhaps one degree. More important, unusual combinations of global weather cycles, possibly related to a rapid succession of ‘el niño’ effects, are thought to have brought with them more extreme weather events. Geoffrey Parker has recently argued that in the more densely populated zones the relatively minor change in climate was intensified by heavy dependence on staples rich in carbohydrates, such as wheat. Small shortages in the supply of grain could cause an outsized rise in prices because demand was inelastic: no matter how much the price of food grains rose people had little alternative but to buy whatever amount they could afford. The resulting lower calorie intake harmed the population’s ability to perform heavy physical labour while increasing their susceptibility to common diseases.

Parker is careful to stress that natural disaster only turned into a demographic, economic, and social catastrophe because of ‘misguided policies pursued by religious and political leaders’. This was the case in the eastern territories of Prussia, Mecklenburg, Pomerania, and Brandenburg, where lords reacted to the massive demographic contraction by restricting peasants’ freedom of movement. They thus initiated a reinforcement of serfdom, the ‘Second Serfdom’, which limited agricultural development and urbanization in most of eastern Europe throughout the early modern period. But depopulation on this scale also meant less urbanization, fewer centres of learning, and lost craft skills.

There is no shortage of anecdotal evidence for adverse weather from Dutch Golden Age paintings to monasteries’ tithe records. But the thesis of the Little Ice Age has been contested on at least two grounds. First, recent research by economic historians warns that the apparent cycle of colder temperatures during much of the seventeenth century might be a statistical illusion caused inadvertently by standard techniques applied in climate research. Kelly and O’Grada demonstrated that in year on year weather observations there is little evidence that something unusual was happening in the seventeenth century. Indeed, weather fluctuations and trends only seem to systematically diverge from their long-term equilibria from the late nineteenth century onwards. Modern global warming is real, they claim, the Little Ice Age was not, even if the social
and economic upheaval of the seventeenth century was. The logic might have been the inverse: the harder the land was hit by wartime disruption and social strife, the colder the winter seemed to contemporaries. Still, even if the evidence might not support the claim that the seventeenth century saw climate change as science understands it now, cycles of randomly bad weather might have been quite sufficient to cause a succession of crises.

Second, the evidence on the link between weather fluctuations and mortality is not entirely straightforward and has been widely debated. While high grain prices generally led to higher mortality, English evidence suggests that after about the mid-seventeenth century that relationship weakened. It is possible though by no means clear that this was driven by a profound change in the provision of welfare, the introduction of the poor law, as an indirect consequence of the destruction of religious welfare provision during the Reformation. Another possibility is that in increasingly integrated markets substitution became easier: the poor found more alternatives to the shortage of particular grains. There is some evidence suggesting that historians might have over-estimated the reliance on staple grains as food for the poor. In line with the more traditional assumption that early modern European households were rarely much above subsistence level, most social and economic historians assume that poor households spent about one quarter to two-fifths of their income on bread. But an early seventeenth-century Spanish prospector came to the conclusion that the real amount was barely 15 per cent after he had ‘interviewed’ a number of householders.\(^\text{44}\) In short, diets might have become more diverse and therefore households were better placed to survive the odd bad grain harvest. Dutch researchers too have found only a muted relationship between grain prices and Malthusian positive checks. In the Dutch and English cases those in the most urban and economically developed parts of the country seem to have suffered the heaviest toll from higher grain prices.\(^\text{45}\) This provides further evidence for the very complex interrelationships between weather, agricultural production, religion and welfare institutions, the emerging states, prices of food staples, and people’s well-being.

The Revolt of the Early Modernists

Mostly exogenous sources of socio-economic change in early modern Europe such as the demographic patterns, commercial and imperial expansion and climate change discussed earlier were certainly important. However, the fundamental conclusion from recent research is that those who saw them as the way out of pre-modern homeostatic society departed from an erroneous starting point. As it turned out the dogma of a largely stagnant early modern European economy was wrong. Demographic adaptation to economic trends and cycles turned out to be more widespread than originally thought, leaving ample room for social formations that were compatible with denser population.
The impact of European expansion was more intensely visible on the consumption side than in terms of the production of new goods. People consumed more diverse and eventually cheaper and fancier goods but they were not necessarily better off in terms of their basic human welfare, that is, how many healthy years of life they enjoyed, as a consequence. Adverse weather events occasioned local and regional famines throughout the early modern period and probably clustered in certain periods. But the occurrence and intensity of acute food shortages was decreasing not because temperatures improved or population had fallen. Instead better integrated markets meant that shortfalls in one location could be remedied from elsewhere or by alternative products. In a process that Jan de Vries has called ‘the revolt of the early modernists’ historians increasingly acknowledge that early modern European societies did experience intensive growth, albeit of the intermittent and reversible kind.46

Divergences: Small and Large

This potential for expansion derived from the fact that early modern economies were inefficient rather than constrained by a corset of available agricultural land and stagnant technology.47 The notion of some sort of inescapable ceiling, demographic or otherwise, was mostly a result of an ideological perception of the ancien régime as unmoveable and stagnant, caught in feudal social formations, and of its ideological twin, the reification of a notion of modernity that freed society from those strictures thanks to the complicity of empowered and regulating states, enlightened citizens, and improved technology. Recent research suggests that per capita output could and did grow at the equivalent of 0.5 per cent to 1 per cent per annum over extended periods. That hardly sounds impressive, but at such rates the size of an economy might double in about a century or a century and a half. The problem was not that there was no economic expansion but that before the nineteenth century the process remained episodic and potentially, but not necessarily, reversible. That turns the search for historical explanations upside down: while traditional social and economic historians looked for
reasons why some parts of Europe eventually broke the yoke of the homeostatic system, it now seems clear that, for a number of reasons, underlying slow growth went into reverse at different times in different places.48

Figure 10.2 thus illustrates not common trends and cycles across all of Europe of per capita product but as many diverse paths as there are countries—and it goes without saying that by displaying proto-nation states and regions that consisted of multiple polities the graph itself simplifies already. Though the traditional generalization of southern European (high-level) stagnation after 1600 versus northwest European expansion is broadly correct, it is easy to forget that this subsumes in one paradigm processes of rapid expansion in the Netherlands and England that occurred with a century delay between them.49 It also sidesteps the fact that Italy experienced modest growth throughout the seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries, Spain from the mid-seventeenth to the early nineteenth century, and Portugal between the mid-sixteenth and the mid-seventeenth centuries and again, especially, in the second half of the eighteenth century.50 Similar periods of growth and decline could be described for the German speaking areas, which broadly mirrored those of the northern periphery, Sweden and Norway.

These cycles of expansion left their heritage. Urbanization rates, shown in Figure 10.3 and often seen as the best way to gauge socio-economic expansion, increased over this period everywhere except the Low Countries (north and south), where they were extremely high already at the beginning of the period. Across the eight regions urbanization rates increased from 7.5 to 12.5 per cent between 1500 and 1800, and only Poland experienced no noticeable net urbanization increase at any time. Though low seen in comparative perspective, it was considerably faster than the growth of urbanization in the neighbouring Islamic world of the Middle East and Western Asia.51 Furthermore, the graph employs a threshold that counts only towns that have in excess of 10,000 inhabitants, which itself lowers the level of urbanization in most parts of Europe. In Iberia for instance the urbanization rates would be close to 20 per cent over much of this period.
if we were to lower the threshold to 5,000. Historians of southern Europe in particular are concerned that many of the smaller towns might have been essentially agrarian in their social and economic structure. Rural and urban were often not very clear-cut categories.

**Rural Life**

The slow socio-economic development of early modern Europe was the result of a complex and repeatedly faltering process of interaction between the agrarian and urban society and economy, local and long-distance trade, and the expanding state. Agricultural change was overwhelmingly driven by the slow adaptation of best practice to local conditions. Most research suggests that peasants voluntarily engaged with the market, contradicting earlier assumptions of a subsistence peasant sector that was hostile to market involvement. Even in those areas where strengthened serfdom seriously restricted peasant autonomy, notably Russia, it was generally in landlords’ interest to encourage peasants to sell their small surplus. At the same time peasants sought to improve their lives with a few material possessions they could not produce themselves.

However, in the very shallow and poorly integrated markets of pre-modern rural Europe, peasants needed to guard against the possibility that markets might fail them, just when they needed them most. Thus agricultural institutions, whether on lordly demesnes or independent freeholds, did not on the whole support full specialization. Where food grain might become unavailable as a consequence of an entirely local weather event and rural society provided limited assistance for the poor, peasants were ill advised to specialize entirely in non-staple productions such as wine or hemp. The inefficiency of markets itself created the need for overproduction in good years and led to poor allocation of resources. In pre-modern society, over-capacity played the role of insurance. As a result, productivity per worker struggled to keep pace with population in most parts of Europe during the seventeenth century—despite the slow adoption and adaptation of better crop rotations, despite the introduction of American maize which increased the productivity of soils in northern Italy and Spain, and of potatoes, which did the same for Ireland and parts of the German speaking lands, and despite changes to rural institutions such as enclosures or sale of commons. French agriculture produced in the eighteenth century 60 per cent less than it could have produced given the available land and agricultural technology. But inefficient labour markets kept workers underemployed.

One available mediating strategy was migration. Migration was a more widespread phenomenon than the vision of the stagnant pre-modern society suggested, and in itself it was one source of social change. In Catalonia in the late sixteenth and early seventeenth
centuries, more than a quarter of the investigations of the Inquisition targeted people of French origin at a time when the immigration of the poor from north of the Pyrenees was met by an increasingly hostile reaction of local residents, bearing witness to the tensions surrounding migratory flows. Rural to urban migration was a permanent feature, driven in part by the much higher mortality rates in towns. Increased rates of urbanization thus reflect even higher rates of rural to urban migration. But migration was often not a one-way road. Intra-rural and temporary migration served to fill the demand for labour during the harvest. In Catholic Europe, where charitable support tended to be concentrated in towns, flows of poor people during subsistence crises could be reversed thereafter. The unique institution of the Poor Law in England by contrast served to keep the rural poor in their parishes. It thus limited the ability of individuals to use migration as an ‘adaptive strategy, bound up with material conditions, social relations and individual aspirations’.

Another way to respond to the inefficiencies of the early modern economy was rural by-employment. Proto-industry expanded and contracted cyclically in pre-modern Europe. Organized in a putting-out system (Verlagssystem) that combined mostly urban capital to buy raw material inputs with small scale, low skill, often part-time employment in rural areas, it had the potential to take advantage of seasonally underemployed labour. On the demand side proto-industry responded to the desire for relatively cheap textiles and metal products. Although there are some examples of proto-industrial producers organized in guild-like structures, especially in German-speaking areas, most of this production remained outside corporate organization. The first phase of expansion of proto-industry in the late mediaeval period turned into contraction as the disposable income of the lower strata and thus their ability to buy proto-industrial products declined. The second phase began in the middle of the seventeenth century and reached its high point around a hundred years later. There are relatively few regions in which historians have been able to trace a direct line from proto-industrial expansion to industrialization: one such area is Catalonia. But in most parts of Europe proto-industry was not a form of ‘industrialisation before the industrialisation’ as some early writings on proto-industry posited.

Proto-industry nevertheless drove important changes in at least three areas. In the first place, it expanded the potential for the production of relatively simple manufactures and increased consumer choice. Cheap textiles responded to a demand that had often simply not found a supply in the urban economy. Hence one important consequence of the expansion of the proto-industrial production was product differentiation, that is, a greater variety of similar goods, as producers responded to diverse demand.

Secondly, proto-industrial production in some regions did increase household incomes. Franklin Mendels assumed in his original formulation of proto-industry that it would lead to demographic expansion and therefore immiseration. Yet, there are a significant
number of European regions in which proto-industrial by-employment seems to have had a positive impact on the disposable income of rural families, especially where families continued to have access to their own farm land. Christian Pfister has found clear evidence for Swiss parishes that manufacturing was concentrated in the hands of women and children in those families that retained agricultural land. Here by-employment changed both the gender division of labour within the household and the potential to earn additional income.\textsuperscript{62} Evidence suggests that where proto-industry became one of a number of activities of households that were too far from larger markets to fully specialize it might have played a crucial role in raising consumption as well. As Hutchison has suggested for Norway, pluri-activity of households that combined agricultural, manufacturing, and in the Norwegian case, maritime activities was likely to have been the driver of the slow development of consumer markets in Europe’s peripheral regions.\textsuperscript{63}

Finally, in some parts of Europe, proto-industry resulted in serious competitive pressure on urban manufacturing, which was generally subject to higher costs. However, overall proto-industry and guild-based production were more often complementary than in direct competition. Francesca Trivellato has shown that the Venetian glass industry, which was organized in a strong guild, outsourced certain activities to proto-industrial producers.\textsuperscript{64} At the same time, in regions in which the production of relatively inexpensive textiles was heavily regulated by urban guilds, rural producers posed a significant threat to the livelihood of urban workers, which led to intense social strife.

\textbf{Urban Life}

Since the high Middle Ages craft guilds and merchant guilds had played a fundamental role in organizing urban production, social life, and political representation. Urban government derived at least part of its legitimacy from the formal and symbolic involvement of these corporate institutions. By combining religious, welfare, political, and more narrowly economic functions, guilds wove together the urban fabric. However, there has been intense debate about the role of urban guilds in either fostering or hindering the transformation of labour practices, technologies, and the commercialization of non-agricultural products in early modern Europe. On the one hand the traditional view saw guilds as essentially conservative institutions that tried to restrict access to particular professions or markets in order to extract monopoly rents. On the other hand it has been argued that guilds provided crucial services and training through apprenticeships and by encouraging the mobility of journeymen.\textsuperscript{65}

The corporate rights of exclusivity with which guilds were endowed meant that they were theoretically able to regulate entry into a craft or a particular branch of commerce through the limitation of apprenticeships. But the geographical reach of guild restrictions
was usually limited to a particular town, and only England possessed regulations that theoretically applied at a national level. Most craft guilds thus found themselves in intense competition with producers from other towns, or in the case of products that required few skills in production, in direct rivalry with rural proto-industry. But guilds substantially circumscribed economic opportunities of religious minorities, foreigners, and women by excluding them explicitly through legal means from exercising most urban occupations. In this guilds were an important part of the corporate structure of pre-modern society that defined collective rights and duties as a function of gender, origin, ethnicity, linguistic group, religion, etc. Indeed, it is striking that in parts of Europe where guilds were introduced relatively late, such as Castile, urban societies relied on sophisticated alternative means of exclusion, notably legal requirements of ‘limpieza de sangre’ and the Inquisition. Social control was not just a top-down phenomenon of an empowered state; popular pressure for this also existed and professional organizations played a part in the institutional response to this demand.

At the same time it does seem likely that apprenticeship contracts were instrumental in transferring the mostly tacit knowledge of pre-modern crafts across generations. Relatively little is known about craftsmen’s mobility. Journeyman travel, the Walz, might have played a crucial role in particular trades, especially those related to construction. Generally there seems to have been a substantial degree of mobility of trained builders and technical crafts of all kinds. The rapid diffusion of moveable print in the later fifteenth century is a case in point and towns that received the technology earlier seem to have done particularly well for themselves. Most craft guilds had a bias towards the adoption of new techniques that would save capital or material, or as in the case of moveable print introduced a completely new technology, but organized against those innovations and inventions that were labour-saving. The latter had a tendency to upset the social basis of corporate order by creating larger income differentials and there are numerous examples of guilds trying to curb such development.

One of the potentially most important functions, the transfer of tacit knowledge, has been surprisingly little discussed in the literature thus far, but has become increasingly clear in recent global comparison, especially with technologically advanced world regions such as parts of early modern China. Europe was on the whole not more inventive or innovative than China or the Islamic World; indeed quite a few of the technologies slowly introduced and adapted over the early modern period, such as gunpowder, relied on inventions made elsewhere. What was unusual about Europe was that the collective stock of technical and practical knowledge rarely declined from the high Middle Ages onwards. To put it another way: Europe did not forget and thus did not have to re-invent wheels. It stands to reason that whatever the balance in favour or against innovation of guilds was
in general, they provided an important service in storing knowledge that could not be codified and written up, and transmitting it to future generations.

The Urban and the Rural: Complementarity and Diversification, Mentality and Consumption

Over the course of the early modern period, guild-based and proto-industrial production became part of more sophisticated and stratified labour and goods markets. Where they were in direct competition they altered labour practices and more often than not urban regulation lost out. But mostly they complemented and completed the market. More diverse products, especially in lower qualities, reached larger numbers of consumers in more places. They took some of the slack and inefficiencies out of early modern society. Producers on the whole became less autonomous. Proto-industrial piece-work had to be completed within clear time limits. Merchants advancing raw materials to rural spinners or weavers increasingly developed techniques to control pilfering and wastage. In urban production, too, material-saving innovations, which were rarely opposed by guilds, increased the need for new work practices on the shop floor.

Less slack in the economy also meant more days of work per year for the average working man, woman, and child. Europe’s moral economy was changing. The Reformation brought far-reaching changes in the provision of welfare to Protestant Europe. In Catholic territories charity remained overwhelmingly urban, provided by religious foundations, hospitals, monasteries, and only secondarily by urban institutions themselves. In Protestant territories the choices differed from the introduction of a locally applied but nationally regulated Poor Law in England to a reliance upon mostly town-based institutions. Notions of deserving poor changed not only in response to society’s view of individual responsibility but also to the rise of states that began to develop more strict conceptions of citizenship. The Reformation did away with many of the feast days in Protestant territories and other customs, such as Saint Monday, a day off to recover from the Sunday rest, disappeared too by the eighteenth century. But over time Catholic regions also began to cut down on festivities, and daily working hours expanded.

The pressure from new social practices was, however, accompanied by the incentives of new consumption goods. Adaptive behaviour encouraged by the availability of new, less expensive consumer goods and extra-European mildly addictive ‘food drugs’ seems to explain the apparent contradiction in the socio-economic development of early modern Europe. On the one hand, economic historians looking at real wages and general indices of human well-being failed to see much reason to assume that over the longue durée most people in Europe were better off; at the same time social historians examining material
culture and consumption began to find European households that, from the sixteenth century onwards at least, contained ever more and more diverse furnishings, kitchenware, and clothing, were used to consuming more exotic foodstuffs, and prone to participate in fashions and fads far down the social ladder. There was an industrious revolution that encouraged families to devote more time to work as a way of obtaining a little share of the new consumer goods.\textsuperscript{69}

A combination of new goods from further afield and cheaper, less durable goods produced by European proto-industry meant that additional income could be turned into small daily pleasures. Historians have uncovered more and more evidence from kitchens and parlours across early modern Europe that there had to be a demand side story to European development in the early modern period. De Vries and van der Woude went so far as to characterize the early modern Dutch economy as essentially ‘modern’, consumer-driven, and free from the sort of structural impediments that were once associated with early modern society. And while early research mostly diagnosed a ‘consumer revolution’ in the Netherlands and Britain, later studies have found more modest but nonetheless substantial increases in consumption across most of Europe, including places hitherto considered as the deeply underdeveloped fringes such as Ireland or Norway.\textsuperscript{70} Still, where markets were less developed, there were both less goods to aspire to and fewer labour market opportunities to take advantage of.

\section*{Rulers, Economy, and Society}

While the European economy of the early modern period was not stagnant, there is nonetheless evidence that the distribution of its product was significantly altered by the processes of state formation. Political consolidation through dynastic accident, sale, and less often conquest left fewer polities that were on the whole better financed, administratively more organized, and overall intervened in more areas of social and economic life. At the same time, early modern society everywhere was based on a corporate model that severely constrained any absolute power, be it monarchical or parliamentary as in Britain after 1688. Political diversity of proto-nation states, polycentric states, city states, and territorial and non-territorial empires was the rule and there was no \textit{ex ante} logic that led towards a more uniform form of governance. While rulers everywhere\textsuperscript{p. 288} continued to share sovereignty with towns, historic territories, noble estates, and the Church, to name but a few, they also extended their administrative reach and with it their revenue. When French and Spanish representatives sat down to negotiate the terms of the peace of the Pyrenees (1659), they struggled in part because no one knew the exact location of the boundaries in the rugged terrain of the Pyrenees.
By the late eighteenth century much of Europe had been mapped, and counted and assessed for taxation.

Even eighteenth-century state administrations were small, however, perhaps accounting for 5 or at most 10 per cent of national product, and their imprint on society and economy was thus necessarily circumscribed. In polities that were more politically unified, especially England and Wales, the new economic thinking of mercantilism turned at times into a powerful political and commercial tool. Mercantilism and its German sibling Cameralism (Kameralismus) should not be seen as consistent doctrines of social and economic policy. But they shared a few basic concerns, among them the view that increased population was beneficial; that exports should be favoured and imports discouraged to avoid the outflow of specie currency; a ‘rationalization’ of the often disruptive internal barriers to trade imposed by towns and historic territorial divisions; and the fostering of new forms of manufacturing including through the targeted immigration of skilled craftsmen. Louis XIV’s formidable Minister of Finance, Jean-Baptiste Colbert and his successful drive to restore France’s finances fit into this new trend, as much as the English navigation laws of 1651 that severely restricted the trading practices of the colonies. Even the Dutch Republic, the self-styled champion of free trade in Europe, subjected its extra-European trade firmly to extremely mercantilist monopoly companies.

Increased control over economic activity occasionally had unintended consequences. The introduction of the excise in England led to a standardization of techniques in brewing and to technological progress because tax inspectors insisted on uniform practices. But this arguably only reinforced existing tendencies to centralization. In less unified, more diverse France the attempt to enforce a monopoly on the tobacco trade through the sheer force of thousands of tax guards only served (according to Michael Kwass) to delegitimize the state and legitimize an underground capitalist trade that was illicit but perceived as legitimate. Elsewhere in Europe, polycentric states and empires as well as city states more often could turn only small parts of any mercantilist project into a social and political reality, or would not try to at all. The eighteenth-century Habsburg Monarchy created with generous financial support a large number of royal factories meant to introduce new techniques into a variety of sectors, but its internal economic space remained fragmented.

Conclusions

The terms used by political and cultural historians for the pre-modern European society, the ancien régime, comes with a connotation of stasis. Yet, this chapter has suggested
that attempts to interpret early modern economic and social history in paradigms of ‘escape from stagnation’ have resolutely failed. They did so because this was anything but a stagnant society. Even at the lower end of the social ladder, in rural areas and on the European periphery, work, life, and consumption had changed dramatically between the sixteenth and the late eighteenth centuries. By that time a poor family clad in a mixture of cotton, woollen, and linen clothes for which they probably had a second set and which they likely had not produced themselves, sat around a table on a few chairs and had a meal that included sugar and tea, which they took from a few cups and pots and metal cutlery they called their own. In the north of Europe they probably also had a simple oven rather than an open hearth. That compared to their sixteenth-century ancestors’ use of locally made wooden bowls and spoons, one set of woollen clothes, and a meal of water, beer, and porridge they had had to boil for hours on an open hearth. The lives of town dwellers and those further up the social ladder had been transformed in much more profound ways. Chinese porcelain and the latest cotton prints would have been a must if one were to keep up with the Joneses in the later eighteenth century.

The forces behind these changes were slow moving, however. Better transport and more integrated markets reduced the dangers of local food shortages and increased the pace of urbanization. Rural areas produced simple goods more cheaply, town artisans became more specialized and produced ever more sophisticated mechanical instruments, fine garments, and the like. The simple things became more affordable relative to poor people’s disposable income, while finer and more sophisticated products became better and also relatively cheaper. The first phase of globalization helped in the process; but much of it was driven by a better use of resources within Europe’s own economy. People worked more days of the year because more work was available but also because more income let them share in the tiny luxuries of most people’s lives: a little tobacco, a second dress, a coffee pot. Every so often the process went into reverse. Warfare and the taxes needed to pay for it were a heavy burden. War brought epidemics and famines, interrupted trade, and dislocated markets; while the loss of life was also a loss of producers, consumers, and skills. Taxes ate dangerously into the small disposable income available beyond the necessities.

The slow and haphazard improvements of agriculture, the vagaries of commercial fortunes, and the impact of the creation of more powerful and more costly polities, social, and economic institutions all created slightly different paths across Europe’s regions. Most of Europe saw demographic and economic expansion throughout the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries and a slowdown or reversal in the seventeenth. But there were almost as many exceptions as regions that followed this common path. The Dutch Republic famously achieved its period of greatest splendour during the seventeenth century. By the eighteenth century a substantial difference in terms of economic development had
opened up placing northwest Europe at the top, southern Europe and parts of central
Europe in the middle, and eastern Europe and Scandinavia at the bottom. As large as
those differences seem to historians of Europe, however, they were nevertheless only a
‘Little Divergence’ compared to the ‘Great Divergence’ that had begun to open up
between Europe and other continents.

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(16.) The classic formulation for this so-called Prebisch–Singer thesis was examined in Leandro Prados de la Escosura, ‘Terms of Trade and Backwardness: Testing the Prebisch Doctrine for Spain and Britain During the Industrialization’, Carlos III Depto de Historia Económica working paper 94–46 (1994).

(17.) Vitorino Magalhães Godinho, Estrutura da Antiga Sociedade Portuguesa (Lisboa, 1975); Stanley J. Stein and Barbara H. Stein, Silver, Trade, and War. Spain and America in the Making of Early Modern Europe (Baltimore and London, 2000); José María Oliva Melgar, El Monopolio de Indias en el Siglo XVii y la Economía Andaluza. La Oportunidad Que Nunca Existió (Huelva, 2004).


(19.) Guillaume Daudin, Commerce et Prospérité: La France Au XVIIIe Siècle (Paris, 2005); David Ormrod, The Rise of Commercial Empires: England and the Netherlands in


the Age of Mercantilism, 1650–1770 (Cambridge and New York, 2003); Findlay and O’Rourke, Power and Plenty; Stein and Stein, Silver; Antonio Miguel Bernal, España, Proyecto Inacabado: Los Costes / Beneficios Del Imperio (Madrid, 2005).


(25.) Wolfgang Schivelbusch, Tastes of Paradise. A Social History of Spices, Stimulants and Intoxicants (New York, 1993); Mintz, Sweetness.

(26.) Grafe, Distant Tyranny.


(31.) Costa, Palma, and Reis, ‘The Great Escape?’


(36.) For a fascinating recent analysis of Genoese involvement in the American trades, see Alejandro García Monton, ‘Génova Y El Atlantico (c.1650–1680). Emprendedores Mediterraneos Frente al Auge del Capitalismo del Norte’ (Ph.D., European University Institute, 2014).


(40.) Parker, *Global Crisis*.

(41.) Parker, *Global Crisis*, 25.


(43.) Kelly and O’Grada argue that the use of twenty-five-year moving averages that is standard in climate research creates, thanks to the Slutsky Effect, an erroneous impression of weather cycles in the seventeenth century that are in fact normal fluctuations. Morgan Kelly and Cormac O’Grada, ‘The Waning of the Little Ice Age’, *Journal of Interdisciplinary History*, XLIV (2013), 301–325.

(44.) José Luis Sureda Carrió, *La Hacienda Castellana y los Economistas del Siglo Xvii* (Madrid, 1949), 209.


(47.) For an in-depth discussion see Grafe, *Distant Tyranny*, ch. 7.


(50.) For more details for Italy see Paolo Malanima, ‘Measuring the Italian Economy, 1300–1861’, Rivista di storia economica, 3 (2003), 265–296; for Spain, Alvarez Nogal and Prados de la Escosura, ‘Rise and Fall’.


(53.) The notion that peasants were subsistence-oriented dominated the so-called Brenner debate, see Aston and Philpin, eds., The Brenner Debate. Agrarian Class Structure and Economic Development in Pre-Industrial Europe; Brenner, ‘Social Basis’.


(57.) For the share of offences see Henry Kamen, The Spanish Inquisition: An Historical Revision (London, 2000), 259.


(60.) For Catalonia see Julie Marfany, ‘Is It Still Helpful to Talk About Protoindustrialization?: Some Suggestions from a Catalan Case Study’, The Economic


(63.) Ragnhild Hutchison, In the Doorway to Development. An Enquiry into Market Oriented Structural Changes in Norway Ca. 1750–1830 (Leiden and Boston, 2012).

(64.) Trivellato, ‘Guilds, Technology and Economic Change in Early Modern Venice’.


(69.) The concept was first developed in de Vries, ‘The Industrial Revolution and the Industrious Revolution’.


Abstract and Keywords

Early modern conceptions of social order developed from a rich tradition of classical philosophy and medieval Christian thinking. This chapter begins with an overview of the core concepts of social order. Particularly prominent was the model of a tripartite society, divided into three orders or estates—the nobility, the clergy, and the ‘third estate’. Early modern society was by no means static, however. Even though there were clear borders between these three estates, social mobility within and between them was considerable. It was in Western Europe where the concept of a society of orders eroded first and new social classifications such as the middle classes or the bourgeoisie emerged towards the end of the eighteenth century. By then for many people the religious justification of social hierarchies had lost its plausibility and power, giving way to new ideas about social equality based on individual natural rights.

Keywords: Tripartite society, estates, nobility, clergy, third estate, equality, bourgeoisie, middle class
conduct which guide both individual and group behaviour and interactions and thereby support the reproduction of a social system.

Christian theology taught for centuries that monarchs held their office by the grace of God and that the hierarchical order of society was the result of a divine design for the purpose of containing the sin of man. Well beyond the end of the ancien régime, theologians continued to stress the religious dimension and symbolism of the social and political order. However, from the middle of the seventeenth century onwards secular philosophers used the idea of equal ‘natural rights’ of man in a hypothetical state of nature as a lever to fight not only for political, but also for social equality. The most prominent of these authors was Thomas Hobbes, whose 1651 treatise Leviathan or The Matter, Form and Power of a Common Wealth Ecclesiasticall or Civill is generally regarded as the founding text of modern political philosophy. Hobbes used the idea of a hypothetical covenant between equals to explain the origin and nature of social and political order. This was in contrast to the basis of Christian teaching and earned Hobbes the accusation of atheism. However, by the end of the eighteenth century, secular social theory had become the predominant form for dealing with the explanation and critique of the existing social order.

Both theological and philosophical tracts on social order were part of a normative discourse. In modern historical research this resulted in an extensive debate on whether and to what extent some of these normative works portrayed reality and mirrored or even formed the self-understanding of early modern societies. This was the case in particular with texts on the nature of social stratification in early modern European societies. This chapter will commence with an overview of the core developments of normative thinking on social order, because of the impact theological and philosophical texts had on how reality was experienced and interpreted by contemporaries. Above all, however, looking at such normative constructions of social order is important, because ‘the tools of distinction … are tools of social and political control’.

Conceptions of Social Order

Early modern conceptions of social order developed from a rich tradition of relevant texts in classical philosophy and medieval Christian thinking. From the eleventh century onwards the most influential model, however, with far-reaching roots, linked by some researchers to a common Indo-European notion of social stratification, was the hierarchical division of society into three orders or estates according to their main functions: those who pray (oratores), those who fight (bellatores), and those who work (laboratores). Developed and first used in this specific Christian version in France, this
ordering of society into three estates quickly became the dominant normative model throughout Europe. It found its way into many different theological, legal, and political texts and contexts, and was used and debated until the end of the ancien régime, when its legitimacy as a guiding principle for conveying privileges and political power was successfully questioned by the French Third Estate (‘Tiers État’) in 1789.

The simplicity of the tripartite model exercised a particular attraction for normative theorists and practitioners interested in the justification and preservation of hierarchical social order and the limitation of social mobility. In seventeenth- and eighteenth-century France a tract on the three social orders or estates by the lawyer to the Parlement of Paris, Charles Loyseau (1564–1627) gained particular influence. He maintained that the three estates were still a valid model of the social order in France: ‘These are our three orders or estates-general of France: the clergy, the nobility and the third estate.’ And while Loyseau acknowledged that there were many subgroups and internal hierarchies within these orders, he still maintained that this tripartite division formed an overarching structure for society as a whole.

Some later historians took Loyseau’s tract as a descriptive text and therefore as a correct portrayal of early modern French society and its self-perception. One reason for this was that they projected their own discomfort with the modern industrial world onto a counter-model of stable early modern societies where all individuals knew their place as determined by that of their forefathers. More recent research, however, has not only shown that early modern society was by no means as stable as these historians presumed, but also that Loyseau’s real intent was to present a normative and conservative theory of nobility and public office. He was trying to fight the social aspirations of what he saw as corrupt social climbers and inadequate officeholders by reinforcing the borders between the orders of society.

Even though Christian doctrine does not lend itself naturally to the justification of social inequality, medieval theology found many reasons to justify it. Most influential for Catholic teaching on social order was the work of Thomas Aquinas (1225–74). In his Summa Theologiae Aquinas holds that the order of society is part of and should relate to the greater divine design of a cosmic order. The order of the universe is necessarily based on a variety of diverse elements. Aquinas exemplifies this in particular with reference to the internal hierarchies of the Church or the celestial order of the angels, but it also pertains to his concept of a well-ordered society requiring social inequality for its perfection. This means inequality between men is even God given, and not only the result of human sin, as other theological writers had it.

This positive conception of inequality as the prime principle of social order and its theological justification were extremely influential during the early modern period, even
across the confessional divide. The most prominent, though very complex example of this is Martin Luther’s teaching on social inequality and social order. In his 1528 tract *Confession Concerning Christ’s Supper* Luther writes: ‘But the holy orders and true religious institutions established by God are these three: the office of the priest, the estate of marriage, the civil government’. Luther substitutes the third estate, those who labour, by the state of marriage. However, marriage means for Luther also being at the head of a household. The state of marriage is therefore fused with a general *status oeconomicus*. The most interesting aspect of Luther’s description of the three orders is that they also contain the whole household of the office bearers. Thus, the clerical order comprises ‘those who preach, administer the sacraments, supervise the common chest, sextons and messengers or servants who serve such persons. These are engaged in works which are altogether holy in God’s sight’. The same is the case with the political authorities and their households.

To some scholars it seemed that Luther was trying to depart from the hierarchical model in order to switch to a system of equivalent functional spheres. However, what he actually did was to place the hierarchical order within these functional subsystems of church, secular authority, and household or economy. Within these three orders there were masters and servants, and each one had to fulfil his or her duty accordingly. This hierarchy was also instituted by God. Luther summarized his teaching on social order in a compilation of quotations from the New Testament which related to the duties of individual social groups and orders and which he added to his catechism. For centuries these so-called ‘Tables of Duties’ (*Haußtafeln*) had to be memorized by all Protestant schoolchildren and were referred to in sermons, religious plays, and other media. They formed an extremely strong religious framework for the Protestant understanding of society and their behaviour within it and prevented them from questioning social inequality. Despite all being brethren in God, the ‘external differences in the stations of life will, of course, continue. … The farmer leads another life than a prince. … Such distinctions must ever remain in our everyday life. But in Christ there is neither male nor female, no prince, nor tiller of the soil: they are all Christians’.

Luther’s doctrine demonstrates how adaptable the tripartite functional system was to Protestant as well as Catholic ideas of social order. This adaptability was not only due to the simplicity of the model, but also to the fact that it was easily reconcilable with many Biblical texts. A particularly telling example of its persistence and confessional permutations, but also its prominence in public portrayals of social order, can be found in the Swiss city of Basle. The pre-Reformation town hall was decorated with an image each of the Pope, the emperor, and a peasant, and the inscription ‘Tu supplex ora, tu protege tuque labora’ (You devoutly pray, you protect, and you work). After the Reformation and the accession of the town to the Swiss confederation, the image of the Pope was
substituted by that of a Protestant priest, and the emperor by the image of a Basle city councillor, whereas the peasant and the inscription remained unaltered.\textsuperscript{15}

There were, of course, also other Biblical texts which could be and were used to challenge hierarchical structures and social inequality. The Biblical notions of Christian brotherhood and of the equality of men before God were transferred into the realm of contemporary politics and formed the basis for claims to equal rights in this world. The radical reformation of the early sixteenth century with its millenarian experiments such as Thomas Münzer’s communist republic in Mühlhausen and the Anabaptist Kingdom of Münster in Germany, or the movement of Gerrard Winstanley and the Diggers in mid-seventeenth-century England are only some of the best known examples.\textsuperscript{16} However, the official teaching of all churches, pre- and post-Reformation, remained strongly in support of the godly nature of a hierarchical structure of society.

It was only in the eighteenth century that this changed and the nature and effects of social inequality were re-thought and criticized in a way that became seminal for all modern thinking on the topic. A critical moment for this was Jean-Jacques Rousseau’s answer to the 1754 prize question of the Academy of Science of Dijon on the ‘Origin of Inequality among Mankind; and whether such Inequality is authorized by the Law of Nature?’ Rousseau’s treatise, published in 1755, made him famous overnight.\textsuperscript{17} Rejecting any natural or divine origins of present social and political inequality, Rousseau argued that believing in these old arguments ‘would amount to asking ... whether strength of body or mind, wisdom or virtue are always found in the same individuals in proportion to power or wealth’.\textsuperscript{18} This being clearly not the case, he maintained that social inequality was steadily on the rise because it was supported and secured by state and law in the interest of the rich. This process would eventually end in despotism as the most extreme manifestation of political and social inequality. However, as private property came into being by some sort of negligent consent, it could also be changed, and, as early as 1754, Rousseau heralded the forceful overthrow of the system when he wrote: ‘The uprising that ends in the strangulation or the dethronement of a sultan, is as lawful an act as those by which he disposed of the lives and goods of his subjects the day before. Force alone maintained him, force alone brings him down. Thus everything happens in accordance with the natural order ...’\textsuperscript{19}

Rousseau’s treatise became one of the key texts in the French Revolution. Just as for centuries before it had been Christian doctrine, now it was the philosophes that provided the language with which claims to privilege or participation were questioned or raised. This function of normative texts, to give voice to claims and provide a coherent framework to arguments, is important. Furthermore, these normative debates seemed to be mostly of a pan-European nature. They served as a common language with...
which social order could be challenged or reinforced across Europe. However, as the
model of a tripartite society had never fully captured the complexity of the social
structure of any early modern European society, in recent decades social historians have
taken more interest in the social dynamics and the permeability of the boundaries of
social groups than in the normative texts around them. Interesting research and
methodological debates evolved around the development and internal differentiation of
both the secular and clerical elites during the early modern period.

The Growing Size and Coherence of the Early Modern European Nobility

By the beginning of the fifteenth century, and with the Swiss Cantons and some Balkan
territories as the notable exceptions, nobility seems to have emerged throughout Europe
as a distinct social order or estate endowed with hereditary privileges which set them
apart from the rest of the population. The exact requirements and standards which
conveyed noble status and what exactly these privileges entailed differed between
regions and states. However, the rise of a privileged group which set itself apart from the
rest of the population and exercised not only rights, but also considerable social and
political power, could be observed throughout Europe.  

The causes of this Europe-wide formation of a noble elite were manifold and differed
regionally. The most common causes, however, were the obligation and the right of
freemen to military service. The rise of equestrian warfare and increased expenses for
military equipment set apart a group of freemen who were able and willing to meet these
costly requirements in exchange for additional privileges. Eventually they were able to
convert their military profession as knights into hereditary ranks. Being turned into a
hereditary status, nobility soon came to rest primarily on noble birth and lineage.
However, as privileges could and had to be granted by the ruler, noble status could also
be conveyed for other merits in princely service and through a formal process of
ennoblement. Finally, there was a large grey area where the possession of landed estates,
castles, or noble fiefs, perhaps with seigneurial rights, and the leading a noble lifestyle or
holding of certain offices gradually resulted in the acceptance of families as nobles by
their peers. This was especially the case during the fifteenth and early sixteenth
centuries, in particular, when the borders of nobility were still permeable and no clear
system of registering and checking noble status was yet in place. A ‘silent’ upward social
mobility of rich merchants, farmers, and professionals at least into the lower echelons of
nobility was, therefore, possible and frequent. The fast rising prices for agrarian goods at
the turn of the sixteenth century often created wealth among the owners of large
agrarian estates as well as among traders who supported these aspirations. In addition,
in Protestant countries this increased social mobility was aided by the fact that the Reformation had made so much church land available for redistribution.\textsuperscript{21}

Noble status conveyed not only social prestige and the right to political participation through institutions such as parliaments or diets, but also considerable economic advantages, sometimes through exemption from personal taxation, such as the taille in parts of France, and, probably more importantly, a general undertaxation of noble property and income throughout Europe.\textsuperscript{22} By the end of the sixteenth century the aspiration of commoners to attain noble status and the considerable upward mobility of the earlier period was, therefore, viewed critically by both the old nobility who wanted to defend their exclusivity, and the states which needed income. The proof of noble lineage became increasingly important in many contexts. In the Holy Roman Empire it was particularly the Catholic regional corporations of noble families who tightened the rules concerning the access to the important benefices of cathedral chapters and similar institutions, binding admission to the proof that all sixteen great-great-grandparents were of noble descent. These benefices provided considerable funds for the support of unmarried and non-inheriting sons and daughters of the local nobility. By the end of the seventeenth century Catholic nobility all over Germany and beyond had succeeded in closing these resources to newcomers.

However, in the European perspective the closure and exclusivity of the Catholic nobility of the Holy Roman Empire has to be considered a fairly extreme case. At the other end of the scale was probably the Polish–Lithuanian Commonwealth. Here neither king nor the upper end of the especially numerous nobility, the magnates, had enough power to successfully restrict access to noble status. Thus, not only families who could prove their ancient noble status, but also those who could afford military service or a noble lifestyle or to buy a noble estate normally passed as part of the growing Polish nobility right through to the eighteenth century. It was only with the partitions of Poland that serious attempts to shrink the noble population were undertaken, in particular by the partitioning powers. Similarly populous was the nobility in parts of Castile, the hidalgos. However, here the ranks seemed to close from the late sixteenth century onwards, and fairly strict documentation of noble descent was requested for many noble functions and rights. Unlike in Poland, in Castile this also resulted in the exclusion of converted Jews from nobility.\textsuperscript{23}

Privileges not only divided the nobility from the commoners, but also resulted in significant status differences among the nobility. Not only was there a differentiation between the so-called titled elite, such as the barons and dukes, and the vast majority of a lesser nobility without such titles who were not considered equal by the better circles of nobility. There was also a differentiation within the titled nobility, where a leading group of families of ancient noble descent emerged, frequently with close family ties to the
ruling houses and in possession of large estates, the so-called aristocracy. They also closed their ranks to the aspiring lesser nobility through a highly selective marriage policy. In fact, the aristocracy formed a European elite increasingly related across nations through intermarriage and with privileged access to the highest court offices and, in Catholic countries, leading church positions. With the notable exception of England, where noble titles were passed down only to the inheriting son and all other children stepped down into the ranks of the gentry, European noble families of all levels passed down their status to all children, male and female. Except for its highest ranks, the peerage and baronetage, the English nobility could not be identified by way of a clear legal definition, and above all none of its members had any particular fiscal privileges. In addition to the older landed country elite, the English gentry, therefore, consisted of ‘demoted’ children of the aristocracy as well as of social climbers from urban merchant classes who bought their way into the lifestyle of the gentry. However, this seemingly ‘open elite’ (Ronald G. Asch) did also have its ‘pecking order’ and more informal ways of closing ranks, and by the eighteenth century, the British gentry was probably socially more homogeneous than, for example, its French counterpart.

In comparison to the closure of noble corporations and marriage markets, state control of legal entitlement to nobility and the verification of noble lineage seem to have been initially less effective. In France in 1579, King Henry III issued an Ordonnance containing a regulation which stipulated that buying a noble fief would not convey noble status. However, effective control was established only in the seventeenth century, when the efforts of Colbert in particular to raise state revenue resulted in a recherche de la noblesse (1665–74) and the demotion of many noble families to commoner status. In Brittany, for example, it affected 38 per cent of noble families, and in other parts of the country the figures may have been even higher. However, apart from revenue-driven state control of the nobility, the turmoils of the late sixteenth and seventeenth centuries led many rulers across Europe to use the revision of noble status as a disciplinary instrument and a means to break internal criticism or noble frondes by the demotion of oppositional and the promotion of loyal nobles. Between the middle of the sixteenth and the middle of the seventeenth century the Bohemian Ritterstand (knights) decreased from about 90 per cent to 63 per cent of the noble families. This was partly owing to their loss of status due to their Protestant leanings, and partly due to the promotion of loyal families into the higher nobility, the Herrenstand. Altogether, in Bohemia, the number of landed noble families entitled to attend the regional diet decreased during this time from over 1,800 to less than 900. Similarly, in Sweden, Gustavus Adolphus more than halved the small number of 400 noble families.

Such drastic measures might have been the exception, and they were regularly followed by a wave of new ennoblements. Rulers refilled the ranks with their own clientèles or
used the opportunity openly to sell titles in order to create additional income. In this process of replacing or supplementing noble and aristocratic families, early modern networks of patronage and friendship played a vital role, giving in particular those nobles assembled at princely courts considerable influence on these mechanisms. Even though it was the ruler who transferred nobility and offices, those people already surrounding him would use their position to sway his choice. All this shows that despite the attempt of the nobility to close ranks, the size and composition of the second estate was, in fact, always in flux. The analysis of this process of contraction and expansion of nobility and the changing pattern of its composition has been the subject of a long and interesting debate within the burgeoning social history of the European nobility since the 1970s.

First of all and least controversial in this debate, research established the overall size of the nobility across Europe. In the fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries in western Europe and most of central Europe, in Britain, France, Portugal, in most of the territories of the Holy Roman Empire and in Prussia, the nobility constituted only around 1 per cent of the population, rarely exceeding 1.5 per cent. In Northern Europe, in particular in Scandinavia, the nobility’s share in the population was even smaller, frequently below 0.5 per cent. In contrast, an exceptionally high density of nobility can be found in some border regions which constituted zones of frequent military conflict. The most obvious examples are Poland and Castile where a mixture of warfare and the need to populate and control (re)conquered areas resulted in a demand for warriors and increased the inclination of rulers to dispense privileges and land in exchange for support. Here the share of the nobility in the population rose to figures as high as 10 per cent—again with quite considerable local or regional variations.

Much of the debate in the 1970s and 1980s concentrated on the question whether during the seventeenth century the aristocracy or even the entire nobility underwent a severe crisis which dealt a more or less lasting blow to its power. Various parameters have been used to answer this question. The long-drawn-out economic crisis of the seventeenth century seems to have diminished the income from landed estates, and the degree of their indebtedness has been taken by some historians as a sign of a crisis of wealth and power. The rise of the ‘absolutist’ state also seems to have curbed aristocratic power in particular, and the change in military organization and warfare and the rise of standing armies is supposed to have deprived the nobility as a whole of its former raison d’être. Finally, historians also realized that many noble and aristocratic families simply died out and vanished altogether. Recent research, however, was able to demonstrate that the opposite was the case and that the nobility and in particular the aristocracy emerged remarkably unscathed from the general crisis of the seventeenth century and, if anything, were able to consolidate and strengthen their position. Debts do not have to be a sign of economic weakness, but of economic credit and investment activity, for example into the...
purchase of land which became more readily available in many parts of Europe during the political and economic upheavals of the seventeenth century. In fact this investment activity formed the basis for the economic rise and consolidation of the nobility that followed in the late seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. In state administration, politics, and also in the military world, the nobility and in particular the European aristocracy were able to secure their leading position for their offspring. As to the demographic instability which came as a surprise to all those scholars looking for long lineages of noble families, this was shared with the rest of the population. Just as all other families, the nobility lost at least 30 per cent of their children at an early age. The high proportion of sons who served in the armies might have added an extra toll on noble families. This resulted in a pattern where most noble families died out after four generations, at least in the male line, which theoretically alone counted as far as lineage continuity was concerned. However, just as the demotion of some families from noble rank mostly resulted in the creation of new and loyal nobles, the biological end of aristocratic lineages created opportunities for a ruler to promote existing nobility into higher ranks or reward commoners such as military leaders with new titles and substantial fortunes.\[30\] In fact, even though the nobility as a whole might have contracted over time in several regions and states due to biological factors or the mass purges at the lower end of the noble scale in order to recover fiscal revenue, the aristocracy as a whole stabilized or even grew in numbers. In Bohemia, for example, while the total number of noble estates decreased from 1,622 in 1577 to a total of 517 estates in 1741, the figure for estates held by lords increased in the same time from 184 to 279.\[31\]

One of the elements which helped to secure the social and economic position of the nobility over subsequent centuries and which was adopted from the sixteenth century onwards was the legal protection of the family estate against mismanagement, individualism, and disputes over inheritance by means of adopting male primogeniture as a rule and establishing entails or Fideikommisse. Entailing a family’s landed property meant establishing it as a trust which could be used, but not sold or divided up by the present occupier whose duty it was to administer it well for the present and future generations of the noble house. Entails, which were not an entirely new legal instrument for protecting family property, spread rapidly across most of Europe in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries with Russia and Denmark as notable exceptions. In the rest of Europe this legal device, which became the much-hated epitome of aristocratic power amongst nineteenth-century democrats, formed the basis for a remarkable rise and consolidation of aristocratic wealth and power. In the eighteenth century, Polish-Lithuanian magnates such as the Radziwiłłs or the Eszterhazys in the Hungarian part of the Habsburg monarchy, who, in the course of the seventeenth century, rose from impoverished nobility to one of the most powerful aristocratic families in Europe, commanded over territories of many thousand square kilometres, larger than many of the
sovereign territories of the Empire. All over Europe aristocratic power seemed to be consolidated in the eighteenth century in economic terms as well as with respect to their political and social power.

However consolidated European nobility appeared, noble rank was never entirely stable or fixed. Ultimately it relied on the fact that it was acknowledged by others and in particular by the monarch or overlord in everyday life and on all levels of social interactions. Political influence and the transfer of lucrative offices, in particular, also depended on trust. In the context of the ‘cultural turn’ of historiography, recent scholarship has, therefore, stressed the performative and symbolic dimensions of social rank and much research has been devoted to aspects of conspicuous consumption, the architecture of stately homes, and questions of precedence and ceremonial matters. The core aim of all social interaction was to preserve the honour of the family, which was not only attached to the manifold privileges, but also to keeping a certain lifestyle and guarding all symbolic assets of social status. The centrality of honour as a regulating norm is, as Max Weber observed, the typical sign of all societies differentiated according to social order or status group rather than social class. It was particularly marked in the noble ranks of society, but not restricted to them. The other orders also had their specific systems of honour and ways to negotiate social status.

(p. 304) 'Those who Pray': The Social Differentiation of Early Modern Clergy

The Reformation divided early modern Europe into two separate ways of positioning what used to be the 'First Estate' into a system of rank and social order. Recent research into the social history of both the Protestant and the Catholic clergy has been able to demonstrate, however, that with regard to higher offices both were interwoven with the social hierarchies and networks of the other estates, and that post-Reformation reforms in the Catholic Church initiated by the Council of Trent contributed to fairly similar paths of recruitment and training of the lower clergy. However, some differences clearly remained.

The structure of the Catholic clergy was hierarchical. There existed four intersecting groups of Catholic clergy: the higher and lower clergy and those in- or outside the monasteries and monastic orders. These non-monastic priests were also termed secular clergy (clerici saeculares, Weltgeistliche). Like the nobility in many countries, the medieval clergy was freed from taxation and had its own judicial system. These privileges continued throughout the early modern period and contributed to the material attractions of clerical service.
In theory clerical posts were non-hereditary, elective, and relied on training and merit not on birth and influence. However, for centuries the clerical elite had been closely intertwined with the Catholic nobility. This is not only true for the popes and cardinals who for centuries had been taken from the foremost noble Italian families, but also for Catholic prince-bishoprics of the Empire which had become linked in quasi-hereditary fashion to noble houses such as the Bavarian ruling house of Wittelsbach. This noble family provided in continuous succession from 1563 to 1761 all the archbishops of Cologne, and from 1561 to 1763 almost all of the prince-bishops of Liège as well as claiming several other high-ranking clerical posts for female members of their family. Similarly, in the Polish–Lithuanian Commonwealth the higher ranks of the Catholic hierarchy could only be given to members of the, albeit numerous, nobility. Similar mechanisms were in place in Spain where church careers for members of the nobility were also common. In contrast, the leaders of the monasteries, the abbots, were much less prone to be drawn from noble families, let alone in a successive row from the same family. Monasteries also provided pious men and women from a humbler background the opportunity to rise to positions of influence and power. The highest ranking clergy, the bishops and abbots, were also part of the political system and represented in diets and parliaments. However, the early modern Catholic Church was on all levels also an institution which allowed a surprising degree of social mobility, and the Catholic Church and the Papal State served as particularly prominent examples of patronage and early modern clientèle systems. In fact, patronage has been recognized as a fundamental part of early modern political culture and an important dimension of state formation.

The Protestant Churches partly broke with this tradition of reserving church posts to specific noble families by either abolishing the higher clerical ranks altogether or, as the Lutherans did, making the rulers into ex-officio surrogate bishops (Notbischöfe) and protectors of their churches. However, some hierarchies remained within the Lutheran ministry in particular. Deans, prelates, or superintendents frequently came from leading bourgeois families, and there were substantial differences in income between rural parishes and such elevated positions in the Protestant Churches. In many territories bourgeois protestant ‘dynasties’ emerged which occupied key positions in the Church over centuries. It was also quite common for the son to follow the father in office in ordinary parishes. Socially, the Protestant ministry as a whole tended to orient itself towards the urban elites such as academically trained officeholders in local or state government or professionals rather than towards the nobility. However, through noble patronage rights rural ministers were highly dependent on the nobility, and, at least in Brandenburg–Prussia, intermarriage of younger daughters of the Junkers with Protestant priests seems to have been socially accepted. In Britain, too, the nobility and gentry continued to exercise patronage rights, and it was not uncommon for younger sons of the gentry to become Anglican clergymen in livings provided by their families—even though
it was definitely not always their first choice. Apprenticeships in banks and trading firms attracted them far more than a clerical career.\textsuperscript{36}

In the Catholic Church the leading positions remained firmly in the hand of noble families right through to the end of the eighteenth century. In the middle of the eighteenth century about 70 per cent of the students of the Collegium Germanicum, the Jesuit elite training centre in Rome, were young noblemen preparing for such a career in higher church offices. It is interesting, however, that after the Tridentine reforms and the improvement of clerical training, ordinary parish priests were increasingly recruited from families of educated urban elites. In seventeenth-century France, Italy, and in the Catholic territories of the German empire, families of the urban middle and upper classes provided more than 80 per cent of the monastic as well as secular clergy who served as parish priests. Historical research into these recruitment processes is still very sketchy, but it is to be presumed that financial interests were not totally alien to these families and that the reasonably high endowment of many urban parishes and the fact that the clergy remained exempt from taxes increased the attraction of a clerical career for younger sons of Catholic urban upper classes.\textsuperscript{37}

The incomes of the parish clergy varied substantially. They were still mostly bound to a traditional mixture of tithes and charges for clerical offices and the returns of their own gardens or small farmsteads. It was only in the later eighteenth century, and in urban parishes in particular, that monetary salaries for the clergy were on the rise. However, even though clerical incomes varied in accordance with agricultural prices, even smaller parish priests seem to have been remunerated reasonably well, and really impoverished clergy were rare. At the beginning of the seventeenth century Catholic priests received approximately the same amount of money for celebrating a memorial mass as an agricultural labourer for a day’s work. Protestant ministers in German urban parishes frequently received an income which put them on a par with city councillors or lawyers in public offices.\textsuperscript{38}

Thus, in both the Protestant and Catholic Churches the lower and middle-ranking clergy tended to live like and integrate with the urban professions, higher administrative echelons, and better trades. Even though they had to derive some of their income from fields and gardens, rural pastors in particular were frequently reminded by the church authorities that not all types of manual and agricultural work were compatible with the dignity of the office. Increased academic training and ‘professionalization’ became characteristic for the clerical careers. Even if the living of a parish was meagre, the symbolic capital of college or university networks and academic degrees secured the connection of the Protestant and Catholic clergy with the urban middle classes well into the twentieth century.
The Third Estate

The third estate or the common people were not only by far the largest group within the tripartite system, but also the most complex one. In most of Europe the third estate accounted for more than 90 per cent of the population. It was socially heterogeneous, comprising burghers and country dwellers, that is, everybody from the richest urban merchant to the poorest day labourer. Their only common characteristic seems to have consisted in the fact that the common people did not belong to either of the two other estates and did not share at least two of their major privileges: there was no doubt that they had to pay taxes or do socage, and their participation in the political processes on the level of the central government was in most European states or territories at best sporadic and never uncontested. However, if one perceives family lineages and households as the most important social units of early modern societies, it is important to realize that at least families of the upper echelons of the ‘third estate’ could have members or branches belonging to the other two.

The differences in the economic, legal, political, and social status of individuals and social groups within the third estate were substantial and there were also far-reaching regional and national variations within such social groups. One major difference, for example, was that between rural and urban populations. Whereas rural populations in Europe remained predominantly integrated in some sort of ‘ruling organization’ (Herrschaftsverband) dominated by local noble families, burghers enjoyed more the status of political subjects due to the liberties and rights granted to many cities in the course of the Middle Ages, and there is an extensive debate on the connections between the political rights and cultures of early modern cities and republican traditions in Europe. However, even though local citizenship was at the core of civic urban culture in Europe, urban societies were far from being societies of equals. This is true for all types of cities such as court cities or independent city states. How important social hierarchies and gradations in political as well as social and economic entitlements were, can best be studied in the many small city states of the Holy Roman Empire where a quasi-noble urban elite, the patriciate, emerged during the late Middle Ages. Similar processes could be observed in the powerful city states of Northern Italy or in the North West. In German cities as well as in Northern Italy and in the Low Countries, this urban elite frequently intermarried with the region’s rural nobility, which in turn often tried to acquire citizenship (without giving up their noble status) in order to gain influence. The Imperial City of Nuremberg is a famous example for the closure of an urban elite. Throughout the entire early modern period, access to key offices and membership in a select city council (engerer Rat) was restricted to a small number of less than thirty rich
and influential families. However, Nuremberg was exceptional in the fact that this patrician elite also succeeded in excluding craftsmen from political power over this period.

All over Europe urban social stratification and systems of rank found graphic expression in detailed sumptuary laws, in particular dress codes, which detailed the types of material, furs, and particular styles which members of different social groups were allowed to wear. On the one hand these laws tried to curb the desire for social distinction through conspicuous consumption and prevent overspending by individuals. On the other hand they helped to create and enforce status differences. Many of these sumptuary laws and dress codes related in particular to festive days, church going, and marriages. Not dissimilar to courtly rituals and quarrels over precedence between nobles, the seating order in churches was an additional way of visualizing social distinction in early modern society—and a constant cause of dispute between individuals and families. Just as with the nobility, preserving one’s status and social rank was of prime importance to urban elites and to all those who wanted to count as ‘respectable’ citizens.

These respectable citizens and their households formed the core and also the overall most homogeneous part of urban societies in early modern Europe. ‘What the core group of householding families did have in common almost all over Europe was this: their lives were centred on work, and their work, in turn, was structured by the guild system.’ Except for Britain, where the guild system gradually disappeared during the seventeenth century, this medieval form of self-organization of urban (and partly also rural) trades remained influential throughout the early modern period. It gave the urban artisans their internal social structure and specific hierarchies of trades. They, too, enjoyed privileges and liberties and guarded them carefully. Just as in the circles of nobility and court societies, the public enactment and demonstration of social hierarchies formed a vital part of the public life of urban guilds and other corporations. Being the most powerful and important guild, the Paris goldsmiths, for example, orchestrated their annual inspections of the workshops with great pomp and ceremony. They wore ceremonial robes and paraded through town ‘in marching line according to rank’.

In general, the respectable citizenry did not constitute the majority of early modern urban populations, which was formed by the large group of servants, day labourers, apprentices and journeymen, petty sales people, and groups entirely on the margins of society such as beggars, but also Jews. There has also been a wide debate on how far and from when the urban ‘householding families’ formed a middle class or bourgeoisie in the Marxist sense of the term, that is, with the clear consciousness that it constitutes a social group of its own with a specific economic position and specific group interests beyond the local urban framework. The term ‘middle class’ first emerged as a
collective term in Britain in the late eighteenth century.\textsuperscript{49} Similarly, there has been a wide debate in particular by historians of the French Revolution, on whether a bourgeois class emerged in France in the course of the eighteenth century and formed the basis of what Marx saw as a bourgeois revolution in 1789.\textsuperscript{50} For Germany and central Europe it was quite clear that the old urban structures prevailed beyond the end of the eighteenth century, and that the German Bürgertum shared primarily a common cultural background, but not common economic and political interests.\textsuperscript{51}

Just as in France, in Germany, and most other European countries, the universities served for many aspiring ordinary families as important secular institutions of social mobility—just as the clergy, legal experts, doctors, and academics formed an important layer of influential families. Many of them, however, hoped for the elevation at least into the lower nobility, the French noblesse de robe or the German Amtsadel. Legal experts were frequently in the public service anyway and their status derived from this connection to the ruler. In most European countries a specifically bourgeois identity which defined itself in opposition to the ruling classes was, therefore, a phenomenon rather of the nineteenth than the eighteenth century.

It was in western Europe, in particular in the Dutch Republic and in Britain, where the old concept of a society of orders eroded first and new social classifications emerged. In Britain with its different and more open nobility which had close family links to the mercantile elite of the country and little or no restriction on engaging in modern industrial enterprises themselves, the old tripartite model had long lost its normative power to regulate social life anyway. In France, it was still used in the late eighteenth century to convince the increasingly critical population of its place in the social hierarchy. However, it was here that the most rigorous attacks were led, both intellectually and through political action, which resulted in a short breakdown of privileges and power in particular of the nobility. At least for the more radical branch of the French revolutionaries social inequality was no longer God given, but seen as an insult to human dignity and the equality of men. Even though the revolutionary impetus waned quickly and the nobility returned with the monarchs, the concepts of political order were transformed. The demand for social, political, and legal equality accompanied the rise of both the bourgeoisie as well as the proletariat, which emerged as the new categories of a perceived social order during the nineteenth century.

Further Reading


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(7.) Loyseau, *Treatise*, 6f.

(8.) Mousnier 1973, 76.


(12.) Luther, ‘Confession’, 364.


(18.) Rousseau, Discourse, 38.

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(20.) The differences between the nobilities are stressed by Ronald G. Asch, Nobilities in Transition 1550–1700. Courtiers and Rebels in Britain and Europe (London, 2003), 9–11.

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This chapter examines the major contours of family and household patterns in early modern European history. Drawing on research in historical family demography, together with the various ways in which the notion of 'family systems' have been conceptualized within this discipline, it presents an overview from the perspectives of leaving home, life-cycle service, marriage and household formation, domestic group structure, and individual living arrangements. By blending history and historiography, the chapter surveys the present state of the subject, illustrates crucial developments over the last four decades, and suggests areas where considerably more research is needed before a more complete picture of early modern European family and household patterns can be achieved.

Keywords: Household structure, life cycle, living arrangements, family systems, historical family demography

Introduction

With individuals, families and households were the essential building blocks of early modern societies. By providing different permutations of significant interactions, decisions, and motivations at the micro level, the varying patterns of family and household organization influenced economic and other—wider—societal outcomes. Their study thus provides invaluable insights into the very functioning of communities, societies, and whole countries.
This chapter examines the major contours of family and household patterns. Some preliminary observations are necessary about how the subject matter should, and should not, be defined, both temporally and conceptually. The meanings of the terms ‘family’ and ‘household’ in this context first require clarification. This chapter does not examine families reduced to their biological histories. Such ‘families’ have long been studied by historical demographers who, by linking information from historical marriage, birth, and death records, have generated a wealth of information on the rhythms and mechanisms of conjugal reproduction among early modern European populations. Nor is this a survey of kinship in general. Although most of the social groups discussed here were organized around kinship ties (at least in their essential features), there were many other kinship groupings that were not brought together within residential space, and these remain outside the scope of this chapter.

Its primary focus is what has been commonly termed a ‘co-resident domestic group,’ or, more briefly, a ‘household’; that is, a task-oriented residence unit made up of a group of people who share the same physical space for the purposes of eating, sleeping, taking rest and leisure, growing up, child-rearing, and procreation. Relatives and non-relatives who are living under the same roof and share the same hearth, as well as servants and lodgers who participate in some common activities, are all considered to be members of the household or domestic group. Thus, the household is clearly distinguished from the family, whose members are related to each other, however distantly, but do not necessarily co-reside. A household generally consists of either one simple conjugal (nuclear) family or multiple families—any of which might or might not be extended either laterally or across the generations—together with non-kin members.3

The Handbook takes as its notional dates 1350–1750, which is a deliberate break from the established timeframe for ‘early modern’ history, conventionally taken to extend from the sixteenth to the eighteenth century. With the emergence of the family farm, households, as just defined, had become standard commensurable units in surveys and assessments by the early Middle Ages, or more precisely from around 700 onward. However, documentary records of such groups are extremely scarce before the late seventeenth century, or even the early eighteenth century. Although some literary sources and property registers found in parts of Europe do something to compensate for this lacuna, any precise reconstruction of household and family patterns for the period from the fourteenth to the mid-seventeenth century has proved very difficult.4

This lack of records for most of the period covered by this chapter imposes real limitations on the scope of the analysis which follows. Yet the marked concentration of available data on living arrangements and household composition in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries still provides us with important clues about the waning years of the old demographic régime. First, when inspecting these sources from the decades
around 1800, we should keep in mind that we are still dealing with populations who were predominantly practising ‘natural fertility’; that is, with people who were not systematically practising any form of contraception and so were following the traditional patterns of reproduction dominant for centuries, which continued until the demographic transformations of the late nineteenth century. We should apply similar levels of caution in assessing the progress of the epidemiological transition, as no significant changes in mortality and survival occurred in Europe before 1850, except in a handful of countries such as Denmark and Sweden, which are commonly considered to be in the forefront of historical mortality decline. For most of Europe’s population during the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, the basic demographic underpinnings of household and family forms were not markedly different from those of the two preceding centuries following what is commonly referred to as a ‘pre-transitional’ pattern. The vital rates of Europe’s population during that old regime have been subject to extensive historical reconstruction. Throughout most of the period between 1400 and 1750 (or even up to 1820, with very few exceptions), annual birth rates and death rates remained in the range of 2.5–3.5 per cent. Overall life expectancy was around thirty years, with approximately half of the population dying before the age of 16 and those who survived childhood usually dying by age 50.5

It is, of course, not the intention to suggest that no change in family systems occurred between 1400 and the earlier nineteenth century. From the early 1500s to the end of the 1700s, the population of Europe more than doubled, rising from 81 million to 180 million.6 If, however, we examine annual or even decennial growth rates, we see that demographic growth overall was rather slow during this period, with most societies experiencing extended phases of both expansion and contraction. Meanwhile, as a result of the schism in Christianity brought about by the Protestant Reformation, an important dividing line emerged across Europe. This religious upheaval led some groups to challenge old perceptions of the family, including norms related to parental power, marriage, and conjugal relations. Moreover, two large-scale though contrasting socio-economic processes during the early modern centuries strongly influenced family and household arrangements, and led to a deepening of the differences in family life between major regions of Europe. These were the consumer and industrious revolutions, together with proto-industrialization, in western Europe; and the rise of a ‘new’ serfdom and a manorial-serf economy in east central Europe.7 Nevertheless, it remains true that—with the possible exception of a small elite—most Europeans lived in a world of relative cultural and demographic stability from the thirteenth to the eighteenth centuries, and even beyond. Thus, most Europeans would have noticed few changes over the course of their lifetime in the family organizational structures of their local or regional communities.
In light of this historical context, the aims of this chapter can be set out. In the first section, we present a brief survey of the field of historical family demography, a sub-discipline of demography which has recently made substantial strides in uncovering family and household patterns in past centuries. The chapter then provides a general rationale for the study of co-residence patterns and living arrangements in the past, paying special attention to various ways in which the notion of ‘family systems’ has been conceptualized. It is followed by a short overview of the operation of family systems from the perspective of certain key developments: leaving home, life-cycle service, marriage and household formation, domestic group structure, and individual living arrangements. As a necessary corollary, the impact of demographic constraints on residence patterns is then examined. The chapter ends with a discussion of how the research field may develop in the future.

**Historical Family Demography**

By its very nature, research on early modern family and household patterns has been interdisciplinary, combining conventional historical approaches to studying past societies with concepts and methods borrowed from demography, sociology, and social anthropology; it also relies heavily on measurement tools from the social sciences and from demography in particular.\(^8\)

Historical family demography, as this research strand is labelled here, is concerned with (a) the configuration of families, households, and kin groups; and (b) the transitions that affect those configurations, which include the departure of children from the parental home, marriage, household formation, and the transition to old age.\(^9\) Despite its explicit interest in past social structures, the approaches used by historical family demography are fundamentally different from those employed in the majority of historical works in terms of thematic layering, methodology, and epistemology. In contrast to many traditional strands of scholarship, the focus of historical demography is not on great men and important events, but rather on the obscure, illiterate masses of mostly rural people enumerated in the censuses, with a few characteristics fitting predetermined broad categories. In this sense, historical family demography research shares the early ambition of the *Annales* school to write the history of ‘ordinary people’. On the other hand, because it looks at large-scale structures and processes, and uses quantitative methods as a fundamental analytical tool, historical family demography is very similar to what has been called ‘social science history’, or ‘historical social science’.

Of the various research traditions in historical family demography, three are of particular relevance for our subject. The earliest was the research strand on families and
households undertaken by Peter Laslett and other scholars associated with the Cambridge Group for the History of Population and Social Structure in the United Kingdom. Scholars who adopted this approach shared the belief that the distinguishing features of historical patterns among families and households can be recognized and captured in structural and numerical terms. This conviction not only moved their studies very close to sociology and, to a lesser extent, to social anthropology, but also led to the development of various classification schemes for the analysis of family systems. These efforts were based on a shared conviction of the profound analytical significance of the phenomenon of co-residence, and of the critical importance of studying historical household systems from a comparative perspective: that is, between cultures, over time, and both together.\textsuperscript{10}

The Cambridge Group’s approach to studying historical family and household forms was the major impetus behind a significant number of scholarly works. Many of the most recent comparative studies on household and family behaviours in the Eurasian context still follow the basic research template introduced by Laslett and his colleagues during the 1970s. However, scholars are increasingly shifting their attention away from efforts to discern patterns and regularities within Europe, and toward inter-continental comparisons.

Since the groundbreaking studies of the Cambridge Group were published in the 1970s and 1980s, historical family demography has faced a number of challenges, and has undergone several transformations. Driven by micro-historical and anthropological perspectives, which eschew grand theories and broad-brush descriptions of the distribution of family types, a second group of scholars have felt increasingly compelled to reject attempts to brand major areas of historic Europe as having had a particular type of household system. Instead, they have sought to uncover the localized demographic, economic, cultural, and institutional underpinnings of particular family forms, thereby identifying a plethora of contexts within which household activities were taking place and residential behaviours can be studied.\textsuperscript{11} However, other scholars (such as the EurAsian Project on Population and Family History) have used comparable micro-level longitudinal demographic data to provide detailed—demographically ‘thick’—snapshots of a few dispersed local populations from Europe and Asia over extended periods of time (anything from eighty to 150 years). These efforts are intended to encourage comparisons which can permit generalizations about certain aspects of human familial behaviour, but which are nonetheless nested within the cultural, economic, and historical contexts of the specific communities in question.\textsuperscript{12}

Advocates of the third major line of research share with the practitioners of the two strands mentioned above a belief in the analytical significance of co-residence together with a comparative agenda, but they diverge on several other crucial issues. Unlike the
authors of earlier studies, which normally took the form of analyses of a single community or a small group of communities, scholars of this new genre are taking advantage of the ongoing historical micro-data revolution and recent developments in computer technology to advocate a global comparative approach to systematic variations in family and household organization in Europe and elsewhere.\(^{13}\) Through the application of harmonized variables common to dozens or even hundreds of datasets, these scholars are reaching unprecedented levels of scale and sophistication in the comparative analysis of patterns of living arrangements in the past. These new techniques allow researchers to analyse data for hundreds of communities, regions, and societies at a given point, as well as over time. Whereas most earlier studies conceived in the spirit of the Cambridge Group adopted the household as the unit of analysis, the newest studies in historical family demography have moved beyond a narrow focus on the structural propensities of domestic groups, permitting the presence or absence of different types of kinship ties within the domestic domain to be treated as key characteristics of the individuals involved.\(^{14}\) Occasionally, however, the two apparently divergent methodologies are combined. The analysis of individual living arrangements may, for example, be accompanied by an investigation of the composition of residence units, thus allowing scholars to measure co-residence at different analytical levels simultaneously.

### Families, Households, and Beyond: Why Bother?

Generations of anthropologists, demographers, and historians have considered family organization to be of primary importance for social reproduction and for the transmission of values. In most pre-industrial societies, households or domestic groups were the primary organizing framework for family life, and the most basic arena for kinship, socialization, and economic cooperation between individuals and groups. Since households were the locus of economic decision making and the cross-generational transmission of resources in most rural societies, we can assume that varying models of household organization, membership patterns, life-cycle changes, power relations, and patterns of labour division strongly influenced regional variations in wealth accumulation, social structure, and status hierarchy.

Underlying these views was the conviction that the ties established between certain people who shared a single dwelling provide meaningful insights, not only into the very workings of family systems, but also into a much broader terrain of historical social structures. It was commonly believed that individuals living under the same roof and sharing the same hearth would also be connected in other ways, such as by exploiting the same resources in order to subsist and/or by working together at the same tasks, or by being related by either blood or marriage. The life chances of those
individuals were arguably bound up with the durability of the domestic group in which they found themselves. Given this multifaceted character of the ‘domestic domain’, it is probable that there were a wide range of social relationships between the individuals sharing a living space. This assumption of strong ties between co-residents appears to have arisen because, it was argued, the residence itself possessed an ‘existential quality’.15

The emphasis on household co-residence among historical demographers has been strengthened by the concreteness of the domestic group, and by the relatively good documentary records of such groups in historical archives, especially from the mid-seventeenth century onwards. Because the household was seen as a ubiquitous and essential part of the functioning of an economy and a society, various institutions produced numerous records about domestic groups. Not surprisingly, historians studying family structure have tended to pay attention to archival documents containing enumerations of inhabitants by household or residence unit, such as lists of parishioners by name, taxation documents, or other types of historical micro-census enumerations.

This general intellectual optimism has been tempered by critical voices arguing that household structures represent only a ‘side effect’ of the workings of kinship systems operating in specific cultural or socio-economic conditions. It has been argued that the relationship between households and larger kinship networks is crucial to an understanding of the various household and demographic processes, and hence for capturing the specificity of individual family systems. According to some scholars, the exclusive reliance on structural data concerning households could obscure the actual functioning of the relationships between kinsmen, as dense kinship networks linked independent households, and often joined them in complex relationship patterns based on reciprocal obligation and mutual assistance. However, the conclusions of research directed at pursuing the kinship contextualization of co-resident domestic groups in historic Europe have so far been disappointing.16

Recently, powerful arguments have been made in the scholarly literature that family structure should be analysed at the level of individuals, rather than at that of dwellings, households, or hearths. Some authors have noted that concentrating solely on domestic groups may be insufficient to identify all the family relationships between the people who share living quarters. Assessing the living arrangements of households as a whole in a unitary fashion makes it impossible to assess the differential effects of individual characteristics on residence decisions, such as age, sex, or marital status, or to study individual residential life courses. This approach may thus significantly impair fruitful comparisons between populations.17
Currently, most scholars seem to agree that an intermediate strategy is the best option: in other words, that an analysis of individual-level experiences should be accompanied by an investigation of the composition of residence units, and that the two should be considered together whenever possible. Accordingly, the most fruitful approach is to measure co-residence at the level of individuals, but also at the level of populations and of households. Looking at living arrangements from those different perspectives allows researchers not only to overcome a substantial amount of criticism of the household-level variables; it also helps them to capture more precisely the relationships between the different entities, and, through the use of various complementary classification schemes, to understand the patterns of living arrangements in greater depth.

**Seeking a ‘Master Variable’**

The identification of a ‘master variable’ capable of capturing the differences in family/household patterns across past European societies has been the central preoccupation of historical family demography ever since its inception. The key underlying concept in these discussions has been that of the ‘family system’. Over the past half century, various scholars have made a number of proposals for pinning down various dimensions of family systems. Laslett and other scholars associated with the Cambridge Group for the History of Population and Social Structure tradition sought to formulate systematically what they perceived to have been the key features of historical family systems: that is to say, the age at marriage and the scale of celibacy, post-marital residence rules, domestic group structures, and the pattern of life-cycle service of young adults. Building on Laslett, John Hajnal suggested two sets of household formation rules which operated through principles governing home-leaving, entry into marriage, and post-marital residence, and which he believed primarily accounted for the variation in family systems within Eurasia.18

A number of other scholars also came up with ways to measure family systems across time and space. Some suggested that the size and the composition of the kin group within the household are the key features to be explained. Others emphasized the importance of post-marital residence, parental authority, or inheritance patterns; while another group advocated investigating ‘family ethics’ and family bonds, as measured by social attitudes towards familial loyalty, obedience, and authority. The discussion was given a new impetus in the studies of Steven Ruggles, who argued that family structure and living arrangements could be most profitably analysed from the perspective of the elderly. He observed that because the living arrangements of the oldest family members tend to reflect the characteristics of social security and family welfare systems, an analysis that
focused on this group revealed the very essence of the functioning of family systems. Recently, the members of the EurAsian Project on Population and Family History stipulated that one of the most important characteristics distinguishing various family systems is the sequence of individual life-course transitions. Jan Kok added yet another building block to these theoretical considerations by pointing out promising ways in which family systems could be approached and conceptualized through the prism of illegitimacy patterns.

Although most scholars tend to favour one aspect of the family system while neglecting the others, a new group of scholars have been experimenting with more holistic approaches. For example, some authors have conceptualized the family system as an entity that comprises the household and marriage arrangements typical of a certain population at a certain time, as well as all of the connected phenomena. Among the factors that might contribute to the family system are household formation patterns, family forms, the nature of the family life course, and marriage behaviour. Thus defined, the family system becomes a social institution that changes over time, and its development depends on the combined effects of numerous external factors, including economic, social, and ecological influences.

In yet another contribution, domestic co-residence was treated as a matrix of most crucial ‘statuses’, ‘functions’, and ‘relationships’, from which various ‘attributes’ of family systems can be discerned. These include its capability to provide welfare, the household as a work unit, the status of women within the family, the patterns of marriage and household formation, the household as a kin group, and inequalities between households. For each attribute of the family system, a range of measures was proposed, all of which can be derived from a ‘standard’ historical census or census-like survey, together with a presentation of the target population consisting of those individuals who most obviously depended on whether a particular role was fulfilled by the co-resident group.

In sum, scholars of historical family demography continue to endorse the basic premises of the discipline by arguing that the structural manifestations of family systems can be effectively understood by means of detailed observations of one of its major domains (attributes); or, better still, of several of them combined: leaving home, life-cycle service, marital behaviour and household formation (including female headship), domestic group structure, and individual living arrangements. All these issues are accessible for direct or indirect observation and analysis through the use of historical census micro-data, which have survived in large quantities for many parts of early modern Europe. A narrowing of the perspective to the structural and quantifiable elements of the historic familial reality appears to be justified, even if taking this variable-oriented approach entails a loss of context.
Home-leaving patterns constitute a special case in the life-course transition, and societies with different patterns of when individuals left the family home are often thought to represent entirely different family organization structures. In many parts of pre-industrial Europe, there was a link between the large-scale departure of children from the parental home and the circulation of young unmarried people as life-cycle servants in other households on the one hand; and certain demographic features, such as a late age at marriage, distinct tendency for the bride and groom to set up their new residence apart from their respective natal families and wider kin, and households consisting of a single family, on the other. In turn, the centrality of marriage patterns stems from their significance for the potential exposure of individuals to reproduction, and for the patterning of adult roles. As the clearest transition from childhood to adulthood, entry into marriage is unquestionably the most important of all life-cycle events, which has manifold consequences for the subsequent life course and family relationships.

Becoming the head of a separate household is also closely related to other life-cycle milestones. Household formation is intertwined with a number of choices (or constraints), including whether to leave the parental home, whether to marry, and whether to live alone or with others while unmarried. Because the formation of a household is inherently associated with choosing some combination of a set of component goods—such as privacy, companionship, domestic services, and autonomy—the structure and the timing of processes of household formation provide meaningful insights into a broad range of social behaviour and societal attitudes.

Since they provide information on the nature of co-residence group interaction and forms of organization governing the transmission of practices and values, variations in the structure of the co-resident domestic groups are considered to be among the most crucial indicators of diversity in family systems. Differences in household structure may reflect significant differences in the preferred or the achievable residential patterns, and be indicative of different notions regarding the structure of obligations to kin outside of the immediate family.

Family organization in different societies may imply the co-existence of a number of different elements from various domains in all possible permutations and combinations, especially before the major demographic convergence which took place during the late modern era. This inherent complexity of human behaviour can present serious challenges when the goal is to measure differences in familial organization on a global comparative scale, and to classify various societal family constellations. To address those issues, an indexed composite measure of family system organization was recently proposed: the Index of Patriarchy. This index incorporates a range of variables related to familial behaviour, including nuptiality and age at marriage, living arrangements, post-marital residence, power relations within domestic groups, the position of the aged, and the sex
of the offspring. Each of these elements is given equal weight in the calculation of the final index scores, which represent the varying degrees of sex- and age-related social inequality (‘patriarchal bias’) in different societal and familial settings.22

**Spatial Construction: Promising Path or Blind Alley?**

Discussion concerning European family systems has long been preoccupied with establishing borderlines, and distinguishing between the zone where the ‘true’ (northwestern) European pattern was prevalent, and other areas.23 John Hajnal has been most influential in developing the viewpoint that there was a unique northwestern European marriage pattern.24 He proposed a demarcation line from St. Petersburg to Trieste, running right through central Europe and dividing the continent into two zones of sharply contrasting family systems. To the west and north of this line there was the zone of nuclear family households, where marriage was late and far from universal, because it was typically linked to the formation of a new household as an independent economic unit. To the east and south of this line, the ‘non-European’ (eastern European) pattern prevailed: multi-generational complex families were ubiquitous, and marriage was universal and occurred at an early age.

Starting from Hajnal’s hypothesis, Peter Laslett drew together dispersed evidence from different areas of traditional Europe from between the 1640s and the 1820s, and divided the continent into four broad geographical zones, with each having a specific family type. He retained Hajnal’s view that western Europe (and England in particular)25 was ‘unique’ in its emphasis on the nuclear family household, but divided the rest of the continent into three areas (west/central or middle, eastern, and Mediterranean). Compared to the west, these areas were assumed to have had more complex families, a lower average age at marriage, a higher share of the population who married (especially women), and a smaller share of households with life-cycle servants.26

Although the Hajnal–Laslett models came to represent a kind of historical and sociological orthodoxy, they were also challenged from different angles. In particular, testing the ‘Mediterranean model’ suggested by Hajnal and his followers rapidly became one of the prime research goals of historical demographers and family historians working on southern Europe. After less than a decade of investigation, their results contradicted most earlier generalizations. For example, an unexpected degree of regional and sub-regional variation in marriage and household patterns was found for the Italian peninsula. Scholars who were researching family patterns in the Iberian peninsula soon delivered an almost identical message: in both Spain and Portugal, these varied considerably at the regional level. Thus, these studies clearly demonstrated that none of
the models proposed to describe the ‘Mediterranean’ reality was fully applicable to those regions.

A similar variegation of family types began to appear for the German territories which, despite providing unusual opportunities for the investigation of demographic variations, have long been isolated from the main current of family research. Recently, spatial disparities marked by a north–south pattern have been found for the 1880s, with greater household complexity observed in the north. This disparity can be associated in structural terms with the economic and socio-economic characteristics of the individual regions, and may be projected back at least two centuries.

This current reorientation of perspectives has spurred a debate about whether northwestern Europe itself may have been much less uniform in terms of its family patterns than was previously believed. Richard Wall found a considerable degree of inter-regional variation in familial organization within historical areas which were traditionally labelled as having simple (and neo-local) household systems, such as in England, northern Europe, and central Europe. In light of these findings, Wall expressed doubt about whether Hajnal’s generalizations capture much of the reality of family and household patterns of early modern northwestern Europe.27

Italian, Spanish, and Portuguese scholars have successfully ‘deconstructed’ the ‘Mediterranean’ model by showing that it rested upon an inadequate coverage of the data. By contrast the revisionist offensive against a similar notion of a homeogenous (p. 323) ‘eastern Europe’ have been much slower to develop. Among the earliest heterodox investigations in this context was June Sklar’s reconsideration of nuptiality patterns in eastern Europe around 1900.28 Sklar observed that in Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, and the Czech and Slovak lands, people ‘married rather late, and moderate proportions never married at all’. Thus, she concluded that historic populations in these regions did not exhibit the ‘eastern European pattern’ of marital behaviour, but instead displayed patterns closer to those of western Europe. She further observed that in eastern Europe, both ‘western’ and ‘eastern’ European marriage patterns could be found, with the latter being followed in the Balkan countries.

Starting with Sklar’s groundbreaking work, the doors were open for recasting eastern European marriage and family patterns, and, not surprisingly, other scholars dealing with earlier periods soon followed suit. One of the basic premises of Czech and Slovak scholars studying historical family systems was that there may have been an intermediary marriage and household formation pattern in early modern central Europe. Relying on the 1651 ‘census’ (‘Soupis poddaných podle víry’), which was drawn up by the Habsburg Monarchy and covered almost all of the lands of the historical Kingdom of Bohemia, they introduced the concept of the ‘central European model of the family’; by this they meant
a nuptiality and household pattern that was transitional between the northwestern and eastern European models. The Bohemian variant of the central European family pattern was deemed to be more or less compatible with those observed in western Europe, since it was characterized by relatively late female marriage, a high proportion of nuclear households, and a significant fraction of the young unmarried population working as life-cycle servants. The situation was different in Slovakia, and especially in the Moravian Carpathians, where higher proportions of complex households were found together with a lower mean age at marriage. This latter pattern has been viewed as representing a broad transitional zone with mixed family patterns, rather than an ‘eastern Hajnal-type family system’.

A similar variegation of family patterns was also found for late eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century Hungary. The very patchy patterns of marriage and family observed across the country led scholars to argue that Hungary had both ‘eastern’ and ‘western’ modes of nuptiality and household organization in early modern times, with several intermediate patterns (often called the eastern-central European family model: Ostmitteleuropäische Familienmodell) encompassing behavioural traits between those of the ‘northwestern European pattern’ and the Russian pattern in the east.  

Poland–Lithuania displayed the greatest degree of familial diversity found in east-central Europe. Using measures of household structure and composition, Szołtysek revealed that, at the end of the eighteenth century, three distinct family systems existed in the Polish territories. There were substantial numerical and qualitative differences between these systems in terms of home-leaving patterns, the timing of marriage, household formation, and multi-generational co-residence. The structural progression within larger regions was shown to have moved from less kin-centred, more nucleated and neo-locally formed households in the west; to much higher levels of household complexity, greater numbers of co-resident kin, and tighter constraints on individual life-course transitions in the east of the country. This mosaic of patterns cannot be explained simply by a bipartite model, and instead calls for a much more complex set of explanations that take into account a wide variety of demographic, socio-economic, and ecological factors.

The main challenge that scholars interested in the (re)compositional analysis of Europe’s familial history currently face is whether they should call into question the existence of a demographically uniform population in any region. The persistence of a binary division of the continent into two zones of contrasting familial behaviour separated by some imagined ‘line’, or into several distinct familial regions, no longer appears defensible. The new approach to understanding past populations advocates the systematic use of archival sources to document the contours and variability of household, nuptiality, and life-course patterns for various European regions by using spatially organized historical statistical data. Instead of relying on traditional simplistic notions of dividing lines and ‘ideal family
systems’, the current agenda is to take a more flexible view of the nature and permeability of frontiers and transition zones, and the ways in which familial and demographic borders have been crossed and blurred in early modern Europe, both across space and over time. Such critical investigations should replace simplistic claims and tentative hypotheses based on isolated demographic facts or undifferentiated population aggregates. While these scholars take variations in European early modern populations for granted, the shift in their thinking does not preclude the construction of meaningful generalizations, though they would argue that these observations apply to local regions only.

Leaving Home

The departure from the familial home is one of the least explored dimensions of early modern family systems. One of the most crucial issues in this regard has been the assessment of the various dimensions of the nest-leaving processes, in particular the average age at which young adults ceased to be members of their parents’ household. Once again, England was the first country for which reliable estimates became available for the pre-industrial period. The result is that models based upon English evidence have dominated the historical discussion. Using the data for twenty-one communities between 1599 and 1831, Richard Wall found that most young people in England left home in their mid- to late teens.\(^{31}\)

As the transitions to adulthood were assumed to have been structured differently in societies following different principles of household organization, it was also tacitly assumed that the English pattern—characterized by the prevalence of nuclear families and a widespread labour market for domestic servants—was found only in certain regions of Europe, and may even have been unique to northwestern Europe. The first wave of comparative research has generally corroborated this picture, demonstrating that in the northwestern zone the departure of men and women from the parental home occurred at a very early point. While the analysis of the 1851 census data for England and Wales yielded average home-leaving ages of 17.7 years for men and 16.6 years for women, very similar figures were found for early nineteenth-century southern Sweden (17 and 18 years, respectively). In family systems based on different principles, such as those in Spain, Italy, France, and parts of Germany and Belgium, young people tended to live much longer with their parents. In the late eighteenth-century French Baronnies in the Pyrenees, 76 per cent of young people aged 15–19 (measured as a percentage of children aged 10–14), were living with their parents, compared with only 40 per cent in England during the same period. In northwestern Germany, where more complex family organization prevailed in the mid-eighteenth century, the average home-leaving age was
26 years for men and 20 years for women. In Casalguidi in nineteenth-century Tuscany, both men and women left home on average at the age of 24.

The recent investigation of the timing of leaving home in early modern east-central Europe suggests that for some parts of the region, the transition to adulthood took place at a very similar point to other areas of the continent. Young men in western Poland during the 1790s tended to leave home around the age of 20 on average, but a significant proportion had undergone this transition by their early teenage years. As in northwestern Europe, most women in western Poland left the parental home well before the age of 20.

The life-cycle servant system, in which large numbers of young women left home before marriage to work as servants in another household, could be found in both southern Sweden and western Poland (Figure 12.1). However, with the exception of the western Polish communities, the home-leaving patterns differed sharply between western and eastern European societies, especially by gender. Whereas in England, Scandinavia, the Low Countries, and western Poland men and women left home at more or less the same time (regardless of whether the age was generally early or late), in eighteenth-century Belarus and parts of Ukraine the home-leaving patterns were strongly gendered, with married sons staying in the parental household much longer, often until their late twenties, while the daughters moved elsewhere upon marriage, usually at a very early age.32

The destinations of the offspring who were leaving home also differed markedly between different areas of Europe, and depended upon a variety of factors, including the production and income-pooling function of the domestic group, the gender and patterns of labour participation of children, as well as regional labour market characteristics. In regions where home-leaving generally occurred earlier and was based on gender equity, young men and women were more likely to have left the nest as a single person moving to a semi-autonomous stage prior to both family and household formation. In the late home-leaving societies (for example, in Belarus), men tended to leave the family of origin late in life to become a resident in the household of other kin, or did so mainly in order to 'branch out’ from the parental household and assume the resulting headship; in both cases, marriage was likely to have preceded the departure from home. Alternatively, the men assumed family and household responsibilities only after a long period of delay caused by external constraints (as in Belgium). Whereas in most of early modern Europe females tended to leave the parental home rather early, family formation was their prime reason for leaving in most of the eastern European areas. In the west, a significant fraction of young females left the household of origin to spend an intermediate stage as an unmarried farm servant prior to completing other transitions.
It would be unrealistic to expect that in most areas of Europe the age at which young people typically left home remained unchanged over the course of the early modern era; unfortunately, however, little is known about how these patterns might have evolved. Studies of English pre-industrial populations have shown that there was a decline in the age of home-leaving, from almost 28 years for men and 25 years for women in the eighteenth century, to 18 years for men and 17 years for women in the mid-nineteenth century, and that this pattern was not reversed until the late nineteenth century. Short-term fluctuations were also possible. In twenty-one villages of the central Pyrenees between 1793 and 1846, the proportion of young people over age 15 who were living with their parents (measured as a percentage of those aged 10–14) increased from 76 to 100 per cent. This suggests that the constraints on leaving home increased over the period. There is reason to believe that in other areas of Europe as well, home-leaving ages rose and fell over time in response to changes in real wages, returns to skills, and other economic and demographic factors.

**Life-cycle Service**

In many parts of pre-industrial Europe, life-cycle service—or wage labour performed outside of the family of origin by an unmarried individual—was common, if not normative, for both sexes. Service positions in husbandry, crafts, and household maintenance had been widespread in Europe at least since early modern times, but the demand for this kind of labour was especially strong between the seventeenth and early nineteenth centuries.33

The proportion of servants in the total population in a rural region depended upon several factors: the character of the local ecotype, the tempo and the extent of economic growth, and the patterns of devolution of property. Finally, for the institution of service to emerge, other elements in the social structure—including cultural prescriptions regarding female autonomy, intergenerational relations, and a number of other demographic parameters of the familial regime—had to be finely tuned with each other. This is because the large-scale departure of children from the parental home to serve and live in other households was closely linked to a relatively late female marriage age, and the establishment of new nuclear families. Thus, life-cycle service is often perceived as having been the central distinguishing feature of the northwestern European family system. The widespread employment of young, unmarried people as live-in servants in pre-industrial Europe was linked to patterns of accumulation of savings and human capital formation, and behavioural traits which, by strengthening ‘acquisitory impulses’ and ‘individualistic’ attitudes, promoted economic growth. It was suggested that these young, unmarried, sexually mature ‘life-cycle servants’, as Peter Laslett first called them,
played a central role in the social structures in the rural areas in pre-industrial England, Iceland, Denmark, western Germany, Flanders, the Netherlands, and Austria; but they were found only rarely (if at all) in Europe’s eastern ‘peripheries’, which were presumably subject to very different economic trajectories and demographic principles.\(^{34}\)

It has been estimated that in most western European countries during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, servants constituted at least 10 per cent of the population. The number of people who ever experienced life-cycle service was much higher, with estimates ranging from one-half to two-thirds of the population. For many unmarried adolescents in their mid- to late twenties, service provided secure employment, board and lodgings in their employer’s household, and a small cash income. Most of these servants were hired on annual contracts, and at the end of each year many moved on, negotiating new terms of employment with a new master. Thus, service was at the heart of the agricultural arrangements of early modern societies in which the demographic regimes were embedded in a highly commercial environment, and in which households interacted frequently with labour, capital, and commodity markets.

![Age distribution of servants in western Poland, eighteenth century](https://example.com/figure12.1.png)

*Figure 12.1* Age distribution of servants in western Poland, eighteenth century


Outside of the northwestern core and German-speaking areas, the situation looked very different. In southern Italy and parts of Spain (southern and central regions, as well as Galicia in the north), rural life-cycle service was almost non-existent. Similarly, becoming a servant was seen as a last resort for unmarried girls in fifteenth-century Florence, and there were almost no farm servants in nineteenth-century Greece. Moreover, several case studies from early nineteenth-century Russia indicated that servants were unknown as a class in the serf villages. Servants were found in the eighteenth-century Baltic area, but unlike in England or the Low Countries, they were often married, and remained servants throughout their lives.\(^{35}\)\(^{(p. 328)}\)
This seemingly functional relationship between the prevalence of life-cycle service and the demographic and socio-economic characteristics of early modern western Europe has recently been challenged by specialists on eastern Europe. Areas with substantial servant populations were revealed to have existed in pre-industrial eastern-central Europe, including in seventeenth-century Bohemia, in parts of eighteenth-century Hungary, and, above all, in the western part of Poland–Lithuania (Poland proper) throughout the entire early modern period.

The institution of domestic service based on a contractual relationship between a servant and a peasant householder may have had a long history in the western and central Polish–Lithuanian territories. As early as 1590, 51.5 per cent of peasant households in villages in southern Poland contained live-in servants, while servants made up 13 to 27 per cent of the population. In the eighteenth century, the percentage of servants and the percentage of households employing them in Poland proper were almost identical to or significantly higher than the comparable shares in pre-industrial England (13.3 and 41.5, compared to 14.6 and 32.9 per cent, respectively). The demographic characteristics of Polish servants also resembled those of their western counterparts: that is to say, most were unmarried teenagers and young adults between the ages of 15 and 25.

There were some differences as well, however. Compared to servants in Denmark and Flanders, servants in Poland were on average much younger. Thus, relative to their counterparts in the west, servants in Poland—and especially young women—would have been less able to accumulate savings over the course of their service, and would have left service earlier to marry and start having children. Still, the discovery of pockets of substantial numbers of young hired workers in east-central Europe, which was dominated by manorial serfdom, represents a significant challenge to the long-standing distinction between the high-and-universal service that was supposedly found in northwestern Europe, and the low-and-incidental service that supposedly dominated in the eastern part of the continent in early modern times.

Marriage and Celibacy

In the 1960s and the 1970s, it was commonly assumed that historical Europe was divided into two contrasting, if not divergent, marriage systems. As Hajnal pointed out in his seminal article of 1965, what set northwestern Europe apart from other pre-industrial demographic regimes was an older age at first marriage and a high proportion of the population who never married. A large body of research has shown that, for the early modern period prior to the nineteenth century, the mean age at first marriage for women in the west was between 24 and 30 years—although some scholars have argued that the
average ages were somewhat lower, of the order of 23 for women and 26 for men. Throughout the early modern period in western Europe, the proportion of females estimated to have remained celibate ranged from 10 to 20 per cent.

This marriage pattern may be assumed to have had a major impact on fertility. When fully implemented, this nuptial regime substantially restricted procreation: in pre-transition societies, the resulting fertility would have been less than half the rate that would have been achieved if all women between the ages of 15 and 50 were married. It has long been believed that this ‘unique’ marriage pattern was restricted primarily to northwestern Europe. Hajnal proposed a demarcation line from St. Petersburg to Trieste (the so-called ‘Hajnal line’), which ran right through central Europe and divided the continent into two zones of sharply contrasting marriage systems. To the west and north of this line, there was the zone in which marriage was late and far from universal; while to the east and south of this line, there was a ‘non-European’ (eastern European) zone in which marriage was universal and happened at an early age (the mean ages at first marriage were under 26 for men and 21 for women).

It has been further assumed that this major demographic fault line in Europe was generally in force throughout much of the early modern era, and persisted well into the late nineteenth century. However, scholars disagree about the roots of this ‘unique’ pattern. Existing explanations for the emergence of the western European marriage pattern can be classified into at least five groups: those which associate late marriage with the emergence of individualism and the capitalist ethic; those which insist on the link between late marriage and nuclear family; those which see the transition to late marriage as a preliminary phase of the demographic transition; those which associate late marriage with the operation of the Malthusian preventive checks; and finally, those which see its origins in the changes in the agrarian structures and property relations which came about in western parts of Europe in the aftermath of Black Death, or later.

While much of the evidence does suggest that during early modern times the age at marriage was fairly consistent across northwestern Europe, greater geographic and temporal variability has been observed for patterns of female celibacy. The proportion of women who never married ranged from a low of 6 per cent in late eighteenth-century rural Denmark, to 23 per cent in Iceland in 1801. The variability was even greater between cities, which had larger proportions of men and women who remained unmarried than rural areas.

The diversity of marriage customs seems to have been even greater in the eastern part of the continent. Sklar was the first to question the division of Europe into late- and early-marrying parts, and pinpointed that regions of Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, and Czechoslovakia did not exhibit the ‘eastern European pattern’ of marriage around 1900,
but rather that prevailing in western Europe. Again, like Hajnal before her, Sklar assumed that the patterns she found were not restricted to the years around 1900, but would have been relevant for a broader historical period.

Sklar’s research opened up a proverbial Pandora’s Box. The dozens of case studies that followed revealed areas of both late and early marriage in the vast areas of eastern-central Europe. Long-standing patterns of late marriage very similar to those of northwestern Europe were found for the Baltic area and for parts of Bohemia. A similar pattern, albeit with some moderate deviations from it, was found in eighteenth-century western Poland. Although the extended postponement of marriage characteristic of some other eastern-central European sub-populations has not been a part of the matrimonial tradition in early modern Poland, western Polish men and women still married rather late, at average ages of 27 and 23 years, respectively. These areas certainly did not follow the typical ‘east European’ pattern of early and universal marriage, but instead followed a marriage pattern that appears to have been a combination of western Europe’s late(r) marriage on the one hand, and eastern Europe’s low levels of celibacy on the other. While many laypeople in western Poland seem to have been just as willing as some of their western neighbours to postpone marriage (or were forced to do so), an overwhelming majority were reluctant to forego it altogether.

Instead of sustaining the binary division of Europe, these new strands of research show a more variegated picture in which some models of marriage in eastern Europe might be interpreted as having been variations within a ‘repertoire of adaptable systems’ of western marital behaviour. There is also growing evidence pointing to the existence of a wider intermediate marriage zone in east-central Europe. Just as western Poland was closer to western and central Europe than to its eastern borderlands in terms of the timing of marriage, its territories can be considered a transition zone between the western and the eastern models of marriage. This contrast also reveals itself in a wider east-central European perspective, with the western Polish and the Bohemian populations linking a lower nuptiality zone of the German lands with an earlier and more universal marriage in southeastern Hungary, and further into Ukraine.

This is not to deny, of course, that the true hot spots of very low ages at marriage in the early modern period were confined almost entirely to eastern Europe. From Karelia at the historical confluence of Finland, Russia, and Sweden in the north, through the Russian central black soil region, to the Belarusian and Ukrainian territories, and further south to the Hungarian borderlands and the Balkans, a wide and broadly uniform zone of early marriages has been identified. In addition, an extreme version of the ‘eastern European pattern’ of female marriage was found to have operated in the marshes of Polessya in what is today southern Belarus (historically part of eighteenth-century Poland–Lithuania) in the final decades of the eighteenth century. The female marital age in Polessya (17
years on average, but with 50 per cent of girls who eventually married entering into their first union by the age of 16, and 10 per cent marrying before the age of 12) was lower than in all other eastern and southeastern European locations, including the Russian hot spots of youthful marriage in Mishino, Petrovskoe, or Manuilovskoe. In fact, records from Polessya, where prepubescent marriage has been widely practised, indicate that the region had one of the lowest female marriage ages ever recorded for historic Europe. In eastern Europe (broadly defined), the region’s low marital ages were surpassed only by the figures for the Orthodox Christian women of Belgrade in 1733–34 (between 14.9 and 16 years), and beyond that by the evidence of a very low average marriage age for the area around medieval Lucca (16 years).39

Like most other types of demographic familial behaviour, the patterns of the age of entry into marriage and of celibacy fluctuated widely in many parts of Europe in response to changes in socio-economic conditions, labour and wage constraints, or land availability. For example, it has been suggested that the significant swings in celibacy rates account for most of the fluctuations in English fertility—which have otherwise been characterized as responses to changes in the standard of living—between 1541 and 1871. The nuptial habits of eastern Europe were also subject to change. For example, the highly unusual Polessyan pattern of prepubescent marriage had entirely disappeared by the end of the nineteenth century. This critical break from earlier patterns of courtship and entry into marriage among the laypeople of historical eastern Poland gave way to marital ages that did not drastically depart from the broader European norm.

Household Formation

Like patterns of marriage and celibacy, the circumstances surrounding entry into marriage—and, more precisely, the relationship of marital timing with the acquisition of residential and economic independence—varied widely across early modern Europe. It is now widely acknowledged that since the beginning of the early modern era, family formation processes in most western European societies (Scandinavia, the British Isles, the Low Countries, and northern France) have been linked to the assumption of the headship of a household. This means that, in those areas, either marriage and household formation usually went hand in hand, or both transitions were concentrated within a comparatively narrow age range; and that the newly marrying couples were not absorbed into pre-existing households, but instead set up their new residence apart from their respective natal families and wider kin (the rule of neo-local residence). It was generally assumed that, for western Europeans, achieving independence entailed carrying all of the start-up costs associated with acquiring housing and equipping the household with the necessary material possessions. Thus, it was further assumed that both marriage and
headship occurred relatively late in the life-cycle, when the couple had been able to accumulate capital through many years of living outside the parental homes and working as servants (see earlier).

By contrast, the interrelationship of marriage with leaving home has been deemed to have been largely or entirely irrelevant in the family model operating beyond the fringes of northwestern Europe. It has been argued that in east–central and eastern Europe, new couples generally followed a patri-local residence rule, going to live with the groom’s natal family in a multiple-family household in which there was another, more senior couple. Here, the key feature was not only that marriage took place at a younger age, but that it hardly ever led to the establishment of a new independent householding unit, but rather resulted in the enlargement of the existing parental household.

In both western and eastern Europe, however, there were important regional differences in these patterns. Some scholars have suggested that the east–west dichotomy of household formation patterns was too simplistic, and that various scalar types of systemic associations between headship and marriage timing have existed in various parts of historical Europe. This feature of household formation patterns in early modern Europe is illustrated in Figure 12.2, which shows two ‘archetypical’ but divergent patterns of the relationship between entry into marriage and entry into headship (early nineteenth-century Norway and nineteenth-century Russia), as well as an intermediate pattern found in eighteenth-century Poland.

The intensity of the marriage–headship nexus varied enormously in the territories in question. The relationship between marriage and headship was found to have been very close in Norway. In this society with strong neo-local rules in household formation, around 80 per cent of the youngest, ever-married males were already household heads. At the other end of the spectrum we find the Russian pattern, where hardly any married
men before the age of 25 could become household head, and where the share of householders among ever-married men in their early forties barely reached 50 per cent. On the other hand, between societies in which entry into marriage and into headship was almost absolute, and those in which entry into marriage occurred almost entirely independently of the assumption of household status, we find situations in which the shares of householders among ever-married men were visibly lower than they were in Scandinavia, but where the formation of a family and the attainment of headship were not consistently separate events in the life-cycle. The Polish case seems to represent quite well such intermediate behaviour.

The suspicion that the motivations and behavioural choices underlying household formation in western and northern Europe may not have been entirely unique in early modern times was recently strengthened by more qualitative analyses. On the one hand, some scholars have argued that it ‘was often more the exception than the rule’, even in western Europe, for a young peasant couple to have lived a completely independent life in terms of sleeping and living quarters and economic resources from the start of their marriage. However, other scholars have pointed out various ways in which a drive towards residential autonomy and economic independence could be observed among the majority of the population in those parts of Europe where the greater social and demographic structures seemed to depart from the principle of western ‘exceptionalism’.

**Domestic Group Structure**

Until the late 1960s, historians examining the household and family organization since the beginning of the early modern era would have spoken of the gradual rise of the modern nuclear family model in Europe under the influence of the various ‘modernizing’ effects. This classical view derived from modern sociology was challenged first by Peter Laslett who, based on several community studies, insisted that the extended household was very rare in historic England, and declared that multiple-family arrangements were ‘a nullity’ there, at least after the Middle Ages. Subsequently, Laslett asserted that English household behaviour based on the predominance of nuclear families (on average, 72 per cent of all domestic groups) was representative of western Europe as a whole (that is, England, the Low Countries, Denmark, and northern France).

A large body of subsequent research has questioned even this revisionist view, by demonstrating that simple families were common over substantial parts of early modern Europe outside its northwestern core. A long but discontinuous belt of other territories in which nuclear families predominated was shown to have stretched from southern Italy and Iberia, through certain areas in both northern and southern German-speaking
territories, to seventeenth-century Bohemia. Recent studies have even shown that the pattern stretches to the east and southeast of early modern Europe. A clear domination of the nuclear family model was found in western Poland–Lithuania (Poland proper), with similar tendencies reaching as far east as early nineteenth-century Wallachia (in Romania) and western Ukraine (Table 12.1).

### Table 12.1 Predominance of the nuclear family model in various regions of early modern Europe

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Household category</th>
<th>English ‘master sample’ (61 communities, 1599–1821)</th>
<th>Western Poland (18th c.)</th>
<th>6 parishes/estates, Bohemia 1651</th>
<th>Podalia (southwestern Ukraine), 18/19th c.</th>
<th>Bracław Guberniya (southwestern Ukraine), 1795</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Solitary</td>
<td>8.5</td>
<td>1.7</td>
<td>7.2</td>
<td>3.4</td>
<td>0.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No family</td>
<td>3.6</td>
<td>0.3</td>
<td>2.5</td>
<td>0.4</td>
<td>0.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Simple</td>
<td>72</td>
<td>78.0</td>
<td>80.1</td>
<td>72.5</td>
<td>81.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Extended</td>
<td>10.9</td>
<td>11.2</td>
<td>5.7</td>
<td>10.8</td>
<td>6.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Multiple family</td>
<td>4.1</td>
<td>8.9</td>
<td>2.8</td>
<td>12.9</td>
<td>12.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N (=100%)</td>
<td>11638</td>
<td>1340</td>
<td>1131</td>
<td>1537</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Source:** Mikołaj Szołtysek and www.censusmosaic.org

Interestingly, in many of these eastern regions, the extent of the structural simplification of the domestic co-resident groups numerically outweighed the levels observed among ‘paradigmatic’ English parishes. By revealing the substantial concentration of ‘streamlined’ household structures in rural areas of eastern Europe, these findings posed a significant challenge to the long-held distinction between northwestern Europe, where households were assumed to have been predominantly nuclear for centuries, and the eastern part of the continent, where more complex family arrangements were assumed to have been dominant.
In addition, there were areas where the amount of local variation in household structures significantly exceeded anything known from other parts of Europe. One of the most intriguing findings of recent research has been that family patterns in east-central Europe were far more heterogeneous than in the west. Future scholars will have to verify whether—as some research has suggested—there were at least three regional family patterns that were distinct in almost all crucial aspects—household structure, household formation, marriage, and life course—in the territories stretching from either the Baltic to the Danube, or from the Oder to the Volga. At a micro-regional level, the diversity was even more astonishing. For example, in a relatively compact area of eighteenth-century Courland (present-day Latvia), the range between the smallest and largest observed proportions of nuclear households in some forty settlements amounted to 85 percentage points. So great was the degree of variation in that area that it is doubtful whether any rigid generalization could capture the reality of the family and household patterns which were to be found.

Still, hot spots of family complexity can also be easily detected. These include two kinds of complex family organization: stem-family arrangements, based on the residential rule that only one married child remained with the parents, forming a multiple-family household; and joint-family arrangements, with more than two co-resident related conjugal families co-residing. Stem families and joint families have been the key concepts employed in the typologization of Eurasian family systems since an early stage of research, and both have been subjects of particular fascination in the minds of scholars because of their complex inner ‘architecture’ and their presumed ‘archaic’ traits.

The geographic spread of the former family arrangement in early modern Europe is usually subdivided into four areas or blocks: the German, especially seventeenth- and eighteenth-century rural Westphalia, together with several regions of Austria; the northern Scandinavian, particularly the _odal_ farms (allodial property of a family, inherited from one generation to the next) in the highland areas of southeastern Norway, but also the estate-dominated farming areas of central Sweden in the eighteenth century; the Celtic, especially Ireland, albeit primarily following the ‘post-famine adjustment’ in the nineteenth century; and the Occitan and northern Iberian, particularly the southwestern French departments, the Pyrenean Baronnies, the Basque country, Galicia, Catalonia, and northern Portugal. In addition, stem-family traces were found among the Walloons of Belgium.

Joint-family appearances in early modern times were more dispersed. More recent research has revealed that societies following joint-family rules could be found in many parts of historic Europe, including early medieval Germanic societies, fifteenth-century Tuscany, early modern central France, nineteenth-century northern Italy, and
some parts of the Alps; but also in Finland, Belarus, and eastern Ukraine, and particularly in Russia and the Balkans.

This is by no means intended to suggest that the major characteristics of family systems were permanent and stable over long periods of time. During the course of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, the dominant household system in Hungary evolved from a simple-family system similar to that of northwestern Europe toward more complex structures, as land became increasingly scarce in one part of the country, while there were labour shortages in another. Similar changes of direction had occurred some time earlier in northeastern Poland–Lithuania (modern-day Lithuania): in response to an increase in the peasant compulsory labour obligations imposed by landlords, the nuclearized family system that dominated in fifteenth- and sixteenth-century Lithuania was replaced during the eighteenth century by a system with a significant proportion of multiple-family households (33 per cent of all domestic units). Other societies moved in the reverse direction: for example, in the southern French Département of Haute Provence between the end of the eighteenth century and 1840, the basic family organization evolved from a traditional stem-family pattern in which residential groups were large and complex, towards a society in which the majority of domestic groups were small nuclear families. Even the English family system, despite its otherwise telling stability, was not entirely immune to changes over time. As Richard Wall showed, there was an increase in the proportion of extended and multiple-family households in England between the late eighteenth and mid-nineteenth centuries. Long-run changes in family structure proceeded along similar lines in North America as well.43

### Demographic Constraints on Living Arrangements

The discovery of structural regularities in the residence patterns of any population or society may tell us something about the family and household formation patterns in a given area, but these patterns might also be attributable to chance, random variation, or demographic constraints. Thus, a finding that nuclear households predominated, or that most young individuals tended to live separately from their natal families in a given region, could be indicative of a preference of the inhabitants for this type of arrangement over other types of arrangements; but it might also suggest the presence of demographic constraints (that is, low fertility, high mortality, late marriage), which would have prevented the formation of extended households by setting limits on the type and number of kin available for co-residence. Before we can draw conclusions about people’s preferences or societal norms regarding residential patterns, we must be able to prove that a certain household type did not predominate for demographic reasons.
Scholars have tried to address this problem for the early modern period from different angles, and using a variety of methods. Those who turned to analytical models—the expression of various assumptions in mathematical terms—often argued that under early modern demographic conditions, such as those of pre-industrial England, the proportion of married couples who could reside with their widowed parents or parents-in-law may have been substantially constrained, with the maximum frequency of three-generation families being approximately 30 per cent.44

Others have relied upon techniques of computer microsimulation, which, by applying the appropriate demographic parameters, make it possible to determine (‘simulate’) the type, number, proportions, and ages of the relatives that an ‘average individual’—usually called ego—has during the course of his or her life. It has been shown, for example, that in fifteenth-century Tuscany, around 27 per cent of egos at age 30 would have had neither parent living, almost exactly the same share as in mid-sixteenth-century England. The structure of the ‘universe of kinship’ did not become much more favourable as the eighteenth century continued, at least in the major landmass of continental Europe. The probability of an individual having no surviving biological parents at age 30 was still around one in three in France during the first half of the eighteenth century, and it was even higher in historical Poland–Lithuania (almost one in two). In fact, for a rural inhabitant of enlightened east–central Europe, the chances of having at least one parent alive at the age of 20 were nearly the same as they were in the sixteenth-century Mediterranean region (approximately seven in ten).45

These apparently prodigious calculations are important to the extent that they bring us closer to understand the delimiting effect of the availability of kin who could be mobilized for the purposes of joint dwelling—the extent to which co-residence with various relatives was possible under specific early modern conditions. Based on these considerations, several scholars have tried to determine what proportion of the arrangements which might have existed under specific demographic realities actually did exist. The Cambridge Group, for example, has found that in sixty-four English settlements before 1822, an average of 13.2 per cent of households were stem families. By simulating household formation scenarios based on a range of demographic situations in England in the 1600s and 1700s, they demonstrated that all of the versions of the simulation rules produced a higher frequency of stem households than typically existed in English communities. This, it was argued, suggested that the striking avoidance of a nuclear-family norm for much of early modern English history was not the result only of demographic constraints.

Striking regional disparities in the ‘propensities’ of elderly people to live with at least one married offspring (that is, estimates of the percentage of those individuals who could have resided in such configurations who actually did so) have been found in Poland–
Lithuania. Whereas in western Poland only 60 per cent of elderly people who could have resided with a married son did so, in the eastern territories of the Commonwealth (in Belarus and Ukraine) more than 90 per cent of the elderly people (and in some areas even close to 100 per cent) who had the option actually chose intergenerational cohabitation at the end of the early modern period. The Polish case is instructive, as it offers insights into inter-societal differentials in the utilization of available demographic potential to develop complex family arrangements, providing a window for better disentangling a complex relationship between basic structures of society on the one hand, and family strategies and human agency on the other.

An Agenda for the Future?

After many years of making substantial progress, the major task for historical family demographers who focus on the early modern era is to make further advances in global comparisons; that is, to provide complex, multifarious accounts of global family change and dynamics across time and space. Current conditions are particularly suitable for addressing those global questions, as the ongoing revolution in the availability of historical census micro-data (see NAPP and Mosaic projects) allows for the unprecedented expansion of historical research. This will, however, require scholars to develop new approaches and new tools, and to refine existing research concepts and problems. In this context, two future research avenues can be suggested, both of which are particularly promising for the further enhancement of our knowledge of early modern household and family systems: thinking of family and household systems as ‘geo-cultures’, and linking systemic variations in family organization with patterns of global inequalities.

The first agenda would imply treating the domestic group, their living arrangements, and their associated elements, in all their regional variability, as dependent variables. The primary analytical task will be to explore how variations in the rest of the social system and environmental properties across multiple settings affected the structure and configurations of these groups. Even after five decades of research, there is still a shortage of convincing explanations for the observed regional diversity in early modern family systems. Scholars have long been aware that human familial behaviour is simultaneously affected by a variety of factors, as the economic, social, environmental, and institutional structures tend to intermingle to exert considerable—if sometimes unexpected—influence on the strategies of individual households and families in terms of their structure, composition, and recruitment practices. What we need, however, are large-scale attempts at situating historical household patterns within multilevel associations, with the contextual influences embedded in diverse spatial circumstances.
Such an approach should replace the usually unsystematic—and often problematic—associations between families and other spheres that have so far been posited. A helpful category in pursuing such an agenda is the recent conceptualization of historical family and household systems as ‘geo-cultures’; that is, as institutions or structures which are influenced by the customs, traditions, and history of a particular area. This approach would encourage a closer scrutiny of the interdependencies of large-scale spatial regularities and their local contexts; and it would foster further advancements in the meso-level comparative analysis, while facilitating better micro-level research through the creation of a grid of information on households and families in thousands of localities. By combining the macro/meso and the micro perspectives, and by encouraging the use of a variety of methods, this programme would spur progress in the development of theories capable of explaining a wide range of residential situations and behaviours across time and space.

The second approach should take the opposite path: in other words, the domestic group—along with its composition, patterns of life-cycle change, and so forth—should be treated as an independent, or at least intervening, variable that may be entered into multiple interactions with demographic, environmental, socio-economic, and cultural contexts across many societies of early modern Europe. Family historians have long argued that differently configured systems of domestic group organization have distinct effects on fertility, mortality, home-leaving patterns, and migration, and thus have direct effects on the adjustment of population growth to economic trends. Economic and social historians have added to this insight by suggesting that varying patterns of family and household organization have influenced economic and other, wider societal outcomes through their effects on the position of women, human capital investment, the maintenance of specific cultural norms and ethos, labour relations, and the development of corporative institutions—and thus greatly influence regional disparities in well-being, wealth, and inequality. What is needed here is an approach which combines recent advances in historical census micro-data with a deliberate mobilization of various data collections in other related fields, such as global histories of wages and prices, or historical indicators of human development or land use. There are various ways in which these exogenous datasets could be linked with increasing amounts of historical data on family systems. The systematic statistical and geographical analysis of these data could provide fresh, exciting insights into the connections between basic forms of human organization and well-being, and wealth and inequality.

**Further Reading**

Ehmer J. and M. Mitterauer, eds. Familienstruktur und Arbeitsorganisation in ländlichen Gesellschaften (Vienna, 1986), 185–323.


Segalen, M. Historical Anthropology of the Family (Cambridge, 1988).


Notes:


(4.) See, however, David Herlihy, *Medieval Households* (Cambridge, MA and London, 1985), and Michael Mitterauer, *Why Europe? The Medieval Origins of its Special Path*, trans. Gerald Chapple (Chicago, 2010), ch. 3. The earliest comprehensive survey of a historical population by individuals in households is the Florentine Catasto of 1427 (see David Herlihy and Cristine Klapisch-Zuber, *Tuscans and Their Families: A Study of the Florentine Catasto of 1427* (New Haven, 1985)). The earliest household listing from pre-industrial England, which surveyed all individuals denoting their ages, was that of Ealing of 1599, but its occurrence was quite exceptional. The earliest listings of that kind found in eastern–central Europe date back to the 1650–60s (in Bohemia and on some Polish lands).

(5.) The most comprehensive survey of these issues remains Michael Flinn, *The European demographic system, 1500–1820* (Baltimore, 1981).


(7.) Programmatic statements on those topics include: Jan de Vries, *The Industrious Revolution: Consumer Behavior and the Household Economy, 1650 to the Present* (Cambridge, 2008), and Markus Cerman, *Villagers and Lords in Eastern Europe, 1300–1800* (Basingstoke, 2012).


(12.) For example, Noriko O. Tsuya et al., *Prudence and Pressure. Reproduction and Human Agency in Europe and Asia, 1700–1900* (Cambridge, MA, 2010).


(15.) For a fully elaborated argument, see Michel Verdon, Rethinking Households: An Atomistic Perspective on European Living Arrangements (London, 1998).

(16.) A superb discussion of this once heated debate is provided by Verdon, Rethinking Households, ch. 2.

(17.) Ruggles, ‘The Future of Historical Family Demography’.


(21.) For a recent assessment of leaving home patterns in the past, see Frans Van Poppel, Michel Oris, and James Lee, eds., The Road to Independence: Leaving Home in Western and Eastern Societies, 16th–19th Centuries (Bern, 2004).


(23.) The issues discussed in this section have been elaborated in greater detail in Mikołaj Szołtysek, ‘Spatial Construction of European Family and Household Systems: Promising


(25.) The English ‘sample’ of sixty-four pre-industrial settlements that Laslett and other English scholars commonly referred to consisted of local household listings covering the period 1574–1821, with the largest concentration in the eighteenth century.


(29.) Czech and Hungarian topics are discussed at length in Szołtysek, ‘Spatial Construction’, 28–31.


(36.) Hajnal, ‘European Marriage Patterns’. 
Another way to explain variation in marriage patterns (as in living arrangements) is to make reference to varying patterns of household succession. The rules governing land succession and strategies of heirship have often been cited as primary exogenous factors in determining family structure, as well as the associated demographic behaviour (for example, Lutz Berkner and Franklin Mendels, ‘Inheritance System, Family Structure and Demographic Patterns’, in Richard Wall, Jean Robin, and Peter Laslett, eds., *Family Forms in Historic Europe* (Cambridge, 1978)). Earlier research tended to analyse inheritance in terms of a simple partible–impartible dichotomy. For example, it has been assumed that in the ideal type of peasant society, the prevalence of partible inheritance should have led to lower percentages of unmarried people, a lower age at marriage, and less complex household structures. On the other hand, the prevalence of ‘pure’ impartibility should have resulted in the emergence of co-residential stem families, higher celibacy rates, and out-migration.


cf. Laslett, ‘Characteristics of the Western Family’.


Social Roles and Individual Identities

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Abstract and Keywords

The first section of this chapter introduces thinkers who have deeply influenced past and present understandings of roles and identity, such as Karl Marx, Thomas Carlyle, Michel Foucault, Judith Butler, and others and also discusses the impact of the social reform movements of the 1960s upon historians’ efforts to understand these issues. The second section of the chapter deals with hierarchy and role differentiation in the early modern period, especially with respect to gender, race, and noble status (or lack of it). It critically assesses claims about the ‘rise of the self’ in the early modern period and it also looks in greater depth at several representative early modern social roles. The final section of the chapter discusses the ways greater geographical mobility, growing literacy, the ‘consumer revolution’ and the rise of the fiscal–military state affected social roles and selfhood and individual identity, both prescriptively and in practice.

Keywords: Agency in history, Marxist theory, functionalist theories, history of the self, deconstruction, human rights, slavery, marriage, women, homosexuality

In the year 1713 Jesper Svedberg, the Lutheran bishop of Skara in Sweden, was casting around for a mental image to help people better understand their proper role in society. He chose a popular metaphor of the time, one that likened human society to a single organism where the limbs and other parts represented the various social classes and all worked together harmoniously. Here is how he put it:¹

Concerning our circumstances, obligations and duties ... the Lord in his great wisdom has divided [human beings] and made them considerably different. Some He has blessed and elevated ... [But] He gives to each and every one as He sees.
fit. The human society is like one man’s body, which consists of different limbs. Where everyone is placed in his own place, and has his own task and mission for the good and preservation of the entire body. Everything cannot be head, eyes and ears. Then there would be no man, but a deformed monstrosity and a horror. The same applies in the political sphere. Everyone cannot be head with its limbs. Everyone is not allowed to rule. The major part has to be ruled. The gifts are manifold, but the spirit is one. Obligations are many, but the Lord is one ...

In his book Svedberg was at pains to draw attention to God’s role in fashioning the world as it is, not as some individuals might wish it to be. He wanted to call people to their duty: ‘everyone is placed in his own place, and has his own task and mission for the good and preservation of the entire body’. He condemned attempts to abandon one’s proper place in society claiming, somewhat melodramatically, that the result would be ‘a deformed monstrosity and a horror’. And above all he urged submission to temporal authority on the part of the large majority who had not been chosen by God to rule.

He may have felt some urgency on this last point. The disastrous Battle of Poltava (disastrous from the Swedish point of view, at any rate) had taken place only three years before in 1709, and the burdens on Sweden were heavy. Of the approximately 60,000 men who departed with Charles XII for the Ukraine and Poltava only a few thousand ever returned, and 1708–11 also saw an outbreak of the plague and serious harvest failures. The authorities were understandably worried that war-weariness and opposition to tax demands might lead to social unrest. In the event Sweden stayed calm but Svedberg’s apparent attempt at an intervention is a good entry point for showing why historians of the early modern period take such a strong interest in social roles. Official or semi-official statements about how people should behave, in the form of idealized models for society, edicts, law codes, sermons, catechisms, and moral advice books, have much to tell us about the sustaining ideologies behind social and political hierarchy within the family, the Church, the village or town, and the state. They also give us, in broad outline, a lot of information about what contemporaries imagined roles like ‘king’, ‘subject’, ‘husband’, ‘wife’, ‘parent’, ‘child’, etc. to mean. But they become especially interesting when they are placed against other kinds of evidence, evidence that shows the often unpredictable relationship between the ways different individuals and groups were told to behave (and even told themselves to behave) and the ways they actually lived their lives.

The terms ‘social role’ and ‘individual identity’ are extremely over-determined. That is to say that they have both a history and a good deal of political baggage attached to them. This chapter tries to unpack some of that complexity. But while seeking to historicize and perhaps destabilize these terms it also uses them to reason with, which demands some baseline working definition of what they are. As a starting point this chapter uses the
phrase ‘social role’ to emphasize the operational duties, norms, expectations, permissions, prohibitions, and methods of enforcement that adhered to and perhaps actively created social categories in the past. It does not however assume that people always behaved in the way they were ‘supposed’ to; history is full of evidence of people breaking the rules, taking advantage of conflicting understandings of what was right, and even actively trying to change the norms. Nor does this chapter assume that social categories or social roles were static, and later we will pay some attention to the rise of new social categories and roles in the early modern period, in tandem with large changes in the economy, cultural life, and the state.

Individual identity is another highly contested term for historians because it is so bound up with the question of the extent to which people can be said to be agents in their own lives and in history. Notions about individual identity (often called ‘the self’) are also inextricably tied to evaluations of social and civilizational worth. In this chapter three major issues are front and centre with respect to individual identity. They are questions of agency, problems to do with hierarchies of personhood, and change over time.

Theorizing Social Roles

One common way to think about social complexity in the past and the present is a set of approaches known as ‘structural functionalism’ or simply ‘functionalism’. Late nineteenth- and twentieth-century functionalism tended to see social complexity (often described in terms of social roles) as key to the way societies survive, and its theorists generally called upon organic or biological metaphors (the ‘social organism’, ‘the body social’, ‘social evolution’, and the like) to describe the processes by which the different parts interact over time. Functionalism has also tended to lay considerable stress on role complementarity, and arguments that reflect this preoccupation are still used around the world to combat modern philosophies such as equal rights for women. A typical example of this would be to say that rights for women will make them too much like men, thus violating a form of role differentiation and complementarity thought to be ordained by nature (or God). The conservative uses of functionalism explain why, to critics, it has often seemed little more than a modern and partially secularized version of the ancient belief that social hierarchy is part of a divine plan (Svedberg’s harmonious ‘social body’, which would disintegrate into chaos if anyone stepped out of place, represents a standard proto-functionalist worldview).

But functionalism need not always be a conservative creed. It is true that the complex set of theories that make up modern functionalism represent a less conflict-driven approach to history and society than some of the other theories we will turn to in a moment, and
functionalist arguments have often been called upon through the ages to combat reformist or revolutionary agendas. On the other hand it is possible to exaggerate modern functionalism’s commitment to role conformity and to the maintenance of the status quo. Its most famous twentieth-century proponent, the American sociologist Talcott Parsons, assigned an important role to social tension and negotiation, believed in major ‘breaks’ in history, and developed a complex set of theories about social change. A good many functionalist theorists also hold the view that deviations from social norms are a creative force propelling historical change. Conservative or not, some of the terms historians and others still use (and that this chapter uses) to talk about societies in the past (‘social structures’, ‘social roles’, ‘norms’ and ‘normative’, ‘enforcement of norms’, etc.) derive originally from functionalist analysis, though as we will see they are used in more fluid and dynamic ways today than was the case when they were originally coined.

Modern historians’ views of social roles have been especially heavily influenced by the nineteenth-century political economist Karl Marx and his followers. In his 1867 opus Capital (Das Kapital in the original German) and other writings, Marx laid great stress on the concept of ‘class’, which he used to denote a group with a common relationship to economic production and a similar set of economic interests. In the early modern and modern periods, according to Marx, the ‘bourgeois’ or ‘capitalist’ class owned the means of production (capital to invest, raw materials, the factories, the machines) while ‘working class’ people owned nothing except their own labour, which they found themselves having to sell for a pittance to capitalists. For Marx modern history was constituted by the conflict between these classes, conflict fuelled by the universal tendency of classes with greater wealth and power to exploit those with less. Marx had nothing but scorn for a worldview in which the ‘social body’ relied upon each status group to fulfil its divinely appointed role; no doubt he would have seen the good Doctor Svedberg as just one more apologist for class oppression. For that matter he and his followers seldom utilized terms like ‘social roles’—they probably did not sound conflictual enough. For them social roles and social norms were ideological constructs and mystifications that elites imposed on their social inferiors in order to facilitate and paper over economic exploitation. Moreover, since Marx believed that human beings naturally resent and struggle against oppression and exploitation, it followed that social roles and norms were intrinsically unstable rather than ‘natural’ or ‘God-given’. Indeed, in time he predicted that workers would coalesce around a consciousness of their common economic interests, defy the master’s self-interested norms and rules, seize the means of production, and establish a new egalitarian world where humans were not alienated from themselves, their fellow human beings or their work.

Almost 150 years have passed since the publication of Capital and the worker’s paradise has not materialized. Moreover few people today, even people on the Left, believe that
class is the only or even the main way to understand identity or social differentiation. Some of the major challenges to Marxist theory have come from anti-colonial, civil rights, anti-racialist, and feminist movements, all of which have generated historical sub-specialties. There are now many historians who focus upon the rise and decline of imperialism, the history of slavery and racialist or religious prejudice, and the role of women and gender in societies past. But while theorists of gender, race, and the like have rejected many features of Marxist thought, including the utopian endpoint and the monolithic focus on class, they have tended to retain Marx’s focus on conflict, exploitation, and hierarchy. Moreover, like Marx, they are deeply hostile to the claim that social roles are fixed, ‘natural’, or ordained by God.

As these intellectuals have studied the problem they have often come to view social categories in quite complex and fluid ways. Women’s and gender historians almost immediately rejected the Marxist claim that only women of the capitalist (‘bourgeois’) class were oppressed and exploited by their menfolk, but together with historians of race and slavery in North and South America and the Caribbean they have also grown increasingly critical of any unitary conception of ‘woman’. The reasoning runs along the following lines: it is often said that women’s primary locus of oppression is the family with its many gender asymmetric social and reproductive demands. Yet slave women historically had very different experiences, role expectations, and opportunities than women who were not slaves. The latter might have been confined by family, marriage, and motherhood, but slave women often were not allowed to marry at all and their children could be and often were sold away from them. They had, in short, considerably fewer opportunities to form stable human bonds than free women did, and it would be absurd to say that their primary locus of oppression was their own families. Slave women and (most) free women inhabited fairly low positions in the hierarchies of early modern life but the circumstances that defined and confined them were totally different. Given this stark difference, how is it possible to think of slave women under the same analytical rubric as free women, especially given the fact that free women were sometimes their actual owners? Many have concluded that it is not possible and that the broad category ‘woman’, though useful in vernacular speech, may obscure more than it reveals when used to analyse the past.²

In recent years the approach often known as ‘deconstruction’ (or ‘social constructionism’) has still further destabilized our understanding of social categories and social roles even, or indeed especially, when they seem to be ‘biologically-based’ (for example, male vs. female), reputedly ‘natural’ (for example, based on age or the life-cycle), or powerfully normative (heterosexual vs. other sexual alternatives). Deconstructionist approaches urge us to be very suspicious of biologistic claims or of the unspoken assumption that there is some transhistorical essence of ‘femaleness’ or ‘maleness’ (or
Theorists have also focused a great deal of attention upon the dramatic ways that understandings and practices of gender and sexuality have changed over time, a project identified especially with the French theorist Michel Foucault who produced ambitious historical surveys of the intimate disciplinary practices of the emerging nation state, changing notions of insanity, and the fluid and ever-changing content of sexual taboo. A more recent intervention has come from the American feminist philosopher Judith Butler who has launched a concerted attack on the belief that there is any essential reality to gender. She argues that gender, which she has called ‘a phantasmatic ideal’ and ‘an imitation for which there is no original’, assumes its social power and seeming naturalness from the repetitive way it is ‘performed’. And while one might think ‘performativity’ entailed a certain freedom from constraint, in fact Butler imagines a whole host of ways that it encounters and is defined by larger regulative regimes.

While deconstruction is sometimes represented as anti-progressive, or at least politically quietist, in reality almost all the postmodernist thinkers (including the deconstructionists) come out of the political Left. Moreover, many of them are or have been political activists. It is hardly surprising then that at the heart of most deconstructionist projects is the claim that hierarchy, inequality, and conflict determine the ways human beings name, understand, and experience reality. Then again, while deconstruction has undermined the essential basis for key social categories it may paradoxically be encouraging a resurgence of the language of ‘social roles’ and ‘norms’ and their derivatives, despite the fact that these sorts of formulations are sometimes imagined to be static and conflict-averse. That is because terms like ‘role’ and ‘normative’—the latter being especially common in postmodern theorizing—seem less biologistic or essentialist than some of their alternatives. They are also more consistent with notions of intimate regulation (like those of Foucault) and performativity (like those of Butler), though they may still suggest an internal coherence those theorists would reject. But whether or not they use such terminology, most deconstructionists are uninterested in the old functionalist models, which often were based upon quite rigid and presentist notions about role-appropriate behaviours. Instead they endorse and indeed celebrate far more fluid conceptions of how social categories and structures evolve, change, and are enforced and resisted across time and space.

Theorizing Individual Identity or ‘the Self’

Up until the later nineteenth century, and often beyond, most history that spoke about such ‘self’-oriented questions as individual motivation, historical agency, and psychological complexity did so by reference to famous men. In fact this focus went
beyond particular men, great or otherwise, to become a theory about how history advanced. As the enormously influential nineteenth-century Scottish essayist and historian Thomas Carlyle pithily (and in utter seriousness) put it: ‘The history of the world is but the Biography of great men’. According to this view remarkable men—intellectual giants like Michelangelo; military heroes like Lord Nelson; gifted leaders like Napoleon Bonaparte—were the ones who made history; everyone else was merely drawn along in their wake. Today we would think this a very restrictive view, not least because it was so obviously tied to the belief that only elite men possessed the rational faculties necessary for political leadership.

But however out of touch they might seem today ‘Great Man’ theories of history did have a certain logic to them. History-writing in those times was, to a large extent, based upon the correspondence and writings of kings, nobles, and their chroniclers, sources that lent themselves well to judgements about character, intellect, and talent at the pinnacle of society. Carlyle and others did their research largely in isolation from many of the kinds of sources historians use today. Carlyle, in particular, was also a champion of assertive and militaristic male leadership (he wrote a laudatory biography of the eighteenth-century monarch Frederick the Great of Prussia), critical of democracy, which he dubbed ‘mobocracy’, and no feminist. It is hardly surprising, therefore, that he would come to view the ‘great men’ he so admired as the very soul of history and would accord only bit parts to anyone else. The fact was that even historians of a more egalitarian bent than Carlyle had difficulty figuring out if non-elites really had a complex enough inner life to qualify as ‘individuals’ in anything like the modern sense of that term. They had particular difficulty seeing women and colonial subjects as agents either in their own lives or in history.

Three main factors were at play here. First, sources penned by non-elites (many of whom were illiterate before the late nineteenth century) were rare and sources attesting to the lives of non-elites (primarily, though not solely, administrative and court records) had not yet been clearly identified or shown to contribute much to historical thinking. By contrast both written sources and other kinds of evidence (grave markers, portraits, building-projects, and many other material survivals) were relatively abundant for members of the elite, which encouraged historians and others to focus on them.

Second, theories of history that credited non-elites with any power to effect historical change were hard to find in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, and almost non-existent in the case of non-elite women. Karl Marx was a direct contemporary of Thomas Carlyle’s, but Marxist notions about the proletariat (working class) as an agent of change were not initially as helpful as one might think, both because Marx tended to think of the revolutionary working class in primarily male terms and because he and his followers were ambivalent about the role of individual initiative in the ‘making’ of history. They
preferred instead to credit a combination of collective action and deterministic historical cycles. In sum, the lack of overarching theory, whether Marxist or non-Marxist, greatly limited the perceived relevance of studying the history of non-elites.

And finally some theorists seemed not to want to know what non-elites thought, because they were too committed to the notion that the past was more harmonious and ‘authentic’ than the present—a time when people knew and celebrated their proper role in society and women supposedly devoted themselves single-mindedly and without complaint to home and hearth. People who believed that women ‘belonged’ at home and who considered the sphere of the family to be static and unchanging were unlikely to see either women or the family as a source of historical dynamism. Those who deplored socialism or labour agitation were unlikely to feel much sympathy for histories that tried to recover the inner lives and (putatively) rebellious thoughts of workers or the poor. And a central strain of pro-imperialist thinking, one that lasted well into the twentieth century, held that colonial subjects were too irrational, illiterate, or childlike to be capable of self-rule. Obviously it followed that none of these groups could ‘make their own history’, or at least they could not make it anywhere near as well as their social superiors could.

The Study of Roles and Individual Identity After 1945

This picture did not go unchallenged though, even as it was in the process of being formed. Nineteenth- and early twentieth-century movements for the abolition of slavery, anti-colonial and pro-independence revolts and mutinies, socialist organizing, and numerous democratic movements, including the women’s suffrage movement, all ensured that views like Carlyle’s were never completely hegemonic. Still, the real defeat of this worldview dated from the decades after the Second World War. Decolonization (usually itself the result of mass movements), civil rights and anti-Apartheid movements, and, from the 1960s on, the anti-war movement, nuclear disarmament campaigns, the events of May 1968 in France, the ‘Prague Spring’, also in 1968, the women’s movement, and various sexual liberation movements, to name only some of the best known developments, seemed to many to ‘prove’ that change, far from being a top-down project of ‘great men’, actually bubbled up from relatively anonymous men and women going about their lives. The 1960s and 1970s also saw a powerful attack upon conformity. Though it was not new to imagine that individual identity existed in tension with normative social roles, the 1960s and early 1970s challenge to what were often referred to at the time as ‘bourgeois values’ happened on a very large scale in many countries, involved very disparate social groups, and was extremely thoroughgoing. Perhaps most notably of all, it included a very significant and lasting loosening of women’s sexual mores in many countries. One of the
main conclusions to come from all this was the belief, which became virtually an article of faith, that the most ‘authentic’ people with the most authentic inner lives were those who devoted themselves to resisting oppression and defying prescribed roles.

This had a number of implications for the profession of history. One was that Marxist historians began focusing a good deal more attention on individual agency, something about which, as we have seen, many on the Left had previously been ambivalent. This trend was especially associated with British Marxists like E. P. Thompson, whose *The Making of the English Working Class* (1963) traced the way non-elite individuals and small groups both consciously and unconsciously built the associational bonds and worldviews that would form ‘the working class’. ‘History from below’ represented a frontal attack upon the ‘Great Man’ theory of history; it also broke from earlier social history, which had tended to focus on statistical models and more or less slow-to-change structures. The new social history focused instead upon the agency, mentality, and (where possible) the actual words of individual members of the lower echelons of society. This ‘humanistic’ approach has dominated social history ever since, especially but not only in the Anglo–American scholarship.

Despite the fact that Thompson had had little to say about women, during the years immediately following the publication of his book women’s history emerged as one of the most vigorous of the historical sub-disciplines. Women’s historians of the late 1960s, 1970s, and 1980s were well aware of the power of gendered roles; often they also had personal experience of the power of other categories of difference such as class, religion, race, and sexual identity. Many of them had experienced the heady sense of freedom from convention offered by the various cultural and political movements of the day. They were also powerfully impressed by the strong and highly visible participation of women in a number of contemporary anti-colonial conflicts in Vietnam, various Latin American countries, Algeria, and elsewhere. And they grasped the political nature of the traditionalist claim that women in the past were unable to reflect upon their own lives or influence them in any way. Consequently one of their first orders of business was to establish that women in the past, though clearly constrained, had been able, under some circumstances, to exert agency over their own and others’ lives.

The scholarship on colonialism, postcolonialism, and race also took some new turns. Intellectuals from the former colonies seized a good deal of the initiative in terms of defining their own fields of study. Influential works like Edward Said’s *Orientalism* (1978) not only charted the repertoire of stereotypes about the East but indicted several generations of Western scholars of Asia and the Middle East for the way they had supported imperial projects and ideologies. Among the many stereotypes Said and those he has influenced have taken the time to trace and refute are the claim that people from the ‘East’ lack an individuated self and the claim that ‘Eastern’ societies are
sociologically static or stagnant, topics this chapter takes up in more depth later on. In addition many postcolonial scholars have turned their focus onto groups previously poorly represented in the historical or sociological literature and assumed to be largely powerless to change the circumstances of their own lives. The Subaltern Studies group, which emerged originally from the study of colonial South Asia, though its approaches were subsequently extended to other geographical contexts, is probably the most famous and influential of these. Historians of the slave trade and slavery also made important interventions that especially focused on gender and on the interplay of individual subjectivity and the deeply exploitative regime of plantation slavery.6

These projects have been complicated by and, depending on one’s view, either enriched or undermined by deconstructionist theories about self, agency, and identity. The postmodern debate about the nature of the self is extremely complex and, at times, philosophically challenging, but the gist of it, for our purposes, is the claim that what is typically (p. 350) taken to be ‘the self’ (what one scholar calls ‘the tradition of the individual knower, the rational, self-directing, morally centred and knowledgeable agent of action’),7 far from being about personal uniqueness and separation from others, is largely or wholly relational. It is about how people perform a ‘self’ in relation to linguistic, ideological, and material constraints and possibilities, a set of expectations that inheres in a community or a network of people, processes, and things. It follows from this that statements like ‘I am gay’ or ‘I am a man (or woman)’ or even just ‘I am me’ are normative claims and, as it were, performances, not statements about biology or some transcendent ontology. Historians tend to like many things about deconstruction, not least the fact that it offers many opportunities to think about changes in consciousness over time. On the other hand many have been less than enthusiastic about the fact that (as they see it) personal agency can seem to get lost in the deconstructionist shuffle. Therefore historians of early modern Europe tend to grant that much that we see is heavily determined by relational context, social roles, or other structures and processes, but in practice many of them shrink from accepting the stronger claim that there is no other reality.

Self, Society, and Agency in the Early Modern Period

People who study the early modern period have their own internal debates about the nature of the ‘self’. It has long been argued, especially within disciplines like literature and art history, that the ‘self’ was an early modern invention, probably of the Renaissance, and also that it was distinctively Western. The evidence for this claim includes, among other things, the rise of individually differentiated portraiture, especially in Italy and the Netherlands, from the fifteenth century on, new or at least newly popular
literary genres (the novel, the autobiography, revealing personal correspondences) that carefully probed people’s inner lives and thoughts, and assertions by some early modern European intellectuals about individual uniqueness—their own or/and that of other people. The opening lines of Jean-Jacques Rousseau’s *Confessions*, completed in 1769 and published posthumously, is a famous example of the latter. There Rousseau asserts, in a characteristic blend of personal revelation and self-promotion:

I am not made like any one I have been acquainted with, perhaps like no one in existence; if not better, I at least claim originality, and whether Nature did wisely in breaking the mould with which she formed me, can only be determined after having read this work …

Here Rousseau is not just claiming to be unique but he is also putting on the mantle of the solitary, and, as he goes on to say, the alienated genius, a role that may indeed have been new or at least newly popular in the time in which he wrote. This notion would ultimately contribute greatly to the ‘Great Man’ theories of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, but it would also encourage the belief that the truly authentic self is one who resists the status quo.

As might be expected, claims that the ‘self’ only dates from the early modern period and is found only in the West (or at least first arose there) have encountered resistance. Classicists and medievalists do not, on the whole, imagine that the people they study lacked an individuated self, though they may believe that these selves are either partially unknowable or very unlike modern selves. Some would also argue that the so-called discovery of the self in the Renaissance (or later) has more to do with record survival than it does with the ways people really thought about themselves and others. Scholars of regions not included in that rather flexible expanse of territory called ‘the West’ have been similarly sceptical of the claim that the individuated self is or was unique to Europe and its settler colonies, especially in the extremely reductionist way that that claim is sometimes made. A good example of the kind of thing these critics are reacting to is the assertion that ‘Western culture’ stresses the importance of the individual as an independent entity, while ‘Eastern cultures’ stress the centrality of family and the dependence of the individual on other people—a claim that reifies and naturalizes an East/West binary, glosses over an enormous amount of diversity, ambiguity, ambivalence, and change over time in both ‘regions’, and almost completely erases any part of the world that is not Asia, Europe, or a former European settler colony.

How has the scholarship on early modern Europe reflected these debates? Historians of women and gender have been especially active in seeking alternative ways of understanding both the self and agency. The search for active and empowered women—ideally women of the people—grew more urgent from the 1960s on, and the scholarship
took several directions. One was to try to reclaim religion as a source of at least partial empowerment for women—a project that benefited from the fact that much early women’s writing was of a religious character and a good deal of it was penned or dictated by undeniably powerful characters such as Hildegard of Bingen (1098–1179), a German mystic, composer, and abess, Teresa of Avila (1515–82), a Spanish saint and reformer of the Carmelite order, and Joanna Southcott (1750–1814), an English prophetess and founder of a new religion. One benefit of this continuing strain of research has been to draw attention to the continuities as well as the differences between mystical notions of the agentic soul that strives (or at least looks) toward God, and supposedly new early modern or modern notions of the self. It has also drawn attention to the reciprocal impact of religion on women and women on religion—especially new religions, of which the early modern period saw many. There is now a large literature on nuns, in particular, that argues that many of them were quite spiritually and creatively empowered, in good part because some convents allowed them intellectual opportunities uncommon in the world outside. However nuns were also vulnerable to attack by highly placed male clerics who sometimes sought to muzzle them or to limit their freedom of movement. Larger shifts in the religious cosmos also had a powerful effect upon them. Convents were shuttered and the role of ‘nun’ entirely eliminated in those parts of Europe that went over to Protestantism in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Moreover, even in areas that remained Catholic there was a new emphasis on cloistering nuns away from society even to the extent of remodelling convents so as to safeguard their ‘purity’. Like much scholarship on early modern gender this approach confirms the reality of agency and an individual self, but also sees them as vulnerable and highly constrained.

Another important body of research has focused upon women in times of political upheaval. As many historians have shown, at such times women tend to surface in the historical record and often play quite prominent roles. Scholarship on the Fronde (a series of French insurrections and civil wars of the mid-seventeenth century) has shown that noblewomen played extremely prominent roles both militarily and otherwise and that this was reflected in contemporary propaganda—though it also seems to have sparked a conservative reaction against overly assertive noblewomen. During the English Revolution and Interregnum (1640–60) middling city women (the wives of artisans, small shopkeepers, and the like) formed themselves into political pressure groups and engaged in large-scale petitioning drives over religious issues and in order to support groups of radical men. Polish noblewomen were very active in politics during the tempestuous eighteenth century, though they and their male counterparts were unsuccessful in stopping the erasure of Poland as a political entity by the end of the century, partly at the hands of two women, Empress Catherine the Great of Russia and Empress Maria Theresa of the Habsburg Monarchy. During the early phases of the French Revolution (1789–93) women were spectacularly active, staging a famous ‘women’s march to Versailles’ which
is considered to be one of the turning points of the Revolution, demanding to carry arms, addressing radical clubs, forming themselves into large clubs and associations in both Paris and the provinces, fighting on the front line in the wars, and, at times, demanding feminist reforms including law reform and the right to vote. Many women also insisted on being addressed as 'citoyenne' (citizenship) rather than as madame, mademoiselle, or femme—a powerful statement that most historians have interpreted as at least partially aspirational: 'citoyenne' did not categorize women solely on the basis of their marital status as the older forms of address had done, but instead promoted their membership in the political nation.\(^\text{12}\)

While defiance of conformity and of one's assigned role (or at least efforts to redefine that role) can often be found in unsettled times a now large body of scholarship has focused on women's public or semi-public roles in more ordinary times, and much of this effort has relied upon legal records. Hundreds of thousands of European women encountered the law involuntarily in the early modern period through religious inquisitions such as the Roman, Spanish, or Portuguese Inquisitions (which were especially directed against crypto-Jews and crypto-Muslims, or people suspected of being so), criminal trials for theft, infanticide, bawdry, and witchcraft, and summary proceedings in a variety of local venues for petty infractions like begging, vagrancy, prostitution, or violating the guild monopolies of men. The court records abundantly demonstrate a great deal of deviation from expected norms for both women and men, indeed so many as to suggest that the norms were never more than notional, especially when it came to the poor and relatively marginal people who were largely the targets of such efforts. In the eyes of some historians the evidence from the criminal courts confirms the belief that the law (and, by extension, normative ideologies) were an instrument of authoritarian governance by the well-off rather than the 'rule of law' in any broader sense.

On the other hand the court materials also show that willingness to violate the basic rights of Jews, Muslims, gypsies, ‘strangers’, and other non-dominant religious or social groupings, callousness toward the poor and old, a pervasive sexual double standard, and a scant respect for legal process were quite widely distributed among people who were manifestly not of the elite. Indeed it is clear that ‘officialdom’ often complemented and reinforced more popular assumptions about how to enforce order and whom it should be enforced upon. The fairly widespread use of judicial torture for more serious crimes, as well as punitive violence—whippings and brandings and the like—for less serious ones, had its informal counterpart in vigilante violence at the village level against foreigners and suspected witches, not to mention the everyday use of violence to enforce obedience in the workplace and family.
Studies that rely on criminal records have also drawn criticism precisely for their focus on deviance as opposed to the presumably more representative behaviours of those who neither broke the law nor were suspected of having done so. In the last few decades scholars have paid a good deal more attention to courts that adjudicated or simply mediated mundane inter-personal conflicts to do with property, debtor/creditor relations, inheritance, marital problems (especially legal separations and the problem of husbands who refused to support their wives and children), defamation, and illegal enslavement. These problems were dealt with in a variety of venues, from provincial administrative boards to ‘full-court’ tribunals, from courts associated with various religious minorities (for example, the rabbinical courts) to catch-all venues like the Ottoman shari’a courts. This sort of evidence, precisely because it is somewhat more representative than criminal court records, has greatly expanded our understanding not just of women, but of men, family life, local hierarchies, and personal agency.

An important area of scholarship with special relevance to debates about subjectivity and the ‘self’ involves the study of same-sex love in the past. In the 1960s and 1970s the orthodox view was that sexual identity was a central and largely fixed element of the ‘self’. The early gay and lesbian liberation movements were based in part on the rhetorical claim that no one should be persecuted just because they happened to be ‘born that way’. Some of the earliest historians of same-sex love, most notably the American medievalist John Boswell, adopted this position as the starting point for their scholarship. Boswell’s *Christianity, Social Tolerance, and Homosexuality* (1980) and his later work on same-sex marriage assumed that ‘gay’ people constituted a sort of trans-historical subgroup of humanity but that significant changes could be found in the way they were viewed. Many of Boswell’s writings sought to show that medieval Catholicism, at least up until about the twelfth century, was actually surprisingly accepting of homosexuality, even going so far as to permit special ‘marriage-like’ rites that celebrated same-sex unions. The view that homosexuality is an essential and fixed part of one’s core self still enjoys some support, but it has been supplemented and to some extent supplanted among historians by a more social constructionist view of both same-sex love and the self.

Historians have confirmed Boswell’s claim that the treatment of same-sex love has varied enormously over time (though his argument that the medieval Church countenanced rites that were very like same-sex marriage has its sceptics). But historians like Alan Bray (writing on sixteenth- and seventeenth-century England), Jeffrey Merrick (writing on early modern France), and Michael Rocke (writing on fifteenth-century Florence), among others, have adopted a much more fluid view of homosexuality that focuses more on acts than on identities. Thus Rocke shows that there was significant participation in homosexual activity on the part of Florentine male youth in the fifteenth century, and that it was apparently a fairly acceptable stage of adolescent life at least to the youths themselves and often to their parents, if not to the Church or the special
branch of local law enforcement charged with slapping these youths upon the wrists. He also shows that most of these boys later settled down and married heterosexually—strong evidence that homosexuality was not a fixed or essential feature of their identities as men.

**Looking in Depth at some Early Modern Social Roles: Married Women, 'Serfdom', and Slavery**

As indicated earlier, historians of women and gender have become increasingly sceptical of the category 'woman', at least if it is intended to cover all persons of the female gender whatever their age or station in life. Women’s situations were simply too diverse. Considerations like these have resulted in a far more subtle understanding of the relationship of gender to other kinds of hierarchies. Wives were supposed to obey their husbands (which, as we will see, they may or may not have done) but what about widows who answered to no man? And what happened if the woman was of high status? A noblewoman might have and probably did have considerably more power and authority than a male serf—she might even own him and his family, or even his whole village. Clearly some women had more power—sometimes quite a bit more power—than some men. How are we to understand this kind of power in relation to more conventional understandings of gender? What happened when a person was both a monarch and a female, as was the case for queens? And what did it mean for contemporary practices of masculinity? All of these questions have been taken up in recent years by historians.

One early modern social role that has received a good deal of attention is the role of wife. Largely as a result of studies of family-related litigation in a number of countries, historians now know much more than they did about the nuanced relationship between prescription and reality in early modern marriages. In most early modern societies married women were subject to certain asymmetric expectations, a key one being that they were supposed to obey their husbands (many faiths actually required women to swear an oath to obey their husbands as part of the marriage ritual, and some still do). Clearly the intent of this was to place barriers in the way of wives’ self-determination, and we can see this operating at many levels in real marriages. Thus, wives did not have the right to control their own bodies and sexuality, they had only an attenuated ability to control money or household consumption, their labour, in effect, belonged to their husband, and they were not allowed to leave the marital home without their husband’s permission.

And yet in practice it is abundantly clear that some, perhaps many wives did not obey, or at least not all the time; sermons and handbooks of the time insisted so obsessively upon
female obedience precisely because it was no simple thing to get women to comply if they did not think it was in their own or their children’s interest. The problem of getting wives to obey, coupled with the pervasive assumption that they were always on the brink of rebellion, help to explain why almost all early modern societies permitted husbands to physically discipline their wives, at least in moderation. But it was also obvious to contemporaries that wife-beating was a poor solution to a complex problem: it could seriously injure the wife, it placed excessive power in the hands of often flawed patriarchs (patriarchs who were drunks or violent or both were a recognized problem in most communities), and it could backfire and permanently alienate a woman from her husband and her family duties. It also tended to give marriage a bad name. It is interesting to note the shift that has taken place in the scholarship on marriage. Where previously historians tended to see marriage as a sort of closed patriarchal cage, they now see families in general as far more open than before, patriarchal relations a good deal shakier, and masculinity much harder to establish. This is not to deny that marriage could turn into hell on earth for some women; indeed matrimonial litigation can make for very disturbing reading. However, while women took a risk by marrying, most also expected to gain advantages by doing so, both in terms of higher social status and more tangible benefits.

What were those benefits? Married women as a group often had the right to deploy and supervise the labour of unmarried girls and women. Often married women enjoyed more prestigious seating within churches and synagogues and in some places they got more food than their unmarried counterparts. In many communities across Europe married women monopolized the better-paid women’s jobs and they were much more likely than single women to be allowed to run their own trades or businesses (married men also enjoyed various rights and opportunities denied to unmarried men). In most European societies wives also had a customary and sometimes a legally enforceable right to at least partial financial support from their husbands, and tens of thousands of women went to court seeking to enforce that right (Muslim shari’a courts in the Balkans and Turkey were especially hospitable to such claims). Obviously too, wives were celebrated for bearing children—in contrast to women who got pregnant out of wedlock, who were generally punished and sometimes ostracized. And usually wives inherited something—and sometimes quite a lot—if their husbands predeceased them. In short, marriage defined both the status hierarchy and distribution of economic resources of early modern Europe, both for men and for women. This is significant because in quite a few European societies and colonies a significant percentage of the population, for a variety of reasons (poverty, enserfment or enslavement, military status, having been deserted by a prior spouse, etc.), was largely or altogether denied the right to marry.
Both constraints and privileges and opportunities helped to constitute the complex social role of ‘married woman’ as did an enormous amount of regional variation. But perhaps the most important point of all is that in real life this ‘role’ was anything but formulaic. It carried certain expectations and restrictions, but they were not always followed and could not always be enforced (or some parts could only be enforced at the expense of others). It contained bundles of rights and responsibilities that, in practice, often conflicted with each other, and which gave rise to debate at the time. Social roles, this example suggests, were not play-scripts that people memorized and performed by rote, but more akin to individual and collective improvisations, hedged about by conventions, norms, restrictions, and enforcement mechanisms, but improvisations nevertheless.

Modern societies still maintain a distinction between ‘married woman’ and ‘unmarried woman’, though without the fairly extreme markers of difference common in the early modern period. But some other early modern social categories and roles no longer exist in the modern day or they are rare or illegal. Historians take a particular interest in these now-disappeared social roles, because they see them as a way to better understand the culture, economy, and politics of societies with different notions of human rights, human dignity, and the individual, than are typical today.

Many groups in early modern Europe and its distant settlements found themselves, often by accident of birth, burdened with duties, constraints, and limitations on their desires that modern people would have no hesitation in calling un-freedom. However there has been much disagreement about the extent of this un-freedom, and the tendency in recent historical writing has been to stress diversity, evolution over time, and agency—albeit sometimes limited agency—on the part of many groups formerly thought to lack both economic and legal rights. A good example can be seen in relation to what used to be called ‘the Second Serfdom’. Serfs were, in the older literature, a broad category of unfree persons who, among other impositions, were not allowed to leave their lord’s estate without special permission, were subject to forced labour demands, had to bring their disputes to courts controlled by the estate-owner, and owed taxes or other customary payments in cash or kind to the owner of the estate or village where they lived. According to the traditional narrative, while ‘serfdom’ largely disappeared from western Europe by the early modern period, from roughly the later sixteenth century on a new or revived ‘Second Serfdom’ extended its reach in east-central and eastern Europe. This intensified form of political, legal, and labour exploitation is said to have encompassed the vast majority of the rural and some portion even of urban populations in these regions, and to have supplied much of the coerced muscle-power that turned the vast plains east of the Elbe into the ‘breadbasket’ of Europe.

Today historians are increasingly critical of this monolithic picture of the labour systems of east-central and eastern Europe (and, for that matter, western Europe). Markus
Cerman, for example, prefers to define a ‘serf’ as someone who is in personal bondage to another, and sees ‘serfdom’ as a much smaller subset of what he and others prefer to call ‘demesne subjection’ (or sometimes ‘demesne lordship’), a hierarchical relationship, granted, but one that, more often than not, did not involve personal bondage. Several historians—among them Cerman—stress the fact that in much of eastern Europe serfs were not in the majority, and that even in areas dominated by ‘demesne farming’ (that is, large estates where owners farmed most or all of their holdings directly rather than leasing them out to tenants) landowners relied both on ‘labour service’ (that is, unpaid labour performed by their dependents) and on wage labour to do the job. Today many historians also emphasize that demesne subjects and even serfs participated robustly in the market, and that they frequently resisted or sought to control the terms of their subjection. Nevertheless it must be admitted that many demesne subjects, whether or not one wants to call them serfs (and the terminology was contested even at the time), experienced a variety of legally or customarily enshrined limitations on their freedom, particularly limits on their mobility, on their ability to resist having to do unpaid labour for someone else, and on their ability to sue freely in a court not controlled by their lord. Other kinds of servitude, among them indentured labour and debt servitude, and their close relative, penal servitude, were fairly common across Europe and the colonies and were also characterized by constraints on mobility, and by the fact that a master did not ordinarily have to pay his servant for the work he or she did. Early modern Europe was a complex patchwork of close and interdependent relationships between unequals and historians continue to try to understand these relationships both on a case by case basis and in terms of what they meant for the larger economy and society.

Of the many and varied forms of un-freedom to be found in early modern Europe and her overseas colonies slavery was the most profoundly exploitative, though again, modern historians are prone to stress diversity of rights even with respect to slaves. One of the central differences between slaves and other subject groups was that slaves were typically people captured or abducted from one region and transferred to another by merchants, brokers, brigands, or invading armies. Slaves were forcibly separated from their families and native soil, so they tended to be especially disempowered. Between the early sixteenth and the early nineteenth century chattel slavery became much more extensive than it had been in the medieval period, largely as a result of the rise of large-scale sugar, tobacco, and cotton cultivation in the European colonies of North and South America and the Caribbean—all of them products for which there was a seemingly insatiable global demand. Slaves were also found in Europe itself. In southeastern Europe the Ottoman Empire maintained a fairly robust slave trade, taking slaves both from the Balkans and the areas north of the Black Sea and from Northern and sub-Saharan Africa, and largely using them for military, administrative, and domestic rather than agricultural
purposes. In northern and central Europe too, slaves could sometimes be found attached to aristocratic or overseas merchant households, and they were often transported through European ports like Liverpool, London, and Bristol in Great Britain; Nantes in France; Seville and Cadiz in Spain; Lisbon in Portugal; and Amsterdam, Flushing, and Middelburg in the Low Countries, usually on the way to one or another of the European colonies.

(p. 358) During the classical, medieval, and early modern period European slaves were most often other Europeans (the word 'slave' derives from the word 'Slav', a term still used today for a group of ethnicities and languages associated with east central and eastern Europe and the Balkans). This meant that 'slave' status was marked primarily by differences of religion (Christians often enslaved Muslims and vice versa), language, or place of origin rather than the colour of one’s skin. During the early modern period slaves came increasingly to be people abducted from Africa, or those abductees’ children or grandchildren. By the time slavery was finally abolished in Europe and her colonies and former colonies (a drawn-out process that lasted from the late eighteenth to the early twentieth century) it had largely become associated with people of African descent. Two mutually reinforcing elements: skin-colour racialism and condition of servitude—particularly new kinds of servitude associated with large-scale commodity production for a world market—combined to greatly diminish the status of slaves. This is a striking case of the way the various social indicators associated with a given social role can change significantly over time.

Social expectations for slaves laid an uncommonly strong stress on obedience. Slaves also had little or no bodily self-determination and no freedom of movement. Moreover, as captives or the descendants of captives, their social support systems tended to be extremely attenuated and their owners demanded backbreaking labour in return for little more than survival rations. Slavery was sufficiently unattractive that enormous efforts had to be made to justify and enforce the rules, especially late in our period when the institution began to be criticized as inhumane (the first large-scale abolitionist movements date from the later eighteenth century, though individual slaves, and sometimes small groups, can be found protesting the terms of their enslavement far earlier than that). Some justified slavery by arguing that the needs of production outweighed the inhumanity of the institution: not surprisingly this argument loomed large in relation to plantation economies in the New World. Another approach was to argue that human bondage had been established by God (the many bondsmen and bondswomen who populate the Bible and the Qur’an proved especially useful to pro-slavery theorists). People who sought to rationalize slavery and serfdom also tended to make claims about the moral status and ultimately the personhood of the people trapped in these roles. It became common, for example, to claim that slaves were lazier, more stupid, more
thievish, and more promiscuous than their betters and that, consequently, they ‘needed’
to be enslaved so that their vices could be kept under control.

The problem was further complicated by the fact that serfs and slaves could be and were
physically punished if they refused to work. Indeed since they received few if any positive
rewards, it usually proved difficult to get them to work except by resorting to physical
violence or the threat of it. The liberal use of the lash gave rise to some especially
intricate rationalizations, especially once plantation slavery became closely identified
with people of African origin, and therefore with more ancient prejudices against people
with dark skins. Here is how a Scottish woman named Janet Schaw, who travelled to the
West Indies in the late eighteenth century, sought to pre-empt criticism of plantation
owners who forced their slaves to work by means of the lash:

When one comes to be better acquainted with the nature of the Negroes, the
horror of [flogging] must wear off. It is the suffering of the human mind that
constitutes the greatest misery of punishment, but with [slaves] it is merely
corporeal ... it inflicts no wound on their mind, whose Natures seem made to bear
it, and whose sufferings are not attended with shame or pain beyond the present
moment.17

Here Schaw is directly addressing and attempting to refute those who would argue for
the abolition of slavery on humanitarian grounds. According to her, physical pain has no
lasting effect upon slaves (‘it inflicts no wound on their mind’) and therefore slave-owners
need feel no qualms of conscience about relying on it. This is a good example of the ease
with which early modern people could arrive at the belief that some people were less
human than others. Janet Schaw had a clear notion of what a human being (or at least a
free, white human being) was because that person was much like her: someone with
complex emotions, a memory, foresight, sensibilities—in short, a feeling self. She was all
but acknowledging that had she been subjected to the whip she would have been deeply
traumatized. However, ‘Negroes’ in her estimation possessed none of these traits. Their
emotions were simple, like animals. They lived for the moment and possessed neither
memory nor a capacity to plan for the future. According to her they even lacked a sense
of shame (the claim that people of African origin were unable to feel shame—especially
sexual shame—was an especially prominent feature of early modern racialist belief). They
had, in short, no inner life, which meant that whipping them caused no lasting trauma.
And besides, she goes on to say, they could be made to work in no other way. This
unapologetically self-serving way of looking at social difference tended, as has been said,
to take a particularly extreme form in New World plantation societies, but ‘softer’
versions of it turn up in relation to many other early modern social roles.
It is certainly evident in European law codes. All European countries allowed status superiors to use physical violence on their inferiors—and often inferiors who struck back were savagely punished. This tells us not just about how social inferiors were viewed but about the ways elites defined their own honour. Most societies had different rules for how the different social ranks were punished if they broke the law. Slaves, commoners, or poor people were typically punished by inflicting pain (whipping, branding, etc.). By contrast, free people, nobles, or well-off people—people of honour—often had a monetary fine levied on them instead, precisely because they would be deeply dishonoured by being subjected to pain at someone else’s hand. Even societies that did not openly distinguish between rich and poor, noble and non-noble, tended to punish crimes only perpetrated by poor people, such as street prostitution or begging, quite differently from some other kinds of crimes, and predictably, one of the differences had to do with whether or not the penalty involved pain.

Asymmetric punishment practices like these have prompted historians to ask deeper questions about social attitudes, social practice, and social change. Why was it so hard for people to imagine that the tasks of daily life could get done without liberal doses of violence? Did status superiors really think their social inferiors were more like irrational animals than people? And experienced from the other side, how did the greater bodily vulnerability of slaves, serfs, demesne subjects, servants, wives, and others affect their sense of the world and of themselves within that world? These are some of the most challenging problems in the whole historical study of personhood and the individual self.

**Change over Time**

If the individual self was not wholly new in the early modern period it is nevertheless clear that some longer term trends did have a big impact upon it. And new social roles also emerged that had not been present before, or not to the same degree. Here there is only space to explore four big shifts. They are: increasing geographical mobility, print and literacy, the rise of more consumption-oriented societies, and the rise of much larger, more centralized military states.

One is accustomed to hearing that in the early modern period Europeans discovered the world and hence came to better understand themselves. This formulation offers much ground for criticism however. Europeans were not the only ones expanding into new territories, embracing new technologies, and engaging in new forms of self-reflection in the early modern period, and encounters with far-flung places were not new either. Still there is little question that in the early modern period Europeans came to have to explain themselves more than they had, both to themselves and to others. And it became far more
common than it had been for people to travel to, hear about, or read about distant countries. Both first-hand and second-hand encounters with unfamiliar places and peoples had the capacity to destabilize assumptions about social roles, morality, religion, and politics. On the other hand the self-reflection that presumably followed greater exposure to foreign climes did not always result in greater openness or mutual respect; indeed it could have the opposite effect. This is well-illustrated by a recent study of the early modern Habsburg encounter with people and exotic objects from the Aztec and Ottoman empires. Far from leading to cosmopolitan openness, these experiences appear to have led to the demise of an older posture of moral relativism and to have encouraged a belief in European moral superiority that would have major implications for later imperial projects.  

Still, at least some greater fluidity and flexibility (though also punctuated by self-doubt and even repression) may have ensued by virtue of the greater mobility of early modern people, the result of a striking increase in the number and size of towns—most of them peopled by immigrants from the countryside—better roads, the quickening of river and maritime trade across most of Europe and the Russian and Ottoman empires, better maps, etc. It was a standard claim in the medieval and early modern periods that the air was freer in towns and that towns also offered more opportunities for social mobility than the countryside did. As historians have shown, they were also characterized by very high death rates, especially among children and recent immigrants, by more persistent policing, and perhaps by more callous attitudes towards one’s neighbours. Nevertheless, some of the virtues of towns have held up to scrutiny: they really did multiply occupational prospects, allow more poor people to marry, and offer a greater abundance of opportunities for religious devotion and education, which in turn gave rise to new social roles and new kinds of self-fashioning.

Print and literacy are usually assumed to be positive things, but they can divide a society as well as unite it. Over the course of the period roughly 1400 to 1800 literacy rates rose substantially: initially perhaps 1 to 5 per cent of the population could read; by the end of our period literacy rates were close to 50 per cent in western Europe on average and somewhat lower in eastern Europe. There were also areas of astoundingly high literacy, most notably Sweden, which by the late eighteenth century boasted literacy rates as high as 98 per cent.  

But in most countries rising literacy—as well as the new prestige of literacy—probably meant that the cultural divide between elites and non-elites widened. Certainly literacy rates trace some of the key social distinctions of the early modern period, with women, the poor, and rural people lagging well behind men, better-off people, and town dwellers. Some groups, such as New World slaves, were routinely forbidden to learn to read (though of course people periodically defied these prohibitions). The literacy–illiteracy divide often reinforced the low status of the illiterate
Social Roles and Individual Identities

and became yet another argument for their exclusion from social privileges and political power.

On the other hand print and literacy also became a form of striving and a mental discipline to which many were drawn in the early modern period and the ability to write, which, in the early modern period, was less common than the ability to read, clearly generated new ways to describe a self and attempt to influence readers. Especially from the seventeenth century on, an increasing range of people—sailors, craftspeople, nuns, members of the lower nobility, Jews, Quakers, travellers, merchants, soldiers (including a whole genre written by women who dressed as men in order to enlist), criminals facing execution, male and female fine artists, unhappy wives, serfs, midwives, religious converts, former slaves, and others began penning (or dictating) autobiographies and other ‘ego-documents’ (to use a term originally developed by scholars from the Netherlands). These sources not only powerfully illuminate these various social categories but leave no doubt that early modern people had individual selves, inner lives, and a capacity both to embrace and defy convention that is every bit as powerful as that of people in the modern day.

By the end of the early modern period the ability to write, and the rise of a community of readers had actually changed the character of some older social roles and given rise to some new ones. Many eighteenth-century middling and elite women spent significant portions of their day writing letters. This clearly opened up new and more far-flung communication networks for some women, though for others it seems letter-writing turned into just one more onerous task. At the same time writing and print offered both men and women new ways to generate an income, through published letters, novels, journalism, plays, and poetry. It can hardly be coincidental that some of these early efforts, both by women and by men, were controversial precisely because of the ways they seemed to undermine traditional norms, by stressing heroines who resisted their guardians’ efforts to marry them to men they did not love, women who married above their class, or even (late in the eighteenth century) women who fell in love with men of a different race from themselves. They also helped create public intellectuals of both sexes, people who, in some cases, came to have an outsized influence on the societies around them. The Catholic mystic Mme Guyon (1648–1717) wrote best-selling devotional tracts that are still read today; Voltaire wrote bitingly witty poems and essays that became all the rage in educated circles; Jean-Jacques Rousseau, whose origins were humble, first came to fame with an essay he had submitted for one of the many eighteenth-century literary contests; Mme Riccoboni (1714–92), the estranged wife of an actor, became one of the best-selling novelists of the eighteenth century of either sex; the Abbé Sieyès, Thomas Paine, and Mary Wollstonecraft all wrote political pamphlets during the era of the French Revolution that sparked massive public interest. In short, writing,
and especially publishing, became a way to exert agency, to influence public opinion, and to make money. It also became part of the negotiation of identity for a far wider range of people than had ever been the case before.

In much of Europe, especially in the cities, the early modern period saw a significant increase in the availability of consumer goods. This was already evident by the fifteenth century in some of the Italian city states and the Ottoman Empire, but it became much more widespread from the later seventeenth century on, especially in major cities. Many historians see the early modern period as the time when ‘fashion’ emerged—by which they mean a reiterative relationship between consumer desire, novelty, and display, especially in clothes and home furnishings, usually linked to significant increases in the availability of luxury textiles. Fashion was tied closely to issues of identity and status. Then as now people sought to ‘create’ themselves in part through what they wore on their bodies or displayed in their homes and this inevitably caused anxiety in an extremely status- and role-conscious world. In much of Europe the broadening stream of silks and painted cottons arriving from Asia by sea and by land was met by a protective wall of sumptuary laws, attempts to force people to dress according to their station in life by forbidding individuals below a certain rank from wearing the new textiles or by banning particular fashions. Some sumptuary laws and proclamations were extraordinarily detailed, outlining dozens of social ranks and the particular colours or types of cloth or even cuts of clothes men and women of each rank were permitted to wear. Judging from the frequency with which they had to be repeated it does not appear that sumptuary laws were especially effective. In fact, if anything these rather bumbling efforts point to the difficulty of controlling the performance of social identity even in extremely hierarchical societies. Still, sumptuary laws are interesting as a window into what some early modern elites imagined social order to mean. All this has given rise to an extensive literature on consumption, the rise of shopping, and what one might call ‘shopping as resistance’—a topic that has especially interested some historians of gender. It has also suggested some powerful connections between identity formation and economic and cultural change, between the ‘microcosm’ of the desiring individual, who is actively trying to negotiate his or her place in the world, and the ‘macrocosm’ of trade, commodity production, and politics in an increasingly dynamic early modern world.

For a long time scholars saw ‘fashion’ (like the individual) as distinctively Western, but this position no longer enjoys much credibility. Craig Clunas’s Superfluous Things: Material Culture and Social Status in Early Modern China (1991) made an especially important intervention on this issue, and since it came out Clunas’s book has helped to inspire a great many other studies of consumer behaviour in Japan, South Asia, the Ottoman Empire, and elsewhere that clearly show that fashion (and self-fashioning) were in no sense unique to the early modern West. At present a good deal of attention
is being paid to early modern fashion as a prime example of the complex role of East-West interaction, one in which European traders and consumers adopted, adapted, and imitated the initially more advanced textile technologies of China and South Asia and made them the centre of a complex and contested terrain of innovation and collective self-fashioning. The trade with the East clearly led to a relative democratization of textile consumption, and, in time, to an increase in textile production for the market within Europe itself. Both trends intensified as a result of the Industrial Revolution, which was partly an attempt to use new technology and methods of organizing work so as compete with Asian textile producers.  

One final development we will deal with here is changes in the nature of European warfare and its relationship to the centralizing state. Historians often bundle these developments together under the rubric ‘the rise of the fiscal–military state’. From the perspective of social roles and individual identities, several aspects are important. One is the very significant increase in the size of armies and navies in the early modern period. Many more young men entered the army or navy, especially from the later seventeenth century on, than had ever been the case before, and they often did so involuntarily, as conscripts. This had broader social implications. Recent scholarship has tended to stress that early modern households were, in practice, far more open and permeable to outside influences than are ‘modern’ households. But when states began conducting censuses for tax and conscription purposes officials tended to assign people distinct roles and to give these permanence and meaning by writing them down in an official book. Censuses also tended to ‘fix’ and reify the household itself by treating it as a closed, bounded, entity. The new intrusions by the early modern states may, therefore, have led to significant shifts in the meaning of family as well as in the social roles and identities families tended to generate.

Soldiers with their insatiable needs also began to intrude much more into ordinary life. People, especially townspeople, often had soldiers or sailors billeted upon them; almost everyone paid higher taxes in order to sustain the growing cost of waging war, and large assemblages of soldiers, or, in port towns, heavily armed ships that were much bigger than most buildings, became a standard part of the city or townscape. The often-destitute wives, widows, and children of military men became a recognizable social category as well as a pressing social problem across Europe. In some places they were grudgingly offered small benefits, though usually only after a good deal of complaining and even, in some cases, public demonstrations by starving women and their children. In Russia in the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries Tsar Peter the Great reorganized the Russian army so that soldiers were drafted for life (their term was later shortened to twenty-five and then twenty years). This rendered ‘soldatkas’ (soldiers’ wives) functionally akin to widows—except that they could not remarry. Often they were
left with few or no means of support apart from prostitution and they were subject to various forms of social discrimination and stigmatization. Many early modern states (including Russia) tried, at least initially, to mitigate the social impact of military service by forbidding soldiers to marry, but the probable result of this was to increase illegitimacy and the desertion of sweethearts rather than to solve the problem.

Militaries also changed their internal structures. Early modern militaries were hierarchical institutions, and they made various efforts to ensure that the higher ranks were filled with men of noble rank. However, not least because the death rates were fairly high (though this was more the result of epidemic disease and of what today would be considered minor wounds than because very many men were killed outright in battle), the new militaries did offer opportunities for upward mobility to talented young men of humble birth. Over time this generated new social roles and forms of identification that were linked to particular ranks (the lengthy chain of command we are familiar with today largely dates from the early modern period). Militaries also encouraged new understandings of masculinity while offering many new ways to perform it. Soldiers and sailors were encouraged to develop a sense of service to the nation and they were sometimes given benefits (often small pensions) that differentiated them from civilians. In later years people with ties to the military often formed an especially important source of support for the various European imperial projects, projects for which they and their families had often made considerable sacrifices.

Current Trends in the Study of Structures and Subjectivity/Social Roles and Individual Identity

Over the last half century historians have clearly demonstrated that people of both sexes, below the level of the elite, at least sought to exert agency over their own lives, though the jury is out on how much difference it made. In recent years there has been something of a reaction against approaches that focus too much upon agency and resistance. It is not clear whether this is a return to more functionalist notions of society or the beginning of something entirely new. A fair amount of attention has recently been paid, especially by women’s historians, to the work of Saba Mahmood, writing on Egyptian women in the so-called ‘mosque movement’ in the present day. Mahmood argues that women’s studies scholars have too often sought to find themselves in the people they study, and have therefore overemphasized forms of agency that involve active resistance to patriarchal norms. Her claim is that agency is often much more complex than that. It may involve various forms of spiritual and bodily discipline. It may involve creatively redefining the role one has been assigned, including embracing its constraints and inegalitarian features. And it may have more to do with God and a future life than with the here and
now. If this approach takes hold it will certainly redirect the emphasis of historians of women and subaltern people.27

The canvas of history is far more crowded now than it used to be in the old days of the ‘Great Man’ theory. Consequently there is more interest in studying the interrelationships between different social groupings, and in a more complex way than simply as a story of oppression and resistance. There has been, for example, a considerable amount of critical attention paid to the social categories (and attendant roles) early modern (and later) people used themselves—a field of study especially associated with colonial historians and with the study of European notions of race, and often linked to inquiries into sexuality and other intimate bodily concerns. There is also a great deal of interest today in the ways early modern people came to identify with and support existing power structures—not just to resist them.

An ongoing problem for thinking about the self and society lies in the terminology. A term like ‘social role’ does not mean today what it meant in the 1960s. As we have seen this has something to do with the widespread retreat from and suspicion of functionalism, but it probably has more to do with the rise of deconstruction, the Foucauldian sense of swirling discourses of power—a rather different notion of constraint and possibility than is implied by the old term ‘social roles’. On the other hand social roles do retain a certain power even as their ‘essentialist’ character continues to be denied, and they may even be staging a hermeneutic comeback as a result of the current emphasis on performativity. ‘Individual identity’ has, if anything, become even more unstable and effervescent in recent decades: historians think they know what it is when they see it in the records, but they are increasingly unsure of how to characterize it. Current scholarship has been focusing a great deal upon issues like the changing nature of the performance of masculinity and the impact of trauma on identity, among other issues. The retreat from the notion that personhood, individual identity, or ‘the self’ are or ever have been distinctively Western, has also opened up numerous possibilities for studying hybrid identities and social roles, border crossing, and the performance and negotiation of self in a very wide range of contexts.

The very terms ‘social roles’ and ‘individual identities’ are modern ones, and while they have a few analogues in the early modern period, these will only take us so far.

Europeans of three hundred or more years ago can, at one moment, seem like people one could sit down to dinner with; at another moment they can strike us as incomprehensibly callous and strange. The medieval historian Caroline Bynum, in a recent meditation on the historical study of identity, speaks of ‘[an] encounter with the past whose lineaments are not what we at first assume, [and] whose traces in our sources answer questions we haven’t asked and deliver only silence to our initial, self-referential queries’.28 People may always have had an inner life, and certainly they have striven both to live with and to
evade the expectations life places upon them. But by its very nature this intricate and sometimes secretive performance is hard to study, there is a great deal still to discover, and there is much that can never be known.

**Further Reading**


*German History*, Vol. 28(3) (September 2010), Special issue on the Social Self and ‘Ego-documents’, edited by Mary Fulbrook and Ulinka Rublack.


Wirtschafter, Elise Kimerling. *Social Identity in Imperial Russia* (Dekalb, 1997).

Notes:

(1.) Thanks to my colleague Henrik Ågren for supplying the English translation.


(6.) A good recent collection of key writings of scholars broadly associated with the Subaltern Studies school is Vinayak Chaturvedi, ed., Mapping Subaltern Studies and the Postcolonial (Columbus, OH, 2000). An important recent work on slavery that pays a good deal of attention to these issues is Gwyn Campbell, Suzanne Miers, and Joseph Calder Miller, eds., Women and Slavery (2 vols.; Athens, 2007).


(11.) Maria Bogucka, Women in Early Modern Polish Society, against the European Background (Aldershot; Burlington, VT, 2004).


(19.) On the remarkable achievements of early modern Swedish literacy campaigners—who, unusually, extended their efforts both to women and men—see Egil Johansson, The History of Literacy in Sweden: In Comparison with Some Other Countries (Umeå, 1977).

(20.) Ability to orally read a verse from, say, the Bible, did not imply the ability also to write, even where literacy was high. Well into the nineteenth century many Swedes could read but not write, and this pattern probably held true throughout Europe.

(21.) See the special issue of German History, 28(3) (September 2010), guest edited by Mary Fulbrook and Ulinka Rublack on the promise of and methodological problems posed by ego-documents.


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Abstract and Keywords

This chapter provides both a survey and a critical interpretation of the growing literature on material culture and consumption in early modern Europe, focusing on the experience of Italy, France, the Dutch Republic, the German lands, England, and to a certain extent east–central Europe. It looks at different approaches to the history of the rise of purchasing consumer goods on the market, and the changing nature of goods desired in light of the expansion of long distance and global trade. It stresses the importance of considering the meaning such goods had for consumers of differing wealth in different social contexts.

Keywords: Consumption, consumer revolution, material culture, industrious revolution, clothing, food, everyday life, standard of living

It is undoubtedly the case that in the early modern period Europe became more commercial, and this offered more people the opportunity to purchase new things. By the eighteenth century it was, for example, more possible for a resident of Istanbul to purchase English woollen cloth, or for an English subject or Dutch citizen to buy oranges from Spain, currants from the Venetian Empire, and new goods such as tea from China. Historians’ attention has inevitably been drawn to the many comments by contemporaries concerning the novelty and diffusion of such items, but we must remember that much of what people consumed was regionally or nationally produced food, furniture, clothing, metal ware, and pottery. These were as often as not bought in local shops and workshops and were valued and enjoyed through canons of taste which might involve local identity, tradition, and custom. Novelty often came into conflict with these factors, making taste political and moral—for example in the case of Indian cottons and English woollen fabric for women’s clothes, or moral opposition to the ‘luxury’ of tea and coffee. Often the study
of consumption is seen as the progress of more material comfort and more choice for more people over time, and there is a basic truth to this. But just to focus on change or progress can obscure the meaning of and access to goods in different places both within countries and between them.

Poorer consumers in Naples by the eighteenth century had some access to ice cream sold by street vendors, but Tuscan sharecroppers could only use their limited disposable income for local cloth. The same Tuscan peasants made do with straw mats, while many rural English households had feather and flock mattresses in their beds as early as the late sixteenth century. The latter fact probably does point to a desire for comfort, even for some labourers, in England at that time, as pointed out by the contemporary William Harrison. In France and Italy beds became much more comfortable and valuable in towns, even for servants and labourers in Paris, with feather, down, and wool mattresses and bolsters as well as coloured curtains. Such increases in luxury, in contrast, were only available to the wealthy in the countryside. But in Württemberg even rural households demonstrate that good beds were considered necessary where lower and upper feather beds offered comfort and warmth. Slightly later in the seventeenth century Roman households of artisans and traders of what would be equivalent to the upper middling sort in England, possessed on average over forty pictures each, vastly more than simpler dwellings in England, although in the sixteenth century many English homes had painted hangings—probably canvas painted with greenery, decorative forms, or crude pictures, which had disappeared by the seventeenth century. Similarly window glass was so cheap by the seventeenth century in England it was almost universally used, but in areas without plentiful coal and other minerals, interiors in the winter would have been darker and colder. However, in general, all over Europe, new goods were adopted first and in significantly greater numbers in cities than in the country. In general, the larger a town, the greater its importance for national and international trade, giving its inhabitants more exposure to greater variety and possibly cheaper prices than rural villages and towns.

The Study of Consumption

Understanding the acquisition, use, dispersal, survival, and change of the millions of different things, from clay pipes disposed of after being used a number of times, to elaborately carved sideboards or painted dowry chests, is clearly an impossible task and simply to describe the state of the historiography would do a disservice to the taste, design, and provenance of the goods which form the basis of the study. We will attempt to summarize what is a continually growing literature, while at the same time providing some sense of the nature of goods being consumed. We will also consider how this was
related to the material conditions of different societies in the broadest sense—what Adam Smith called the state of public opulence—where more goods could be enjoyed by all, not only by discerning elites. The effect of the shift of trade from the Mediterranean to the Atlantic, as well as the catastrophe of warfare will be examined to some degree.

When examining the historiography of consumption studies it is convenient to make a distinction between two major trends. The first focuses on the diffusion of new goods and commercialization and has its origin in economic history. This has been by far most influential in British history and the history of the Dutch Republic and Flanders. The other, which stems from the Annales school in France and studies of the anthropology of material culture, looks more at the experience of things, and is less concerned with accumulation or social difference. A more anthropological approach was prevalent for a long time in Germany and in the Czech Republic, for example. Most theories of increasing consumption in English and Dutch historiography have had at their heart some sort of theory about economic growth or modernization which has involved a move from basic consumption, much of which was of home or locally produced goods, to more market oriented consumption involving more elaborate or decorative manufactured and imported goods, especially clothing. This is the process that Adam Smith wrote about (p. 371) in 1776. He argued that in the end all capital was directed towards consumption, and that investment capital led to the increasing division of labour helped by machinery to produce goods of better quality for cheaper prices to be sold on the market. This can be plainly seen in his wonderfully tactile description of the wide number of economic processes which went into the making of a day labourer’s coat:

The woollen coat, for example, which covers the day-labourer, as coarse and rough as it may appear, is the produce of the joint labour of a great multitude of workmen. The shepherd, the sorter of the wool, the wool-comber or carder, the dyer, the scribbler, the spinner, the weaver, the fuller, the dresser, with many others... we shall be sensible that without the assistance and co-operation of many thousands, the very meanest person in a civilized country could not be provided.3

Also increased trade was able to supply a much wider variety of goods from around a country and eventually from around the globe, although customs, tolls, or lack of proximity to cheaper water-based transport could raise the price of imports in many places.

The ‘birth’ of this strand of historiography can be traced back to a seminal collection of essays in English history published in the 1980s, McKendrick, Brewer, and Plumb’s Birth of a Consumer Society.4 The agenda of ‘commercialization’ was set by McKendrick in his essay ‘The Consumer Revolution in Eighteenth-Century England’ which was to shift the emphasis in economic history from the study of increasingly productive output preceding
industrialization, to the demand side of the economy interpreted through the lens of social behaviour. McKendrick especially focused on the success of one manufacturing enterprise, the Wedgewood Potteries, in proactively creating popular middle class markets for its high quality mass manufactured porcelain and earthenware. He also focused on new economic and social thought such as that of Mandeville, which justified spending on luxury, and he examined advertising and women’s seasonal fashion as ways of generating demand for new consumer products, and on the role of women as consumers. More controversially, he also focused on emulation of the aristocracy in fashion and tea ceremonies as a primary motivation behind the purchasing of new goods. His periodization was very much focused on the late eighteenth century, and was Anglocentric. This was a commercial society becoming richer through colonial trade, which also supplied new goods such as sugar, tea, coffee, and cotton. Market novelty was stressed as a motor for economic development, as consumers desired new goods and luxuries.

This was followed in 1988 by Lorna Weatherill’s *Consumer Behaviour and Material Culture in Britain 1660–1760*, which provided the first empirically detailed study of the changing patterns of domestic ownership of goods bought on the market such as clocks, mirrors, pictures, china, and pewter plates, employing perhaps the seminal source for the study of consumption, the probate inventory taken upon the decease of a household head. Her investigation went back to 1660 but ended in 1760 due to the survival of sources available for her sampling technique. Inventories, as we shall see, were a common part of the management of death, and in some jurisdictions marriage, all over Europe. There are literally millions of such lists of goods in households, inns, workplaces, and shops, all over Europe. However, as has been stated repeatedly, they constitute a static source which does not supply the weekly or yearly dynamics of when and why people purchased certain items. Moreover, they also do not tell us if goods were bought second hand, inherited, or how often they were replaced. However, where marriage inventories exist, purchased additions to inherited goods and marriage portions can be seen. Also a significant difference exists between English inventories and those which have been analysed for France, the Netherlands, some German territories, Italy, and Bohemia. In England, probate was administered by the diocese and the appraisal of goods was undertaken by knowledgeable neighbours, while elsewhere they were done professionally by notaries or community officeholders (Württemberg) who were paid more for their task. Also, numerous items were appraised in English inventories—cooking utensils, for instance—which were usually intended for auction, while in areas with partible inheritance goods were itemized very carefully to be valued and initially divided between the legatees. One result of this is that English inventories more rarely have individual prices and say much less about the nature of the goods. Inventories for Paris, Bohemia, southwest Germany, or Rome by contrast contain an invaluable wealth of qualitative
description such as the colour and texture of clothing, curtains, and tapestries, descriptions of pictures, and the style and wood used for furniture. In England, a table might be listed, or a carved table, but the nature of the carving can only be guessed at. Similarly a painted hanging, occurring in the inventories of even very poor people, leaves the reader literally hanging, wondering what was painted on the sheets of canvas.

Other sources such as account books have been used to try to overcome this problem, but while a good run of accounts can give a dynamic shape to some purchases, the entries are still often laconic about the nature and quality of purchases. However, inventories are an invaluable comparative source and can be used to compare town and countryside, different geographical areas, gender differences, and perhaps most importantly variations in ownership between different social and occupational groups. For many regions social coverage remains a problem though. Where drawing up inventories was not mandatory, a social bias occurs in that many more lists of more wealthy households survive. In Württemberg, for instance, inventories covered a large part of all social strata and both sexes because they were legally introduced with the Duchy’s law code (Landrecht), which made death inventories compulsory in 1555, and marriage inventories in 1610. They served inheritance settlements in view of partible inheritance and thus addressed both women and men. The resulting richness of the southwest German inventories allows a more detailed analysis of the socio-demographic context as well as of the material culture. Indeed, other central European inventories show the same amount of detail, for example from South Tirol, where inventories from the end of the fifteenth century can be found, or Bohemia.

Arguably the best way to analyse consumption is by combining quantitative and qualitative sources, if this is possible. Hospital accounts and ordinances for information on daily diets and later medical sources such as topographies can be used to study food consumption and the quality of dress and housing. In the same category are travelogues. On a regional consumption level toll and customs registers, tax registers, and foreign trade statistics have also been utilized. Less used are court records, but they are increasingly being consulted, for example by Hans Medick and Sheilagh Ogilvie. Wills also have the potential to reveal the most valued and thus meaningful personal objects. Similarly, research on ego-documents offers insights into what people thought about their own and others’ goods.

A number of other volumes on consumption followed in the early 1990s comparing England and colonial America, and a series of essays covering a wide variety of areas such as different objects, print culture, and attempts to discover the meaning of goods, and the psychology of the ‘consumer’ as an historical agent motivated by a desire for new things rather than embedded in local customs of taste and continuity. This historical interest developed against the background of a politically changing landscape in 1980s
Britain as consumerism became a means to attack the standoff between strong unions and a complacent uncompetitive managerial class. In the years since, with consumerism triumphant, work has continued apace on English consumption with further examination of the production and importation of luxury goods such as brass buckles or Chinese porcelain and silk, together with their role in shaping the identity of the rapidly growing middle classes in towns like Birmingham, Leeds, and Manchester, as well as an analysis of the largest sample of inventories yet, going back to 1700, which stressed home production and regional variation rather than the accumulation of new luxuries over time.\textsuperscript{11}

Looking at central European historiography we encounter a different situation. In 1982, independently of McKendrick’s study, Roman Sandgruber published a study on the beginnings of the consumer society in which he analysed consumption, living standards, and the everyday culture of Austria in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries—from the history of food, to changes in the production of textiles and the demand for clothes, to housing conditions. By specifically looking at the demand side as well as at the supply side, he aimed to complement the history of industrialization during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. He looked at different social groups, namely peasants, labourers, the middling sorts (bourgeoisie), and the aristocracy. Class structure and the different experience and behaviour of social groups is an integral part of his book. For instance, Sandgruber investigated the question of what was needed to convince peasants and labourers to increase their market participation which involved longer working hours and more risk of unemployment. In his view, the supply of desirable and cheap market goods, which were regarded as superior to self-sufficiency, acted as an incentive to higher market participation. Sandgruber here was responding to an early formulation of Jan de Vries’s industrious revolution thesis in his book \textit{The Dutch Rural Economy} (1974). Sandgruber’s pioneering study for Austria was, however, not as influential in German-language historiography as McKendrick’s or de Vries’s theories were in English and Dutch. Because neo-liberal ideas were at that time not as influential in Europe outside of England, the history of production and labour tended to dominate over the history of consumption. Instead of being based on theories from economic history, subsequent central European consumption studies were rooted in everyday life and social anthropological studies of material culture (Austria, Germany, and the Czech Republic).\textsuperscript{12} The entrenchment in social anthropology created a pathway to material culture studies in history. Emphasis was put on historical analysis of material and object culture by conducting micro studies.

In the past twenty years, Jan de Vries’s theory of the industrious revolution, most fully formulated in a book published in 2008, has become more influential than that of the consumer revolution or of commercial society. The theory originated in his work on Dutch
rural inventories from the provinces of Friesland, Groningen, and Holland in the early modern centuries. He argued that during this period households increased their labour market participation in order to buy new consumer goods with the money they earned from their labour. This increase in work could be achieved in a number of different ways: by individuals working more hours or more intensely over the course of a day, or it could involve more members of the family participating in work, such as the wife and children working in the cloth industry. He termed this the ‘industrious revolution’ to account for this increased work. In his earlier work, he specifically focused on household goods as the key items of new consumption. However, in his recent book he has retreated from this claim somewhat by noting that in his previous work not enough inventory evidence exists to argue that the consumption of household goods by the poorer part of the population increased. Instead, he has focused on the growth in the popular consumption of new food items such as tobacco, sugar, and tea. De Vries’s theory is important because it is a way of bringing the majority of the population into the field of consumption studies.

Also, several studies have been published looking at the poor and at household (everyday) objects, such as the clothing of the poor, and mundane and breakable objects such as ceramics and thimbles as well as kitchenware. What this work seems to suggest is that market purchases were numerous before novelties like tea or sugar began to be imported in large quantities. Already in the sixteenth century English labourers owned a large number of pewter items and had feather beds, linen, and roasting equipment. An increased opportunity for work did allow the poor to buy more, but their strategies were varied and not directly emulative. In the years from 1742 to 1754, when the daughters of the poor Richard Latham, a labouring smallholder from Lancashire, entered their teenage years and remained at home earning money from cotton spinning, the average annual household expenditure went up from about £16 to £28, while expenditure on clothes trebled. Labourers in England only marginally improved the quality of their goods when their earnings increased after 1660, rather than buying silver spoons, or porcelain, or clocks. Clothes too might be more influenced by gendered labouring roles than emulation, and less expensive decorative elements like brass buttons or silk ribbons had their own market and fashion trends. Tobacco, the first mass consumed colonial import, was taken up by poorer consumers during the tumultuous years of civil war and revolution in England, and although the story of this process has yet to be written, it must have been influenced by the experience of soldiering.

For France and Italy we immediately see the impact of different schools of historiography, most prominently that of the Annales, and especially Braudel’s Civilisation and Capitalism centred around experiences within the household, especially eating and sleeping. Although this approach is often simply termed part of the history of...
material culture, this perhaps places too much emphasis on the centrality of the object or things and not the ensemble and process of which it is a part. Its nature is possibly better captured if we adopt and modify the concept used by historians of America of ‘foodways’ to describe the study of how and why people eat what they eat and what it means. So perhaps this literature is better called a ‘material pathways’ approach, which looks at how and where people slept, how they experienced lighting, and most prominently how, when, and why they ate together. An inventory in this approach is a map through the activities of a household with clues to smells, sights, and textures more than a list of objects for comparison or data for a spreadsheet, and here perhaps the difference in the nature of the documents has influenced the way history has been written.

In the first volume of Braudel’s great pioneering attempt to write an economic history for the early modern globe published in 1979, after dealing with population, he turned immediately to chapters on daily bread, food and drink, and then houses, clothes, and fashion, before turning to energy, technology, and money. But even before Braudel, continental literature focused more on behaviour and meaning of food, in relation to space and apparel, and focused less on economic changes such as the rise of overseas imports. The fruits of this literature have been beautifully brought together in Raffaella Sarti’s wonderful survey *Europe at Home*, where, for instance, the function of a tablecloth (and other eating utensils and vessels) is discussed in a survey of eating and manners. This literature has always seen food as a central part of both consumption and material culture, which is certainly appropriate given both the cultural and economic importance of eating. Food was vital for work; and for socializing and doing business. In an era before electronic communication, and of travel by foot and horse, it was almost always the case that meals were offered to others and were the activity where people interacted with each other’s households. For most households the cost of food formed over 70 per cent of the yearly household budget, even if some of it was grown at home in gardens and orchards, or traded for wages. Eating, as well as the time spent in its preparation, not to mention the cost of utensils and heat, took up many hours of the day. Even for wealthy households expenditure on food took up roughly half of the total expenditure compared to 10–15 per cent on clothing. Also, domestic furniture tended to be bought or inherited in bulk at the time of marriage and added to or exchanged only a few times per year thereafter, while kitchenware and eating utensils were in daily use and needed to be replaced most often.

Also, it was foodstuffs more than anything which drove the early modern expansion of overseas trade. Portuguese and then Spanish exploration was motivated by the search for a direct sea route to spice-producing areas in the east to bypass the middlemen of India, the Levant, and Venice. The Dutch golden age was characterized by contemporaries as an age of wealth fuelled by the spice trade which they won from the Portuguese. The
development of seaborne trade in the Mediterranean was significantly driven by the desire for oranges, lemons, and currants in northern Europe. In the Atlantic trade (after gold and silver), sugar, tobacco, and fish predominated. Although the trade with India and China was initially dominated by cotton and silk fabric, tea eventually predominated, and porcelain dishes were also imported into Europe in vast numbers by the mid-seventeenth century. Marcy Norton has produced a brilliant study of the intricacies of the cultural transfer of taste and ceremony involving the consumption of chocolate and tobacco from Spanish America to European Spain and then England in the sixteenth century. Given this, it is striking that English consumption historiography has not engaged very greatly with food apart from the popular commercialization of coffee drinking, and work on cooking and kitchenware. The social importance of meals and their preparation still needs more research, and we still need to know more about how tobacco became popular, and how tea supplanted coffee as a popular hot drink.

This demonstrates why it is crucial to think of how people enjoyed things in a cultural context, and how contexts changed as new tastes and patterns of sociability became known from encounters with other cultures. However, such enjoyment was obviously affected by access and purchasing power, so it is equally important to look at things in the light of market availability and cost, and studies of England and the Low Countries have generally been more attuned to the effect of wealth on consumption.

**Change Over Time**

In the years since McKendrick focused on the late eighteenth century as the period of the ‘birth’ of a consumer society, many historians of consumption in earlier periods have been debating the origins, the places, and the timing of the changes in consumer behaviour, and historians of all periods have laid claim to some sort of consumerism. This has not been difficult, because at least since the Middle Ages it has always been possible to buy manufactured goods on the market, and many exquisitely manufactured goods were sourced by elites from places of specialized production. But surely this is insufficient to characterize a consumer society? It would be better to look for some evidence of Adam Smith’s virtuous circle of consumption and employment which he termed ‘public opulence’. Here, a widespread social demand for manufactured goods produced by specialists, and traded widely on the market, led to more employment, rising wages, and more consumption. Finally, in Smith’s view, a stasis had been reached based on the limits of animal energy powering machines (something he thought had occurred in China by the thirteenth century).
Smith made little distinction between labourers and the middling sort, but one might expect to find a socially widespread ability to purchase a range of manufactured goods or distantly produced goods in shops or from pedlars. This is, of course, an economic more than a cultural argument, but avoids the problem of having to judge between the subjective value of a peasant’s polenta and a silver astrolabe. It might be that consumerism is the decision to accept a hierarchy of enjoyment based on market goods and imported novelty, but the local and the imported could be valued and used in different ways, such as silk ribbon worn with homemade linen. But it is probable that the better workmanship supplied by specialization, the greater colour offered by fabrics finished by specialized dyers with access to imported colouring agents, or indeed all of the English feather mattresses required sophisticated market structures and a link between the division of labour and consumer desire.

Of course, just how much of this type of consumption grew over time, and how many poorer customers there were is difficult to say. The idea that medieval households were self-sufficient has been shown to be false. In east Switzerland, for example, a study found that fifteenth-century rural households were integrated into a complex system of exchange, buying, and selling foodstuffs, and that they could satisfy their consumption needs through those networks. Peasants appeared in this area of study not only as suppliers but also as consumers. Archaeological findings in southwest Germany too show how people’s diet included fruit and spices traded with the Mediterranean. Also rural labouring households in England possessed more brass and pewter items during the sixteenth century than later. But, as a number of historians have argued, by the eighteenth century in many areas there was a much wider and more regular consumption of less durable items and luxury foodstuffs. Non-European products such as tea, coffee, and sugar were regularly drunk by large segments of the population of many areas out of earthenware cups produced in specialist areas like Delft or Staffordshire in England. Increasingly industrially produced linen replaced homespun hemp, and colourful printed Indian calico dressed more women. Silk ribbons produced in Spittlefields and Basle were sold all over Europe. Of course there were similar examples which pre-dated this, such as Florentine eyeglasses and Spanish and Virginia tobacco and clay pipes, but many more can be found by the mid-eighteenth century.

Thus, some contours of a chronology are clear. By the fifteenth century in the highly urbanized Northern Italian peninsula a consumer society can be verified which involved innovative production and shops producing for both home consumption and export to northern Europe. By the mid-sixteenth century, Lisbon was already shipping more pepper to northern Europe than was being imported through Venice, and a culture of sugar consumption from production in the Portuguese Atlantic islands and Brazil was beginning. There is less work on the fifteenth- and early sixteenth-century expansion of
German cities in relation to consumption, but many manufactured goods and artworks were certainly being produced, and Cracow’s famous cloth hall was selling imported Italian cloth from the late Middle Ages throughout our period.26 There is much more work done on the rise of commercial society and consumption in the seventeenth-century Low Countries and England, where an increase in consumption can be traced first in the cloth producing towns and the export centre of Antwerp, and then after the Dutch Revolt in the cities of Holland. Probate inventories also show a very rapid growth in consumption in yeomen’s and tradesmen’s households in English towns and countryside after 1550, which is supported by trade records and some industrial growth. Unfortunately, documentation on London households is rare before 1660, but given the rate of its growth London was undoubtedly a centre of consumption, especially of luxury goods. But whether it rivalled Amsterdam in its embarrassment of riches before the late seventeenth century is more difficult to say.

In France and central Europe the successive disruptions caused by the Wars of Religion and the Thirty Years’ War means we do not know enough about these years.27 Whereas some regions and cities such as Leipzig and Frankfurt, the two big fair centres, showed resilience, other regions like Augsburg and Nürnberg experienced economic decline. There was also a transition from the south linked to the Mediterranean to an Atlantic orientated northwest.28 Market consumption was affected by a different sort of change in Poland, Russia, Ukraine, Hungary, and the Bohemian crown lands where the development of ‘demesne lordship’ during the late fifteenth to the early seventeenth century tied the peasants to the land. This often entailed labour obligations, and the dependency of the rural population on the landlords. In contrast to the medieval form of serfdom, the landlords now sold much of the produce such as grain on a growing market (for example Poland supplied the Dutch Republic with much of its grain consumption) which led in some areas to rising labour obligations. Thus elite consumption could flourish, and with it consumption in urban market centres, but there was no public opulence for the peasantry although the nature and economic consequences of the ‘demesne lordship’ is subject to ongoing research.29

In Italy, the seventeenth century has been portrayed as the beginning of a long period of stagnation and then decline of industrial production and living standards.30 But a vibrant consumer society and household culture continued in Rome throughout the seventeenth century. By the eighteenth century we have many more studies for France and the German lands and some work on Spain as well. Work on Germany reveals similar changes in consumption patterns, namely the increase of the purchase of ‘decencies’ and manufactured goods by the middle classes such as mirrors and clocks, the diffusion of new materials and fashions such as printed cotton (calico), and the impact of new stimulants such as coffee and tea on the market. Such changes in central Europe
appeared much later and only for the second half of the eighteenth and beginning of the nineteenth century.\footnote{31}

The scholarship already mentioned demonstrates the continually growing wealth of England, especially during the second half of the eighteenth century, with a generally Smithian rise of consumption. The wealth of Paris is demonstrated in a study by Daniel Roche, which also shows there were some labourers and servants benefiting from a rise in ownership, although since the notarial inventories used were more expensive than the English process, they might be more biased towards the better off. Evidence from orphans’ inventories in eighteenth-century Amsterdam also shows an involvement in consumption of hot drinks. This was also the case in Paris before the French Revolution.\footnote{32} Also by the mid-eighteenth century the use of colonial imports such as tobacco, tea, sugar, and cotton was widespread through all of society, and equally there is evidence of the consumption of tea, coffee, and sugar in the major cities of the continent, but it is much less clear as to whether there was much diffusion in the countryside especially amongst peasants, whereas by the 1780s we know that a majority of English labourers drank sweetened tea.

We will now look in more depth at Italy, England, and the Low Countries, France, Germany, and eastern Europe to see what points of comparison can be made.

(p. 379) **Italy**

Renaissance towns such as Florence or Venice have been studied as the site of the development of the first consumer society of shoppers beginning in the fifteenth century. Evelyn Welch has combined an examination of private household accounts with the wonderful pictorial depictions of shops found in frescoes, most notably those in the Castello di Issogne in the Valle d’Aosta from c. 1500 of an apothecary, draper, grocer, pie shop, and market.\footnote{33} However the majority of such shopping was undertaken by the wealthy urban elite who had profited from banking as well as cloth and silk production, among other growing industries and services in this period. They could afford to purchase such things as silk stockings, coloured woollens, blown glass, sugar, and spices. In fifteenth-century Florence the greatest area of consumption on the part of elites was the built environment. The construction and decoration of palazzi was as important as the items bought to put inside them, employing many carvers and decorators. But the number of such palazzi ensured that there was also a growing market for finely produced artisanal goods such as marriage chests (cassoni), musical instruments, fine glassware, and paintings. The Catasto (tax list) of 1427 shows the number and wide variety of shops in Florence at the time. One shop contained almost 10,000 drinking glasses alone demonstrating there must have been a wide market. However going down the social scale
we find much less information. What poor labourers and artisans had in their households is more difficult to know, although in the late sixteenth century the artist Vasari commented that there was not a shoemaker’s house without a painting. The Florentine glass industry developed the technique of grinding glass into lenses for eyeglasses to the extent that a pair could be bought for a fifth of a day’s wages and hundreds of thousands were exported all over Europe. To the north the Bolognese silk manufacturing industry developed the technological capability to mass produce silk thread through the application of massive three-storey silk winding mills which were used to produce the diaphanous veils for women which can be seen in so many paintings of the period.

The institutions of the Monte di Pietà, church-sanctioned pawn shops, offered cheaper credit to the poor (usually 5 per cent interest) on receipt of pledges, which also demonstrates how crucial the possession of goods of lesser value was in the economy of the poor. They needed certain sorts of goods which were not too expensive to be placed at pawn in order that they could obtain cash to purchase food, healthcare, and other daily needs in relation to consumption. In early seventeenth-century Bologna, for instance, over 100,000 goods were pawned annually at the Monte, generating 500,000 lire of loans. The most common goods pawned were items of clothing, followed by linen, bedding, and other household items. Some items were described as being poor and worn, but many pieces of clothing were brightly coloured in red, green, and pink. The Florentine apothecary shop, the Speziale al Giglio served a large number of both poor and wealthy clients in the 1490s, and most debts were eventually paid in kind. Here both valuable and poorer quality pledges were deposited. A set of c. 100 Tuscan peasant inventories has been studied which shows that for poor sharecroppers, market participation was extremely limited, and standards of living were generally low with only small numbers of goods possessed. However it was possible to spend some surplus earnings on commercially produced textiles and clothing.

Renata Ago’s study of a set of c. 80 seventeenth-century Roman inventories of largely wealthier middling sort households of artisans and merchants focuses very much on what she terms the ‘gusto’ for things—a word which nicely encompasses both the desire and pleasure people took in the use and display of things in the rooms of their households. Unlike their more prosaic English counterparts, the Roman inventories contain much more information on the colour and texture of fabrics, both of clothing and wall coverings, as well as more detailed descriptions of the nature of goods. Over time Ago finds an increasing specialization of rooms and an increase in linen. One interesting aspect of these households was the fact that the linen and many good quality goods were locked up for much of the time, giving rooms a bare quality except for special occasions. Also, only a minority of households had much kitchenware listed, implying that cooking was done outside the household by specialists. But perhaps the most striking aspect of
these Roman dwellings was the huge number of paintings they contained, with an average of twenty-three each. Although devotional images predominated, there were also many portraits and Flemish landscapes.\textsuperscript{39}

After the rise of Atlantic trade routes, and increased competition from English woollen and glass manufacturers and French and Swiss silk makers, the Italian economy stagnated from the late seventeenth century, although an elite luxury consumer culture survived in Rome based on papal revenues and in Venice and Florence based on luxury production. It has been argued by Paolo Malanima that the basic standard of living of the poor declined dramatically in Italy after this. However his argument is based more on real wage data than on the inventories he previously studied. Here, consumption is heavily abstracted into a basket of consumables as a way of dealing with poorer consumers. This is a methodology which has proved very useful as a way of making broad comparisons of standards of living around the world when dealing with the poor. But for examining the lives of poorer people this approach unfortunately obscures any agency the poor had, let alone \textit{gusto}. The food and alcohol as well as silk ribbons or printed cottons and canvas wall hangings they enjoyed, or aspired to enjoy, are ignored and we are left with more of an impoverished explanation than a material pathway for the poor.

\section*{The Netherlands}

The wealth of the Dutch economy and especially of Amsterdam has attracted the attention of many historians. The most comprehensive study by de Vries and van der Woude, has argued that it was the first modern economy, but this argument is constructed almost entirely from the point of view of production and trade. Although de Vries had examined 640 rural inventories to examine demand over the period from 1550–1750 in his 1974 work on the rural economy of the northern Netherlands, in the \textit{First Modern Economy}, consumption and demand in what was a very urbanized economy for that time, was largely ignored.\textsuperscript{40} However, he used the increase he found in books, mirrors, silver, and shirts as a starting point for his industrious revolution argument. An entirely different approach was adopted by Simon Schama in his interpretation of the Dutch golden age, \textit{The Embarrassment of Riches}. He organized his book around the theme of Calvinist disquiet with luxury spending in the face of the expense of the religious conflict with Catholicism and interpreted the moral messages in genre paintings about clean vs. disorderly households, the importance of children, and the meaning of maps among many other topics. However, there was no quantitative approach, but one example of what we might term a middling sort inventory was used to describe the physical nature of the household.\textsuperscript{41} Fasting and feasting also get a chapter in relation to atonement. There was also a huge popular market for genre painting in
seventeenth-century Holland, with estimates of up to three million paintings being made and sold. Despite reservations about too much buying leading to excess, this is what happened during the famous ‘tulipmania’ episode of the 1630s, when speculation in bulbs which might potentially produce the valuable multi-coloured flame-like patterning we now know to have been caused by a virus, led to a bubble in which some bulbs sold and resold for the value of houses. Here chance and the fetishization of a certain aesthetic delight led to hyper-marketization of value in an ephemeral object.

The most detailed empirical work on the Low Countries has been done for eighteenth-century Antwerp, Aalst in the Catholic Netherlands, and Delft and Doesburg in Holland. This, like much other empirical work on continental Europe, focuses on the late seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. This work has shown a decline in wealth and value of possessions towards the end of the eighteenth century as the economy stagnated. However, despite the economic strain, even the poorer inventories in the sample saw growing ownership of earthenware and other utensils and equipment to serve hot drinks, and has argued that the take up of tea and coffee was achieved despite the falling total value of household goods, by item substitution. New fashionable things were afforded by abandoning older less fashionable items. So coffee and tea pots, as well as cups and straw mattresses, increased while dresser boards, and mattresses, for instance, decreased. In Amsterdam too Anne McCants has demonstrated the ownership of coffee and tea drinking accessories amongst the Amsterdam poor.

**England**

In terms of empirical depth, no country has been studied as intensively as England, where well over 14,000 probate inventories have been subject to various degrees of quantitative analysis, ranging in date from 1550 to 1800, although with most emphasis placed on the period between 1600–1750. In addition many account books and some diaries have been consulted to get a better sense of the dynamics of consumption over time. From all of these studies some brief trends can be extrapolated. England had suffered a great decline in commercial activity towards the end of the fifteenth century, and the story of the sixteenth century was one of re-commercialization and expansion driven by a growing amount of profit oriented capitalist farming. This in turn led to urban specialization to supply the so-called yeoman farmers with new consumer items. There was a rapid increase in the numbers of items in inventories of the expanding middling sort between 1550 and 1600. Most of this increase was accounted for by items produced by artisans such as furniture and pewter tableware, but imports such as linen sheets and tablecloths also rose. Imported fruit from the Mediterranean also became common by the turn of the century. The period after 1600 until 1750 then seems to have
been one of continuing expansion of material wealth, especially in towns and wealthier agricultural counties. The total value of goods such as furniture, linen, and tableware in households went up, while the market price declined. After 1650 it seems that even the households of labourers experienced a modest rise in the value of their household goods, and very moderate trading up in the quality of such goods.

Houses became divided into more specialized rooms, and grew with the addition of second floors. More fireplaces were constructed for warmth. Also after 1650 more wealthier households began to possess a greater number of expensive items such as clocks, mirrors, pictures, and china. Broad-based consumption increased with the rise in use of colonial beverages and drugs. Smoking Virginia tobacco became almost universally practised throughout society by the 1650s. Then by 1720 coffee had become a common beverage for at least the middling sort in towns, consumed not at home but in coffee houses. However it went into decline once the East India Company started to promote tea as an alternative beverage, which was brewed more commonly in the home rather than in drinking establishments. By 1770 both tea and sugar produced on West Indian slave plantations had become items of consumption in labouring households. In terms of the rise of popular luxury goods such as porcelain tea cups and clocks, it seems that the largest rise was indeed after 1750, especially in the northern county of Yorkshire whose wealth was increasing with industrialization. Popular consumption was hit by rising food prices and war after 1780, but middling sort consumption continued to grow. However, geographical differences could be crucial—Cornwall, a county with poor agricultural resources and located a distance from the trade connections of London, experienced almost no rise in material wealth in this period, while highland Scotland suffered a severe famine in the 1690s.

It is probably a fair assessment that this wealth of data gives us a much better and more comprehensive picture of change over time for all ranks of society over much of England than we have for any other area of Europe. But, apart from a few exceptions, such as Lorna Weatherill’s chapter on the domestic environment, John Styles’s work on clothing, Jane Whittle and Elizabeth Griffiths’s book on purchasing decisions in the le Strange household, and Craig Muldrew on labourers’ food, the reader needs to look elsewhere for a qualitative description of how people moved through these households and used the goods. The experience of the warmth of 60 lbs. of feathers in a bed, or how candlelight might reflect the laughter at a dinner party in a mirror is not considered. Qualitative experience is written separately from quantitative studies.
France

Turning to France, the focus is very much on Paris from the late seventeenth century to the beginning of the French Revolution. In the *People of Paris*, Daniel Roche has examined 400 inventories of wage labourers and servants for the periods 1695–1715 and 1775–90, and subsequently 1,000 inventories for similar periods for *The Culture of Clothing*. Paris is also the subject of the study of almost 3,000 inventories by Annick Pardailhé-Galabrun and her colleagues in *The Birth of Intimacy: Privacy and Domestic Life in Early Modern Paris*. These fine studies provide us with an enormous amount of detail on what households and dress were like during the ancien régime. These Parisian inventories were drawn up by notaries and, as Roche notes, were expensive to produce. As a result only 10–15 per cent of the population of Paris was inventoried. But since social difference was a central feature of his study he searched for occupational designations to look at the poorest groups found in the documents so that they could be compared to wealthier occupations and nobles. But these were still a fairly well off strata of the poorer sections of society. The average value of the fortunes of the labourers for instance in the earlier period was 776 livres, equal to almost three years’ wages. But what is remarkable about his findings is the rise in wealth of this poorer group. By the later part of the century, wage earners’ fortunes had risen to be worth 1,776 livres, despite the fact that male wages had not increased that much. This resulted in a number of changes in living standards, including the ownership of more and finer earthenware and porcelain, and the decline of pewter table and copper kitchen ware. New types of furniture such as chests of drawers and sideboards were also acquired, and some families also had stoves instead of hearths. However, rents also rose over the century and the majority of wage earners and servants still had to cram everything into one-room dwellings, often on the second storey or higher.

But the most significant change indicating a rise in the standard of living was found in the increased value of clothing in the inventories. Wardrobes and linen rose from an average value of 42 livres for wage-earners to 115 livres, or by 215 per cent. In contrast, the rise in the value of goods in everyday use was only 44 per cent. This increase becomes even more significant when compared to the much more modest rise in the value of bourgeois wardrobes. Women’s wardrobes grew in value more than men’s and by 1789 wage earners possessed more silks and their clothing was more colourful, with brighter reds and yellows together with stripes and patterns. Colour was also found in the poorer rooms in the form of bed curtains, and the universal use of cheaper green or grey Bergamo tapestries and door hangings. Some rooms, however, were papered instead by the end of the century. Interestingly, mirrors, which were produced by the famous royal manufactory, were present in over 60 per cent of wage earners’ dwellings...
already by the beginning of the eighteenth century, a much higher level of ownership than in English or central European rural inventories of all classes at the same time.

The presentation of a much broader range of Parisian households in the Birth of Intimacy is perhaps the most exemplary ‘material pathway’ approach. Although 15 per cent of the sample of inventories is drawn from the seventeenth century, it is really also a book about the changing eighteenth century. The reader is given a real sense of the size, layout, and physical textures and colours present in rooms. Reactions to things such as the different sorts of heat from stoves instead of hearths are described. So too is the full complexity and multitude of colours for the beds found in wealthier households, some of which were worth considerable amounts. Here again we see some general changes over the century, with the creation of more private rooms and spaces for sleeping and dining being particularly important. Also, things became more colourful over the century, and there was a rise in the possession of many more porcelain and earthenware utensils, especially for drinking coffee. The possession of pictures also increased to around seven or eight per household, with as many as 88 per cent of waged households possessing a picture by the 1770s.54

Thus, eighteenth-century Paris was certainly an expanding consumer society involving increased consumption across a wide range of social classes. Roche broadened his research in a subsequent volume, A History of Everyday Things: The Birth of Consumption in France, 1600–1800, in which urban and rural consumption is compared, and as elsewhere, the possession of more and newer goods was much more common in urban areas, and even more so in Paris. This book also gathers and expands previous research on lighting to describe experiences of household activities at night or the possibilities of urban street life after dark. A common household object like the candle is related to space and activity such as singing. The meaning of light in churches and the expense of public lighting by the early nineteenth century are examined. Here the approach is by way of evidential example and imaginative connection, although the price of candles and their quality, whether tallow or wax, was considered as a mark of wealth in households as well as public spaces. The use of water, together with the cost, labour involved, and availability of soap, are examined in order to provide a sense of the possibilities of hygiene and cleanliness according to wealth. The Culture of Clothing also stressed the vast service industry to wash linen undergarments and napkins and handkerchiefs every four days or weekly. Also, here and in the Birth of Intimacy utensils used for food preparation and consumption are described in terms of sociability and civility at the table. Finally, changes in diet in both town and country saw the introduction of new Mediterranean, and then global, foods such as haricot beans, artichokes, tomatoes, and subsequently sugar, coffee, chocolate, and potatoes. For the bourgeoisie and the nobility, the eighteenth century saw the rise to prominence of a new
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style of cooking based on sauces. There remains much less research on the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, however, so it is more difficult to compare consumption in Renaissance Paris with the eighteenth century.

Germany and Central Europe

In central Europe, changes in the consumption patterns of manufactured goods such as mirrors and clocks, and the diffusion of new fashions and imported foods is to be seen much later than for England or the Netherlands, during the second half of the eighteenth and beginning of the nineteenth century. Earlier than this in the Austrian monarchy, common household expenses were used up for basic needs, leaving hardly any leeway for other consumer goods. The ‘new temptations of the eighteenth century’ were similar to McKendrick’s, and included fashionable fabrics, cotton and silk dresses, pocket watches, tobacco pipes, sugar, new stimulants, and stoneware dishes. Clocks, for example, were important indicators of consumption changes: according to Sandgruber, the composition of rural household utensils hardly changed between 1750 and 1850 except for an increasing number of clocks. The earliest could be found in a farmhouse in Carinthia in 1758 and during Joseph II’s reign the demand for pocket watches increased significantly. Similarly, Sandgruber’s example of the differences in the interior decoration of people’s homes is telling. Dwellings of the urban bourgeoisie were filled with furniture, pictures, and accessories. Farmhouses, by contrast, contained a few necessary pieces of furniture. The interiors of labourers’ dwellings were hardly known apart from some autobiographical documents describing their sparse furnishing without any adornments. This only changed during the nineteenth century when more and more durable consumer goods could be found in labourers’ households such as mirrors and clocks. Similarly in the Württemberg village of Kirchentellinsfurt, clocks remained a prestige item until the first half of the nineteenth century. During the eighteenth century they were still very expensive and were owned by only six upper-class families (3.9 per cent of the households studied). Other research also indicates that major changes and a broader dissemination of durable goods and new consumer items did not take place until the beginning of the nineteenth century.

The approach of looking for evidence of such a consumer revolution, however, has resulted in a concentration upon the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. As a result we do not yet know enough about the period of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. In this perspective, Ulinka Rublack’s recent work, Dressing Up, is a very welcome exception and important study. In Dressing Up, Rublack looks at appearance in relation to the self in the sixteenth-century German lands, particularly Augsburg and Nürnberg. By analysing people’s dress and the cultural arguments about dress, she draws conclusions
about the understanding of the self, viewed in all its complexity. Dress becomes a part of society and its understanding mirrors social standing or one’s position in this society. For instance, Rublack reflects on the changing meaning of stripes (related to the multi-coloured hose) in public discourse and the emergence of the expression ‘striped layman’, denoting people of little formal education during the early Reformation. This approach suggests that material culture and especially clothing formed an integral part of social life and thus of historical understanding. In fact, clothing becomes history itself. This can be shown with changing expectations during the early Reformation, for example, with multi-coloured clothes being regarded as improper. In contrast, around 1530 black was identified with ‘constancy and soberness’, and white with ‘faith and humility’. But by 1600, sources reveal the importance of new dyes, for example saffron colour or light colours such as light blue, accompanied by change of tastes in bourgeois fashion. Colour was as important as fabric or style in dress and material culture. Interestingly one correspondent, Magdalena Behaim, decorated her beds and bed curtains with green, similarly to many beds in Paris. Green remained a favoured colour for bed curtains and could still be found in seventeenth- and eighteenth-century inventories of southwest Germany.

After 1770 fashion for all classes, and in both town and countryside moved towards simplicity, following the English example of a tendency towards comfort and functionality. Silk and cotton were consumed by the middling sort and even peasants by then. With printed cotton, colours were made more available for a broader clientele and clothing became more colourful during the nineteenth century, especially women’s fashion. However, between 1720 and 1829 in three Württemberg agricultural villages, women owned more clothes with less value, while men had fewer items but with higher value. Apart from gender, clothing was not only dependent on social status but on age, with newly married people bringing more clothing items into their new household. A clear social differentiation was not apparent other than between the very rich and the very poor. Most were able to invest in more and better clothes. A further study on costume shows the rising importance of accessories. This included silk neckerchiefs for men and women, and braids/trimmings which constituted an important line of production in Basle and Reutlingen. Such innovations first became apparent within the upper strata of the village: the craftsmen and especially officeholders. Similarly to Daniel Roche, changes in preferences for new materials such as silk and cotton become visible. But whereas silk of lesser quality can be found frequently, for example for neckerchiefs in the second half of the eighteenth century, cotton remained infrequent.

In another southwest German inventory study based on the village of Laichingen in the second half of the eighteenth century, a complex set of clothing practices could be determined. Here, clothing took up a growing proportion in the moveable goods of the
inventories throughout all social strata. According to Hans Medick, this reflected a claim for validity, not a pursuit of luxury, as he found that the wealthy and the less wealthy both experienced rises in the value of clothing in this period. This increase in expenditure on clothing, though, was in proportion to the overall value of the marriage portion. Women possessed a rising number of clothing items, especially an increasing number of accessories such as neckerchiefs, necklaces, and bodices. But accessories were important for both men and women who owned more neckerchiefs over time. They would often consist of luxury materials such as silk and cotton. Between 1750 and 1800 the number of items made of silk and velvet tripled, from 0.9 per cent (sixty-five pieces) to 3 per cent (210 pieces), and the number of cotton pieces rose from 1.4 per cent (100 pieces) to 5.1 per cent (355 pieces). Although the overall value of accessories remained relatively low, they did carry a symbolic value and could be found in all social groups, in households of craftsmen, day-labourers, and burgher notables alike. However, dress and colour were used to highlight social distinction. Here the history of clothing sheds light on the social meaning of dress and reveals a complexity of its use in displaying social stratum, ideas of honour, and self-representation. In south Bohemia similar developments occurred, but with much less silk, mostly belonging to innkeepers. But the gender differences observed were very similar. Men had fewer clothes but more valuable single items such as overcoats. Women, on the other hand, had a higher number of clothing items in different colours.

These studies highlight the importance of accessories for the social broadening of the consumption of clothing into smaller decorative objects for poorer consumers. This corresponds with John Brewer’s view that the participation in consumption of the lower strata was made possible with the use of clothing accessories such as buttons, braids, buckles, and neckerchiefs. A similar development was observed by John Styles for England and Roche for France. Evidence from the supply side also supports this. One supplier, a Savoyard trader from the Upper Rhine region, sold neckerchiefs, hats, stockings, buttons, and other mass products on a regular basis between 1724 and 1740. The prices for caps and stockings were relatively low and the items mostly sold by the dozen. An analysis of nine retailers in the rural town of Wildberg between 1625 and 1736 likewise shows the importance of cotton, silk and fustian, buttons, yarn, needles, and also braids—although hardly any ready-made clothes. Exotic textiles such as silk and cotton were found in retailers’ inventories as early as 1661 and 1675 (silk), but they experienced only little growth and were missing in some of the eighteenth-century lists. But braids were present since 1631. While the authors rightly conclude that a consumer, or indeed industrious, revolution would have to be set at a much later date, the importance of accessories and early appearance of braids, for example, could indicate the ability and desire of the Wildberg inhabitants for participation in changing styles and thus support the suggested role of accessories in the history of dress.
A different approach to a possible industrious revolution has been taken by looking at changes in the time allocation of women for household and food-related tasks through an examination of kitchen tools, their number, value, and distribution across gender and social strata. It finds that women possessed more moveable goods than men, of which a large part constituted objects for food preparation, especially for baking bread and cakes. Women across all social strata possessed more food-related objects, and especially more baking-related objects than men. Bread, cake, and pastries, and other flour-based foods constituted an important part of people’s diet in the southwest German lands and central Europe, so that the high number of baking tools complements what we know about dietary habits from food history. The surprisingly high number of kitchen tools and specialized food-related objects stands in contrast to the impression of a very basic early modern food culture. The high number of specialized tools reveals their preferences and the meaning the objects had for them. To judge by their number, baking-related tools seem to have been most important. The importance of cakes and pastries for feast days, in addition, highlights the social meaning of the food and its related objects. Hospital data also establishes that cakes or white flour for cakes were handed out to the inmates on special holidays or feast days.

Nature and Meaning of Consumption

Most of the studies above emphasize the ownership and enjoyment of goods within households, or as dress on people’s bodies. But it is important to emphasize that most goods had a much more public function. One general trend evident in most areas was the division of houses into more private rooms, with beds and their appurtenances becoming something used mostly within the realm of the family. However, clothing, table linen, tables, chairs, and all the other items associated with eating and conversation remained essential to hospitality and social interaction. For the ambitious London diarist Samuel Pepys in the 1660s, the appropriate dress was a crucial part of his happiness which, as he recorded, was felt when he perceived that others, especially of a superior rank, looked upon him and his family favourably. This was also the cause of most of his extended descriptions of both the goods he owned, and those of others. Ordinary household objects such as cooking equipment or chairs were mentioned infrequently, but tableware and its social function is something which gets mentioned quite often, as in his description of the following dinner:

I did make them all gaze to see themselfes served so nobly in plate; and a neat dinner, endeed, though but of seven dishes. Mighty merry I was... they full of admiration at my plate, particularly my flaggons (which, endeed, are noble).
In addition, many goods had a public value and circulation. There is increasing evidence that many things were not primarily interacted with as personal possessions, but rather as objects used and exchanged within a myriad of different social contexts, from the utensils, drinking vessels, napkins, and tablecloths used for dining, to clothing which was pawned and sold and bought second hand by others. Renata Ago has stressed how often even highly valued objects could be sold for liquidity, and concluded that only very few objects were kept as personality outside of the market. The editors of essays in the volume, Material Renaissance have emphasized how much the pricing of goods could depend not just on the quality and on supply and demand, but also on the personal circumstances of the relationship between the buyer and seller. Goods certainly had a contracted price, but over time the value of this price could vary according to the circumstances of the debtor and creditor. Many creditors accepted less to settle a debt. We also know how easy it was for the owners of crafted gold and silverware to melt down their plate to convert it into its metallic value.

Goods moved around very much as well. Ongoing work by Louisa Muzzarelli, Mauro Carboni, and others on the use of the Monte di Pietà in North Italy and other parts of Catholic Europe is showing how hundreds of thousands of goods were taken out of households each year for credit. The importance of the second-hand trade has been stressed, and innovative work is being done by Alexandra Shepard on the importance of goods to establishing the ‘worth’ of witnesses before English ecclesiastical courts from 1550 to 1728, and by Don Spaeth and Shepard on the importance of probate inventories as written means of dividing such value into saleable or transferable value. They were part of a process of redistribution, through sale or bequests. It is only in wills that we get a sense of which goods were held dearly by individuals, and they are few in comparison to the wide range in inventories. Goods were also sold to pay debts, or often publicly distrained for the same reason. In addition there is a large literature on the importance of the gift economy of elite families, but there is much evidence that this was important for plebeian families as well.

In addition sumptuary laws, mentioned earlier, which attempted to regulate the social expression of wealth through clothing, were in existence and enforced all over Europe from the Middle Ages. During the early modern period their number, however, increased, with the exception of England. Sumptuary laws combined restraints on consumption and class restrictions with mercantilist intentions such as protection of local markets. Only when market capitalism advanced did they cease to exist as they stood in the way of a further expansion of consumer markets and were thus increasingly questioned during the eighteenth century. However, there has been a debate on the extent of their negative effect on the local economies, and the degree to which they reflect the actual social
differentiation in a village. People also showed a confident handling of the laws by wearing highly coloured accessories such as braids, kerchiefs, or caps.\footnote{p. 390}

Finally, with this in mind, one aspect of consumption which has been neglected in most western European studies so far is the importance of goods in communal spaces such as inns, guilds, colleges, town halls, and of course churches, where battles over the meaning of costly decoration, and of light and decoration were central to the Reformation and Counter-Reformation. The high number of newly constructed or refurbished churches during the Baroque, for example, and the high density of sacral buildings in towns (this could reach a proportion of a tenth up to a third in a Catholic town) shows that churches represented important public spaces for the people. Not all new buildings were commissioned from above. Quite often it was the community which authorized the building or new interior of their church and the same motives for Baroque splendour found in the elite such as glory, prestige, pomposity, representation, and ostentation were true for communities as well which entered a competition for the newest, most beautiful, and magnificent parish church. In addition, the baroque splendour of church services which spoke to all senses must have been a big attraction for the masses, especially for the many illiterate people. Thus, the sacral building, its interior with elaborate ceiling frescoes and altars, the pomp of the service, and all the material culture related to it, such as monstrances, created a specific material culture consumed by the people in Catholic areas.\footnote{Taverns and inns were also spaces decorated with furniture, pictures, globes, and other items to attract custom, and guild buildings were often richly decorated to express the guilds’ prosperity and community.}

How then do we begin to attempt to draw together all of these divergent types of research into a coherent whole for all of Europe which can reasonably encompass changing patterns across so many varied cultural, political, economic, and social differences? We can identify some trends already discussed by historians, such as the ebullient rise in shopping and consumption in late medieval Italian cities based on the domination of trade from the east through the Mediterranean, and on the production of fine clothing. In the seventeenth century this trade became relatively less important as the Atlantic economies captured trade with the east and developed an Atlantic trade network. The benefits of this new trade have been very well documented for Holland, Antwerp, England, and Paris, with rising consumption first in the Low Countries and southern England from the late sixteenth century, and then elsewhere by the eighteenth century, of new imports such as tobacco, sugar, chocolate, coffee, tea, cotton, and porcelain. There were also changing styles of furniture, as chairs became more common and cupboards and chests with drawers replaced trunks. If prosperity increased in western Europe after the mid-seventeenth century, eastern Europe followed after the mid-eighteenth century, while Italy declined relatively. But there were exceptions, such
as Antwerp and the southern Netherlands which saw a decline in the value and number of household goods caused by a fall in demand for the locally produced luxury goods such as tapestries and linen. However the area still experienced an increase in the consumption of sugar, tea, and coffee, and their associated consumption goods. In addition privacy, heating, and lighting were more present. However, we still do not know enough about the preceding 150 years, when there was a widespread rise in consumption of things like pewter, pictures, and tobacco.

Thus, there is a need for more empirical work on inventories in areas where they have not been exploited, to obtain the necessary comparative dimension, between different towns and rural areas. But some of the most interesting recent literature focuses on how people experienced their goods. Gender has been central to histories of clothing and food preparation, but has also been the focus of work by Margot Finn and Amanda Vickery on other items. But, we still need to know more about the central question of older social history which is how the social order and differences of wealth affected consumption both for individual families and geographical areas. A wonderful example of how this can be done is provided by John Styles’s book *The Dress of the People*, and with care, inventories can be used to examine different levels of wealth. But it is even more important to look at the meaning of goods as objects central, and even necessary, to the myriad forms of social interaction within early modern society. In this way we can avoid the problem of the older social history which tended to define groups which remained too static and coherent over time. Face to face relations were in a constant flux affected by local power struggles as well as catastrophes such as the Thirty Years’ War, and social position was, as the plebeian English eighteenth-century diarist John Cannon put it quoting Hollingshead’s *Chronicle*, a ‘tennis ball of fortune’.

With this in mind, we will end with a wonderfully detailed example of the case of Edward Barlow, the son of a poor husbandman from Prestwich, Lancashire, whose own self-description provides an apt concluding statement. Barlow was born at the beginning of the English civil wars in 1642. Although Barlow’s father managed to send his son to school, he was forced to leave school at about 12 years of age and go to work in the local fustian trade. He then travelled to London where he had an uncle and a brother. After working as a tapster and other domestic work he decided to seek his fortune at sea in the last year of the Commonwealth, 1659. His journal was written at sea once he had become a sailor and learned to read and write. Ten years later in 1669, after voyages to the Mediterranean and Brazil, fighting the Dutch and the Barbary pirates, and just before his first Indian voyage, after having been paid a large sum of his past wages to his ‘great joy’ he decided to travel back to Lancashire to see his parents for the first time in eleven years.
So I began to provide myself, and I bought myself two or three very good suits of apparel, which many thought were too fine for me to wear and too good, many of my betters making worse to serve them: and I must confess they were too high for my calling to wear, but I knew the getting of them and was not beholding to anybody for them, having endured many a bitter storm and hungry belly for them … so I was resolved to wear them, let who would say to the contrary, intending to go down in the country to put my friends rather to credit than disgrace, intending not to show myself beholding to any of my friends or acquaintance, on the contrary more for their love and respect which they might show towards me.

... And nine days afterward I came to my father’s house ... So the next day being Sunday, I went to church in a good suit of clothes, which lay me in fifteen pounds: and at church I was saluted and welcomed home by many of our neighbours, being much wondered at to see me so brave, and I am sure I was more looked at by many than they looked or gave ear to what the minister taught, everyone calling me Master Barlow and suchlike, taking me, I believe, to be the owner of the greatest ship in the river of Thames. And everyone that knew me desired to be in my company, and one asking ‘What gentleman was this?’, and ‘Who was that that was so brave?'; but and if they had seen me many times before and since on such condition as I was many times in, they would sooner have asked what beggar or what gaol-bird I had been, or from what prison I had come out of.

The next day being Monday I went to a great fair, which was kept Whitsun Monday and Tuesday at Manchester, in another kind of habit; and there I was much beheld, and whatsoever company I came in I would be sure to pay the greatest share, and many times for some of those which were in our company, showing that I had no want of money, some thinking that I had more money than I could tell what to do withal.

The Sunday following I went to church in another manner of clothes, having my ‘kemlit’ cloak on my shoulders, walking all ‘one marchant’ [en merchant] in my silk stockings and holland shirts and all the rest of my bravery. And then I was much more looked upon, wondering where I had been and how I came by all this.81

His description is worth citing at length, not only because it provides a poor person’s sense of the meaning of his clothes, but as historians of consumption we too can do no better than to ask where our subjects have been, and how they came by what they had.
Further Reading


Consumption and Material Life


**Notes:**

(1.) Melissa Calaresu, ‘Making and Eating Ice Cream in Naples: Rethinking Consumption and Sociability in the Eighteenth Century’, *Past and Present*, 220(1) (2013), 35–78; see also n 38 below.


(7.) The Württemberg inventories project uses a technique to take all gender, demographic, social, and economic aspects of the household members into account in relation to each other. Sheilagh Ogilvie, Markus Küpker, and Janine Maegraith, Research Project ‘Human Well-Being and the “Industrious Revolution”: Consumption, Gender and Social Capital in a German Developing Economy, 1600–1900’ (ESRC Research Grant RES-062-23-0759).

(9.) An excellent starting point for further research related to ego-documents is the Swiss 'Base de données suisse d’écrits personnels / Schweizerische Selbstzeugnis Datenbank’, at <http://www.egodocuments.ch>.


(12.) For example Hans Peter Hahn, Materielle Kultur. Eine Einführung (Berlin, 2005); Sandgruber had emphasized the important role of socio-anthropological studies for a more comprehensive consumption history. Roman Sandgruber, Die Anfänge der Konsumgesellschaft. Lebensstandard, Konsumgüterverbrauch und Alltagskultur in Österreich im 18. und 19. Jahrhundert (Vienna, 1982).


(17.) Patricia Harris, David Lyon, and Sue McLaughlin, *The Meaning of Food* (Guilford, CT, 2005).

(18.) Braudel, *Civilization and Capitalism*, I.


(20.) Weatherill, *Consumer Behaviour*, 133.


(27.) The Württemberg project addresses the effect of the Thirty Years' War on the southern German lands.


(Vienna, 2009); Markus Cerman, Villagers and Lords in Eastern Europe, 1300–1800 (Basingstoke, 2012).


(33.) Welch, Shopping, 65ff.


(36.) Maria Giuseppina Muzzarelli, ‘From the Closet to the Wallet: Pawnng Clothes in Renaissance Italy’; Mauro Carboni, ‘Converting Goods into Cash: An Ethical Approach to Pawnbroking in Early Modern Bologna’ both, Renaissance and Reformation / Renaissance et Réforme, 35(3) (2012), 23–38, 63–84.

(37.) James Shaw and Evelyn Welch, Making and Marketing Medicine in Renaissance Florence (Amsterdam, 2011), ch. 5.

(38.) Paolo Malanima, Il lusso dei contadini. Consumi e Industrie nelle campagne toscane del Sei e Settecento (Bologna, 1990), 34–49.


(40.) Jan de Vries, Dutch Rural Economy in the Golden Age, 1500–1700 (New Haven, 1974), 214–224; Jan de Vries and Ad van der Woude, The First Modern Economy:


(42.) Michael North, Art and Commerce in the Dutch Republic (New Haven, 1997).


(48.) Weatherill, Consumer Behaviour, 26; Overton et al., Production and Consumption, 109–111.

(49.) Sneath, ‘Consumption, Wealth, Indebtedness’, 351.


(51.) See n 2 above.
(52.) Roche, *Culture of Clothing*, 109.


(61.) Medick analysed over 1,400 marriage and death inventories between 1747 and 1820 for his book, but here concentrated on about 440 marriage inventories which list clothing for both bride and groom.


(65.) A similar pattern was found in England by Margaret Spufford, The Great Reclothing of Rural England: Petty Chapmen and their Wares in the Seventeenth Century (London, 1984).

(66.) This is based on an analysis of 227 marriage and 191 death inventories between 1602 and 1662.

(67.) Ogilvie, Küpker, and Maegraith, Material Culture of Food.

(68.) We realize that both Scandinavia and the Iberian peninsula have not been dealt with here, as less work exists in English. But see the recent study on Catalonia—Julie Marfany, ‘Was there an Industrious Revolution in Catalonia?’, Zeitschrift für Agrargeschichte und Agrarsoziologie, 59(2) (2011), 76–90.


(77.) Peter Hersche, Muße und Verschwendung. Europäische Gesellschaft und Kultur im Barockzeitalter (Freiburg, 2006), vol. 1, 543–568.


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Abstract and Keywords

The main developments in western European agrarian society and economy are surveyed at the outset in a regional analysis which stresses the degree of variety within quite small areas and by the same token the irrelevance of national boundaries. The survey considers employment and production beyond tillage and pastoralism: fishing, hunting, mining, or local crafts and manufacturing are treated as part of the rural economy. There follows a detailed thematic analysis which examines crop yields, credit, share-cropping, landholding, labour, and total factor productivity. The conclusion briefly takes up the debate over the transition from feudalism to capitalism, initiated by Robert Brenner, to argue that the regional variations in landholding and inheritance practices which might emerge from an initially similar environment, while casting doubt on aspects of Brenner’s general thesis, nevertheless were shaped as much by power or class relations as by natural endowment, ecology, or technological innovations.

Keywords: Regional variety, agricultural diversity, crop yields, credit markets, labour markets, share-cropping, Brenner debate

Over the last forty years the history of the agrarian west between 1350 and 1750 has been dominated by a debate over the transition from feudalism (or manorialism) to capitalist agriculture whereby land and labour became fully commoditized. This debate, initiated by Robert Brenner, has not yet run its course; but in recent years its terms have been subjected to considerable refinement and revision. For our present purposes, however, the Brenner debate does not offer a suitable point of departure since its geographical canvas was too narrow (restricted essentially to a comparison of England and France, with later contributions on the Low Countries) and because it was chiefly concerned with power or class relations between landlords and peasants, manifest in new forms of
tenure, rather than with agricultural practices themselves, such as technological innovations or changes in crops and crop rotations. Above all, the debate focused on arable agriculture (tillage) rather than on pastoralism, forestry, or fishing, all of which, away from champaign (open level country) or the heartlands of the European continent, constituted principal or supplementary sources of peasant livelihood. The present review accordingly falls into two halves. It begins with a survey of the main developments in Europe’s regions, from south to north, stressing the degree of variety over even quite small areas, before discussing outstanding issues in current research (including questions addressed in the Brenner debate). At the end it will be apparent how many topics still require further research.

I

Regional Variety

Throughout the Mediterranean lands farming on what were often poor soils in an arid climate kept crop yields low, unless boosted by irrigation. In the Italian peninsula the rural population declined by anywhere between 40 and 60 per cent between 1350 and 1450. Plague was the principal culprit, but the increasing weight of rural taxation prompted many peasants to sell their farms and emigrate to the towns or to other districts. As a result, there was a perceptible expansion of large consolidated farms (podere) in the hands of urban landowners, worked in many areas— Umbria, Tuscany, Emilia, and the Marches—by share-croppers. In Lombardy such farms were managed by rural entrepreneurs, reliant upon direct wage-labour, who abolished the fallow by integrating cereal-growing with cattle-rearing on irrigated water meadows, where rice, hemp, and flax were cultivated. In the south there was a similar emphasis on labour- or cash-intensive crops, often alternating by zone or by season. In Sicily, a peculiar agricultural regime evolved which combined seasonal rotations of the cultivation and processing of flax in high summer and winter, silk (supplying a vigorous export market) between May and August, wine in the spring and autumn, and latterly olive oil in early spring and mid-winter. But this regional efflorescence was not destined to last. By the 1590s Italy was hit by a run of disastrous harvests, followed by epidemics in the north (1629–31) and south (1647–56), with renewed population loss. The underlying problem for Italian agriculture was that high land productivity (in some areas) was never matched by an equivalent labour productivity. Output may have increased, but despite epidemics the numbers of peasants outstripped resources. Until the rise of rural manufacturing and proto-industry from the late seventeenth century there were insufficient opportunities in
non-agricultural employment to offer an escape from the perennial problem of a society in which peasants clung to their smallholdings at the price of self-exploitation rather than consolidating farms using less labour.

In Iberia the variety between regions was equally marked: the vast, arid, high plains of Old and New Castile, given over to pastoralism (oviculture) and transhumance, were flanked to the north by areas of greater rainfall, more arable farming, fruit growing, and viticulture, while in the south—Andalusia, Murcia, and Valencia—the Muslim tradition of intensive specialized agriculture, heavily reliant upon irrigation by means of water-wheels (the noria system), was maintained to aid the cultivation of wine, olives, and mulberries for silk weaving. Although peasants made up around 70 to 80 per cent of the population, in reality many townsfolk were agricultural workers for part of the year, acting as day-labourers alongside peasants whose hereditary tenures entitled them to membership of the village community (vecinos).

From the late fifteenth to the late sixteenth century the rural economy of Iberia was in relatively good health: cereal yields were high, and there was a flourishing export market to northern Europe for Merino wool. But after 1570 both grain yields and wool exports declined. Traditionally the blame has been laid squarely on the imposition of a grain price ceiling (the tasa), and on soil erosion as a result of transhumance by the Mesta, the powerful sheep-breeders’ guild. In fact, appropriation of farmland by landlords and the weight of indirect taxation, especially the sales tax (alcabala) were the true culprits. That can be seen in the behaviour of urban magistrates and the better-off farmers, for in the course of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries the common lands (baldíos), which had been managed collectively by the village council for pasture or temporary cultivation, were progressively sold off to urban investors, seriously compromising the integrity of rural society. That exacerbated the permanent deficit of manure for soils which required long fallowing. Only in the late sixteenth century was maize brought in from the New World, but its spread was slow (just as in Italy). At the same time, overgrazing on the central uplands led to mass migration to the hypertrophic cities of the south as gateways to the New World.

The shining exception was Catalunya. After the protracted struggle in the mid-fifteenth century against a particularly onerous serfdom (remenças), peasants had good security of tenure on long-term leases and their rents were fixed at a moderate rate. As in Andalusia, an already wide variety of crops was augmented in the sixteenth century by potatoes, maize, and root vegetables. The pull of a large urban market—Barcelona’s population trebled in the eighteenth century alone—helped to encourage higher agricultural productivity through irrigation and recourse to fertilizers, but much of Catalunya’s produce was shipped abroad. In Portugal, viticulture thrived as export markets opened up
in northern Europe, especially trade with England after the Methuen treaty of 1703 had abolished tariff barriers.

France offers an even starker regional contrast than Iberia. The main cereal-growing plains were located in the north (eastern Normandy, the Loire valley, Burgundy, and the borderlands with Flanders); western France (western Normandy, Brittany, Anjou, and Maine) had poorer soils, with dispersed farmsteads and enclosed fields, where pastoralism, viticulture, and orchards dominated. Mediterranean France (Languedoc, Provence, and Guyenne) was, like Italy and Iberia, hot and dry, the soils mostly too light for profitable grain-growing; instead, olives, fruit, vines, and silk worms were the staples. But that still left a swathe of mountainous terrain—the Pyrenees and the Massif Central—where pastoralism was supplemented by forestry. Nevertheless, it was the poorer and more remote areas which suffered less in the frequent famines and warfare of the seventeenth century than the areas of commercialized wheat production, such as the Paris basin, since the sheer size of the capital threatened to suck the countryside dry of labour and resources. On the other hand, the pull of a disproportionately large capital city could stimulate agricultural change over a much longer distance. In the Beaujolais arable was converted to vineyards in response to Parisian market demand, a switch facilitated by a network of specialized merchants and hauliers, as well as by the construction of canals linking the Loire and the Seine, which lowered transaction costs.

The majority of French peasants were not proprietors but tenants on various types of lease, whose farms were small, and usually partible. It has been calculated that, once taxes, rent, and tithes had been rendered, the peasant was left with no more than one-third of his annual harvest; even when the burden of direct state taxation eased towards 1700, the peasants were hit by higher consumption taxes (excises). In these circumstances, only the large farmers could survive; the middling peasantry was squeezed out (as in the Paris basin), with a corresponding increase in wage-labour (employing anything up to 90 per cent of the rural population) or, in the poorer south and west, share-cropping contracts. That verdict, however, requires some qualification.

Share-cropping was often the result of absentee landlordship (as in Italy), for as the burden of taxation on the peasantry increased from the sixteenth century onwards, nobles, officials, and bourgeois investors had every incentive to buy up land (including some common lands held by the village community collectively, as in Iberia) in the environs of towns since they enjoyed fiscal exemption on their rural property. These estates were managed at a distance by share-cropping contracts, which by the eighteenth century had spread to almost all parts of France except the north and east, though we also encounter them in Normandy and Brittany. At the same time, there was no widespread move to enclose common land, not so much on account of resistance by poor cottars and share-croppers who depended on it, but by the richer farmers who espied...
profits from leasing it out. In any case, enclosure was often impeded by competing or overlapping jurisdictional rights. In general, it was more prevalent, as one might expect, in those areas where communal rights were less developed (Brittany, Flanders, and the far north in Artois and French Flanders), and where pastureland was more extensive than champaign. Nevertheless, by the eighteenth century, through a series of steady incremental improvements, French agriculture was able to feed half as many mouths again as it had in 1500.

In the old-settled German-speaking lands in the west agriculture divided broadly speaking into three regions. By around 1500 in the south and west there had been superimposed upon an already diversified rural economy—mining in the Alps, pastoralism in the foothills, viticulture and market gardening along the river valleys—a network of rural industries (wool-, linen-, and later fustian-weaving), organized by outwork and under the control of urban merchant capitalists. Much of the Swabian countryside was dominated by entrepreneurs from Augsburg and Ulm, while Franconia’s rural economy, given over to handicrafts, metallurgy, and mining, fell under the sway of Nuremberg. In the central lands of Hessen and Thuringia the rural economy mixed pastoralism, arboriculture (including charcoal-burning and glass-making), and some viticulture, with silver- and copper-mining stretching through southern Saxony to the borders of Bohemia. In the north, large farms, on which peasants usually had good rights of tenure, were given over both to extensive grain cultivation (which extended into the areas east of the Elbe) and to pastoralism, inland to sheep-rearing, on the coast to cattle-rearing for meat and for dairying, as cattle were shipped or driven on the hoof from Scandinavia to the lush pastures of the North Sea littoral. All three regions, therefore, were exposed to a commercialized agrarian market, though the different crops and goods produced, as well as the differing levels of capital investment and risk, meant that their fortunes might fluctuate widely.

Swabia remained a principal supplier of cereals to northern Switzerland throughout the early modern period, a captive market which ensured that grain farmers in southern Germany could ride out the vicissitudes of a deteriorating climate and the ravages of war at the turn of the sixteenth century better than most of their neighbours. Nevertheless, the picture of alpine Switzerland as predominantly pastoral is misleading. Only after the fourteenth century did mixed agriculture give way to specialized, export-oriented stock-raising. Tillage could still be practised on higher slopes by means of terracing. Crucial to commercial pastoralism was the availability of spring meadows, situated below the alps proper. These meadows came under greater communal control after 1500, especially with the spread of dairy-cattle, for the rise of commercial butter- and cheese-making was only possible if beasts could be grazed together in large numbers, beyond the resources of individual farmers. That was achieved by hiring shepherds, who in the
short summer season drove beasts onto the highest slopes, where exposure to sunlight ensured milk with the best fat content. Nevertheless, the pattern of pastoralism varied greatly: some districts were given over to livestock, others to dairying, and yet others to fodder production. By the sixteenth century the production of fatty cheeses was increasing, as the use of rennet allowed cheeses to harden and mature, which made them marketable in southern Germany and beyond. South of the Alps, by contrast, in the Valtellin, the Adige and Aosta valleys, commercial pastoralism was never as widespread, since it had to compete with viticulture and market-garden crops.

In the western German lands, however, viticulture was plunged into crisis. The heaviest population losses of the Thirty Years’ War (aside from Bavaria) lay in Franconia, the Rhineland-Palatinate, Württemberg, and Alsace— anywhere between 30 and 50 per cent—with the result that viticulture, dependent in any case on fickle consumer demand which was turning increasingly to hopped beer in northern urban markets, together with the requirements of a seasonally labour-intensive occupation, drove many winegrowers to emigrate. Any recovery after the mid-seventeenth century was further delayed by the French Wars of the 1670s to 1690s, which laid waste much of the Rhine valley in the west.

The mining areas, both in Tirol and Saxony, were already in decline a century earlier, not so much (as was once thought) because of the influx of silver from the Americas, but from diminishing yields of ore coupled with the increased cost of extraction. Only the rural iron industry of the Siegerland west of Cologne continued to prosper, aided by the abundance of timber and water to drive derricks and furnaces, and by a well-integrated distribution system which was not distorted by oligopolistic ambitions on the part of Cologne’s mercantile elite. Just as in the south, the existence of rural manufacturing and industry provided a safety-valve in terms of employment which helped sustain a peasantry unable to subsist on farming alone, at a time when the ranks of smallholders and the landless were swelling, particularly in areas of impartible inheritance.

In northern Germany agriculture proved more resilient. Large farms with substantial households of eight to ten members developed alongside the nuclear families of smallholders. These ‘strong farmers’ benefited from the growing interdependence of cereal agriculture and stock-rearing, for the cattle grazed on the marshes of Frisia and Emsland provided draught animals for ploughing and carting, as well as dung to manure the soil. Intensive forms of cereal cultivation emerged, notably the annual turning of the topsoil admixed with stable dung, which enabled rye to be grown perpetually in a one-field system which dispensed with traditional fallowing. Indeed, in parts of Schleswig-Holstein and along the Frisian coast regulated convertible husbandry was pioneered, in which a series of corn-growing seasons could be succeeded by anything from three to six years’ grazing. This practice (known in German as *Koppelwirtschaft* and in English...
sometimes (p. 403) as ‘up-and-down’ husbandry) foreshadowed the ‘improved’ agriculture of the eighteenth century observable in other parts of Europe. Yet all that was accomplished without a widespread enclosure movement; rather, beasts were pastured by hurdling or folding, that is, by erecting temporary fencing, with frequent droves to fresh pastures. The fiscal appetite of lords, both local and territorial, in early modern western Germany prompted widespread peasant resistance from the 1590s onwards, but it was never so insatiable that it undermined the viability of peasant family farming as such.

The coastal areas of the North Sea presented peasants with problems of drainage, the threat of inundation, soil degradation, and the collective management of precarious resources which farmers further inland did not face. But it has recently been shown that the contrast between the littorals of Flanders, Brabant, Holland, Frisia, and Groningen, on the one hand, and the inland districts of Brabant (the Campine/De Kempen), Guelders, or Drenthe, on the other, is too coarse-meshed a comparison to capture salient divergences within those areas. It is not simply that the agrarian development of the northern Low Countries lagged behind the south; rather, differences of tenure, of proximity to the market, and, not least, what Jan de Vries has termed ‘the quality of assets’ (that is, the productivity and profitability of different ecological endowments) led to significant variations in both agricultural production and the matrix of social relations in the countryside.

Within a relatively narrow canvas the Low Countries witnessed the survival of traditional peasant smallholdings with largely subsistence agriculture (Veluwe and Drenthe), contrasted with small farms given over to intensive market-driven agriculture and proto-industry around urban centres (inland Flanders); or the growth of large farms specializing in production for market and reliant upon wage-labour (coastal Flanders and Groningen), as opposed to the Guelders river area, where that shift occurred alongside the survival of peasant farms with good rights of tenancy using family labour. The explanation for this extraordinary variety will be explored later; here it is only necessary to stress the distinction between the spread of urban merchant investment in the countryside (evident in the hinterlands of the three largest Flemish cities, Ghent, Bruges, and Ypres, or, somewhat later, around Antwerp) and the rise of agrarian capitalism proper. Indeed, one historian has posited a four-fold aetiology of agrarian capitalism in early modern Holland!

Much of the agrarian history of the Low Countries has been written around land reclamation, but that in turn might have deleterious consequences. From the fourteenth century (or even earlier) the towns of Flanders and Brabant were exploiting peat bogs commercially, but their example was initially not followed further north in Holland and Frisia, not simply because of the absence of major urban markets until after 1500, but
because the peat there was rich in nutrients and thus not suitable for fuel. Where peatland was reclaimed, the soil degraded as the dry surface oxidized. The ground-level sank, bringing with it the danger of inundation, while countermeasures only served to lower the water-table and make arable farming no longer feasible. In Robert Brenner’s pithy phrase, peasants were thus robbed of their means of subsistence but not of their means of production (for they still owned the degraded land). The consequence (unintended or not) was a decisive switch to pastoralism (both grazing and dairying) which, in the case of Holland, as both Brenner and de Vries argue from their different perspectives, marked the beginnings of a capitalist agrarian regime.

As the population of the Low Countries recovered after the Black Death, the rural economy reacted in two contrasting fashions. In some areas, holdings were subdivided; more intensive cultivation (by means of a concomitant increase in labour input) responded to an increased demand for foodstuffs, while rural by-employment offered a growing cottar class a safety-valve for those who could not make a living from the land alone. But in other areas, where the possibility of commercially driven labour-extensive agriculture existed, that is, above all in areas of pastoralism, tenants kept their farms intact and abandoned non-agricultural subsidiary occupations in order to concentrate on raising output to sell on the open market. Under this regime, surplus labour was obliged to emigrate to the towns or else find new rural employment in road- or canal-building, brickworks or forges, or in petty dealing. Those who remained in the countryside congregated in quasi-urban settlements, known as *vlekken*, where they constituted another rural class alongside the peasantry. This contrast between a ‘peasant’ and a ‘specialization’ rural economy, as Jan de Vries terms it, holds the key to the transition to fully fledged capitalist agriculture in certain parts of the northern Low Countries. And where cereal agriculture was widespread, the availability of manure from stock-rearing encouraged the spread of convertible husbandry, as we have previously observed in northern Germany.

The network of commercial pastoralism spanned the North Sea and the Baltic, linking the cattle-rearing regions of Scandinavia—Denmark and Scania (southern Sweden)—to the rich marshland pastures at the estuaries of the rivers Weser and Elbe. Further north, however, cereal agriculture came up against the vagaries of poor soils, a cold climate, and a lack of manure. Many agriculturalists sought to supplement their incomes by fishing in lakes and seas (‘fishing’ Norway on the west coast is contrasted by David Gaunt with ‘farming’ Norway inland), or by seasonal employment in the quiet winter months in mining (for instance, in the Swedish iron-ore mines) or by domestic artisan activities such as weaving or wood-carving. Another source of income for inhabitants of the Arctic Circle was afforded by reindeer hunting, but the once extensive herds were severely depleted by trapping, so that the Sami people of Norway turned towards a more pastoral economy,
which mixed cattle-rearing and reindeer hunting on a reduced scale, though the Sami also began to milk their reindeer. Insofar as tillage was attempted, the rural population practised swidden, that is, the burning of forests followed by the sowing of rye in the ashes. At first, given the nutrients in wood ash, very high yields might be achieved, but the soil quickly became exhausted. In any case, yields from coniferous woodlands were much lower than from deciduous. This system of slash-and-burn led to a quasi-nomadic form of agriculture, in which the peasant landownership and inheritance practices observable in most of the continental west did not apply.

The difficulties of agriculture in an ecologically marginal region may be illustrated by a brief comparison of Denmark and Iceland. Denmark suffered from severe deforestation: as much as a quarter of the country had been wooded in 1600, but by 1750 that figure had sunk to less than 10 per cent. As in other parts of the North Sea coast, western Jutland was exposed to sand drift and floods, which deforestation only exacerbated. The blame for this catastrophe has been laid by one historian at the door of the peasants themselves, eager to enclose and enlarge their farms where they had secure freeholds—a phenomenon often regarded elsewhere in Europe as a sign of agrarian improvement! These independent farmers, untrammelled by communal village by-laws or the supervision of landlords, stand accused of reckless ‘uninhibited egotism’, the pursuit of a quick profit. Since, however, grain prices remained stable in Denmark throughout the early modern period, despite a burgeoning population, it is difficult to weigh this eccentric verdict.

In Iceland, a far more dramatic ecological degradation occurred in the fourteenth century, when two major volcanic eruptions in 1300 and 1362 covered the island with a thick layer of ash. Yet, just like timber, volcanic ash contains mineral nutrients. The problem lay therefore not so much with the ash as with its suffocating thickness. Moreover, volcanic soils (andosols), though often fertile in milder climes, were on Iceland’s sloping terrain susceptible to soil erosion by sand storms, especially when they had been overgrazed. Sheep-farming removed organic material from poor soils and prevented the spread of lush vegetation which would have combated sand blows.3

In the British Isles the historiography of agrarian change has been dominated by the debate over the alleged disappearance of a traditional peasantry and the rise of capitalist agriculture, variously dated to the two centuries before 1750, or else to a rapid transformation in the century thereafter. In this debate, whose focus has been on farmers’ legal status, types of tenure, and the impact of parliamentary legislation upon them, remarkably little has been said about agricultural practices as such. It is silently assumed that the spread of leasehold and the enclosure or engrossment of farmland in themselves conduced to significant changes, not least in a dramatic rise in crop yields.
Whatever the merits of this argument, it applies principally to midland and southern England, rather than the north, let alone to Scotland, Ireland, or to Wales—that is, to areas where cereal husbandry, not pastoralism, prevailed.

In a nutshell, the terms of the argument—whether accepted, qualified, or rejected—start with the Black Death and a slump in population which was not recuperated until the sixteenth century; serfdom and the labour services attaching to it disappeared; and customary (or manorial) tenancies were either replaced by leaseholds let out at market rates, or else survived as copyholds, which offered peasants little protection against engrossing landowners. With that the way was paved for a free market in land, in which farmers responded to price signals and market demand, embracing new farming practices and technologies in order to raise output. The main objections to this line of argument are three-fold: first, some of the changes can be observed before the Black Death and the period of supposed agrarian crisis which ensued; then, ‘feudal’ constraints within the manorial system proved no obstacle either to agrarian innovation and accumulation on the part of peasants or to the development of a land market; and lastly, enclosure (or engrossment) occurred much more gradually than is commonly allowed, and in any case brought with it no automatic or immediate rise in agricultural productivity. These matters will be considered in the second section of this chapter. In the meantime, let us examine the range and evolution of farming practices themselves.

In the cereal heartlands of central and southern England the system of cultivation underwent no dramatic shift in the period under review. The cycle of winter cereals (wheat and rye), sown in the autumn, and spring crops (barley, oats, peas, and beans), sown in February or March, did not alter. From 1500 to 1650 land under tillage increased at the expense of pasture, as a growing population swelled the demand for grain, but after 1650 pasture made a come-back, in part because parliamentary legislation permitting enclosures allowed the creation of large farms, usually (though not invariably) given over to cattle- or sheep-breeding. At the same time, land productivity was raised through improvements to the soil. Marling (the admixture of clay with calcium carbonate), which reduced soil acidity, was widely deployed from the mid-seventeenth century, as was lime. By contrast, the use of fodder crops may be less significant than once thought. Both turnips (though not swedes, until the nineteenth century) and clover were not widely sown before 1750 (but potatoes as a food crop were grown before 1700). Moreover, there were few technological innovations of note until the end of our period, except for the wheel-less swing plough, the seed drill, and the gradual supplanting of the sickle, used to harvest wheat and rye, by the scythe (already used to cut barley and oats), in other words the replacement of shearing by reaping. Altogether, agricultural output in cereal England may have increased as much as three-fold between 1700 and 1850, but the reasons, as Mark Overton has stressed, are not well understood. It is likely, though,
that recourse to convertible husbandry, as in other parts of arable Europe, played a major role.

The productivity of marginal lands in the wetter and colder climes of the British Isles presented challenges of a different kind. Though there had been some medieval drainage of the East Anglian fenlands the task of draining the marshes by means of water channels known as ‘levels’ and constructing sluices to regulate water flows was not energetically pursued until the seventeenth century by agricultural entrepreneurs such as the duke of Bedford. Yet drainage threw up the same problems as in the Low Countries: as the peat bogs dried out the ground sank, which required water to be pumped up into the drainage channels, though the technology of windmills does not appear to have been widely diffused until the eighteenth century. In Scotland, the ditching and draining of peat mosses allowed farmers to strip off the dried-out surface, which was then burnt and the ashes scattered. These ‘burntlands’, as they were known, initially gave high cereal yields (just as with full-scale swidden), but the reclamation of peat lands was much less systematic than in East Anglia. The reclamation of less fertile heathlands called for different methods: essentially the sowing of new nutrient-rich crops such as sainfoin (and later clover), which were highly nutritious for animals, while from the mid-seventeenth century the Norfolk brecklands, the sandy dry heaths flanking the Fens, were brought into cultivation by marling and by sheep dung, which extended the area of profitable tillage, hitherto largely confined to heavier clay soils.

In Scotland, reclamation and improvement were much patchier. In the case of cereal agriculture, it has been mordantly enquired (by the current historiographer royal) who was supposed to buy any increased output of grains in a country which had witnessed mass emigration at the beginning of the seventeenth century, a phenomenon which continued into the eighteenth in areas where enlargement of farms and commercial sheep-rearing drove men from the land, as in the eastern Borders? Improving landlords may have promoted new rural settlements or domestic industries such as linen, brewing, or distilling (the latter at least increased the demand for barley), but their concern was often more educational than practical, bestriding the countryside as rentiers rather than direct capital investors. Further north, in the eighteenth century, enlightened landlords such as Lord Kames could only persuade their tenants to clear the peat mosses along the Tay at Blair Drummond through rent remissions.

In Ireland, the switch to pastoralism took a somewhat different turn. Initially, cattle-breeding displaced sheep-rearing, stimulated by overseas demand, especially from England, until the English Cattle Acts of 1663 and 1667 prohibited the import of live cattle. As a result, Irish farmers resorted to dairying—labour-intensive, but against the background of a rising population—and barrel beef. Dairying offered employment to cottars and subtenants, for cattle-ranchers rented out herds of milch cows to
smallholding peasants with grazing sufficient to deliver specified quantities of butter (in effect, a form of share-cropping). By contrast, in Scotland, where cattle-rearing did not fall foul of the Cattle Acts, the driving of cattle on the hoof to foreign markets (which we have observed in Scandinavia) was organized by landowners, such as Sir David Dunbar in Galloway, who bought lean steers from their tenants and fattened them on their demesne parks before driving them to England the following autumn. These were much more commercialized forms of pastoralism than existed in Wales. There farmers practised a type of transhumance which included both stock and habitation. As autumn ended, animals would be moved from the hills to the valleys or the coast for overwintering, while the farmers themselves took up residence in their ancestral home (hendre) in the valleys. Come the spring, the beasts would be driven back up the mountains to summer pastures, where the farmers occupied temporary housing (hafod). The land in the valley could then be sown with summer crops or turned over to hay meadows, in a manner reminiscent of the Alps. By the sixteenth century, however, some hafods had become permanent farmsteads, and cattle-droving beyond the borders of Wales was common by the seventeenth century.

In other marginal areas of the British Isles (in terms of remoteness or altitude), where sustenance was precarious or seasonal, work in fishing or mining—the Cornish tin-mines, the lead-mines of the southern Scottish uplands or northern England, or the slate mines of north Wales—could provide supplementary employment and income. In the Scottish Highlands, the land clearances, though largely beyond our chronological scope, deserve mention since they occurred against the background of a rapidly rising population after the mid-eighteenth century (as was the case in Ireland). Although the evictions continue to arouse strong emotions, a sizeable number of peasants were in fact resettled in coastal areas, leading to a revival of crofting. The ability of crofters to make a living from the land was enhanced by fishing and by the processing of kelp, seaweed which was burnt to produce alkali used in soap-making, though that proved a short-lived boom. The spread of potatoes also helped sustain rural smallholders, and that was equally true of the west of Ireland, though in northern Munster spring oats, rather than potatoes, remained the staple during the eighteenth century.

II

Crop Yields

In measuring agricultural progress between 1350 and 1750—by which is meant higher productivity, better-quality crops, and an increase in profitability—historians have until
recently concentrated on crop yields. But it is now widely recognized that this is too crude a yardstick. What needs to be assessed is ‘total factor productivity’, that is, the return on capital, land, and labour inputs (of these three, the latter, given the paucity of sources, are undoubtedly the hardest to measure). Put simply, an increase in crop yields can be a misleading indicator: the changing balance between crops sown, an increase in fallow at the expense of tillage, a rise in labour productivity at the cost of land productivity—all these features could cause crop yields to fall, without implying any general agricultural retreat.

Nevertheless, the pattern of crop yields throws up some remarkable variations. The principal grain crops were wheat and rye (the hard grains), and barley and oats (the soft grains). The former were primarily for bread, the latter for fodder or beer. But even oats had hard and soft varieties, the latter cheaper and less soil-exhausting; emmer and spelt were lesser types of wheat, commonly sown on poorer or colder soils; while maslin was a mixture of wheat and rye. In the mountains of southern Europe bread flour was also obtained from chestnuts—the deciduous forests of the Garfagnana, for instance, supplying the city of Lucca, or the alpine woodlands of the Ticino. Over time, maize, rice, and potatoes were added as food crops: by 1750 it is reckoned that maize may have outstripped wheat output in Lombardy. Yields of any one grain could vary greatly, depending on soil and season. For the area south of Paris in the seventeenth century wheat yields fluctuated from 6 hl/ha to 8 hl/ha on poor soils in poor years to as much as 20 hl/ha on better soils in warm years. As a rule of thumb, oats yielded most, followed by barley, with rye and wheat lagging behind. It is striking that the two food grains, rye, the everyday bread grain of poor folk in town and country, and wheat, the source of coveted white flour, shared similar low yields. Moreover, seed ratios varied: 2 hl/ha was common throughout Europe, but by 1700 market demand from Paris had driven that ratio up to 3 hl/ha; in England, by contrast, seed ratios for barley and oats at 3.5 hl/ha outstripped 2.2 hl/ha for wheat and rye. In the drier regions of southern Europe, such as Old Castile, the ratio could drop to a mere 1 hl/ha.

The secular rise in crop yields is illustrated by Table 15.1, which gives statistics for England between 1300 and 1800, though there is a worrying lack of information for the sixteenth century. What stands out immediately is that an increase in yields—for all the main grains—only occurred around 1700, accelerating appreciably thereafter. Given what is commonly argued about the beneficial effects of early manifestations of capitalist agriculture in England, these figures make sobering reading. If these
statistics are set in a European context, they seem to bear out the argument that the economically advanced regions of the North Sea littoral achieved better returns than the Mediterranean areas, as Table 15.2 demonstrates. There is, however, one glaring anomaly, namely the high figures calculated for Ireland, a country for which no one has ever claimed a rapid transformation towards capitalist agriculture, whether driven by the pull of urban demand or for other reasons. By 1800, however, Ireland was a substantial exporter of grain (and livestock) to England, which may account for high yields on estates of enterprising landlords. These tables, therefore, require further elucidation.

Table 15.1 Net grain yields in England, 1300–1871

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Wheat</th>
<th>Rye</th>
<th>Barley</th>
<th>Oats</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1300</td>
<td>8.5</td>
<td>7.3</td>
<td>11.6</td>
<td>6.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1380</td>
<td>6.9</td>
<td>6.4</td>
<td>11.6</td>
<td>7.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1520</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>--</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1600</td>
<td>8.2</td>
<td>7.6</td>
<td>9.2</td>
<td>10.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1700</td>
<td>12.0</td>
<td>9.3</td>
<td>12.5</td>
<td>16.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1800</td>
<td>17.3</td>
<td>17.3</td>
<td>22.2</td>
<td>24.9</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Table 15.2 Estimated crop yields (hl/ha) and yield ratios for selected countries/regions, c. 1800

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country/region</th>
<th>Wheat</th>
<th>Rye</th>
<th>Barley</th>
<th>Oats</th>
<th>Wheat</th>
<th>Rye</th>
<th>Barley</th>
<th>Oats</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>England</td>
<td>20.3</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>29.3</td>
<td>32.5</td>
<td>11.3</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>12.7</td>
<td>9.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ireland</td>
<td>19.9</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>31.2</td>
<td>32.9</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>--</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Netherlands</td>
<td>18.9</td>
<td>15.4</td>
<td>27.7</td>
<td>28.8</td>
<td>11.2</td>
<td>7.5</td>
<td>14.2</td>
<td>11.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Belgium</td>
<td>19.6</td>
<td>20.8</td>
<td>25.3</td>
<td>25.1</td>
<td>11.5</td>
<td>12.2</td>
<td>14.1</td>
<td>13.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Germany (select)</td>
<td>13.7</td>
<td>13.2</td>
<td>20.4</td>
<td>25.8</td>
<td>7.1</td>
<td>5.6</td>
<td>6.7</td>
<td>8.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>13.7</td>
<td>12.5</td>
<td>13.5</td>
<td>17.0</td>
<td>--</td>
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<td>Austria</td>
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<td>19.3</td>
<td>4.0</td>
<td>4.0</td>
<td>4.6</td>
<td>5.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>France (north)</td>
<td>14.4</td>
<td>12.1</td>
<td>14.0</td>
<td>15.4</td>
<td>6.6</td>
<td>5.5</td>
<td>6.6</td>
<td>8.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(south)</td>
<td>10.1</td>
<td>9.7</td>
<td>12.3</td>
<td>14.5</td>
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<td>Total</td>
<td>12.2</td>
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<td>13.5</td>
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<td>5.5</td>
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<td>Italy</td>
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<td>Spain</td>
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A detailed comparison of areas of the Netherlands throughout our centuries has challenged many comfortable assumptions. Around 1400 crop yields for all varieties of grain had been appreciably higher than in the early modern period—by as much as
The subsequent decline may be attributed to the collapse in population after the Black Death and to a switch to less intensive pastoral agriculture. At the same time, there may have been an increase in yields on the more suitable lands once additional manure became available. The seeming paradox may be resolved if we concede that a decrease in land productivity over the entire area under tillage may have been compensated by a concomitant rise in labour productivity.

Despite palpable variations between regions of the northern Low Countries—lower yields on the sandy soils of Limburg and the eastern Netherlands or on the sea clay soils of Groningen and Frisia, compared with better yields in the central river clay area of Guelders—nowhere did yields rise significantly before the nineteenth century. If there was an increase in agricultural output, then it came about through the extension of the cultivated area (poldering and drainage increased the cultivated area of northern Holland by one-third in the space of a mere forty-five years up to 1640!), by changes in crop rotation, and over time with a reversion from pastoralism to tillage. The pioneer of this research, Bas van Bavel, decisively rejects any notion of an ‘agricultural revolution’ in the Low Countries in terms of improved yields—a salutary finding which may well have relevance for other regions of the agrarian west.5

In the Italian peninsula, by contrast, a decline in crop yields might be occasioned by exogenous factors. In the Romagna, for instance, the retreat in wheat yields from 7:1 or 8:1 at the beginning of the sixteenth century to a mere 5:1 by 1590 was caused not only by population decline but by a lack of infrastructural investment in roads, bridges, and canals, and possibly by the impact of share-cropping, a controversial issue to be examined in more detail later. Elsewhere, however, continuing urban capital investment in farming, backed by the Milanese state, ensured that in western Lombardy cereal agriculture still prospered.

Almost all modern scholars are agreed that urban demand drove the increase in agricultural productivity, both in cereals, and in dairy produce and livestock. Empirical evidence throughout Europe certainly supports this linkage. But market-led demand was also influenced by other factors, both institutional and environmental, not least the deliberate foundation of new markets at the frontiers of existing territories, designed to attract produce from adjacent areas, as Stephan Epstein has emphasized for Tuscany in particular. For his part, Robert Allen has stressed that ‘the expansion of cities and therefore of their markets, and demand for agricultural produce was a key factor in stimulating changes in agriculture’; in short, agriculture had clear incentives to increase its productivity through a greater division of labour and a concentration on specialized crops.6
To illustrate the point, we may point once again to the Paris basin where by the eighteenth century maslin was giving way to wheat, not as a means of increasing yields but rather of augmenting the value of the crop. Moreover, the paving of roads allowed night-soil and horse-manure to be easily carted into the surrounding countryside, in a city where horse-drawn carriages were becoming common. None of that, it should be added in passing, required either larger farms or enclosure, though larger fields did permit sheep-folding in temporary pens.

The process, of course, could work both ways. For the Low Countries what amounted to a relay-race occurred, whereby the Flemish cities of Bruges and Ghent initially drove increased agricultural output, only to be overtaken by Antwerp in Brabant and then Amsterdam in Holland. As cities declined, so did output, so that Jan Luiten van Zanden has spoken of ‘undulations’ in demand and output. Only after 1700, he concludes, was the U-shaped curve of urban decline and productivity decline in parallel finally broken. The example of the Netherlands suggests, moreover, that the role of cities could be constricting: competition might as easily distort the primary sector as stimulate it, for in the sixteenth century, as Jan de Vries has observed, a series of ‘economic units’ linking cities and their hinterlands was superseded by a regional (or even inchoate national) economy, in which agricultural specialization was no longer dominated by urban demand, but was driven instead by government operating at provincial level, in marked contrast to Flanders and Brabant, where institutions continued to be based on the ‘quarters’ of the once-powerful medieval cities.

‘The town set the countryside on fire’, in Gérard Béaur’s memorable phrase, but changes in agricultural practice and productivity should not be linked to any one causal factor. The relatively high productivity of Irish agriculture does not fit the prevailing pattern of explanation. It occurred in a country without major urban centres, except Dublin and Cork, neither of which was large by the standards of continental cities. The new settlements established by improving landlords in several parts of Ireland in the eighteenth century were intended to compensate for the very lack of market centres. Moreover, a traditional peasantry with secure rights stood in the way of innovation: as the earl of Abercorn complained in 1773, it was easier to change farming practices on his Scottish estates than on his Irish, where he was powerless to alter the terms of existing leases! The anomalous figures for Ireland may derive from data taken from ‘improved’ estates: the year of comparison, after all, is 1800, not earlier.

Credit

The availability, cost, and impact of credit within the rural economy have only recently received detailed scrutiny, with especial attention devoted to the Low Countries and
England. It is now recognized that informal credit arrangements were commonplace within peasant society or within the village, where wealthier tenants might extend credit to their poorer neighbours, as has been shown for France and Switzerland. Within the peasant household, buying and selling of plots of land not regarded as integral to the heritable farmstead, or raising money from local lenders, satisfied the needs of the life-cycle: setting up a son on his first farm, providing for retired grandparents, paying dowries, or buying out non-inheriting siblings, especially in areas of impartibility. Many such transactions remained unwritten; credit could be raised within the extended family without charging interest; that in turn created a web of mutual obligations. In that sense, evidence of peasant indebtedness should not necessarily be read off as a sign of impoverishment.

These domestic arrangements must be distinguished from investment credit obtained on the open market or advanced by outsiders at the going commercial rate. In Italy, even before 1350, rural notaries were acting as credit-providers, and pawnshops offered a further source of credit (though in them land was not accepted as collateral); ultimately a system of centralized bargaining emerged, with working capital set at a price determined by a public committee. That went well beyond anything seen in other parts of Europe at the time. In many instances peasants resorted to purchasing annuities from urban lenders. In the Low Countries perpetual annuities had become redeemable in the course of the fifteenth century (confirmed by government legislation in Flanders in 1529), though that occurred earlier within the commercialized agriculture of maritime Flanders, where large leaseholding farmers had a constant need for working capital, than on the peasant family farms of inland Flanders. A credit market in annuities developed, with security offered not on the land but on moveables—a boon to tenant farmers who could not offer land they did not own as collateral, as may be observed in Holland and the Guelders river area. Likewise, the fifteenth century witnessed the spread of letters obligatory (IOUs), which were not only transferable but backed by public statute, initially in the leading cities but then for the Low Countries as a whole by 1541.

During the later Middle Ages interest-rates were also falling, though not as rapidly as sometimes supposed. In England, for example, a rate of 10 per cent was still common in the sixteenth century, only falling to 8 per cent in 1641 and to 6 per cent a decade later. What gave English farmers a particular advantage was the stability of the currency (after the debasement of the mid-sixteenth century), in marked contrast to many regions of continental Europe racked by inflation and government defaults, together with low taxation rates, which barely altered until the nineteenth century, assignable letters of credit and mortgages, and, not least, an absence of famine, disease, and high mortality. All these steps, both large and small, led to greater flexibility in farming. But we should be wary of seeing urban investment and credit as the highroad to capitalist agriculture,
since bourgeois landowners usually took more out of the rural economy than they put in; moreover, their motives for investment often had as much to do with security, status, and prestige as with agronomic improvement. Nowhere was that truer than in share-cropping, one of the most contentious and least understood aspects of land management in the agrarian west.

**Share-cropping**

Share-cropping has a long European pedigree, but it was chiefly confined to the Mediterannean—Iberia, the Italian peninsula, and latterly the south and south-west of France—though in our period it was also practised in northeastern France in the Ardennes, and in Brittany and Normandy to the northwest, all regions with strong village communes. Elsewhere it was usually sector-specific, associated in particular with viticulture, as in western Germany. It also occurred in the Netherlands, though with the rise of capital markets sufficient to supply agricultural investment it withered and vanished. In central and northern Italy it went hand-in-hand with the spread of fixed-term leases (*afitti*) from the eleventh or twelfth century onwards, though one historian claims to have identified share-cropping as early as the ninth century. At all events, share-cropping persisted in Tuscany until the 1960s, which is why discussion of the topic remains politically highly charged. Yet the very fact of its survival over so many centuries should alert us to the fact that share-cropping took many forms: it served different purposes at different times and in differing contexts.

Nevertheless, verdicts on share-cropping, both in terms of its contribution to agrarian progress and of its consequences for the peasantry and village society, have been almost uniformly negative. It has been associated with agricultural stagnation or backwardness, hostility to innovation, and risk aversion; accused of perpetuating feudal dependence under the guise of leaseholding, inasmuch as it served as an ‘instrument of surplus extraction’; and, not least, of being a symptom (if not the cause) of rural impoverishment. In Italy, it was always, for Stephan Epstein and others, the ‘second-best option’ compared to straightforward fixed-term leasehold on a fully monetarized basis. In southern Spain, Andalusian landlords were supposedly guilty of abandoning direct farming on their vast latifundia and ‘drifting’ instead into share-cropping. In Castile, hereditary tenancies were giving way to share-cropping tenancies (*aparceria*) in the sixteenth century as landlords saw their rental income eroded by rapid inflation. In France, share-cropping retreated to the more remote areas of the south and southwest, with poor transport links and market integration. That is why, for Immanuel Wallerstein, it became the hallmark of a Mediterranean semi-periphery in an emerging Atlantic world economy in the sixteenth century.
Another (albeit minority) view regards share-cropping in a positive light. It enabled landlords and peasants to cultivate labour-intensive crops at diminished risk, or engage in specialized arboriculture—mulberry trees for silk, vines, olives, or fruit-trees—which required long-term investment with no prospect of a quick return. Share-cropping also allowed landowners to react swiftly to new market opportunities by switching in and out of crops in response to changing consumer demand. After the Black Death a new type of share-cropping developed, specifically in Tuscany, on farms which had been engrossed or consolidated (a process known as appoderamento), namely mezzadria poderale. This form of share-cropping has been seen as the vehicle of increased agricultural productivity, inasmuch as landlords made capital improvements to their extensive estates, and thus constituted a capitalist form of land tenure.

It is impossible here to survey share-cropping in all its varieties. But since the most intensive research on the changing character of share-cropping has been conducted for Tuscany, it is worth dwelling on developments there in some detail, provided that we bear in mind that share-cropping in an area of high urban density and market penetration—and huge urban demand for agrarian produce—may not tell us much about those less well-endowed, more sparsely populated, and infrastructurally more disadvantaged areas of western Europe where share-cropping was also prevalent.

Before 1350 share-cropping reflected the efforts of urban entrepreneurs to seize new opportunities in a flourishing market with rising demand. In the immediate hinterland of cities such as Florence and Siena a pattern of intense farming by means of share-cropping contracts emerged. Indeed, the availability of labour allowed Florentine and Sienese landlords to impose harsh conditions on their share-croppers, including the compulsion to perform haulage services or assist with bridge repairs: it is this extra-economic coercion which has persuaded some historians to regard mezzadria as quasi-feudal in character. Where share-cropping was rare, as in Lucca before the sixteenth century, it was chiefly deployed in market-gardening and pastoralism; in Pisa, its absence before 1500 can be explained by particular circumstances.

But after 1350 the signs were reversed. Demand fell as the population slumped; labour became scarce and land lay uncultivated. That provides the background to appoderamento. It was difficult to find tenants with sufficient capital to take on farms for money leaseholds; as a result, peasants on smallholdings or the landless were attracted to sign share-cropping contracts, usually for between two and five years, which at least afforded some security of subsistence or protection against harvest failure, though it might entail them leaving their villages to resettle on isolated farmsteads, or even abandoning peasant farming to become wage-workers pure and simple on these large estates.
Yet the spread of *mezzadria poderale* in Tuscany was highly uneven. It was rare in the remoter mountain districts, where a distinctive silvo-pastoral economy prevailed, based on transhumance and chestnuts as the staple flour. Equally, it did not spread along the marshy and malarial valley of the Lower Arno or into the Pisan and Sienese Maremma. For Florence, the famous *catasto* of 1427 allows us to plot the diffusion of share-cropping in its *contado* and *distretto*: essentially it was confined to the fertile slopes given over to market-gardening and cereal production around Prato, San Gimignano, Pistoia, and in the Mugello. But it also spread to hillier areas, such as the Upper Valdarno and Chianti, or around Siena and Arezzo.

In Siena, a city whose fortunes had rested on banking and commerce, the economic downturn encouraged its merchants after 1400 to turn to agricultural investment. But this was not a manifestation of ‘refeudalization’; even before 1350 some richer citizens had been active as rural entrepreneurs (as the so-called Table of Possessions of 1310 demonstrates). And it is noticeable that share-cropping was most prevalent on the estates of its wealthy elite, in the fertile north of the city state, and especially in the *Massa*, Siena’s immediate environs. Nevertheless, ecclesiastical institutions and ordinary citizens also acquired rural estates with share-cropping contracts, the latter indeed for reasons of security and to cover household food requirements. The manifold afflictions which befell Siena’s *contado* in the fifteenth century led to an erosion of its village communes and widespread peasant impoverishment. But the Sienese magistracy sought to countervail these perils by legislating to curb peasant indebtedness and to stem the landflight of its share-croppers.

With Pisa, the hoary explanation for the absence of share-cropping, namely the inhospitably marshy and sparsely populated terrain, no longer carries conviction, for the marshes, despite investment in drainage by Florentines after the city’s conquest of Pisa in 1406, had not been eliminated. Rather, the fragmentation of holdings on what good land existed discouraged the rise of *mezzadria poderale*. Furthermore, Pisa looked to its *contado* more as a source of men (for its galleys) than of grain, for its mercantile elite had its gaze firmly fixed on maritime commerce, and could conveniently source supplies of grain from Sardinia, Corsica, or further afield. If there was share-cropping before 1500, then it was confined to particulture (*coltura promiscua*) in market-gardening, not cereals. That only began to change as grain prices recovered towards 1500, when Florentine investors, such as the Riccardi, did acquire large estates managed by *mezzadria poderale*, so that by the sixteenth century Pisa had ‘caught up’ with other Tuscan cities in terms of share-cropping contracts. Likewise, share-cropping appeared in the Lucchese after 1500, especially in its own district of the *Sei Miglia*, but it never became widespread since Lucca remained a city of manufactures and industry (silk, textiles, paper) for centuries to come, which made agricultural investment less tempting.
The reasons for the adoption of *mezzadria poderale* in Tuscany remain controversial. For Francesco Galassi it is not self-evident that share-cropping offered landlords greater benefits than leasehold wage-contracts, either by facilitating better supervision of labour, by better conserving their capital and spreading risk, or by obtaining better returns on their investment, all of which, he believes, could be achieved by other means. Rather, he sees *mezzadria poderale* as a way of compensating for absent or imperfect credit markets. For Stephan Epstein, who agrees with much of that criticism, the shortage of wealthier peasants willing to take on leasehold tenancies was decisive, and he notes in passing that the greater the distance from Florence itself, the greater the survival of peasant proprietorship and the lesser diffusion of share-cropping. Instead, he argues that landlords were faced with a dilemma:

[T]hey had large amounts of land to lease ... yet the most attractive tenants either resided at a great distance or were unable to provide the requisite labour input for a *podere* [because they naturally managed their own farms first]. There were available, however, comparatively large numbers of poor, generally landless peasants. To these risk-averse, un-creditworthy tenants the lord was forced to offer a lease which reduced their degree of risk and provided interlinked credit.

Given the fact that share-cropping was widespread in Tuscany before 1350, however, the question is rather why share tenancy encouraged *appoderamento*, not vice versa. It can only have been, Galassi suggests, to avoid the danger of an undersupply of labour, and he points out that share-cropping contracts on *poderi* contained provisions barring tenants from engaging in outside wage-work and enforcing residence on the *podere* by the share-cropper and his family.  

This debate will doubtless continue, but for both Galassi and Epstein share-cropping remained what Arthur Young, the celebrated eighteenth-century English agronomist, called `a miserable system`. That it should have been deployed in the proximity of large and wealthy cities where capital was presumably readily available leads us to the final conundrum: why did share-cropping not become the agent of a decisive transition to agrarian capitalism? This argument starts from the assumption that share-cropping, in its fifteenth-century manifestation as *mezzadria poderale*, was a capitalist form of land tenure, in which loans advanced to share-croppers, whether of cash, cattle, seed, tools, food, or clothing, stimulated agricultural productivity. That was especially the case in areas of *coltura promiscua*, where investment in share-cropping contracts was greater than in fixed-term leaseholds. The advantages lay on both sides. Florentine absentee landlords, who did not constitute a rural landowning class, and who lived at some remove from their farms, could lower their transaction costs by offering share-cropping contracts, while retaining their primary economic focus on urban manufacturing and
commerce. Share-croppers, too, benefited, since Florentine taxation was based on assets (of which they had few), not on agricultural income (which may have increased). But in the long run Florentine agricultural investment redounded to the disadvantage of the rural population (whether share-croppers or leaseholders), since Florence’s capital wealth was so dominant that it swamped existing local factor markets in land, labour, and credit. Florentines bought up land on such a scale that share-cropping peasants were progressively stripped of whatever smallholdings they once possessed and therewith of their ability to engage in those markets. ‘Consequently’, as Rebecca Jean Emigh has concluded, ‘local market structures which might have developed into capitalist domestic markets were largely eliminated’.9

More than that: Florentine landlords not only controlled agricultural production, in many cases they also marketed that output, so that they held the levers of power at the point of distribution as well. In other words, Florentine investment in share-cropping did not stimulate autonomous rural growth—its citizens could derive their income from manufacturing and agriculture, whereas the rural population only had agriculture to fall back on and found Florentines foreclosing on their potential involvement in factor markets. This argument, pitched at an elevated conceptual level, in fact finds empirical support from scholars of widely differing ideological persuasions, who have identified the deleterious influence which cities such as Florence exerted through their hegemonic control of their contadi.

If we step back from the intricacies of Tuscany, what more general conclusions may be drawn about share-cropping in the agrarian west? Already the Tuscan evidence points to the close connection (though not interchangeability) between fixed-term leaseholds and share-cropping contracts, the latter clearly a hybrid of feudal and capitalist forms of tenure. Ultimately there is no reason to demur at Philip Hoffman’s sober assessment of tenancies in France, namely that, ceteris paribus, the wealthier tenants received fixed-term leases and provided all their capital inputs themselves; poorer tenants were offered share-cropping contracts which involved some supervision to ensure that no negligence or malfeasance occurred; while the poorest tenants were entirely dependent on the landlord’s provision of capital in return for the lion’s share of the crop. So little incentive for the peasant attached to this latter form of dependence that the landlord was better off employing such peasants as labourers at a fixed wage.

Landholding

Much recent writing on the agrarian west has dwelt on changing forms of land tenure and the rise of a land market which, together with progressive engrossment or enclosure, led on, above all in England and the Low Countries, to fully fledged agrarian capitalism.
As a result, emphasis has been placed on the disappearance (or initial absence) of customary tenancies under manorial law and their supersession by fixed-term commercial leases of longer or shorter duration. But of equal significance were, on the one hand, the gradual reduction in the number of peasant freeholders (those who either occupied allodial land without feudal superior, or else owed purely fiscal obligations to the state alone), and, on the other, the ranks of landless peasants, earning their crust through wage-labour under various conditions or from by-employment, whose numbers swelled rapidly throughout the agrarian west in the early modern period, regardless of the agrarian regime under which they lived.

Freeholders were commonly found in areas where inducements were required to settle virgin soil or to clear land for cultivation from forest, marsh, or hillsides. It is therefore no surprise to find them in the East Anglian fenlands, the Dutch coastal areas, the Alps, or the remoter areas of Scandinavia (and of course also in the colonial lands of eastern Europe, beyond the scope of this chapter). These were all areas, moreover, where landlordship (or more specifically manorialism) was vestigial or absent. Hence, sokemen (those who held land by socage, that is, in return for fixed services) may have made up 60 per cent of the population of East Anglia, though lower estimates of freeholders in the rest of southern England, once put at around a quarter, have now been revised upwards by Bruce Campbell to around one-half. In the Low Countries peasant ownership was very widespread in Drenthe and the peat area of Holland (between 80 and 90 per cent), around 50 per cent in the rest of Holland and Guelders, and elsewhere only 25 per cent. In France in the seventeenth century there were many fewer freeholders—anywhere between 11 per cent in Brittany to 20 per cent in the Garonne and Auvergne, that is to say, generally in areas remote from the larger cities (except, perhaps, Toulouse). In Scandinavia, the northern and eastern districts of Norrland and Finland in the sixteenth century had the most freeholders, amounting to 95 per cent in some localities. In central and southern Sweden, these peasants, known as skattebönder, who made up half the rural population in the same period, paid taxes to the crown alone, as did the much smaller number of freeholders in Denmark, on varying estimates between 2 and 17 per cent, who were explicitly called ‘peasants of the crown’.

Over time the number of freeholders everywhere declined (except in Switzerland and the northern Low Countries, and also in Norway, where the total remained steady at between 20 and 33 per cent of peasants into the eighteenth century), either on account of the growing weight of state taxation (as in Scandinavia), the land purchases of bourgeois investors and royal officials (as in France), or else because the status of other peasants became assimilated to that of freeholders, as in the Low Countries, where state legislation increasingly recognized only absolute proprietorship or short-term leasehold tenancy, or in England, where the legal system, substantially different from that...
of continental Europe, eroded or elided the various categories of tenancy, a development abetted by parliamentary statute. Before 1500 many peasants in England held land under both freehold and copyhold (up to 60 per cent in East Anglia); they resorted to an array of devices—jointures, entails, or *inter vivos* transfers—to ensure the continuity and integrity of their family farms, the very same devices, in fact, as deployed by the gentry and nobility! From a welter of evidence Richard Smith has concluded that copyhold by inheritance (dismissed by Robert Brenner as undermining peasant tenure) effectively allowed peasants to treat their farms as held in fee simple (that is, full proprietorship). And that applied in all but name to leaseholds as well, for by 1500 the courts were recognizing a ten-year lease as ‘an estate in land’ (as it was technically called, that is, full ownership), except that it was still classed as non-freehold to distinguish it from other such ‘estates’.

In Scotland, where no manorial legal system or customary rights had existed, it might be thought that a free peasantry would have flourished, or that in the Highlands clan loyalty, undergirded by the principle of *duthchas* (heritage), might have meant that kinship carried with it the entitlement to possession of land. But such an obligation was based on ‘fictive kinship and emotion’, in Rab Houston’s sardonic diction, not on law. More generally, land was concentrated in the hands of a cohesive and powerful aristocratic elite, whose absolute rights of proprietorship were confirmed by a judgment in the Court of Session in 1744 which declared that a proprietor could be put under no restraint.

By the sixteenth century leasehold had become the prevalent form of land tenure throughout western Europe, except for those regions where it was flanked by share-cropping, as in parts of the Italian peninsula. By definition, leasehold was a commercial form of tenure, and it has therefore been regarded as holding the key to the rise of agrarian capitalism. This verdict has come under fire in recent years from those who compared developments in contrasting regions of the Low Countries and England.

In almost all areas of the southern and northern Low Countries leases had become the rule as early as the thirteenth century (echoing Italy); by the sixteenth century the area of cultivated land let out on leasehold varied from 25 to 90 per cent, but the social–property relations erected thereon differed appreciably. In Overijssel, Frisia, and Groningen, areas of weak lordship, short-term leases often became in practice hereditary, whereas in the densely populated Guelders river area south of the river Lek leases which expired were not automatically renewed. Rather, there was competition for land, which led not to parcellization (even though this was originally a district of partible inheritance, like most of the Low Countries) but to the emergence of sizeable leasehold farms of between 35 and 70 hectares, employing wage-workers in labour-extensive pastoralism. The explanation lies in the willingness of seigneurial lords (many and strong), in an area already marked by high urban density and commercialized agriculture, to abandon any
vestiges of manorialism and recast themselves as landlords pure and simple, forsaking jurisdictional powers, who henceforth derived their income entirely from the profits of commercial leasehold rents on large farms which were not divided. And yet, not far distant, in the Land van Heusden, between Dordrecht and ‘s-Hertogenbosch, peasant family farms under customary (that is, feudal) tenure survived, which engaged in labour-intensive farming to produce increased crops for market.

In districts such as the Guelders river area the prevalence of short-term leases encouraged a brisk market in land, with as much as 1.5 per cent of land changing hands annually, underpinned by the rise of a system of public auctions of land or leases, with transfers registered in the public courts. Market-led demand led in turn to the dissolution or privatization of common land in much of the Low Countries (but not in Drente, the Campine, and the Ardennes). All in all, Bas van Bavel concludes, ‘the rise of modern land and especially lease markets thus formed a main element in the economic and social transition from feudalism to capitalism ...’ in the Low Countries.\(^{12}\) In that he appears to agree with Robert Brenner’s argument, except that he accords leasehold no function as a universal solvent of feudalism; it only did so under very specific circumstances, not because of demographic trends, the movement of prices and wages, or the penetration of urban capital, but rather as a result of particular property relations (such as those which obtained in the Guelders river area). In other areas and circumstances short-term leases could facilitate the exchange of small plots of land without upsetting the integrity of the main peasant family holding, the terra unius familiae. Even where short-term leases replaced customary tenures, as in inland Flanders, they might help to preserve such small family farms (which by the late sixteenth century often covered less than 5 hectares), in what Erik Thoen has termed ‘a commercial survival economy’.\(^{13}\)

In England, the argument at the heart of the Brenner debate has revolved around the alleged disappearance of copyhold and its replacement by commercial leaseholding, facilitated by engrossment or enclosure of the land to create larger, more productive and efficient farms, unfettered by legal or seigneurial constraints, as a response to the demands of an emerging national market. While no one takes seriously Alan Macfarlane’s bizarre view that medieval England never had a traditional peasantry, it may be the case, as Jane Whittle has argued, that the ‘family-land bond’, as it is called, was never as strong, at least in eastern England, as on the continent. By the sixteenth century, with the decline of serfdom and the consequent erosion of villeinage (the unfree tenure of peasants without access to the royal courts), the bulk of the rural population held land under various forms of copyhold, be it of inheritance, or for lives. Although the peasants’ title to land was entered in the roll of the manorial court (hence the term ‘copyhold’), Brenner believed that such peasants enjoyed little security, so that copyhold was doomed to yield before the spread of commercial leases and the engrossment of land. In fact,
copyhold of inheritance (in the southeast and the Midlands) offered a large degree of secure possession and did not lead to landlord expropriation, though copyhold for lives was less secure and at the turn of the sixteenth century was giving way to so-called beneficial leases.

By 1600 copyhold of inheritance was effectively enshrined in law, and copyholders could sue in the courts for the return of wrongfully alienated land. In short, as Robert Allen has put it, this form of copyhold converted villeins into peasant proprietors. Moreover, as Richard Hoyle has noted, parliament (dominated by landed interests) could have chosen to abolish copyhold in favour of leasehold, but refrained from doing so. Copyhold land indeed became the target of investment by burghers, clerics, and gentry, since it no longer carried the taint of villeinage or the fines attaching to it. A further attraction was that a limit was set to entry fines on hereditable copyholds.

The English yeoman—the capitalist leasehold tenant in his manifestation as ‘the forty-shilling freeholder’ with parliamentary voting rights—was as likely to emerge from the ranks of the copyholders as from the leaseholders (who at the beginning of the sixteenth century made up no more than one-eighth of the peasantry). In the aftermath of the Black Death manorial lords began to lease out their demesnes; by the sixteenth century such land, perhaps a quarter to a third of all land under cultivation, was overwhelmingly held by leasehold tenants. Equally, leases were offered as an inducement to unfree peasants to take on farm tenancies previously held as freeholds or by custom. Nowhere was the shift from copyhold to leasehold rapid. Often it took the form of copyholds for lives being regranted as beneficial leases, for the latter’s long terms (usually for three lives) and low rents were in fact quite similar to the former’s. There was little resistance to the change: for landlords, beneficial leases may have conferred greater contractual flexibility; for their part tenants gained clear rights under common law. Perhaps as much as three-quarters of freehold land and anywhere between 20 and 60 per cent of customary land (the evidence is infuriatingly scanty) was recast as beneficial leasehold between the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. As Jane Whittle observes, there is little to suggest that leases became markedly more ‘capitalist’ in the sixteenth century, not least because the expansion of leasehold was driven not so much by landlord initiative as by tenants subletting their land to other tenants. The age of capitalist rack-renting leaseholds lay in the eighteenth century.14

Discussion of changes to tenure has mainly focused on areas of tillage or mixed husbandry, that is, broadly central and southern England. The spread of engrossment and enclosure, on the other hand, brings the whole country into purview; in upland areas the border between England and Scotland is indeed irrelevant in this context (aside from the consequences of differing legal systems). That land was being concentrated into larger farms before 1500 is not in dispute; the question is rather where and to what purpose.
The term ‘enclosure’ could have several meanings, but it is particularly associated with the removal of common property rights, rather than with engrossment and the spread of leasehold. Before 1500, it has been reckoned, 45 per cent of land in England had been enclosed, but that followed two distinct paths, namely the enclosure of commonfield arable, and the enclosure of upland waste (that is, uncultivated land, including woodland). It followed a slump in the labour supply after the Black Death, which gave landlords both the opportunity and the necessity to consolidate their estates and to work them with fewer men; in short, it encouraged a switch from arable to pasture. In Devon, Cornwall, and Norfolk there is clear evidence of engrossment, with little popular resistance, perhaps because alternative employment was available in fishing, brewing, tanning, or mining.

In the pastoral uplands of sparsely populated northwest England perhaps one-third of the land had been enclosed; in practice, that usually meant creating pastures held ‘in severality’ (that is, in single ownership) out of common pastureland by separating them from the rest of the common waste by means of dykes or fences. Even after such enclosures in upland England waste remained very extensive and constituted a vital resource both for summer grazing or peat-cutting (turbary), or else as a woodland asset with common rights of pannage and estovers (the right to pasture swine on acorns or beech-mast, and to take timber for domestic needs). The beneficiaries, known as ‘commoners’, were restricted from overwintering more beasts than they could feed on their own plots (in English law ‘levancy and couchancy’), which put a brake on the commercialization of the commons, though transhumance (either by overwintering beasts elsewhere or by droving them to summer shielings) was widely practised in the Anglo-Scottish borderlands. In the course of the sixteenth century any legal restraints were replaced by agreements between individual farmers on the stint of beasts to be allowed on shared pasture ‘closes’—no longer common land, but in effect little different.

After 1500 the picture changed, as population recovery fed a renewed demand for cereals. Now enclosure of arable became widespread, which encroached directly on ancient rights of common and the system of openfield farming. Although there was parliamentary legislation against enclosure, a series of peasant rebellions in East Anglia and the Midlands between 1549 and 1607 demanded that enclosures be destroyed, whether arable or pasture, since the latter was blamed for the rise in food prices. In 1500 half the arable land in England still lay in common fields; by 1850 common rights had all but disappeared. Nevertheless, the change was slow. It may be the case that two-thirds of Midland arable farms supplying the burgeoning London market were enclosed in the course of the sixteenth century, but the fastest rise in enclosures came in the following century, with perhaps one-quarter of all arable land being enclosed, albeit with substantial regional variations. Only in the eighteenth century were enclosures...
sanctioned by act of parliament; two centuries earlier if parliament intervened at all it did so in favour of the tenant and against the landlord. It should also be remembered that freehold land could not be enclosed.

Yet even after 1700 a sizeable number of small farms survived whose occupiers depended on rights of common for their subsistence, or else had to supplement their incomes through crafts or cottage industries. The same held true for family farms which employed no outside labour. Here enclosure made little impact: before 1700 only 10 per cent of such farms had been enclosed, as opposed to 90 per cent of ‘capitalist’ farms, as Leigh Shaw-Taylor dubs them, that is, those of 40 hectares or more. Only southeast England was dominated by large-scale agrarian capitalism; elsewhere medium- and small-scale capitalist agriculture (what Marx would have called ‘petty commodity production’) prevailed, as in the southwest, the Pennines, or northern England. What mattered, he argues, was not farm size as such, since tenures recorded ownership, not size, thus concealing the extent of sub-letting. Rather, the measure of any transition to capitalist agriculture, he insists, was the ratio of labourers to farmers. In northern England family farms reliant exclusively upon their own labour continued up to 1700 and beyond.15

Taken in the round, therefore, there is little reason to regard changes in tenure as heralding a general and fundamental shift to fully commoditized capitalist agriculture in England, as Brenner believed. Innovations in agriculture were as likely to come from tenants as from landlords, especially in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries when smaller farmers (whether tenants or freeholders) achieved increases in productivity within the openfield system—in eastern England they were pioneers of turnip-growing. Contrary to Brenner’s belief that agrarian capitalism spread where landlord control was strong and peasant property rights weak, Mark Overton has shown the reverse to be the case: the best advances in output and productivity came in areas such as Norfolk where landlordship was relatively weak.

In Scotland, agricultural development followed a different track, with no enclosures until the eighteenth century, though they faced no legal impediment. The reasons lay in the separate Scottish legal system. In Scotland, there was no manorialism, and hence there could be no appeal to custom; by the same token copyhold was unknown. Leases were for short terms only and regarded as conferring rights of usufruct or occupancy, not possession. Some leases, however, were converted in the early sixteenth century into feu ferme tenure (hereditary possession) after the crown sold off ecclesiastical estates to raise revenue. Land was commonly held by runrig, which encouraged the fragmentation of holdings, inasmuch as it involved either the intermingling of land among several landowners, or else a single landlord parcelling out land to all his tenants.
Shared pastures, known as 'commonties', were held by landlords and peasants jointly, though a series of parliamentary statutes between 1661 and 1695 encouraged enclosure by means of tax concessions in order to boost agricultural output. But even the act of 1695, which allowed the division of commonties (though it had no bearing on lands held within a single estate), did not herald any general enclosure movement; such divisions were only frequent after 1750. The chief obstacle to agricultural improvement was the entail, which forbade the alienation of lands from designated heirs, as well as the use of estates as collateral for debt. By the mid-eighteenth century around one-third of the land in Scotland was held under entail, which considerably restricted the development of a land market. Sales of land tended to take place within the ranks of a narrow elite of landlords, especially after the debts and bankruptcies incurred after the wars of the 1640s. Tenancies-at-will and short leases have been blamed for the backwardness of Scottish agriculture, though on vacancy tenancies were in practice offered to the heirs or close relatives, as remains the case on the estates of the dukes of Buccleuch to this day.

**Labour and Total Factor Productivity**

The third aspect of total factor productivity, namely labour productivity, requires only brief consideration since its principal manifestations have already been discussed. More intensive deployment of family labour on farms supplying local market demand has been regarded, in the case of inland Flanders, as a 'commercial survival economy'. It ran the risk of drudgery to the point of self-exploitation, as the Russian Marxist economic historian, Alexander Chayanov, put it in the 1920s. Subsistence-oriented intensification was an unlikely route to agrarian transformation. In coastal Flanders, Frisia, and the Guelders river area, by contrast, large leaseholding farms were the norm, with farmers given every incentive to specialize and to reduce labour inputs in order to improve the ratio between output and wage costs, that is, they were seeking greater labour productivity in response to external price signals. In Italy, we have already noted the discrepancy between higher land productivity (achievable in part through coltura promiscua and irrigation schemes) and labour productivity which remained resolutely low, and to which share-cropping was a very imperfect solution. In France labour productivity increased by a mere 27 per cent over the three centuries up to 1800.

If we compare these figures with England, we observe a dramatic shift. Between 1700 and 1850 output rose by 300 per cent, but the reasons are not well understood. Robert Allen has calculated that half is attributable to increased land productivity, but it is hard to weigh that against labour productivity. All that we can be certain of is that the rural labour force sank from around 80 per cent to a mere 20 per cent in that period. Mass emigration to the towns, or alternative employment in proto-industries (which is beyond
the scope of this chapter) must have played a role. At all events, England in this regard was quite unlike its continental neighbours.

Statistics for total factor productivity have so far only been compiled for France, where they tell a depressing story. Up to the French Revolution there was no area of France where the annual overall increase was more than 0.21 per cent. Most regions only achieved 0.13 per cent, and western France actually declined. On the eve of the French Revolution the Paris basin was showing better signs of advance, its total factor productivity rising to 0.31 per cent.

III

Concluding Remarks

A survey cannot hope to offer answers to the many outstanding issues of research into the history of west European agriculture between 1350 and 1750. In particular, some of the issues in the Brenner debate lie outwith the scope of the chapter. Nevertheless, four brief concluding reflections may be offered.

1 From detailed study of various, but often proximate, districts of the Low Countries Bas van Bavel has shown convincingly that only regional explanations for divergences in agricultural practice and progress are likely to convince. More than that, however, he has emphasized that sharp transformations in the exploitation of landholdings might occur, yet ‘notwithstanding changes in form ... the essence of social-property relations remained’.

In other words, he endorses Brenner’s insistence on the role of those relations, but questions whether they must have primacy at all costs and whether class constitutes the most suitable tool of analysis, since the state, especially the emergent fiscal state, had its own interests and agenda which were not necessarily identical with those of the landlords.

2 Shami Ghosh has recently reminded us that whatever agrarian regime prevailed it proved signally incapable of absorbing in any beneficial way the growing numbers of landless (or land-deprived) in early modern rural society; even proto-industry was a two-edged sword in this regard. For, as Jack Langton has pointed out, proto-industrialization could as easily help preserve the peasantry as a way of life by providing the safety-valve of seasonal labour or outwork as part of a general peasant strategy of subsistence risk minimization. For many, emigration or landflight remained the only way of escape, or notoriously in the Alps the ‘export’ (that is, the extrusion of surplus labour) from the Swiss valleys into foreign mercenary service.
The stark contrast between English capitalist agriculture on large farms and small peasant farmers in France—the starting-point of the Brenner debate—has now been discounted. Such large farms with innovative and ambitious tenants certainly did exist around Paris—why would the pull of its market have been any less than London’s? Moreover, even small peasant farmers in France could show entrepreneurial flair. The chief proponent of this revisionism, Gérard Béaur, is even prepared to accord share-cropping a dynamic role! Yet Béaur also concedes that ‘land changed hands at a snail’s pace’ well into the nineteenth century. Does this suggest that an unremitting concentration upon forms of tenure and the rise of a landmarket may have skewed the debate in an unhelpful direction?

Until the Industrial Revolution peasants in Europe (and elsewhere) could not escape what Sir Tony Wrigley has called ‘the photosynthetic constraint’, that is, they could not use more energy in agriculture than agriculture itself provided. Rather than using stocks of mineral energy to increase the photosynthetic flow from the land, all energy for every purpose had to come from that flow. In that regard England was no exception. If agricultural output lay between 50 and 100 per cent higher in England than in France in 1800, that, Wrigley believes, was attributable to the heavier use of horses and oxen. If these factors are then linked to what Jack Langton has called ‘the tyranny of distance’ (whereby the amount of energy expended in transporting goods increased exponentially over quite modest distances), then this review of west European agriculture suggests that it may have showed greater progress between 1350 and 1750 than could reasonably have been predicted.

Further Reading


CORN Publication Series: Comparative Rural History of the North Sea Area:


Vol. 5. Bas van Bavel and Peter Hoppenbrouwers, eds. *Landholding and Land Transfer in the North Sea Area (Late Middle Ages–19th Century)* (Turnhout, 2004).


Dickson, David. *Old World Colony: Cork and South Munster 1630–1830* (Cork, 2005).

Dodgshon, Robert A. *From Chiefs to Landlords: Social and Economic Change in the Western Highlands and Islands, c. 1493–1820* (Edinburgh, 1998).


Pinilla, Vincente, ed. *Markets and Agricultural Change in Europe from the Thirteenth to the Twentieth Century* (Rural History of Europe, 2) (Turnhout, 2009).


Scott, Tom. *Society and Economy in Germany, 1300–1600* (Houndmills/New York, 2002).


**Notes:**


(3.) For information on Iceland I am grateful to Árni Daníel Júlíusson, and to the study by Ólafur Arnalds et al., *Soil Erosion in Iceland* (Reykjavik, 2001).


Pinilla, ed., *Markets and Agricultural Change in Europe from the Thirteenth to the Twentieth Century* (Rural History in Europe, 2) (Turnhout, 2009), 11–36.


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Abstract and Keywords

This chapter deals with the vast territories east of the Elbe river, including Poland-Lithuania, the Czech lands, Brandenburg-Prussia, and Russia. There are two primary and interlocking themes, first the westernization of these lands, secondly, the origins and development of the ‘second serfdom’ in the agrarian East. Westernization of the agrarian East came largely through the introduction and expansion of the ‘Frankish agrarian system’, which began around 1200 with Western colonization east of the Elbe. Westernization was essentially a repetition of basic agrarian developments that had already taken place in much of north-west Europe in the period 600–1000 AD. One of the most important of these developments was manorialism, and the so-called ‘second serfdom’ in Eastern Europe was thus not a deviation from westernization, but rather an integral part of it.

Keywords: Agrarian history of Eastern Europe, Western settlement of Eastern Europe, medieval archeology of Eastern Europe, backwardness of Eastern Europe, manorialism in medieval West, manorialism in Eastern Europe, westernization of Eastern Europe
Explanations of Europe’s Agrarian Development

This chapter focuses on the agrarian societies that inhabited the vast territories between the Elbe and Volga rivers during the period between 1200, when Western colonization east of the Elbe began, and the emancipation of the Russian serfs in 1861. These territories include the north-eastern parts of present-day Germany, east central Europe (Poland, Hungary, the Czech and Slovak Republics), the Baltic states (Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania), and eastern Europe (Belarus, Ukraine, and European Russia) (see Map 16.1). Major historical factors that have shaped these mostly Slavic societies include: low population density, relatively poor conditions for cereal cultivation, and long isolation from both the classical world of Greco-Roman antiquity and the Frankish world of the medieval West. Although the tenth century brought Christianization, and thus facilitated the entry of most east-Elbian elites into the cultural and political life of Latin and Byzantine Europe, it did not alter social and economic conditions in the agrarian East, which remained deeply rooted in archaic, pre-feudal structures.1

Beginning around 1200, however, settlers from north-west Europe, ultimately numbering in the hundreds of thousands, migrated into Polish, Czech, and other lands east of the Elbe, bringing with them Western forms of agrarian organization and agricultural practices. This massive transfer of human capital and technology launched the agrarian East on the road to Westernization, and in the period 1200–1500, societies in Poland, Bohemia, and the north-east German lands appeared to be on a path of convergence with north-west Europe. Up to 1500, as one historian noted,

the peasants’ position was far better than it was in the West, and this included the native population. Class distinctions in the East were less sharp, noblemen moved to the cities and became burghers, while burghers acquired estates and villager
mayors (p. 429) (p. 430) held fiefs. The whole structure of society, as might be expected of a colonial area, was much freer and looser than it was in western Europe. It only seemed a question of time until the East would no longer be backward but would belong to the most developed parts of Europe.²

The agrarian East, however, did not catch up to the West, and still remains its poor cousin. For many historians, this relative backwardness began around 1500, when east-Elbian elites initiated a manorial transformation, turning their landed estates into manors similar to those that had dominated the Frankish heartlands in the Carolingian period. Accompanying this manorial transformation were new forms of rural subjection, including the imposition of heavy labour services and limitations on the peasants’ freedom to leave their lords. Historians have viewed the rise of manorialism east of the Elbe after 1500 as an abrupt break from the Westernizing path that much of the agrarian East had followed since 1200. Scholarly interest in the origins of east-Elbian agrarian divergence grew during the Cold War, which—like the agrarian divergence of the sixteenth century—also divided Europe along the Elbe.³

Polish scholars were especially active in exploring links between the manorial transformation in the sixteenth century, and the subsequent backwardness of east-Elbian Europe. The historian Jerzy Topolski argued that specific conditions east of the Elbe (noble domination, weak towns, extensive availability of land) enabled the east-Elbian nobilities to shift to manorialism and thus reverse the declining value of seigniorial rents that had begun in the late Middle Ages.⁴ Topolski assumed that a decline in seigniorial rents meant a decline in noble incomes, but even if declining rents ruined many noble families, those who survived often increased their revenues by expanding their holdings and consolidating their estates. Feudal rents did not have to increase for (some) seigniorial incomes to rise.

Witold Kula, another Polish historian, argued that the manorial economy, based on unpaid labour services of the subject peasantry, created a perverse set of economic incentives (under-investment in agricultural technology, misallocation of productive resources, tendency to monoculture) that laid the basis for Poland’s economic backwardness, and thus set the stage for Poland’s political eclipse in the late eighteenth century.⁵ Kula’s arguments focused exclusively on Poland, and therefore could not explain why manorialism led to widely divergent outcomes in other regions of the agrarian East, for example Brandenburg–Prussia.

A third model came from Marian Malowist, who argued that estate owners in Poland and north-east Germany shifted to the manorial economy in order to profit from the growing opportunities for exporting grain through Baltic ports.⁶ This reduced Poland to a peripheral status, a supplier of raw materials to the more dynamic economies in north-
western Europe. Following Malowist, the American historical sociologist Immanuel Wallerstein made east-Elbian grain exports a central point in his ambitious study of the capitalist world system in the sixteenth century. In Wallerstein’s conception, east-Elbian manorialism was a crucial component of the ‘new world system’ spawned by merchant capital in the sixteenth century. Supplying grain to the urbanizing economies in the West, the east-Elbian manor occupied a peripheral position similar to the slave plantation in the Caribbean. Capitalist development in western Europe thus went hand-in-hand with ‘the development of underdevelopment’ on peripheries like eastern Europe and the Caribbean.\footnote{p. 431}

Despite its conceptual clarity, Wallerstein’s explanation assigned too much importance to the role of grain exports. Even in Poland, by far the most important grain exporter in the agrarian East, the overwhelming bulk of rye exports (80 per cent!) apparently came from only one region of Poland—West Prussia, the primary hinterland of Danzig’s huge grain market.\footnote{Based on Wallerstein’s argument, West Prussia should have been the centre of Poland’s manorial economy. As we will see, however, the agrarian economy in West Prussia was dominated by capital-intensive forms of agriculture based primarily on wage labour.} Thus, far from creating underdevelopment, grain exports led to the emergence of an enclave of capitalistic agriculture in the Danzig hinterland.

Scholarly interest in grand models constructed to explain the divergent agrarian developments east and west of the Elbe appears to have declined after the Cold War. More recent studies, especially those of individual estates, have emphasized the similarities, not the differences between the early modern agrarian societies east and west of the Elbe.\footnote{As William Hagen, a leading scholar, has noted, ‘Villages in east-Elbia were like much of the countryside in west and south Germany … a world of middling family farmers, self-sufficient producers, and, except in bad years, surplus sellers on nearby markets.’} While the new studies have made the old models obsolete, they have not yet led to a new interpretive framework. Hagen is certainly correct that agrarian societies east and west of the Elbe shared many similarities, but as a historical phenomenon, the manorial transformation of the agrarian East was on much too great a scale to be easily dismissed. The uniformity of seigniorial exploitation across the vast reaches of the agrarian East calls out for an interpretive framework that can account for manorialism’s dominant role in the period 1500–1800.

This chapter advances such an explanation, arguing that manorialism in the agrarian East was a repeat of the manorial system that had emerged 800 years earlier in the Carolingian West, and that it arose for the same reason—the emergence of a new, more productive type of peasant economy that offered lords new opportunities for exploitation.
The Frankish Agrarian System

This ‘new, more productive type’ of peasant economy first took shape in the Frankish heartlands between the Rhine and the Paris basin between 500 and 800 A.D. To call it ‘Frankish’ does not imply that it grew out of specifically Frankish tribal practices, but only that the new peasant agriculture (which drew eclectically on Germanic elements from different regions) first emerged in the Frankish core region. The basis of this new peasant agriculture was the intensive cultivation of cereals, especially rye and oats, which led to a cerealized economy capable of supporting much higher levels of population density. This, however, was only one element in ‘the Frankish agrarian system’, which ultimately included not only basic components of the peasant economy, but also elements of seigniorial domination. In his pioneering work Why Europe?, the Austrian historian Michael Mitterauer sees the Frankish agrarian system as the fundamental agent of change in the Westernization (or Europeanization) of the agrarian East and other peripheral European regions. Space does not permit a full exploration of Mitterauer’s arguments (which are not always identical to those put forward here). Instead, we will concentrate on six important components of the Frankish agrarian system:

1. Short fallow cereal cultivation, especially the two-field and three-field systems. The expansion of grain production required a considerable expansion of the cultivated surface without compromising its fertility. The three-field system kept two-thirds of the arable land under cultivation at any one time, with the first field planted in a winter crop (rye or wheat), the second in a spring crop (oats, barley, etc.), and the third in fallow. Every year saw the rotation of the fields: the winter field normally became the spring field, the spring field became the new fallow, while the old fallow entered service as the new winter field. This system did not lead to higher yields per acre, but it increased the amount of land under cultivation, and planting two different crops at two different times in the year reduced the danger of crop failure.

2. The enclosed, modular farmstead with outbuildings or discrete spaces for peasant habitation, with separate buildings for cattle stalls and other basic activities.

3. Large concentrated village settlements which had gradually emerged in the Frankish heartland after 500.

4. The Hide system (Hufenverfassung), in which the peasant farmstead served as the basic unit of assessment for taxes and seigniorial obligations.

5. Large estates. The large estate was a crucial part of the Frankish agrarian system, since it created a defined territorial space within which the owner might ultimately impose lordship and obligations onto the inhabitants.
The parish church, established by the estate owner who thereby marked the spatial and religious boundaries of his lordship, thus cementing the connection between his power and authority, on the one hand, and his subjects’ religious community, on the other.  

Although born and nurtured in the loess belt between the English Channel and the Rhine, the Frankish agrarian system soon spread beyond the Rhine, gradually taking root in Bavaria, Thuringia, and Saxony. The Frankish agrarian system did not, however, expand at a uniform pace, and while some localities east of the Rhine saw its introduction as early as the eighth and ninth centuries, other regions did not have it even as late as the eleventh century. It took even longer in the agrarian East.

The Frankish agrarian system developed in two stages: the first saw the creation of the new, more productive peasant economy, while the second stage saw the emergence of new forms of seigniorial exploitation, most notably the manorial system. In practice, these two stages overlapped, since Carolingian landowners encouraged the development of the peasant economy by laying out Frankish farmsteads on their newly established manors.

Historians sometimes use the term ‘manor’ to denote any estate owned by the landed elite; in this chapter, however, this term, along with related words like ‘manorialism’ and ‘manorial economy’) refer exclusively to the classic bipartite manor (French: le grand domaine classique; German: Villikation) which first emerged in the Paris basin around 750 A.D and then spread to England, west Germany, and northern Italy. As the term suggests, the bipartite manor had two major components: the demesne, and the peasant farmsteads attached to the manor. The two parts together formed a system of seigniorial exploitation in which the subject peasants drew their livelihoods from the farmsteads they held from the lord, and, in exchange, provided labour services on the lord’s demesne in addition to paying rents in kind.

The manorial system depended on the peasant economy, which attests to the productivity of the Frankish peasant economy; the peasant farmstead was able to satisfy its own needs yet still have significant labour capacity that the seignior could appropriate for his manorial economy. In Joachim Henning’s succinct formulation:

[T]he manorial economy may be seen as a reaction to the high levels of productivity attained in the west... by households engaged in both cereal production and cattle breeding by means of a well-balanced economic system. 

The Frankish peasant economy was an essential precondition for the emergence of manorialism, but it did not inevitably lead to manorialism. Both in the Carolingian West and, later, in the agrarian East, there were estates without manors where the peasants...
The Agrarian East

paid rents in cash, kind, or both, without performing significant labour services.\textsuperscript{16} It is not always clear, however, why landlords chose manorialism on some estates, while preferring rents in cash or kind on others.\textsuperscript{17}

\textbf{The Agrarian East Before 1200}

Archaeological evidence shows clearly that east-Elbian societies prior to 1200 differed sharply from most of their counterparts in north-west Europe. Relative population density provides one of the most vivid contrasts. Around 1000, regions like the Rhineland were supporting twenty to thirty people per square kilometre, while even the most densely populated lands in the agrarian East (Silesia and Bohemia) had a density per square kilometre of only five to six inhabitants.\textsuperscript{18} In the agrarian East, populations clustered together in small settlements of forty or fifty inhabitants— islands of population in a sea of marsh and forests.\textsuperscript{19} Unlike the Frankish West, the populations in these settlements did not live in enclosed, modular farmsteads with separate buildings for (p. 434) cattle stalls and other functions.\textsuperscript{20} Their dwellings (9 to 16 square metres) were tiny in comparison to the Frankish heartlands, which often had large farmhouses of 50 to 70 square metres.

Also in contrast to their counterparts in north-west Europe, populations east of the Elbe did not generally use short-fallow systems before 1200, relying instead on extensive methods of shifting cultivation, like the slash-and-burn system, in which the villagers cleared small plots of virgin or long-fallow land, and, after burning the stumps and other vegetation, then sowed seeds in the ash. After providing one to three years of excellent harvests, soil fertility declined drastically, and the plots reverted to forest or grassland for extended periods of ten to fifteen years.\textsuperscript{21}

Though cereal cultivation was increasingly important, it may have been secondary to animal husbandry (especially pigs) and products gathered from the rivers and forests.\textsuperscript{22} The resulting diet, relatively rich in protein, probably explains the Slavs’ higher physical stature in the early Middle Ages.\textsuperscript{23} Abundant forests in the agrarian East also provided their sparse populations with good access to fuel, building materials, honey, and furs. Tribute, usually paid in honey or furs before 1200, reflects an economy based in large part on hunting and gathering. Endowed with access to abundant resources, the archaic agrarian structures east of the Elbe fed demographic expansion in the period 900–1200, while creating enough surplus to support the emergence of dynastic states and their elites in Poland, Bohemia, and Kievan Rus.
Introduction of the Frankish Agrarian System in the East-Elbian Lands, 1200–1500

In the late twelfth and thirteenth centuries, these elites undertook the transformation of existing agrarian structures by bringing Western settlers into their sparsely populated lands. In the regions near or along the Baltic littoral (East Holstein, Brandenburg, and Prussia), elites consisted primarily of German lay and ecclesiastical rulers—princes, bishops, heads of crusading religious orders, and lay aristocrats, who had conquered the indigenous Slavic and Baltic populations, and forced their conversion to Catholicism. In the Czech and Polish lands, long-Christianized west Slavic elites, along with some Western churchmen, made up a similar mix of princes, bishops, abbots, and lay aristocrats. The decision of these elites to invite settlers from the West reflected their desire to increase revenue and population. Around 1200, Western settlers arrived in the lands that now comprise north-east Germany and the Czech republic: East Holstein, Mecklenburg, Western Pomerania (‘Vorpommern’), Brandenburg, Bohemia, and Moravia. They subsequently appeared in Silesia and other Polish lands shortly after 1200. Colonization of the Prussian lands east and west of the Vistula began only after the Teutonic Order completed its conquest of the Baltic tribes there, in 1248.

Territorial princes and ecclesiastics not only opened their lands to Western settlers, they also provided them with organizational and financial support. Land agents (locatores) played a pivotal role, contracting with princes and ecclesiastics to lay out new villages and to recruit the people who would inhabit them. Typically, the land agent worked as an independent entrepreneur, contracting directly with a territorial prince or ecclesiastical landlord. Some agents were nobles, others were townspeople, but the social origins of most are unknown. These new or reconfigured settlements were called ‘German Law villages’, and many German scholars long viewed Western settlement east of the Elbe as a heroic epic that featured Germanic peasants bringing superior forms of agrarian technology and organization to the backward and impoverished Slavic societies east of the Elbe. Since 1945, however, scholarship has emphasized the complexity of the settlement process and the active participation of indigenous populations in every phase of settlement. Settlers from Germany and the Low Countries played a crucial role, especially in the initial process (1200–1350), but indigenous populations often played the dominant role (especially in the Czech lands, Greater Poland, and Masovia). But whether settled by German colonists or native Slavs, the villages that resulted received most of the components of the Frankish agrarian system. Thus, for example, when land agents (or landlords) laid out new villages, or reconfigured old ones, these settlements usually belonged to large (mostly crown or ecclesiastical) estates. The new settlements also had
other basic characteristics of the Frankish agrarian structure, since they were large, contained enclosed, modular farmsteads organized on the hide system (*Hufenverfassung*), and the open fields of arable surrounding the village core were usually divided into three large sections to facilitate cultivation on the three-field system.\(^{26}\)

Rural parish networks—another component of the Frankish system—also expanded apace. As in the medieval West, east-Elbian landowners who founded or acquired village churches on their estates treated them as their own property (*Eigenkirchen*), appointing the priests and appropriating tithe revenue for their own purposes.\(^{27}\) In the Czech lands (the most advanced east-Elbian region), parish networks at the end of the thirteenth century were almost as dense as in many parts of north-west Europe. In Silesia, the creation of rural parish networks was more or less complete by around 1350, while in Poland, the decisive period of parish expansion came in the late fourteenth and fifteenth centuries. For Polish nobles, acquisition or creation of parish churches in their own villages was the ‘crowning achievement’ of a lifetime spent aggrandizing their landed wealth and status.\(^{28}\)

German Law villages conferred a new, improved status on both Western and indigenous settlers, who were freed from previous dues or obligations, enjoyed hereditary rights to their lands, and held relatively large farmsteads (between forty and eighty acres) as leaseholds, for which they paid moderate rents in cash and kind.\(^{29}\) This, however, took a long time and exacted huge effort. Clearing forests, draining swamps, and putting new lands under plough were backbreaking tasks, and the men and animals who did the work also faced long disruptions from bad weather, war, and other misfortunes. In 1350, 150 years after the beginning of Western settlement, only a third of the settlements in Lower Silesia had German Law, while in Greater and Lesser Poland the percentage was even lower. Masovia (central Poland) remained virtually untouched until the fifteenth century.

The unevenness of development naturally affected grain production. Regions like Brandenburg and Bohemia saw impressive growth in the cultivation of wheat and barley, but in other regions, like Greater Poland, grain production in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries actually fell.\(^{30}\) Subsequent declines in grain production almost everywhere east of the Elbe in the period 1370–1500 reflected the long economic crisis that gripped most of Europe after the Black Death; although the agrarian East escaped the worst scourges of the Black Death, collapse of grain prices and rising levels of violence (Hussite wars, noble feuds) led many peasants to reduce their arable or to abandon their holdings altogether.\(^{31}\)
Despite the economic crisis, cerealization of the economy led to impressive gains in population density throughout much of the agrarian East: in the Czech lands, the population density doubled, rising from only fourteen inhabitants per square kilometre (1350), to twenty-eight by the early sixteenth century. In Poland, it rose from eight inhabitants per square kilometre (1350), to twenty by 1580. Cerealization also supported the growth of towns; urban or pre-urban centres of various kinds had existed throughout the agrarian east prior to the thirteenth century, but Western colonization also brought self-governing towns based on German models like Lübeck and Magdeburg. In Poland alone, 675 new towns were founded in the period 1300–1500. By 1500, two regions, West Prussia and Bohemia, had 20 per cent of their inhabitants living in towns, thus reaching urbanization levels found in the West.

Introduction of the Frankish agrarian system was the primary factor in the emergence of Westernized social structures, with landed nobilities, peasant communities, and urban centres populated by tradesmen and commercial elites. Westernized political structures also emerged, especially in Bohemia, where John of Luxemburg (King of Bohemia, 1310–46) brought to Prague a Western dynasty steeped in the court cultures of Burgundy and France. During the reign of his son, Charles IV (ruled 1347–78), Prague became one of the intellectual and artistic centres of Europe, with the first university in east central Europe (1349), and the beginnings of the influential ‘soft style’ of painting and sculpture, called the ‘International Gothic’. In Poland, Casimir the Great (1330–70) doubled the size of his kingdom, and in 1364 founded a university in Cracow. Under Casimir’s successor, Poland entered into dynastic union (1386) with the Grand Duchy of Lithuania, whose rulers had already forged a huge, though sparsely populated state that included the lands of present day Lithuania, Belarus, and part of Ukraine.

Another sign of Westernization was the integration of east-Elbian states into the wider European political arena. Of the seven electors of the Holy Roman Empire, two ruled principalities in east central Europe (Bohemia and Brandenburg). In addition to these states, the duchies of Holstein, Mecklenburg, Pomerania, Silesia, and the Archbishopric of Riga all became part of the Holy Roman Empire. All these states had political structures resembling the Ständestaaten (literally ‘Estates-states’) in the Holy Roman Empire. The primary characteristic of the Ständestaat was the division of political authority between the ruler, who exercised the executive role, and the Estates, especially the landed nobility, whose wealth and powers of lordship gave them privileged access to the economic and financial resources of the state.

As already noted, the economic crisis in the late Middle Ages led to a general fall of agricultural production in the late fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, but this did not hinder east-Elbian nobles from consolidating their power at both local and territorial
levels. Increased power led to wider political horizons, with the wealthier and more politically astute families evolving into local and territorial power elites. Emerging in historical records as castellans and signatories of treaties, power elites played the role of loan guarantors, rescuing their spendthrift princes from bankruptcy in return for increased jurisdiction over their village subjects, a virtual monopoly on state offices, and a dominant role in political decisions. The success of the Mecklenburg nobility, for example, rested largely on the extraordinary continuity of its landholdings, which provided its power elite with unusual stability and cohesiveness. Not only in Mecklenburg, but in many other east-Elbian lands in the fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries, the nobilities were able to establish long-term hegemony, and by 1500, aristocracies in the Polish, Czech, and north-east German lands had largely succeeded in establishing strong lordship over their peasants while exercising robust political power at the regional and state levels. Noble landowners thus encountered little opposition when they tightened the screws on their peasants in the sixteenth century.

The Manorial Transformation 1500–1800

Introduction of the Frankish agrarian system had launched the Westernization of the lands east of the Elbe, but the coin of Westernization had two sides: on one side, the societies and polities east of the Elbe were increasingly similar to those in north-west Europe, and subsequently played active roles in great European cultural movements like the Renaissance, Reformation, Baroque, and Enlightenment. On the other side of the Western coin, however, we find an increasing aristocratic domination that culminated in the triumph of the manorial system. In the agrarian East the classic bipartite manor first appeared in Lesser Poland in the late fourteenth century on estates belonging to the Bishop of Cracow. Until the sixteenth century, however, it remained very limited in scope, and the real manorial transformation did not begin until the early sixteenth century, when lay nobles would play the major role. In the course of the century, the number of new manors grew rapidly, while the amount of demesne arable per manor also increased. Thus for example, on the huge complex of crown estates in Korczyn district, in Little Poland, demesne arable increased by 52 per cent in the half century between 1515 and 1564. Labour service burdens imposed on the Korczyn peasants also grew; in 1515, the average peasant farmstead there owed two days per week, which increased to three days per week by 1600. Similar patterns in the growth of labour services occurred throughout the Polish and north-east German lands during the sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries.
Expansion of demesne arable required substantial amounts of additional land, much of which came from lands deserted in the late Middle Ages, when many peasants had fled their farmsteads to escape the violent feuds of local nobles, or because they could not pay the rents they owed their lords. Although the manorial transition brought a sharp increase in labour services imposed on the peasants, the latter were to some degree compensated by a reduction of rents in cash and kind.

The manorial economy paid handsome returns to estate owners, but landowners had had other alternatives as well, like investing in capital-intensive agriculture based on hired labour. This, however, required levels of capital, wage labour, and market development that did not exist in most of the agrarian East. Later on, conditions would change, and, by the late eighteenth century, many east-Elbian estate owners were able to farm their estates using only hired labour, but in the sixteenth century there were only a few specific regions in the agrarian East (West Prussia and southern Bohemia) where we find estate owners pursuing capital-intensive economic strategies. We have already seen that proximity to the export market at Danzig played a decisive role in the emergence of West Prussia as an enclave of capital-intensive agriculture, but in southern Bohemia, at least until the Thirty Years’ War, conditions different from those in West Prussia also led to seigniorial preference for wage labour. The rural population in southern Bohemia was prosperous enough to provide estate owners with a ready market for beer, brandy, and other products of their own estates. Estate owners thus eschewed manorialization, preferring to use hired labour while charging their peasants cash rents. This led to a hybrid system in which estate grain harvests were used for the brewing of beer and distillation of brandy, both of which were then sold profitably in estate-owned taverns. Estate owners also increased beer and brandy output by purchasing additional grain from their peasants at market prices. The money that seigniors paid their peasants for grain was rechannelled into estate revenues through the beer that the peasants consumed in estate taverns. Despite its obvious advantages, this hybrid system proved short lived. After the Thirty Years’ War, Bohemia experienced its own manorial transformation, although peasant labour services remained lighter than in many other parts of the agrarian East.

Bohemia and West Prussia were more advanced than the regions where the manorial transformation took place, but rural societies in these latter regions were also very complex. The peasants proper (that part of the rural population that held farmsteads) often accounted for less than half of the village population, and occupied the top rung of the village hierarchy. Below them existed a broad and variegated spectrum of smallholders, cottagers, and landless or semi-landless farmworkers and servants. The typical village inhabitant was not, in fact, a peasant, but rather a farmhand or hired servant.
Peasants themselves kept farmhands, who usually performed the labour services the peasants owed to their lords, and also helped the peasants work their own farmsteads, which were often relatively large by Western standards. Farmhands were paid in a combination of cash and kind and lived together with the peasant family on the farmstead. The number of farmhands per farmstead varied, depending on its size and the labour services it owed. The farmhands themselves do not easily fit the category of a ‘rural proletariat’. First, they usually held some land for their families’ upkeep, and they also received a substantial part of their wages in kind: flour, bacon, smoked fish, and firewood. This cushioned them from rising prices for food, and helps to account for the surprising rise in their real wages during the eighteenth century.

Most villagers spent their lives as hired farmworkers, but also experienced some degree of mobility. Jan Klußmann’s study of village society on an East Holstein manor shows that the hired hand entering service on a peasant farmstead could hope for three promotions, which would enable him to retire as head farmworker (Vollknecht). Whether they worked directly for the lord or for a peasant, hired hands maintained a firm sense of identity based largely on their reputations as competent workers. If an employer did not recognize his abilities through promotions, the worker experienced it as a painful blow to his dignity.

Not only peasants, but also manorial lords themselves depended on the labour of farmhands employed directly by the manor, especially after the disasters of the seventeenth century, which left many farmsteads deserted and forced landlords to increase their hired labour force. In the course of the eighteenth century, growing conflicts with their peasants over labour services also led estate owners to rely increasingly on wage labourers, whose numbers grew steadily. This signalled the beginning of the end of the manorial system, at least in the Polish, Czech, and north-east German lands. In Brandenburg–Prussia, for example, the agrarian reforms of 1807–21 brought to an end the manorial system there.

In other north-east German lands, the manorial system also succumbed to agrarian reform, although peasants did not experience outcomes as favourable as those in Brandenburg–Prussia. The most notorious case was eighteenth-century Mecklenburg, where the noble landowners actually expropriated their subjects’ lands (Bauernlegen) and reduced their peasants to cottagers or semi-landless farm workers. The vast majority of peasant farmsteads in Mecklenburg disappeared in the course of the century.
Agrarian Transformation Further East

Although dynastic union with Poland (1386) had brought Lithuanian and Belorussian elites into the cultural and political world of the Polish nobility, the agrarian structure in the eastern borderlands of the Polish–Lithuanian Commonwealth retained an archaic, pre-feudal character that in some cases persisted into the seventeenth century. Cereal farming was doubtless important, but fur trapping and beekeeping are the activities most often noted in the written sources. The basic unit of peasant landholding, the dvorishche, or ‘kinship holding’, was collectively held by the extended family. Rural settlements often contained more than one kinship holding, and each holding was in turn subdivided among smaller households within the extended family. There was no standard unit of tax or rent assessment like the hide, and although holdings varied hugely in size, each rendered the same annual tribute (usually in honey or beaver pelts).

Under such conditions, even the vast crown estates in Lithuania and Belorussia produced little more than the food consumption needs of Grand Dukes and their retainers, and by the sixteenth century, this archaic system of exploiting crown estates was grossly inadequate for meeting the expenses of the royal household. In the 1520s, the Polish Queen Bona Sforza, the Italian widow of King Sigismund, initiated the so-called włoka reform on her crown estates in Lithuania and Belorussia. Bona’s son, King Sigismund II (d. 1572), extended the reforms to all crown estates in Lithuania and Belorussia, although the reforms were not implemented in the eastern (Belorussian) districts until the seventeenth century, by which time many noble and ecclesiastical estate owners had also followed suit.

Essentially, the włoka reform brought the Frankish agrarian system into Lithuania and Belorussia more than 300 years after its introduction in the Czech, Polish, and north-east German lands. The reform reorganized the countryside, doing away with its small, scattered hamlets and irregular fields, and replacing them with large nucleated villages, enclosed modular farmsteads, and of course, the three-field system. The włoka, modelled on the Frankish hide, was the standard farmstead unit, averaging sixty acres, and serving as the basic unit for assessing peasant rents. As in Poland and other east-Elbian regions, where the Frankish system had already been introduced, the arable was laid out for three-field rotation, with farmsteads holding arable land in each of the three long fields that often extended perpendicularly from the village street. The rural parish network—yet another component of the Frankish agrarian system—also expanded apace with the włoka reform.
The authors of the reform clearly envisioned it as an essential prelude to the introduction of the manorial system, since manors were also laid out on many of the crown estates. Moreover, the Second and Third Lithuanian Statutes (1566 and 1588), which coincided with the wloka reform, gave Lithuanian and Belorussian estate owners the same powerful rights of lordship over their peasants that Polish seigniors enjoyed. Manorial transformation did, in fact, follow the wloka reforms, especially on noble estates, where approximately two-thirds of the peasant households on noble estates in Belorussia were performing labour services by the late sixteenth or early seventeenth centuries. On the large estates of the magnate elite, labour services were relatively light (one to two days per week). On smaller estates, however, labour services were higher, averaging two to three days per week.

In the seventeenth century, however, the manorial transformation in Lithuania and Belorussia temporarily fell victim to wars that repeatedly swept through the region, bringing disease and starvation in their wake. Losses of population (estimated at 50 per cent) and productive resources forced landowners to temporarily abandon the manorial system, which did not recover until the second half of the eighteenth century, when the voluminous estate records of the magnate aristocracy provide us with a detailed picture of the manorial economy in late eighteenth-century Belorussia. Labour services averaged three days per week, and manors in western and central Belorussia were exporting 60 per cent of their rye surplus through the East Prussian port of Königsberg. The remaining surplus went either to the internal market, or to breweries and distilleries on magnate estates. In the third quarter of the eighteenth century, conditions (weather?) were generally unfavourable to rye, whose yields barely exceeded three to one, but in the last quarter of the century, rye yields averaged better than six to one.

In Ukraine, where the manorial ambitions of newly arrived Polish estate owners had inflamed a turbulent society long accustomed to the freedoms of the frontier, the rebellion led by Bohdan Khmelnytsky in 1648 put a temporary end to the manorial economy there. As in Belorussia, estate owners in the late eighteenth-century Ukraine were able to resurrect their manorial economies, but they had to moderate their labour service demands in order to keep their subjects from migrating further to the southeast.

Manorialism in Russia and Livonia are exceptional cases, in the sense that neither saw the wholesale introduction of the Frankish agrarian system. Instead, different elements of the system appeared separately, at separate times, but without programmatic attempts to introduce them. Space does not permit discussion of manorialism in Livonia, and we will instead focus on the Russian case. The first component of the Frankish system to appear in Russia was the large estate, which emerged in the fourteenth century, followed by the appearance of the three-field system, in the fifteenth century. Three other components
appeared in the period 1500–1700: large concentrated settlements, parish church networks, and enclosed, modular farmsteads.

The emergence of large concentrated settlements began around 1500. Prior to this, the typical settlement in the Muscovite heartland between the Volga and Oka rivers was a small hamlet consisting of one to three farmsteads. Large concentrated settlements replaced more numerous small hamlets in a process that began around 1500 and lasted into the nineteenth century. The number of settlements declined drastically, but the remaining settlements were much larger. Thus, of 922 settlements belonging to the Trinity St. Sergii monastery in the sixteenth century, there were only 190 by the end of the seventeenth century.

One factor in the emergence of large concentrated settlements was the massive depopulation of the Muscovite heartland in the late sixteenth century, which left more than 65 per cent of the farmsteads deserted. The population losses may have been less severe than the sources suggest, with many peasants possibly fleeing into the forest to escape tax collectors, but then returning later. Many settlements, however, were actually deserted and when landlords resettled peasants they did so according to economic objectives designed to make their own farming operations more efficient. This meant concentrating peasants in relatively few settlements and turning deserted settlements into demesne lands.

Large estate complexes belonging to princely, boyar, and clerical elites had first appeared around Moscow in the second half of the fourteenth century. In the second half of the sixteenth century, however, the position of the princes and boyars had declined, weakened by executions and confiscations during the oprichnina (1565–72), the most violent period of Ivan IV’s reign. But the role and fortunes of the old elite rebounded dramatically under the Romanov dynasty, which came to power with the conviction that it could not rule without the old princely and boyar families. The new dynasty thus pursued policies aimed at converting the old elite into a new power elite with both more wealth and greater participation in running the state. The major institutions of the elite—the Tsarist court and the Tsar’s ruling council (the boyar duma) thus grew rapidly under the new dynasty. The landholdings of this power elite (princely and non-princely boyar families) also expanded dramatically. In 1646, these families held almost 1,300 hereditary estates (votchiny) with 410,000 rural subjects. Only thirty years later, their holdings had grown to nearly 2,000 hereditary estates with more than half a million rural subjects.

Expansion of noble estate holding greatly accelerated the formation and rapid proliferation of parish church networks, which enjoyed their greatest period of growth in the seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries. As in other east-Elbian lands, parish
churches had an important place in the consolidation of seigniorial authority, but in the Russian village, where the commune held centre stage in peasant life, the Orthodox parish did not play a social role equal to that of Catholic parishes in other east-Elbian lands.  

There is little evidence of the enclosed modular farmstead with cattle stalls before 1700. Words describing such peasant farmsteads do not appear in Russian documents until the early eighteenth century. In the eighteenth century, however, the enclosed modular farmstead with cattle stalls predominated in some, though not all areas of the central black soil region. In some areas of the non-black soil region (Periaslavl-Zalesskii district), farmsteads were enclosed, but without cattle stalls as late as 1767. The peasants there kept their cattle outdoors.

Although the Frankish agrarian system did not arrive in Russia as a single package, four of its six major components were already in place by the late seventeenth century, and another component, the enclosed modular farmstead, appeared in the eighteenth century. The full significance of this achievement is best understood in the context of the massive and profound programme of Westernization carried out by Peter the Great (r. 1689–1725). Peter did not bring the Frankish agrarian system to Russia, it was already there, and the seeds sown by him therefore took root in an agrarian structure that was capable of nurturing their growth.

Serfdom has long dominated the attention of scholars working on this period, who have focused on legislation restricting or forbidding peasant movement without seigniorial permission. Evidence of such restrictions first appears in the Law Code of 1497, which permitted peasants to leave their masters only during a two-week period around St. George’s Day (26 November), and only on condition of paying their lords an exit fine. Beginning in the late sixteenth century, the government repeatedly issued decrees suspending even this limited right, and the Law Code of 1649 bound peasants and their families to the land of their lords, and gave the latter the right to force their return if they absconded. It also gave the lord jurisdiction over his peasants in all cases except for theft, robbery, and homicide.

Most historians have assumed that the Law Code of 1649 institutionalized serfdom in Russia, but the historian Alessandro Stanziani has recently countered that view in a series of provocative articles arguing that the seigniorial peasants (conventionally seen as serfs) were not serfs, and were not even regarded as such. Stanziani’s arguments are persuasive, and in any case, the cumbersome term ‘serfdom’, with its highly charged meanings, will hopefully give way to a terminology that includes the recognition that the Law Code of 1649 diminished the legal and social status of the rural population without necessarily reducing it to serfdom.
Russia’s Manorial Transition during the Late-Eighteenth Century

Whatever the effects of the Law Code of 1649, it did not lead directly to a well-developed manorial economy. The Soviet historian Iu. Tikhonov, who studied the seigniorial obligations of peasants in the Moscow region during two consecutive periods, 1649–79 and 1680–1725, found that, while labour services existed on the vast majority of estates, they were not only quite low, but actually declined during the period 1680–1725. Other than a few localities where manorial development was quite robust, manorialism barely existed until the second half of the eighteenth century, when it finally emerged full blown.

Key to the manorial transformation in Russia was the settlement of the vast and fertile black soil territories south and south-west of the Moscow region. The central black soil region runs diagonally across Russia from the Ukraine to the Volga, encompassing a region the size of West Germany before reunification. The settlement of this region—primarily in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries—was a turning point in Russian history that ultimately led not only to manorial transformation but to the long-term transformation of the economy. Until settlement of the black soil region, Russian economic growth was severely limited by poor soil and harsh conditions. Yield ratios, which averaged only three to one, were barely enough to provide for subsistence and limited taxes or seigniorial obligations. Settlement of the black soil districts radically altered Russia’s prospects, bringing under cultivation a huge region where average yield ratios were five to one, and thus similar to many regions in early modern western Europe.

Colonization of the black soil region began in the late sixteenth century, and greatly accelerated during and after the Time of Troubles (1598–1613). The colonists were mostly peasants fleeing from the Moscow and Novgorod regions. Until the 1680s, peasants and petty military servitors were the dominant social groups, but in the 1640s, powerful aristocrats began to establish large estates there. In the period 1678–1740, the number of large estates (those with at least fifty peasant households) in the black soil region grew from only fifty-four to more than a thousand! Arable land held by nobles in the black soil region quintupled, growing from nine million to forty-five million acres (1780).

Scholars have not established an exact chronology of labour services in the black soil region, but at some point in the mid-eighteenth century, estate owners there began to shift to the manorial economy. According to estimates by the pre-revolutionary scholar V. I. Semevskii, 56 per cent of the seigniorial peasants in the central black soil region were performing labour services by the 1780s. The manorial system continued to grow during the first half of the nineteenth century, and by the 1850s, on the eve of peasant
emancipation, seigniorial demesne accounted for half of the arable land on manorial estates in the black soil provinces.77

**Unique Characteristics of Russian Manorialism**

Russian manorialism was distinctive in several important ways. In most of the agrarian East, the farmstead itself (the hide) became the basis for measuring taxes and seigniorial obligations owed by the individual peasant. In Russia, however, it was the peasant commune that allocated these taxes and obligations among the households. The village commune in Russia had emerged in the late seventeenth or early eighteenth centuries in response to increasing demands from the state and the landowning elite; peasant communes not only allocated obligations, but also chose their officials, held court, selected recruits for conscription levies, and kept written records of their activities. The communal clerk was sometimes the only member of his commune who could read and write.

Russian manorialism also differed from its east-Elbian counterparts in its labour organization. In most of the agrarian East, peasant households depended heavily on hired labour, but on Russian manors, where hired labour was often not available, the peasant family had to personally perform labour obligations at the same time that it worked its own farm.78 This required large, often multi-generational, households with enough labour capacity to serve the simultaneous needs of both the manorial economy and the family farm. Such households did in fact dominate in the black soil region—the heartland of Russian manorialism—and were largely successful in providing labour capacity sufficient for both the peasant and manorial sectors.79 As Steven Hoch has shown, however, life in the large household was hardly a rural idyll; household patriarchs formed a communal elite that ruled with despotic brutality, ruthlessly exploiting their families and denying any autonomy to the adults under them.80 At the same time, however, the large household also protected the peasant family from ruin.81

Russian manorialism was also unique in the role it played in the emergence and development of Russian trade and industry. The thin, leached soils that predominated in the non-black soil heartland did not generally favour cereal cultivation, but the vast forests and river networks there offered huge potential for rural crafts and industries. By the late seventeenth century, there were at least 400 villages in the non-black soil region with significant concentrations of market-oriented crafts production.82 The importance of trade and crafts in the non-black soil region grew immensely as the result of the settlement of the black soil region, and the establishment there of a manorial economy in the second half of the eighteenth century. By the 1760s, huge grain
surpluses, mostly from the black soil provinces, were available in many parts of the non-black soil region, whose peasants were thus increasingly able to purchase all or part of their grain on the market, and to devote their energies to crafts, wage labour, or rural industry. Seigniors with estates in the non-black soil region were usually eager to let their peasants substitute cash quitrents (obrok) in place of labour services, and by the 1780s, nearly two-thirds of the seigniorial peasants in the non-black soil region were paying cash quitrents.83

Freed from labour services and thus able to leave their villages in search of cash earnings, some peasants hired themselves out as wage labourers, while others plied village crafts. Many found work in proto-industrial villages specializing in textiles, metalworking, or other forms of production. As the market economy grew, thousands of rural fairs and village bazaars appeared, especially during the century leading up to the peasant emancipation of 1861. This was the golden age of the peasant entrepreneur, who played a unique role in Russian economic development.84

Peasant entrepreneurs first emerged in the Russian North around 1600 in connection with the Siberian fur trade. Their importance grew rapidly in the seventeenth century, especially in the region where the Oka and Volga rivers converge. By 1700, more than 600 peasant entrepreneurs were active there. Most of them were seigniorial peasants belonging to influential aristocratic families, and their activities spanned the entire breadth of Russian commerce, from local and regional trade to distant ventures in Astrakhan.85

Like the rest of the agrarian East, Russia had its own urban merchants, but in Russia’s harsh and sparsely populated environment, the peasant entrepreneur often enjoyed a competitive advantage over his urban counterpart, especially if the former had a powerful seignior. The Sheremetev family, the richest landowners in Russia, had literally hundreds of peasant entrepreneurs. Thanks to entrepreneurial dynasties like the Grachev and Garelin families, the Sheremetev estate of Ivanovo (Vladimir province) developed into one of the major centres of Russian textile production. Ivanovo was only one of many noble estates that peasant entrepreneurs transformed into centres of trade and industry. As the economic historian Roger Portal observed, the Russian serf estate (in the non-black soil region) was the ‘cradle of an industrial bourgeoisie’.86 On such estates, where peasant entrepreneurs had profoundly transformed the peasant economy, the social and demographic structures differed sharply from those on Russian manors.87
Conclusion

This chapter has explored the Westernization of the agrarian East. The basis of this transformation, and also its driving force, was the introduction of the Frankish agrarian system, in which peasant household economies with unprecedented capacity for cereal production were combined with powerful elements of seigniorial domination. Providing the foundation for societies in most of north-west Europe, the Frankish agrarian structure spread to the east-Elbian lands, either through Western colonization, or by reforms from above (Lithuania and Belorussia), or through piecemeal adoption (Livonia and Russia). The new societies in the East followed the same two-stage process of development, in which the emergence of a more productive peasant economy provided the basis for new forms of seigniorial exploitation, especially manorialism. These societies were not, of course, identical to those in north-west Europe, but they developed social and economic characteristics similar to those in north-west Europe, with cerealized economies, seigniorial and clerical elites, and peasants subjected to seigniorial lordship.

Both east and west of the Elbe, scholars have generally viewed Westernization of the agrarian East as a good thing. This chapter has presented it in a more complex perspective, idealizing neither Westernization nor the archaic societies that it replaced. Each, in fact, had areas of light and shadow: the Frankish agrarian system created a cerealized peasant economy capable of feeding not only itself but also large urban populations. The great cities and universities of the agrarian East, like Prague, Cracow, and, later, Berlin and St. Petersburg, basked in the light of Westernization. But the transformation also had a dark side; the Frankish agrarian system laid the foundations for the manorial economy, with its forced labour services and rural subjection. This is not, however, the end of the story. Since 1989, a new phase of Westernization is once again transforming the societies east of the Elbe. The agent of Westernization is no longer the Frankish agrarian system, but rather global corporate capitalism. It is too early to predict the outcome of this new stage, although it is already clear that it, too, will have both light and shadow.

Further Reading

Overviews of East Elbian Societies:


**Westernization:**


**Lords and Peasants in the Agrarian East:**


Scott, Hamish, ed. *The European Nobilities in the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries, 2 vols.* (Basingstoke, 2007), vol. 2: *Northern, Central and Eastern Europe*.

**Individual Estates and Regions:**


Hoch, Steven L. *Serfdom and Social Control in Russia* (Chicago, IL, 1986) (a manorial estate in the black soil region).


**Notes:**


(3.) Jenö Szücs, *Die drei historischen Regionen Europas* (Frankfurt, 1990), 15.


(6.) Małowist argued this position in many articles, including his ‘Poland, Russia, and Western Trade in the 15th and 16th Centuries’, in Jean Batou and Henryk Szlajfer, eds., *Western Europe, Eastern Europe, and World Development: 13th-18th Centuries: Collection of Essays by Marian Małowist* (Chicago, 2012), 150.


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(16.) There is substantial debate over the reasons for this diversity, as one can see for the medieval West in Jean-Pierre Devroey, *Puissants et misérables. Système social et monde paysan dans l’Europe des Francs (vi–ix siècles)* (Brussels, 2006), 443–478. In the agrarian East, Russia had especially diverse forms of seigniorial rent. See Jerome Blum, *Lord and Peasant in Russia. From the Ninth to the Nineteenth Century* (Princeton, NJ, 1961), 386–401.


(18.) Further east, in the Russian and Baltic regions, population densities were even lower: Henryk Samsonowicz, *Das lange 10. Jahrhundert* (Osnabrück, 2009), 21–22. Given
the scarce and fragmentary information on which these figures are based, they are at
best only estimates.

(19.) In pre-colonization Mecklenburg and western Pomerania, then inhabited by west
Slavic populations, only 5–10 per cent of the land was settled: Charles Higounet, Die
deutsche Ostsiedlung im Mittelalter (Munich, 1986), 140.

(20.) See Peter Donat, Haus, Hof und Dorf in Mitteleuropa vom 7. bis 12. Jahrhundert

(21.) The ash imparts an intense, but short-lived fertility to the soil, resulting in very high
yield ratios for several years. Thus, as late as 1800, the infertile and heavily forested
districts of the Transvolga produced yields of less than three grains for every seed sown
using the three-field system; in contrast, forest clearings cultivated by slash-and-burn
produced yields of ten to one over a three-year period: Edgar Melton, ‘Household
Economies and Communal Conflicts on a Russian Serf Estate, 1800–1817’, Journal of
Social History, 26 (1993), 565.

(22.) Oak forests supported huge pig populations and pork became a food staple in the
eighth century. Maria Dembińska, ‘Les Changements dans la Civilisation matérielle à la
lumière des sources archéologiques en Pologne (viii–xii siècles)’, Archeologia Polona, xix

(23.) A more recent study of forty male skeletons found in Poland, dating from the 9th–
11th c., puts their mean height at more than 172 cm, compared to an average of 169 cm
for north-western European males. Giuseppe Vercelloti et al., ‘Stature Estimation in an
Early Medieval Polish Population’, American Journal of Physical Anthropology, 140
(2009), Table 1, 137.

(24.) On the role of noble land agents, see the discussion of the Wedel family in eastern
Brandenburg, in Robert Bartlett, The Making of Europe. Conquest, Colonization and

(25.) For the development of postwar German, Czech, and Polish scholarship on the
Ostsiedlung, see Wolfgang H. Fritze, ‘Die Begegnung von deutschen und slawischem
Ethnikum im Bereich der hochmittelalterlichen deutschen Ostsiedlung’,

(26.) See, for example, two village plans reproduced by Higounet, Die deutsche
Ostsiedlung, 132, 146.
(27.) Although this obviously violated canon law, east-Elbian nobles continued to treat the churches on their estates as proprietary as late as the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries: Jan Wroniszewski, Szlachta ziemi sandomierskiej in sredniowiercuzu (Poznan, 2001), 152–153.

(28.) In Sandomierz, a region in south-eastern Poland, parishes founded by noble landowners accounted for more than two-thirds of parish church foundations before 1500: Wroniszewski, Szlachta ziemi sandomierskiej in sredniowiercuzu, 127.


(30.) Adam Izdebski et al., ‘On the Use of Palynological Data in Economic History: New Methods and an Application to Agricultural Output in Central Europe, 0–2000 AD’ in MPRA Paper No. 54582, March 2014 (http://mpra.ub.uni-muenchen.de/54582/), 26–28.


(33.) Jerzy Kłoczowski, Młodsza Europa. Europa Środkowo-Wschodnia w kręgu ciwilizacji chrześcijańskiej-redniowiecza (Warsaw, 2003), 131.


(35.) As Jan Wroniszewski’s study of the late medieval nobility in the Sandomierz region (south-eastern Poland) suggests, noble strategies focused largely on the expansion and consolidation of landholdings into ‘closed’ estate complexes, the establishment or reorganization of villages on the basis of German law, and—not least—the founding of parish churches on their estates. They were also strongly engaged in local officeholding and in leasing of crown estates, and also exhibited an intense interest in family genealogies: Wroniszewski, Szlachta, 17–204.


(39.) This is best approached in the essays in H. M. Scott, ed., The European Nobilities in the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries (2 vols.; 1995; 2nd edn., Basingstoke, 2007), vol. 2: Northern, Central and Eastern Europe.

(40.) Labour services on Korczyn also grew, although more slowly than the increase in demesne land. Andrzej Wyczański, Studia nad gospodarka Starostwa Korczyńskiego 1500–1660 (Warsaw, 1964), 105–121.


(42.) A high percentage of deserted peasant farmsteads was typical of the east-Elbian landscape around 1500. In East Holstein, for example, half of the hides belonging to peasants were deserted or uncultivated: Thomas Riis, Wirtschafts-und Sozialgeschichte
Schleswig-Holsteins. Leben und Arbeiten in Schleswig-Holstein vor 1800 (Kiel, 2009), 121. In the Uckermark (north-east Brandenburg), a third of villages were totally deserted in 1500: see the magisterial work by Lieselott Enders, Die Uckermark (Weimar, 1992), 124.


(45.) In the eighteenth century, landless and semi-landless peasants comprised 80 per cent of the rural population in Brandenburg, 75 per cent of the rural population in Western Pomerania, 60 per cent in East Prussia, and 30 per cent in Livonia (early nineteenth century): Edgar Melton, ‘Gutsherrschaft in East Elbian Germany and Livonia, 1500–1800: A Critique of the Model’, Central European History, 21(4) (1988), 315–349.


(47.) In north-east Germany, farmsteads typically averaged two hides (sixty to eighty acres of arable); in Poland, the typical farmstead was smaller, with only twenty to thirty acres of arable, but there were larger farmsteads as well.

(48.) On the Brandenburg estate of Stavenow, where peasant farmsteads were large (100 acres) and labour services were moderate (two to three days per week in the mid-eighteenth century), most peasants kept one or two farmhands. On the Raczyński estate complex, encompassing fifteen villages in Western Poland, almost all the peasant farmsteads averaged twenty acres, with labour services of three days per week, and the peasants kept an average of one hired hand. William W. Hagen, ‘Village Life in East-Elbian Germany and Poland, 1400–1800: Subjection, Self-Defence, Survival’, in Tom Scott, ed., The Peasantries of Europe. From the Fourteenth to the Eighteenth Centuries (New York, 1998), 184.

(49.) Based on the bushels of rye they could purchase with their annual wages, wages for farmworkers in East Prussia nearly doubled in the eighteenth century. Pay for skilled workers such as ploughmen almost tripled: Edgar Melton, ‘The Decline of Prussian


(51.) On agrarian reforms east of the Elbe, see the relevant sections of Blum, *End of the Old Order*.

(52.) Edgar Melton, ‘Manorialism and Rural Subjection’, 315.

(53.) Much of Belorussia was covered with forests and swamps and the cultivated plots often resembled islands in a sea of swamp and forest. R. A. French, ‘Field Patterns and the Three-Field System—the Case of Sixteenth Century Lithuania’, *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers*, 48 (December 1949), 122.


(55.) The actual reforms were carried out by teams consisting of crown officials (mostly nobles), and surveyors (mostly Polish). These teams surveyed the land, laid out the farmsteads and villages, and resettled them with local peasants. Consolidation of peasant and manorial lands required the elimination of scattered parcels belonging to both peasants and nobles. For many Belorussian and Lithuanian peasants, the standard farmstead was too large, and most settled on half-size farmsteads (twenty-five to thirty acres) which carried only half the standard rents. Crown officials adjudicated conflicts arising over both the land, and the status of those who held it. V. I. Picheta, *Agrarnaia reforma Sigismunda-Avgusta v Litovskom-Russkom gosudarstve* (Moscow, 1958), 285–423, 524–530.


(60.) The major reason for peasant flight was the growing tax burden imposed as the result of the long and disastrous Livonian War (1558–83) waged by Ivan IV. During this period, the real tax burden increased 250 per cent for seigniorial peasants, and 300 per cent for crown peasants. A. L. Shapiro, ed., *Agrarnaia istoria severo-zapada Rossii xvi veka. Novgorodskie platiny* (2 vols.; Leningrad, 1971–74), vol. 2, 24–26. On the high percentages of deserted arable, Carsten Goehrke, *Die Wüstungen in der Moskauer Rus'* (Wiesbaden, 1968), 124–128.

(61.) Scholars have long debated the origin and chronology of feudal landholding in Muscovite Russia, and until recently the dominant, though undocumented, view held that feudal landholding originated in the eleventh and twelfth centuries. A recent study, strongly supported by the archeological evidence, locates its origins in the fourteenth century, first with the appearance of princely estate complexes in the 1330s, followed by the appearance, beginning around 1350, of estate complexes belonging to aristocratic boyars. Church estates first appeared around 1370. A. A. Iushko, *Feodal’noe zemlevladienie Moskovskoi zemli xiv veka* (Moscow, 2002), 98–177, 203–204.

(62.) In the period 1613–92, the number of nobles serving at court grew from 2,000 to 7,400. During the same period the ranks of the boyar duma expanded from thirty to 170. Marshall Poe, *The Russian Elite in the Seventeenth Century* (2 vols.; Helsinki, 2004), vol. 2, 41. On the landholdings of these elite groups, O. A. Shvatchenko, *Zemlevladienie i sluzhba dumnykh chinov v Rossii* (Moscow, 1999), 21, 43.


(64.) P. S. Stefanovich, *Prikhod i prikhodskoe dukhovenstvo v Rossii v xvi–xvii vekakh* (Moscow, 2002), 241–278.


(68.) The remaining component, the hide system, did not take permanent root; as we shall see, many of its functions would be carried out by the peasant commune.


(72.) On the black soil region in seventeenth-century Russia, Carol Belkin Stevens, Soldiers on the Steppe: Army Reform and Social Change in Early Modern Russia (DeKalb, IL, 1995), 19, 41–100.

(73.) Robert E. F. Smith, Peasant Farming in Muscovy (Cambridge, 1977), 86. Even yields averaging four to one, as was the case in the Pskov region (north-west Russia), left peasant households with little surplus. See the model of a peasant household in the Pskov region in the sixteenth century, in A. L. Shapiro, ed., Agrarnaia istoriia severo-zapada Rossii, xvi veka (Leningrad, 1974), 91.


(75.) Ia. E. Vodarskii, Dvorianskoe zemlevladeenie v Rossii v xviii–pervoi polovine xix v. (Moscow, 1988), 234, Table 284. Figures for arable land include arable held by the nobles’ peasant tenants.

(76.) The percentage of peasants on labour services varied per province, ranging from a high of 92 per cent (Kursk and Tula provinces) to a low of only 36 per cent (Voronezh province). N. A. Rubinshtein, Sel’skoe khoziaistvo Rossi v vtoroi polovine xvii v. (Moscow, 1957), 101.

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(78.) There were the so-called ‘household people’ (dvorovye liudi), who did not hold land; on one estate in nineteenth-century Russia, household people included carpenters, stable hands, clerks, and foresters. They accounted for 7 per cent of the population on the estate, but the estate owner often monopolized their labour, paying them in cash and kind. There is no evidence, however, that they hired themselves out as farmhands in peasant households. Steven L. Hoch, Serfdom and Social Control in Russia (Chicago, IL, 1986), 17–20.

(79.) The average household in the black soil region had 10.2 members, in vivid contrast to the non-black soil region, where the average household had only 6.8 members: V. A. Aleksandrov, Obychnoe pravo krepstnoi derevni Rossii xviii–nachalo xix v. (Moscow, 1984), 57. In more specific terms, assuming labour services of three days per week, the average peasant household on a manor in the black soil region retained at all times enough labour (one adult couple) for its own agricultural tasks. See B. G. Litvak, Russkaia derevnia v reforme 1861 goda (Moscow, 1972), 141–144.

(80.) Hoch, Serfdom and Social Control, 76–132.

(81.) A study of one Russian manor in the earlier nineteenth century shows that the poor families on the estate (13 per cent of all the families) had failed to establish or maintain large multi-generational households: Edgar Melton, ‘Proto-Industrialization, Serf Agriculture, and Agrarian Social Structure: Two Estates in Nineteenth Century Russia’, Past & Present, 115 (May 1987), 96–100.

(82.) L. L. Murav’eva, Derevenskaia promyshlennost’ tsentral’noi Rossii (Moscow, 1971), 37.

(83.) Melton, ‘Proto-Industrialization’, 76.


(85.) V. P. Tarlovskaja, Torgovlia Rossii perioda pozdnego feodalizma (Moscow, 1988), 31–46.


(87.) Compare, for example, Hoch, Serfdom and Social Control, to Dennison, Institutional Framework of Russian Serfdom.
Livonia and Russia shared fewer of these characteristics, and town life was especially weakly developed. The economic dualism between town and country that characterized most of Europe both west and east of the Elbe was largely absent in Russia. Most provincial and district towns in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries in Russia were small administrative centres with very little economic and cultural vitality. At the same time, however, Russia had many trade and craft villages, especially in the central non-black soil region. These villages, often part of large noble estates, provided much of Russia's economic dynamism during the eighteenth and first half of the nineteenth centuries. Many of them became towns in the late nineteenth or early twentieth century. For a detailed description of a prosperous trading village on an aristocratic estate in the early nineteenth century, see Melton, ‘The Magnate and her Trading Peasants in Serf Russia’, 39-55.

Important exceptions to this scholarly approval of Westernization are the Russian Eurasianists, including the controversial geographer and Turcologist Lev Gumilev (1912–92). In a number of scholarly works (the most important of which remain untranslated) Gumilev argued that Russia and the West are two essentially incompatible ethno-cultural types; much more compatible with the Russian type are the ethno-cultures of the nomadic and semi-nomadic Eurasian steppes. Lev Gumilev, Ot Rusi do Rossii (Moscow, 1995), 307-313.

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Abstract and Keywords

Town and country were closely linked in early modern Europe. While cities normally held the dominant hand in political and jurisdictional terms, their dependence on their hinterlands for food and immigrants made for a more balanced symbiosis. Several distinctive features marked town-country relations in Mediterranean Europe. The most important of these was the construction of small, regional quasi-states under the dominion of a capital city. This *contado* system thrived above all in northern Italy and central Spain, and played a key role in the transition from the later Middle Ages to the early modern period. It has also been one of the leading themes of a dynamic historiography which has made important recent advances in the study of daily life, material culture, and gender relations, especially from the perspective of microhistory.

Keywords: City, country, contado, diet, food supply, Mediterranean, proto-industrialization, urbanization

The Mediterranean Sea has played several distinctive, even crucial roles in the history of Europe. Most notably, it was where European civilization began, and during most of this civilization’s existence it was regarded as its centre. The slow emergence of settled societies started in its eastern half, with the development of agriculture and the domestication of animals during the Neolithic period. Warfare, migration, and trade eventually brought into contact a wide range of peoples from three different continents. Thus, in addition to centrality, from early on the Mediterranean was marked by mixture. From its origins to the present day it has served as a crucible for the fusion of different cultures and traditions. Political unity was achieved only once in its history, under the sway of ancient Rome. This empire left a powerful legacy to the future, through its laws, language, architecture, technology, and institutions, along with other, less tangible...
inheriances. But the greatest force for unity in Mediterranean history came from the sea itself, and the landscape which envelops it. While far from uniform, southern Europe has from its very beginnings been blessed—and cursed—by its peculiar ecology. While multiple factors have shaped this natural framework, perhaps the most visible is its climate, more temperate, but with less rainfall, than that of northern Europe. And, predictably, much of Mediterranean history consists of constant struggles to overcome the persistent limitations imposed by this environment. Here what most stands out is the long-term continuity in agrarian regimes, including the sort of crops grown—barley and then wheat as the main cereals, joined somewhat later on by olives, grapes, and a wide range of fruits and vegetables—as well as the methods used to extract an existence from light and shallow soils.¹

The Mediterranean’s defining role as a zone of contact played an essential, if lethal, part in inaugurating the early modern era. For it was through its eastern ports that the Black Death—the most devastating pandemic in European history—reached the continent from Asia in the 1340s. The new Europe that emerged in its wake was marked by a combination of political turmoil, widespread unrest, and heightened social and geographic mobility. It also witnessed the successful expansion along its eastern shores of a new Muslim power, that of the Ottoman Turks. Their conquest of Constantinople in 1453 not only brought to an end the thousand-year rule of the Byzantine empire. It also opened a new cycle in another inveterate characteristic of the Mediterranean, its serving as the area of Europe which witnessed the most intense and prolonged clashes between Christianity and Islam. And this conflict was the central theme of the single most influential work ever written about the Mediterranean, and which serves as the inevitable starting point of this chapter, the French historian Fernand Braudel’s *The Mediterranean and the Mediterranean World in the Age of Philip II*, originally published in 1949.

Braudel’s work was unusual in many respects. First, the very idea of focusing not on a kingdom, region, or cultural movement, but something as amorphous and overwhelming as a sea, had virtually no precedents. Second, the way he approached this topic was equally singular. He divided his book into three major sections, each linked to a different unit of historical time. Braudel saw history as divided into three chronological layers. The first was deep, ‘geographical’ time, shaped by long-term (*longue durée*) factors, above all of a physical nature. Then came an intermediate stratum, that of human response to this environment as manifested in a medium term of evolving societies and economies. Individuals dominated the final layer, that of events, which was above all the realm of politics. The sea itself provided Braudel with a telling metaphor with which to distinguish these three levels of time. The first layer was found at its lower depths, the realm of the ‘permanent, slow-moving, or recurrent’. Higher up one ran into strong undercurrents, which corresponded to the ‘history of groups, collective destinies, and general trends’.
The surface was the space of individuals and events. Superficial and evanescent, this was the sphere of politics, where even the most powerful individuals learned how difficult it was to battle the fateful realities of geography and distance. By bringing all three dimensions of the past together into a single ‘total history’, Braudel offered a rich and arresting analysis, one which wound up ‘embracing every aspect ... of the rich and dense life’ of the early modern Mediterranean.

The central theme of this remarkable book is decline. For it was the early modern era—more precisely, the ‘long sixteenth century’ stretching from around 1520 to 1660—which saw the Mediterranean relinquish the central role it had earlier enjoyed in European history. At first the area, like the rest of the continent, participated in the general recovery which followed the demographic and economic losses caused by the plagues and instability of the later Middle Ages. The sixteenth century was in fact a boom period, when the Mediterranean’s population almost doubled, its production grew at a fast rate, and commercial integration advanced rapidly enough to allow Braudel to claim that at that point its basin housed the most developed and dynamic urban network in the world. Yet this long and positive ‘conjuncture’—that is, a medium-length economic cycle—did not last. By the early seventeenth century population had started to contract in many areas, while living standards stagnated or declined as virtually all economic sectors began to lose vitality. What brought about the ‘harsh, inward-looking age of the seventeenth century’ was not so much cyclical adjustment, as a historic shift in the centre of gravity of the European economy as a whole, from the Mediterranean (p. 457) to the increasingly more dynamic and globally connected Atlantic seaboard. This displacement—slow, uneven, but inexorable—wound up relegating the South to a backwater of relative poverty and backwardness as its northern neighbours proved far more successful in finding a path to the industrial economy and society of the future.

Still, Braudel’s achievement was only a starting point. While there is no denying the force or influence of his extraordinary book, much water has flowed under the bridge since it was written. The six decades since its publication have witnessed a massive amount of research and writing on the early modern Mediterranean, and on its urban and rural history in particular. And one sees clearly that there are crucial differences not only between the past of southern as opposed to northern Europe, but also in the way in which scholars interpret these two histories.

A generation or so ago, urban history as practised in Europe’s North and South varied in several important respects. These included the very definition of a city, and the basic characteristics of urban life that historians focused on. Generally speaking, urban historians of early modern Britain, France, and Germany developed a strongly social and economic approach to cities. Standard themes there included demography, social structures, and economic activities, all seen as distinctive from those reigning in the
countryside. Relatively little emphasis was placed on civic politics, and on urban form, in
the sense of the distribution of space and buildings within the civic environment. In short,
urban historians conceived of cities largely as containers for social and economic history.
In this they marched in step with both the expansive economic history of the postwar
period, as well as the broadly influential French historiographic movement known as the
Annales school, which Braudel himself headed during the 1950s and 1960s.

The situation in Mediterranean Europe was rather different. True, the Annalistes had
their adepts in Spain and Italy, and it is perhaps telling that some of the most successful
urban research done under its aegis involved southern cities, such as Rome or
Valladolid. The social and economic history of towns was also reinforced from a different
direction, by studies written from a Marxist perspective. This framework exerted greater
influence on urban history by Italians, who could draw on the sophisticated historical
insights of Antonio Gramsci, and Spaniards, many of whom looked to Marxism for
inspiration in the struggle against the Franco dictatorship. Still, these works were the
exception to the rule; the dominant influence continued to be that of the Annales school.
What is more, urban history in southern Europe had bifurcated in an additional direction,
one which focused less on the socio-economic dimensions of urban life, and more on the
city as a built environment. Thus an important branch of the study of the urban past in
Italy, Spain, Greece, and to a lesser extent France, consciously saw itself as forming part
of the history of architecture and urban planning.

Rural history diverged from this dual pattern. Throughout Europe from the immediate
postwar period until very recently, social and especially economic concerns triumphed
over all competitors in the study of the early modern countryside. Three major
approaches vied for attention. First, there was the fairly traditional and highly empirical
economic history which thrived most in Great Britain and Germany. Meanwhile, in France
the Annales school predictably held sway. Indeed, the most famous monographs
its adherents wrote in the aftermath of Braudel were early modern rural studies, such as
Pierre Goubert’s pathbreaking thesis on the Beauvaisis region or Emmanuel Le Roy
Ladurie’s even broader study of Languedoc. Finally, Marxist historiography developed
several significant variants of rural history, which ranged from a strong focus on the
transition from feudalism to capitalism in the agrarian sphere to the work of Hans Medick
and other German historians on industrial activity in the countryside. In the end, the
Annales school and Marxism—both very much in their heyday from the 1950s to the
1970s—had the strongest impact on the sort of rural studies written in southern Europe.
This is not to say that the latter were lacking in the empirical contents which took pride
of place in northern Europe. Rather, it is to acknowledge the much deeper influence of
Annaliste and Marxist models of analysis and terminology in the rural as opposed to
urban history of the early modern Mediterranean, as well as the earlier signs of interest in specifically cultural questions (such as architectural history) within the latter.

Over time the historiographical gap between North and South has narrowed. At present both early modern urban and rural histories throughout Europe are marked by the same tendencies. These include a retreat from strictly economic history, as well as from the more quantitative variants of social history. One also detects an important shift in attention away from the earlier emphasis on the production and circulation of goods and services, and toward their consumption. Above all, an unprecedented amount of attention is now being paid to the cultural dimensions of all these topics. The new cultural history of city and country—and ‘culture’ here is best understood in the broadest, anthropological sense—deals with a wide range of topics, many of which received virtually no attention in the past. Most directly relevant to the concerns of this chapter are how the differences between urban and rural life gave rise to a wide range of identities, rooted not just in the opposition between town and country (a topic dealt with subsequently), but also within these two not so separate spheres. Another topic receiving considerable attention now is how individuals and groups in both domains mobilized resources and devised strategies in order to confront the often dramatic difficulties of daily life. This has brought to the fore a polyvalent approach which sees people in the past as historical actors who struggle to negotiate as best as they can the conditions of their own existence, something which earlier structuralist macro-studies failed to explore.

In short, much recent historical effort has been devoted to breaking down the divisions which sorted history into separate, self-contained specializations. What appears to be emerging in their wake is a more diffused effort to experiment with different combinations of social, political, economic, and cultural factors. To a certain extent this represents a return of sorts to the ‘total history’ that Braudel practised. Yet while this chapter takes Braudel as a starting point, it goes on to focus on more recent studies in order to highlight what was specific, and perhaps even unique, to the Mediterranean in the early modern period. (What is meant by Mediterranean is largely confined to its northern, European half, and to its western corner in particular, which is much more extensively studied than its eastern reaches.) Above all, town and country serve as a handy prism through which to see the more significant ways in which early modern Mediterranean Europe differed from the rest of the continent. For it was there, in city streets and the surrounding fields and mountains, where the people who lived in, from, and as part of the Mediterranean, strove to make the best of the chances history afforded them.
Defining Cities

Exactly what constituted a city in pre-industrial Europe? How did small towns differ from large villages? These are classic questions in early modern historiography, and they have given rise to a wide range of answers. To ask what makes a city is not an idle exercise in theory. Rather, it has important implications for Mediterranean history, and for the growing awareness of difference between North and South that was one of the major developments of this period.

Early modern Europeans defined cities in several ways. First, they were legal and political entities. Higher authorities such as monarchs awarded them privileges and charters that not only referred to them as such, but also clearly differentiated them from lesser jurisdictions. One of the most common markers of this legal status was the presence of a bishop, although by the later Middle Ages many large urban conglomerations throughout Europe lacked this traditional distinction. (This could lead to some awkward situations. During the seventeenth century Madrid was not only the capital of the Spanish Monarchy, but also the largest city in the Iberian peninsula. However, since it lacked a bishopric, its official rank was that of a villa, or town.) A more effective alternative was to mark as a city any space which specialized in functions that were closely associated with cities. The weightiest of these was commerce; after all, most cities originally emerged as meeting points for trade and transport, and thereafter housed different types of markets. Another was services. These were of two types: public, in the form of diverse levels of administration, and private, which included the work of physicians, lawyers, notaries, and the like. (Today we think of industry as the most visibly urban economic function, but it was precisely the early modern period which showed that manufacture could also thrive in the countryside in small-scale, decentralized units.) Finally, common sense looked on cities as places where large numbers of individuals and families were concentrated. Sheer size was an important marker of urban living, as were the buildings, streets, squares, and other physical features which distinguished townscapes from the surrounding countryside.

The Dutch historian Jan de Vries had to decide which of these criteria to use when he launched in the mid-1980s his bold attempt to map changes in the levels of urbanization—that is, the proportion of the overall population which lived in cities—in Europe from the sixteenth through the eighteenth centuries. Thoroughly aware of the complexity of the problem, in the end he chose the number of inhabitants as the boundary differentiating cities from lesser entities. Fixing 10,000 as the cut-off point, he assembled an impressive data base from which several clear trends emerged. First, the overall weight of cities within European society grew during the early modern period.
From 1500 to 1800 the continent’s urban population doubled, from 5 to 10 per cent. Second, cities grew more in some places than in others. In proportional terms, urban population expanded most in northern Europe (from 6 to 15 per cent), and least in the Mediterranean (from 10 to 13 per cent). Thus, while the South started this period as by far the most urbanized part of the continent, by its end the much more intensive growth in the North caused it to surrender its lead. Third, significant exceptions to these broad trends could be found within each of the two halves of the continent. Thus, most of the population gain in the North took place in the British Isles and the Low Countries; increases proved much more modest elsewhere. And as far as the Mediterranean was concerned, regional differences were just as evident. The most dramatic of these pitted the North of Italy against the rest of the peninsula. The former started the early modern era as the most highly urbanized area of Europe, along with the Low Countries. However, by 1800 it had suffered a net loss in its proportion of city dwellers, while the much less economically advanced centre and South had made modest but sufficient enough gains to match it.\(^5\)

While de Vries’s findings had considerable impact, they also attracted criticism. First, some scholars doubted that a single factor could suffice to define a city. Using population as a proxy was logical enough, but it was seen as too reductionist, in that it ran the risk of converting the complex question of the urban threshold into a (too) simple matter of numbers. More cogent was a second objection: that while it was acceptable to use demographic size to mark the difference between town and country, applying a single, uniform criterion—and a relatively high one at that—to widely divergent local realities throughout Europe could produce a distorted picture of what cities were and where they were located. The case of Catalonia, a relatively prosperous region in northeastern Spain, illustrates this problem. Throughout the three centuries under study, only the capital of Barcelona qualified as a city according to his demographic criterion. However, it was precisely during this era when an impressive number of towns appeared in the nearby countryside. While none of these were large enough to figure in de Vries’s survey, there can be little doubt that they were seen at the time as cities, due to their intensive concentration of recognizably urban functions, including industrial finishing processes, and participation in long-distance trade.\(^6\)

In short, this sort of one-size-fits-all data base, while valuable for highlighting general trends, missed important nuances, especially in regard to the local distinctiveness of smaller cities. It also produced several mirages, at least as far as Mediterranean Europe was concerned. One was the obvious point that large areas such as Spain and southern Italy, which suffered from traditionally lower demographic densities, did not lack for cities. What it had few of were agglomerations of population that were as large as Dutch cities, which is not the same thing. Thus, when a city is defined at a threshold of 5,000
Instead of 10,000 inhabitants, one finds central Spain reaching a 20 per cent level of urbanization during the sixteenth century. Another mirage involves the opposite problem, that of so-called ‘agro-towns’. These are towns which resemble cities in terms of size and spatial concentration, but whose citizens specialize not in urban economic activities, but rather work in the nearby countryside in agriculture or tending livestock. That both phenomena could be readily found in the Mediterranean suggested the need for a more flexible approach. Thus, when the economic historian Stephan Epstein assembled results based on defining cities as locales marked by urban functions as opposed to minimum population, he found a dramatically different situation. Not only did urbanization levels increase throughout Europe, but also places which traditionally had been dismissed as overwhelmingly rural, such as central Spain, Sicily, and southern Italy, now were seen as reaching urbanization levels as high as 40 per cent in certain areas.

In the end, perhaps the most lasting contribution of de Vries’s book was his insistence on a different matter altogether: the need for historians to look at towns not as independent entities, but as connected to each other in myriad ways. Studying cities with this in mind means resorting to a concept devised by geographers known as ‘urban systems’. These comprise towns closely enough linked by various social and above all economic interactions that they form a strong and often hierarchically ordered network. Focusing on systems is a helpful corrective to traditional approaches which, by isolating each city on its own, reduce attempts to write a broader history to a collection of individual ‘urban biographies’. It is also a privileged perspective from which to consider how town dwellers dealt with the countryside around them.

**Town Versus Country**

Town and country in the early modern Mediterranean eyed each other with mutual distrust. Peasants had little reason to like city folk, with whom they had contact as absentee landowners, military recruiters, priests who preached to them in a language they could barely understand (when they bothered to attend to their duties), and above all, tax collectors. What united all these figures was their urban origins and the fact that their interest in the rural world was to try to extract what they could out of it.

City dwellers had no higher opinion of their rural neighbours. They saw the latter as rude, ignorant, near-savage in terms of the way they lived, and good only for exploiting. Yet they could be cunning, and turned out to be gifted cheaters when the time came to pay the rents, dues, tithes, and other obligations they owed to their urban betters. The latter knew to keep their eyes wide open when dealing with even the dullest of peasants.
Thus in the early fifteenth century the Florentine merchant Giovanni di Pagolo Morelli wrote down the following frank advice to his heirs in his notebook:

Go round the farm field by field with your peasant, reprove him for the work ill-done, estimate the harvest of wheat, wine, barley, oil and fruit, and compare everything with last year’s crops ... Trust him not, keep your eye always upon him, and examine the crops everywhere—in the fields, on the threshing-floor and on the scales. Yield not to him in anything, for he will only think that you were bound to do so ... And above all, trust none of them.⁸

In the view of well-off patricians such as Morelli, country life stood for backbreaking labour, poverty, and lack of amenities—all disadvantages that invited subterfuge and cheating on the part of those unfortunate enough to be doomed to live there.⁹ Centuries later the situation had not changed. Thus in seventeenth-century Spain, when the crown pressed nobles for extra contributions to fund its armies fighting in northern Europe, the most convincing evidence aristocrats could produce of their being too poor to pay up was that they no longer lived in cities (as one put it, his poverty had obliged him ‘to withdraw into village life’).¹⁰ In short, the countryside was widely seen as the harshest abode within a harsh world. There survival was bought at the price of endless effort and no little luck. The ancient wisdom that the fortune of a few rested on the misfortune of the many seemed to have found direct translation in the inequality which governed relations between the relatively small number of individuals who lived in towns and the vast majority who eked out their existence outside the city walls.

Urban domination of the countryside was the norm throughout early modern Europe, and the South was no exception. Towns controlled their hinterlands in a number of ways. First came seigneury, the appropriation by cities of the same sort of direct lordship by which feudal nobles ruled their subordinates. This was obtained in various ways, including military force, purchase, gifts from higher authorities such as the Emperor or the Pope, or even through voluntary cession (towns often expanded their domains by offering protection against other predators). Other, more informal means of oversight also existed. The most important of these involved city dwellers obtaining rural property. Some bought farms outright, and it was hardly surprising to see numerous citizens purchasing lots adjacent to cities and even further beyond. Urban interest in owning nearby land led in certain cases to the near-total dispossession of the peasantry. Thus by 1789, 93 per cent of the rich countryside surrounding the wealthy city of Bologna was in
Nor did the latter hail only from the upper classes. Tax declarations from the Sicilian town of Paceco in 1623 show many of its inhabitants possessing not only extra-urban land, but also horses, mules, livestock, and seed grain. Moreover, the burgisi who filed these forms ranged widely in status and wealth, from blacksmiths and other artisans on up to apothecaries, notaries, physicians, and most of the civic elite. Many of these urban landowners wound up obtaining their holdings by extending to farmers one of the powerful tools city dwellers had at their disposal: credit. For those forced to borrow, foreclosure and the loss of property was a constant risk, and it often took just one bad harvest to find formerly independent peasants now working as hired labour on the land they used to own.

Such inequalities dominated the relations between cities and the territories surrounding them throughout Europe. What was unique to the Mediterranean was the special institutional arrangement to which this inequality gave rise. By the fourteenth century, a distinctive form of governance had emerged to consolidate the hierarchical relationship between town and country. Known in Italian as the contado, and extended here to mean both the ruling city and extra-urban area it controlled, it provided an effective model for organizing claims to hegemony among cities which competed among themselves for the resources and loyalties of their rural populations.

There were two dimensions to the contado system. First, as a political, legal, and jurisdictional structure, it assured the subordination of the hinterland to urban power. More unusual was a second feature: its coverage of a much broader area which comprised not just the countryside, but also other, more minor cities as well. The latter peculiarity—how the contado functioned as a sort of regional empire—was a persistent theme in the writings of one of the most influential recent historians of early modern Italy, Marino Berengo. In a series of brief but unusually suggestive comparative studies, Berengo surveyed the whole of Europe only to find few cities elsewhere exercising such tight control over so extensive a space as did many Mediterranean towns. Thus, in terms of size, he found that the largest equivalent in Germany, the countryside ruled over by Nuremberg, measured almost 1,200 square kilometres in the early sixteenth century. This was hardly in the same league as the 5,000 square kilometres Florence boasted of a century earlier. And in regard to the sort of leverage such towns wielded over their subject areas, three powers in particular proved especially important. The first was monopolistic oversight of the cultivation of grain and other foodstuffs, in order to set the terms of trade in the city’s favour. This could even extend to forcing the peasantry to grow specific crops. Thus fifteenth-century Siena required farmers under its jurisdiction to plant four fruit and four olive trees a year, which assured low prices within urban markets. Another tack was to allow urban guilds directly to control manufacturing and other forms of work in the countryside. Finally, the latter was obliged to submit to
different and more onerous systems of taxation. In the case of early modern Florence, this meant that its rural population paid direct levies on individual property, while city dwellers were subject to indirect taxation, in the form of excises on basic consumption items such as bread and wine. This dual policy was much easier on the purses of the wealthy, as the lower classes both inside and beyond the city walls wound up paying a far greater proportion of their income on taxes.15

Different motives could lead civic elites to convert a hinterland into a contado. Urban oligarchs could often turn a nice personal profit from the expansion of public jurisdictions. Pope Paul II, during his 1460s confrontation with the civic authorities of Bologna, was not mistaken when he complained that the recent expansion of the city’s contado had wound up ‘being taken over by a few private citizens’.16 Political and military strategy often proved to be another important consideration. Thus, for example, one of the main reasons behind Venice’s crucial decision to create a Terraferma or landed empire to match its maritime possessions was to secure sufficient timber and other resources to keep its shipping and navy in operation.17 This eventually gave rise to a highly unusual political structure, which saw Venice functioning as a political centre which nevertheless delegated substantial authority to the larger subject cities, such as Verona, Padua, or Bergamo. This left the traditional ruling classes of the latter pretty much in charge of local affairs, even if eventually Venetian authorities wound up directly negotiating with elites and even the middle classes in the countryside as well. The case of the Veneto was arguably the closest a contado came to becoming a fully fledged state, although a number of cities started out as republican regimes whose acquisition of ever more distant dominions paved the way for their eventual conversion into more complex and hierarchical political systems. Clearly the contado phase was a decisive stage in the long-term transformation of Florence into the Duchy of Tuscany, and one can point to similar developments in other cities as well, such as Genoa or Milan.

That said, the contado system was far from universal. It flourished only in certain parts of the Mediterranean, and where it did, its existence depended on two conditions. The first was that monarchical power on a local level should not be so overriding as to interfere with municipal prerogatives. This meant that kings saw greater advantages in working with cities instead of against them. The second was that royal–civic alliance should prove strong enough to keep in check the traditional rival of both, the territorial aristocracy. These prerequisites were met in only two places: northern and central Italy, and much if not all of the Iberian peninsula. The former needs little explanation. Most of the larger cities north of Rome not only freed themselves from the effective control of higher powers during the Middle Ages, but also kept their rural nobles firmly in line. The case of Spain was different. Towns in the central and largest kingdom of the peninsula, Castile, had emerged from the late medieval crisis with considerably greater powers and, in
particular, much larger jurisdictions than was the norm in the rest of Europe. Beginning with the reforming monarchs Isabel and Ferdinand in the late fifteenth century, the crown took numerous steps to try to rein in the power of these cities—so much so, in fact, that their successor Charles V provoked them into taking up arms in a wide-scale but ultimately futile uprising known as the *Comunero* revolt (1520–22). While Charles kept up the pressure afterwards, especially through the sale of town properties and jurisdictions, in the end both he and the rulers who followed him realized that they depended on the cities for their most important sources of revenue. The outcome was a political system which externally resembled an early model of royal absolutism, but which in reality was one in which the main cities of Castile used their bargaining power successfully to negotiate a wide range of privileges and advantages for themselves and especially their elites. One of these was precisely the right to fix the tax burden on the peasantry under their thumbs, which turned out to be one of the most important discretionary powers exercised anywhere during the early modern era.

The strong, even strident cultural motif of the superiority of city over country life was rooted not just in an imbalance of power, but also in a darker reality of exploitation that gave rise to real fears of violent reaction by the savage inhabitants of the rural underworld. That relatively little conflict of this sort ever took place suggests that realities on the ground differed from how town dwellers saw them. In fact, one might look on this ‘urban ideology’ which justified the iron control of the city over the country as a self-serving illusion, more trumpeted as a cliché than triumphal in reality. Relations between town and country were considerably more complex than this ideology allowed, and involved an ongoing process of negotiation in which the city was not the only side holding the cards. Claims to urban superiority were repeatedly tempered by the striking dependence of the cities on the countryside for two indispensable resources: food, and human reinforcements in the form of immigrants. That no city was capable of feeding itself, or of renewing its population by itself, forces one to approach the question of town and country from a different direction.

**Interdependence**

On paper the *contado* was a relatively simple structure of domination, one which assured urban oligarchies the upper hand in the assymetrical opposition between town and country. But as ever, the real world turned out to be a more complicated place than that defined in charters and privileges. A wide range of factors converged to turn city–country relations into a more balanced and diverse set of exchanges. Probing these reveals not only that the age-old construct pitting town and country against each other was at best a half-truth. It also highlights the strong need to focus on how the two spheres were
integrated, and wound up depending on each other. And here, hierarchy was only part of the story.

Cities were places of power, but there were certain basic things that they were unable to do. Two of these were especially important. First, like single-child families, they could not reproduce their own ranks from one generation to another. This was due in part to the so-called graveyard effect, the fact that overall urban mortality rates were higher than the ability of urban-born families to replace their losses. (That this was especially true during times of catastrophic mortality such as plague merely underlined the demographic vulnerability of areas with higher population densities.) The net effect was the city’s visible dependence on rural recruits for its very survival. Not surprisingly, in a 1634 dialogue the Neapolitan writer Giulio Cesare Capaccio noted that fully one-third of the inhabitants of his native city were direct immigrants from the country. And what was true of Naples—then the largest metropolis in the Christian half of the Mediterranean—was found in towns of all sizes throughout southern Europe.

Two types of immigrants can be distinguished, temporary and permanent. The former outnumbered the latter, which reflected the basic fact that town and country were linked by patterns of flow that, while in overall terms brought many more peasants to the city than city dwellers to the countryside, nevertheless saw many of the farmers moving repeatedly back and forth between the two spheres. The main priority of these temporary, even seasonal migrants was to find work, and these opportunities fluctuated with the typical cycles of the urban economy. But the line separating them from permanent migrants was often quite thin. Both sought economic and social betterment, and some who started as short-term visitors found it better to stay on and seek greater integration (including marriage and citizenship) into the city and its way of life. Capaccio wrote exuberantly about how urban living transformed such newcomers into better persons. Settling in the city allowed them to be ‘reborn’, to ‘change customs’, and to shed ‘their hometown coarseness’ for the ‘civility and a liberty proper to Naples’. This was obviously how things looked from the urbanite’s point of view. Still, whether push worked more than pull to bring rural folk to the city, they came all the same, at least to those urban centres sufficiently dynamic to offer opportunities that were harder to come by in the countryside. And in so doing, migrants brought town and country together, thus tempering the imbalance between the two spheres.

Early modern Mediterranean cities depended on the rural world for another vital necessity: food. A regular supply of grain had been among the highest priorities of municipal policy since ancient times. Nor did towns limit themselves to controlling food supplies in their immediate hinterland. Beginning in antiquity the larger cities in Italy imported grain from great distances, even the Black Sea. The availability of alternative sources of supply explains what appears to be the apparently more relaxed control
coastal cities exercised over their hinterlands. Thus, while the civic government of a major port such as Barcelona took care to maintain its lordship of the village of Flix, whose relatively distant location on the Ebro river allowed it to intervene in the shipping of grain, it claimed rights of oversight over a surprisingly small number of towns and villages closer to the city itself. On the whole, though, most towns had no choice but to take what measures they could to assure the provision of food, and when local supplies were inadequate they had to compensate by spending (and borrowing) vast sums of money for purchases from distant suppliers.

The alternative was revolt. When shortages caused food prices to rise beyond what was affordable, civic rulers knew that the urban populace would turn to violence in order to force more decisive action from the elite. By far the greater part of the collective violence that occasionally disturbed early modern cities took the form of food riots. These would include assaults on urban granaries or the houses of rich citizens suspected of hoarding foodstuffs, as well as direct attacks on municipal officials in charge of grain supplies. Such violence, or even the threat of it, often produced quick results. Thus in 1647 in the Sicilian city of Trapani, the mere appearance of anonymous posters calling for crowd action led the town fathers to lower the price of bread and remove taxes on olive oil, which succeeded in defusing the threat of unrest. In fact, most of the major growth in debt of city governments throughout the Mediterranean during the seventeenth century can be traced to two causes: rising tax burdens imposed by central states, and the need to provide ever more expensive supplies of grain during a period of declining agricultural production.

Capital cities took the most extensive (and costly) measures to assure regular food supplies, as the case of Rome suggests. There and in other metropoli, a large bureaucracy was created to ensure that grain would always be available at reasonable prices. The office known as the annona took definitive shape in the later sixteenth century, amid a dramatic growth in population that placed growing pressure on the supply of grain. Its officials were charged with overseeing all aspects of the chain of provisioning, from extramural production to final distribution in the marketplace. By 1620 they had been joined by separate annone for meat and olive oil. When major famines took place these offices assumed increased powers of intervention, which they used to privilege the urban market at the expense of producers in the local countryside. All this was expensive as well as unfair, but the Roman population as a whole benefited from such decisive intervention. A note from 1641 boasted that ‘Rome consumes twice as much meat and wine as does Naples, even though the latter is double its size’. Capital and court cities clung to this privilege; there was virtually no difference between market controls which favoured urban consumers in Rome as opposed to Naples, or even Istanbul. The price was greater poverty in the countryside, which was
compensated for only in part by the strong role such policies played in breaking down barriers to market integration.

The supply of both immigrants and food were dependencies that cities proved unable to avoid, even if the basic imbalances worked in their favour. Many more immigrants left the country for towns than vice versa. And clearly city dwellers enjoyed a much more varied and nutritious diet than did their rural peers, who were subject to a ‘monotonous diet based almost exclusively on bread’ and marked by ‘insufficient amounts of calories, fats, certain vitamins, [and] deficiencies in animal proteins’. But there was also a third crucial linkage which brought town and country in the Mediterranean together: shared economic activities. These were many and various, and often had diverse effects on towns as well as country. First, many members of the urban elite quite literally depended on rural rents for their income. Thus the frank admission of Jeroni de Real, a minor nobleman from the Catalan town of Girona, that ‘the majority of the clergy and nobles of Girona have rents from tithes and properties in the Empordà [a rural area north of the city]… and would be reduced to misery’ were the war then raging between France and Spain not to end. Needless to say, such extractions had largely negative consequences for the countryside, even if it did receive investment capital in exchange. Second, in a sort of reverse effect, certain trades wound up implanting the countryside in the city. Maidservants and wetnurses, for example, were recruited by city folk almost exclusively from among women of rural origin. Thus a survey of eighteenth-century notarial documents from the southern French cities of Marseille and Aix-en-Provence reveals that among female servants almost 90 per cent had migrated from the countryside. (Note that a similar if less pronounced majority of menservants also had rural roots.) Third, some townsmen developed closer economic relations with the peasantry through sharecropping. This was a system by which urban proprietors provided farmers with land, housing, and seed, and in exchange for the labour of the farmer (and his family) received half of the crop. This lopsided arrangement was wide open to abuses and obviously favoured the owner over the farmer. Still, its fundamental logic was that, given that both parties shared the risks involved, it could work to mutual advantage, provided that each understood the need to accommodate the interest of the other.

One final and especially intensive economic relation brought town and country together. ‘Proto-industrialization’ is the forbidding term used to refer to an early stage in industrial development in which manufacture took place in rural (and semi-rural) as opposed to urban locales. It flourished in the Mediterranean and elsewhere from the fourteenth to eighteenth centuries. It typically involved using the labour of almost all the members of a rural household successfully to compete with the technological conservatism and higher wages of artisan production in the cities. While it sometimes led to a direct clash between urban and rural interests, it more typically involved cooperation at a broader, more
regional level between country workers and city merchants, who played a central role in coordinating production and sales. Most ventures in this early form of industrialization petered out at the end of a product cycle. However, southern Europe gave rise to at least one highly successful variant which began as rural industry and which ended in the emergence of one of the mostly intensely industrialized regions in the entire Mediterranean. This was Catalonia. There a long tradition of urban manufacture beginning in the Middle Ages saw a shift toward the countryside in the seventeenth century. Once there, interpenetration with other activities, including the maritime export of high-demand goods such as cheap brandy, led to a flourishing textile industry which returned to Barcelona and smaller cities in its environs in the later eighteenth century. Proto-industry in this corner of Iberia wound up playing a decisive role in converting Catalonia into the most dynamic economy of the Iberian peninsula. It also demonstrated that northern Europe was not the only locus of sustained development following the Mediterranean’s loss of economic hegemony during the crisis of the seventeenth century.  

These various urban–rural linkages reveal some of the hidden dynamism of the early modern Mediterranean countryside, which was long dismissed as a sad example of backwardness and immobility. They also shed light on the agents of this modernization. These included, naturally, urban merchants and investors who often became heavily involved in their rural surroundings. But the two-way relationship between city and countryside also led to greater differentiation within the latter. In particular there emerged a stratum of the peasantry which not only profited as intermediaries in commerce and food supply, but who often went even further and involved themselves in other, often extra-local activities, including manufacture and transport. Many of these middlemen were moreover avid practitioners of ‘adversarial literacy’, a term which refers to ‘tactics of resistance through the effective use of written sources’, that is, the petitions, legal briefs, and other forms of obstructionism which turned out to be more effective than violence in containing outside interference. In the end, numerous linkages brought together these and other agents from town and country. At first sight, the cities seemed to be in charge, thanks to their political and jurisdictional influence over the country. But these relations were often characterized by less of an imbalance than one might expect.

All this leads one to look at urban lordship in a new light. In theory the contado was almighty; in practice, nuance marked the way in which towns approached their rural subjects. This helps explain certain apparent anomalies. One is the fact that stronger towns did not necessarily make for stronger regional economies. Another is that even in areas marked by forthright assertions of dominance, municipal control over hinterlands was largely discretionary, and often not spelled out in laws and regulation. Such
reliance on more informal arrangements suggests that civic dominance, while fierce on paper, was subject to the same sort of loose give-and-take which marked political relations throughout the Mediterranean. It also explains why, in a text offering advice to state officials in charge of the territories surrounding Genoa, the seventeenth-century patrician Andrea Spinola recommended a soft touch—trattare bene—when dealing with the local inhabitants.\(^{32}\) A strong echo of the same attitude is found in the Barberini lords in Rome counselling their officials in 1741 to treat their rural vassals ‘with all propriety and good manners’.)\(^{33}\) Finally, it also points to some of the reasons why different discourses emerged to counter the ‘urban ideology’ hostile to the country remarked earlier. More balanced relations in the social, economic, and political sphere had their counterpart in culture as well, in the form of Arcadian poetry, pastoral novels, or the antics of the astute peasant clown Bertoldo. Thus, when the French writer Jean de La Bruyère observed in 1688 that city dwellers may know the law, but they nothing of nature and the country, he served as spokesman for a broader sensibility willing to recognize the virtues—as well as defects—of both town and country.\(^{34}\)

**Gender and the Material World**

Among the many changes which have taken place in historical practice since Braudel published his book, by far the most dramatic has been the emergence of women at the very forefront of scholarly interest. The impact of the recent rise of women and gender as historical subjects has been especially pronounced in Mediterranean history, thanks not just to the later start of this sort of study in southern Europe, but also to what appears to have been the lesser prominence there of women in public life (perhaps another of the mirages arising from our reading of the documentary record). Virtually every area of research into the past has felt the stimulus of this broadening—and deepening—of the ranks of historical actors, and of the impact of their presence on the diverse contexts within which they lived their lives. One particularly revealing example involves the study of material culture—the physical objects and surroundings in which individuals and families eke out their existence—and of the daily life of work, leisure, family, ritual, and the like which marked the fundamental everyday rhythms of the past.

If the closer integration of town and country in the early modern Mediterranean was a slow and virtually invisible process, much the same can be said about the transformations which took place in the habits and habitats of daily life. For the vast majority of southern Europeans, continuity, not change, marked their access to and use of basic resources such as food, shelter, and clothing. Yet once again, the difference in the trajectories of town and country requires one to nuance this all-encompassing sense of immobility.
Urban and rural spheres knew different rhythms of change, and this is readily seen in regard to consumption, material culture, and the physical surroundings of past existence.

At first sight, one might think that it would be almost impossible to reconstruct this sort of underside of history. Yet while any history ‘from below’ has its obvious difficulties, there are nevertheless numerous sources which give a sense of early modern daily life and the contexts in which it took place. Especially valuable in this regard are notarial documents, that is, private contracts and other papers deposited in the custody of a notary, and now in public archives. Of particular importance for tracing changes in family life are marriage contracts and wills, as well as inventories of belongings, which were usually drawn up after the death of an adult property-owner. Thanks to this abundant serial documentation—considerably richer in southern Europe than in the North—historians can come to know the intimate details of families in the past, and above all the ownership and transmission of different forms of wealth. The latter include a wide range of material objects, and even some which revealed personal preferences, such as the books or religious images people owned. In short, with these and other sources in hand, historians can venture plausible hypotheses about more individualized dimensions of the past.

In this effort they are helped by the fact that early modern observers themselves were intrigued by the differences between urban and rural lifestyles. Some were even moved to study them in a systematic manner. By the eighteenth century amateur social scientists began to collect data regarding the work and spending habits of the lower classes (usually in the hope of reforming them). Thus, a study undertaken by one M. de Véran of the Provençal city of Arles and its hinterland from 1750 to 1790 found that a typical rural day-labourer and his wife spent two-thirds of their earnings on food—in the form of wheat, oil, salt, wine, and vegetables—and the other third on rent and taxes. Expenditures by their urban counterparts differed in two crucial ways. First, town dwellers proportionately spent less on food, thanks above all to the fact that they had more alternatives to choose from than the wheat which dominated the country diet. Second, the higher wages they earned in the city allowed them a certain surplus, which they spent on clothing. While such evidence needs to be read with caution, it suggests two factors of obvious importance: that the inhabitants of cities often had more disposable income than did countrymen, and that this extra margin, small as it was, allowed them a degree of participation in the new consumption modes of the era.

By the end of the early modern era the Mediterranean world had registered substantial changes in material culture and daily life. Both the extent and visibility of these changes differed in cities as opposed to the countryside. Take housing, for instance. While there was no single model for organizing domestic space in either town or country, it is clear that during the early modern era much more innovation took place in urban
homes as opposed to rural ones. The former saw their lighting improve, through larger window frames and increased use of glass. Building materials also became more sturdy and resistant to fire, as stone and brick drastically reduced the use of wood, except as beams and frames. (Here the eastern Mediterranean lagged behind the west; Ottoman cities, including Istanbul, were notoriously subject to major fires until the later nineteenth century.) The interiors of homes changed as well. Interior spaces became more differentiated from each other, and furniture and furnishings multiplied in number as they improved in quality and incorporated ever more design elements.

As for diet and foodways (‘food ways’ = the cultural, economic, and social practices associated with the production and consumption of food), one sees the same sort of divergence, between a conservative countryside whose basic diet altered little during the early modern period, and an urban sphere which registered more change, although thorough innovation was reserved to the highest ranks of society, especially the court. Classic urban ideology accompanied these differences, as in the typical assertion by a seventeenth-century physician that diet explained why townspeople were intelligent and peasants dullwitted:

Heavy foods cause strong semen and bad temperament: the son that is conceived will have great strength, but will be wild and of animal spirits. From this results that among men of the countryside it would be a miracle if one turned out to be of acute intelligence and prone to study, especially where such coarse foods are eaten. The opposite occurs among city-dwellers, whose sons we see have more intelligence and ability.

But it could be argued that a far greater gap in basic food habits separated city dwellers in northern as opposed to southern Europe than peasants and town dwellers within the latter. Staples in the South did not differ greatly from the so-called ‘Mediterranean diet’ of today. They included wine, olive oil, and the emerging (and highly cross-cultural) triad of starches of wheat and other grains, rice, and semola. Less meat was eaten—and more in the form of pork, as opposed to beef and mutton—than in the North; similarly, southern diet relied less on milk and butter. Greater fish consumption also marked the South, especially after the Protestant North discarded Catholic fasting practices. Beyond these basics, however, there existed a largely urban zone in which certain changes did take place. The Mediterranean acted as a conduit for the introduction of a number of new foods (and drinks) in the diet of the continent as a whole. For example, coffee reached Europe in the seventeenth century, from Turkey and the Balkans. Above all, Spain introduced a wide range of food products from its American colonies. For a number of reasons—cultural resistance was probably the most important—the ones which proved most significant in the long run took a while to catch on. These were maize and above all potatoes, whose revolutionary impact on European diet did not really take hold until the
eighteenth century. (Interestingly, some of the earliest and most successful domestinations of these and other new crops took place in the Balkan reaches of the Mediterranean.) Other New World products included chocolate (originally consumed as a hot drink), tobacco, tomatoes, peppers, and other vegetables. Consumption of many of these new products started in urban areas, and then either spread to the countryside (as in the case of tobacco), or remained in the cities as distinctively urbane luxuries (chocolate).

All this represented a revolution in comfort, which in the end developed with greater intensity in northern Europe. Still, there is a delicious historical irony here, as the broader move toward a higher domestic standard of living, including increased privacy and attention to decoration and other non-essentials, began in the Mediterranean itself. It was the ruling class of the northern Italian cities, and Florence in particular, which pioneered this new lifestyle in their palaces beginning in the fifteenth century. Elites in the rest of Europe imitated the new indoors amenities of the South, and eventually the middle classes also began to participate in this transformed domestic sphere, first through the consumption of art, and then through the same broader reworking of private space and the objects it housed. (The rise of markets in works of art soon became a particularly dynamic marker of changing urban consumption habits, as traditional patterns of patronage by the Church and the nobility soon gave rise to a ‘taste for things’ which also involved the urban middle classes, including merchants, professionals, and artisans.) These precocious beginnings, and the slow pace of change in general, suggest that what took place was evolution, not revolution. Still, it is clear that the eighteenth century witnessed an acceleration in the rhythms of change in both these spheres, and that an important aspect of this broader transformation was, paradoxically, growing contact between town and country.

‘Rhythms’ is the proper term here, because the speed of change still varied according to setting. Cities and the countryside continued to experience different rates of transformation, although it may be more profitable to think of each sphere as divided into two levels. Change was faster in the larger urban areas, especially metropolitan and capital or court cities, such as Florence and Rome. Smaller cities, on the other hand, often seemed much closer to country life, and altered fashions at a slower pace. As for rural areas, market towns and other provincial nodes integrated into wider systems of exchange proved more willing and able to absorb new products and trends than the rest of the countryside.

A graduated scale of this sort better represents these sorts of change than does the classic stark opposition between town and country. And the same can be said for thinking of Europe in regional terms, as opposed to the general difference between North and South. Recognizing the importance of variation and exceptions, and admitting that
resistance and reception are not mutually exclusive attitudes or behaviours, confers a much needed sense of nuance on the broad generalizations sketched in this chapter. Yes, change in patterns of consumption did take place at a faster pace in cities than in the countryside. The latter was a far from immobile place, though, and in certain regions proved highly dynamic. Thus, the impressive growth registered during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries in the irrigated agricultural estates of Lombardy, the Veneto, Emilia, and other parts of northern Italy often made the countryside seem a less sleepy place than the small cities in its midst. Above all, the new consumption patterns which intensified in the eighteenth century brought town and country together even as they separated them. As urban patterns of consumption penetrated the countryside at unprecedented rates a small minority of the better-off strata of the peasantry participated in these new trends (and that was likely due more to the falling price of textiles than to greater expendable income on their part). Their choices nevertheless turned out to be a crucial source of innovation within a sphere too often dismissed as a conservative world apart, utterly distant from urban novelties. One is thus better off thinking of both worlds as moving together, not so much from scarcity to abundance, as from a less mercantile economy to a considerably more mercantile one which nevertheless witnessed a high degree of self-sufficiency due to home production.

A final decisive factor common to town and country was the dominant role women played in all aspects of their respective domestic economies. They not only contributed their labour to the fundamental tasks of production and reproduction in their households, but also participated actively in making many of the key decisions regarding consumption. Women’s work involved, as is well known, a double duty, and made for longer days (and nights). But there was often less imbalance than is commonly thought. In a world of scarce resources and permanent risk, families had little choice but to work as a coordinated whole to improve their chances. The ideology of patriarchy may have placed men in exclusive control of all aspects of existence, but the sources cited earlier reveal the household, urban and rural, functioning with a greater sense of complementarity. Even the most famous early modern defence of patriarchy, the Spanish friar Luis de León’s *The Perfect Woman* of 1583, defended female submissiveness amidst a family structure which centred on co-dependency and cooperation. And within the ever more present market economy of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, women found ample opportunities to assert themselves and defend their and their families’ interests.

**Microhistories**

The new history of daily life, consumption, and the like developed alongside a second approach from below to the social, economic, and cultural history of the early modern
Many historians have used the term ‘microhistory’, and often in strikingly different ways. (For example, Braudel himself referred to it in the 1950s.) But it became famous beginning in the 1970s thanks to a handful of Italian historians who, while working mostly on the early modern period, not only made a serious effort to define and theorize this way of studying the past, but also won the attention of wider reading publics thanks to a series of innovative studies, all of which were set in Mediterranean villages and cities. The first and by far the most famous of these works was Carlo Ginzburg’s *The Cheese and the Worms* (1975). This highly engaging book tells the story of Menocchio, an eccentric miller from the Friuli region northeast of Venice, whom the Inquisition burned in 1600 for his heterodox beliefs. These included rather bizarre ideas about the origins of the universe—he thought it began in a great sea of milk which eventually turned into cheese, and from which issued worms which eventually became angels and then human beings—and a host of other views which strayed far from the teachings and practices of the Church. Ginzburg reconstructed in close detail Menocchio’s story, and argued that his beliefs, while idiosyncratic, reflected among other things a millennial tradition of materialism within peasant culture.

Ginzburg applied the label of microhistory to his best-selling study because of its tactic of deliberately probing the case of a single individual in order to explore broader historical questions. At the same time others among his colleagues were developing a parallel approach, which focused less on the cultural and religious issues raised by the case of Menocchio, and more on individuals within groups. The best known representative of this ‘social’ brand of microhistory is Giovanni Levi’s *Inheriting Power* (1988). This reconstructs an episode involving a priest from Santena, a village in Piedmont in northern Italy, whom the Church tried in 1607 for his unorthodox use of mass exorcism to cure villagers subject to various physical and psychological ailments. Levi uses this incident as a means of entry into the broader history of the rural community, and offers a highly laborious reconstruction of Santena’s inhabitants, including their kin relations, ownership of property, levels of wealth, and a host of other variables. The result is a thorough exploration from within of the underlying rationality of local practices regarding inheritance and other forms of transmission and exchange of property, the strategies peasants devised in their dealings with various extra-local powers, and the informal norms which the community devised over time in order to assure its stable reproduction from one generation to another.

Levi shared with Ginzburg the same explicit challenge to ‘macrohistory’ as exemplified by Braudel and the *Annales* school, as well as the belief that the benefits of reducing the
scale of historical observation by closely scrutinizing a single individual, family, or village compensates for the narrowing of the field being studied. Both of them were quick to criticize many theories then in vogue (recent cultural history like the writings of Michel Foucault in the case of Ginzburg, and for Levi the basic assumptions of neo-classical economics, family history, and other influential trends in the social sciences). Above all, instead of isolating homogeneous patterns of behaviour and belief revelatory of norms, they deliberately chose to study anomalies and exceptions to the rules. Theirs was thus not just a history from below, but also one which emphasized the agency and strategic behaviour of historical actors as individuals and members of groups (Levi), as well as the circulation of ideas and beliefs among different social levels (Ginzburg).

These were hard acts to follow, and there followed a lull in which historians slowly digested and then responded to their challenge. Eventually a second, younger generation rose to the fore, and broadened the scope of microhistory to include topics as diverse as marriage strategies in the northern diocese of Como, family feuds in a Ligurian village, the powers of social and spiritual mediation of an aristocratic nun in seventeenth-century Sicily, barber-surgeons and guilds in Turin, and even famous individuals such as Galileo and the painter Annibale Carracci. Many of these studies develop the theme of town–country relations, which had also received attention in the works of Ginzburg and Levi. Thanks to this new research, we now understand more thoroughly the links between social and professional mobility and migration from rural areas to cities (and back), the role of urban institutions in mediating (and on occasion causing) conflict in the countryside, and the ‘micro bonds of trust’ which proved so important in daily life in metropoli as well as in villages.

The Italian variant of microhistory turned out to be one of the most innovative experiments in recent historiography in general, and in the study of the early modern Mediterranean in particular. Its success also assured its adaptation in other climes, not just in northern Europe but also considerably beyond. Conceived from the beginning as a deliberate counter to Braudel’s brand of macrohistory, it has evolved far beyond its origins and has consolidated an impressive range of research themes and techniques. And it is likely that among these, town and country in the Mediterranean will continue to attract attention in the future.

The early modern period witnessed ever growing interpenetration between town and country throughout the Mediterranean. This was partly due to the slow but consistent trend toward the greater integration of markets, pulled in some cases by long-distance trade, and pushed in many more others by closer and more efficient connections at local and regional levels. There was much variation in this general process, and the roster of winners and losers changed from one conjuncture to another. Yet Braudel’s fundamental intuition regarding the unity and coherence of the Mediterranean—‘the
whole sea shared a common destiny, a heavy one indeed, with identical problems and
general trends if not identical consequences’—still rings true.45

Both city and countryside suffered during the decline which began in the late sixteenth
century, and which ended in the supremacy of the ever-expanding Atlantic economy.
There is no denying the loss of dynamism; the demographic figures are especially
eloquent, showing gains in a few areas, losses in many others, and stagnation (at best) in
most. And while ‘readjustment’ may be a better description than ‘crisis’ for the long-term
effects of this downturn, one can hardly question that the overall effect was to turn a
once central sea into a minor backwater.46

Historians of this place and period still have many chores pending. For example, much
more research will be required before we attain the same detailed understanding of
developments in the Balkans that we have for the central point of the Mediterranean (and
of this chapter), Italy. Nevertheless, that historical understanding has moved ‘beyond
Braudel’ is beyond dispute. Numerous recent studies point toward a historiographic
future especially rich in cultural analysis. Also, the recent remarkable florescence in
religious history, stimulated in part by rich cross-fertilization between history and
anthropology, has opened unexpected perspectives on a dimension of the past which did
much to bring parts of the Mediterranean together, while keeping many others apart.
Still, amid the hyper-specialization that dominates history-writing today, one wonders
whether we shall ever see again as bold an initiative as Braudel’s undertaking to write
the total history of a long century in the life of this singular sea.

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**Regional Studies**


**City and Country**


**Material Culture and Daily Life**


**Microhistory**


**Notes:**


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Abstract and Keywords

Fernand Braudel likened the towns and cities of early modern Europe to ‘so many electrical transformers’. They exerted a disproportionate influence: functioning as centres of production, transportation, and exchange; providing legal, financial, and educational services; housing secular and ecclesiastical bureaucracies; acting as communications nodes, marketing verbal, written, and printed information; offering increasingly varied and sophisticated leisure facilities. This chapter explores the reasons behind changing patterns of European urbanization, the character and role of its towns, and their place in key economic, social, political, religious, and cultural changes. It charts: the revival of towns during the Middle Ages and their subsequent growth, location, and population; specialized economic functions; distinctive social structures and social relationships; governance and political life; the existence of a distinctive urban mentalité and culture; material environment and spatial characteristics. It concludes with an overview of the development of historical writing on European urbanization over the last century.

Keywords: Towns, cities, urbanization, society, economy, government, culture

Introduction

Societies of early modern Europe were overwhelmingly rural. Across western Europe no more than one person in six lived in a town of any size in 1750. Yet this part of the world was the most urbanized. Other than Constantinople (partly European), Cairo, the
huge Aztec city of Tenochtitlan (250,000), Delhi, Isfahan, and some Japanese and Chinese cities (notably Chang’an, Kaifeng, and Hangzhou) all the towns of 50,000 or more inhabitants in 1500 were in Europe, most of those in Italy. They exerted a disproportionate influence on economic, social, religious, and political life: functioning as centres of production, transportation, and exchange; providing legal, financial, and educational services; housing secular and ecclesiastical bureaucracies; acting as communications nodes, marketing verbal, written, and printed information; offering increasingly varied and sophisticated leisure facilities. A town is, at its very simplest, a group of people living together in a certain way. More precisely, it is: a legal entity; a concentration of population; a set of functions; and a state of mind. This chapter explores the reasons behind changing patterns of European urbanization, the character and role of its towns, and their place in the key economic, social, political, religious, and cultural changes of the period.

Size, Location, and Population

Nearly a century ago Henri Pirenne argued that classical cities had declined in late antiquity because their trade was stifled. Influenced by the Marxist dialectic between town and country in the transition from feudalism to capitalism, Pirenne believed the urban revival of the high Middle Ages, notably in the Low Countries and Italy, came out of the recovery of long-distance commerce, the change brought about by an extra-feudal cadre of traders and artisans (‘new men’) who went on to be the most dynamic social and economic force in Europe. The early modern urban hierarchy was indeed created in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries during the first period of rapid urban creation and growth since classical times. Germany had 3,000 foundations in the
thirteenth century alone and existing towns expanded to market agricultural surpluses, make and trade goods, and provide services, as well as control regions on behalf of secular or ecclesiastical lords. Legal changes from the thirteenth century consolidated this development (notably the extension of what was known in the German lands as Magdeburger Recht), with sharper definitions of: private landownership; corporate privileges, liabilities, and identities; mercantile law to govern transactions. All added to the basic personal freedom of town dwellers, making medieval towns potentially ‘non-feudal islands in a feudal sea’.¹

Urban development in the following half millennium was an extension of these roles, albeit in the context of sometimes drastic economic, political, and religious changes (see Maps 18.1, 18.2). Some early creations flourished and expanded (such as Berne, 1191, or Lübeck, re-founded in 1159), but many more never developed beyond the size of a large village and others faded to nothing—countless seigniorial creations in central and eastern Europe became Wüstungen (abandoned settlements) as the ‘second serfdom’ reduced peasants’ contact with markets. The decline in aggregate demand after the Black Death stifled some towns, though others flourished. The hearts of Bruges, Delft, Toledo, and Ulm look quaint to modern travellers because they stopped developing centuries ago, their flowering preserved in time. In contrast, a city like Antwerp, which periodically regenerated itself over the centuries, announced its economic fortunes in successive waves of Renaissance, Mannerist, and Baroque architecture.

In the high Middle Ages urbanization was concentrated in the Mediterranean, Low Countries, and Germany (see Map 18.1). The broad contours of subsequent change are
clear, even if historians must rely on tax documents, religious surveys, and contemporary estimates in default of systematic and reliable censuses and vital registration. Developments fall under four heads. First, the number living in towns grew from 8 to 21 million; the fortunes of individual towns ebbed and flowed, sometimes dramatically, but Europe as a whole in 1750 was only slightly more urbanized than in 1350. Second, towns with more than 10,000 inhabitants—the size of a small modern university—were rare in the Middle Ages and there were only 220 across Europe as late as 1600; a threshold of 5,000 is more typical of the smaller towns that continued to dominate European urbanization and there were at least five times as many small as large settlements. In some parts of Europe like Ireland, Wales, Poland, and Scandinavia even a threshold of 2,500 is too high; communities with as few as 500 (‘dwarf towns’) may have contained the specialist economic functions that characterized urban existence. Towns on Europe’s northern and eastern peripheries were localized settlements less closely integrated within a wider urban hierarchy. For example, the largest in Elizabethan Wales, Carmarthen, had barely 2,000 inhabitants; contemporary London was a hundred times larger. Third, some regions were far more urbanized than others. A fifth of Holland’s people were already living in towns of 5,000 or more in 1550—easily the highest proportion in northwest Europe and comparable with northern Italy. Total numbers in towns grew steadily from 1.25 million to 2.1 million, but Dutch urbanization peaked at nearly two-fifths of the Republic’s population c. 1700 before falling to a third by 1800. France too was more urban than England in the early sixteenth century (9 per cent) but the proportion living in towns changed hardly at all between then and 1800, when it was 11 per cent.

Fourth, British urbanization was unusually rapid and distinctive between 1600 and 1750. Just five English people in a hundred lived in a town in 1520, thirteen around 1660, and twenty-eight by 1800. For Scotland the figures are two, nine, and twenty respectively. In much of Europe the big towns of 1750 had also headed the urban hierarchy in 1550 (and 1350), these mostly the seats of government for the revived power of Renaissance princes and ports such as Amsterdam, Rome, Seville, and Venice. Between 1350 and 1600 Paris and Naples vied for the position of Europe’s largest city, but by 1680 London surged past both (whether it had overtaken Paris was a topic hotly debated by contemporary scholars) and by 1750 it had roughly 700,000 inhabitants, double the size of Naples. London remained the largest English city throughout this period; it was never less than four times bigger than the next biggest (1520; Norwich) and sometimes twenty-four times larger (1670; Norwich). Dublin’s growth echoed London’s, rising from 45,000 in 1685 to 112,000 in 1744 at a time when total Irish population hardly changed. Outside the capital, the rise to prominence of previously small port and manufacturing towns like Manchester, Liverpool, and Birmingham fuelled English urban growth in the eighteenth century; they eventually became synonymous with the commercial and industrial
revolutions of the nineteenth century. Elsewhere in Britain the urban hierarchy began to undergo profound change. Glasgow outstripped Edinburgh (for centuries Scotland’s largest and richest city) around 1750 while mushrooming industrial centres like Paisley rapidly overtook traditional county towns like Perth.

As well as housing concentrations of population, towns were demographically distinctive in other ways. In England urban and rural bastardy ratios were roughly equal whereas in France they were much higher in cities. For France as a whole, illegitimates made up 1 per cent of all births compared with 7 per cent for Paris. At Bordeaux the figure is 6 per cent for 1692–96 and 19 per cent for 1782–86 with rural levels in southwest France approximately 2 per cent and 6 per cent respectively. The first population systematically to use modern birth control techniques was the Genevan bourgeoisie of the late seventeenth century. The rural hinterlands of Paris and London had a flourishing wet-nursing industry for fashionable bourgeois mothers who did not wish to breastfeed. The human cost was horrendous, with up to three-quarters of eighteenth-century Parisian infants sent to nurse dying before being weaned. Wet-nursing raised fertility within marriage among the bourgeoisie by allowing women to conceive more quickly, an effect enhanced by earlier marriage of better-off young women in the towns; providing dowries for their poorer sisters was an enduring focus of urban charity.

Higher fertility could not, however, compensate for the swingeing mortality that was characteristic of all pre-modern towns. Disease was the big killer and the young were especially vulnerable. Infant mortality in towns was roughly double that of the countryside, meaning that (depending on time and region) 200–500 out of every 1,000 children born in towns would be dead by the end of their first year. The elite of the medical profession, the university-trained physicians, clustered in towns as did more lowly surgeons and apothecaries, classed as tradesmen. They may have made suffering easier, but contemporary medical knowledge offered limited help in preserving life. Immigrants encountered sickness regimes against which they had no immunity while overcrowding, poor sanitation, and ineffective quarantine and medical care meant that air, water, and insect-borne infections like influenza, dysentery, typhoid, typhus, smallpox, and plague were endemic and epidemic until at least the eighteenth century. As many as 50,000 Londoners may have died during the Black Death of 1348–49 and in subsequent decades, reducing the English capital’s population by nearly two-thirds; lesser but still marked falls over a comparable period are evident in most of the towns of France, the Low Countries, the Holy Roman Empire, and Italy.

Famine and warfare too caused direct material and human loss while simultaneously accelerating the movement of peoples that propagated infection. Savage dearths occurred in much of northern Europe in the 1310s, 1590s, 1690s, and 1740s. The
Hundred Years’ War (1337–1453) and the Thirty Years’ War (1618–48) are prominent examples of endemic conflicts; many German towns took centuries to recover from the latter though others prospered, most notably Hamburg as a result of new patterns of trade. Even between the great wars, many continental towns were besieged or plundered, most famously Rome (1527), Vienna (1529), and Antwerp (1576). Towns also drained population in other ways, dispersing adventurers, colonists, and merchants to the New World. One million young men left northwest Europe to work for the Amsterdam-based Dutch East India Company (*Verenigde Oostindische Compagnie* or VOC) between c. 1600 and c. 1800, 600,000 dying during their tour of duty, while Seville/Cadiz and Lisbon funneled perhaps two million soldiers, sailors, traders, and settlers on colonial ventures, 1500–1800. Together, mortality and migration helped adjust population to resources at a time when other mechanisms were imperfect or localized.

**Economic Functions**

As Pirenne realized, towns existed to make, serve, and exchange. With great international trade fairs held in Frankfurt am Main, Lyon, and Geneva, the cities of southern Germany and Switzerland funneled Italian manufactures and imports into the north European trade networks, the traffic dominated in the fifteenth century by Ravensburg’s *Grosse Gesellschaft* (especially cotton and fustian cloth) and in the sixteenth century by the Fuggers of Augsburg. This was the most important non-maritime or trans-isthmian route of this period, though there were others linking the Mediterranean and Atlantic (Bay of Biscay) or Black Sea with the Baltic. As the grain trade between east and west Europe grew in importance from the sixteenth century, towns like Hamburg, which had access both to the sea and to canal routes between the rivers Elbe and Oder, grew steadily from roughly 15,000 in 1500 to 80,000 in 1750. The North Sea and Baltic became the focus of increasingly important trade in their own right, especially in foodstuffs and timber.

Towns promoted commercial and agrarian change. Even during the sixteenth century the Dutch imported as much as a third of their grain needs from the Baltic, stimulating shipbuilding and commerce while integrating markets; the grain price differential between Poland and the Netherlands fell from 1:7 in 1450 to 1:2 in 1750. Long-distance trade in foodstuffs allowed domestic specialization in pastoral agriculture alongside a level of urbanization and industrial employment unthinkable if the Dutch economy had been closed. Marketing created wealth for urban and rural dwellers alike that could be used to fuel further specialization in manufactures and services and so create demand for imported items such as spices, china, tobacco, tea, coffee, and sugar. All started as luxuries and some had enduringly high price differentials between source and market, but they had become necessities by 1750. For Adam Smith in the eighteenth century and
Werner Sombart in the early twentieth, new and unusual goods created a desire to own and to expend on material things that in itself altered attitudes to work, leisure, status, and power; Smith wrote of ‘the silent and insensible operation of foreign commerce and manufactures’ on social and economic life, the effect most notable in the towns.

The economic fortunes of Mediterranean towns were very different from those of northwestern Europe. Signalled by the collapse of the once mighty Medici commercial empire in 1594, Italian cities declined rapidly during the seventeenth century and industrial production fell by more than a half in the Spanish towns of Cordoba, Segovia, and Toledo. New manufacturing centres developed in northwestern Europe and control of world trade passed from the Mediterranean to the Atlantic seaboard, allowing cities like Bordeaux, La Rochelle, Nantes, and Rouen to flourish in the eighteenth century on the back of commerce in tobacco, sugar, and slaves. By the 1750s philosopher David Hume could observe there was ‘no spot of ground ... in antiquity of equal extent which contained near so many great and populous cities, and was so stocked with riches and inhabitants’ as that encompassed by a circle of 200 miles radius centred on Dover or Calais.

Yet overseas commerce was a risky business involving no more than 1 per cent of European production in the sixteenth century and even in 1750 most trade was still local or regional and it concentrated, as it had always done, on the products of the land and sea, on foodstuffs and organic raw materials rather than New World commodities or the mineral-based economy of the coming industrial revolution. Long-distance trade nevertheless accelerated the development of credit and helped promote more sophisticated financial facilities like the banks of late medieval Italy or seventeenth-century Holland. Seventeenth-century legal change allowed the creation of the first joint-stock companies in the Netherlands and then in England: open-ended, indefinite enterprises with shareholders, which were the precursors of modern multinational companies; the VOC and its British equivalent, the East India Company, are famous examples.

The key to urban economies was specialization in both commerce and manufacturing, reflected in the much broader range of occupations they contained. Where a rural village might have a simple carpenter, a large town could have wheelwrights, shipwrights, cabinet makers, coffin makers, wood turners, icon makers, and so on. The larger a town, the greater was the degree of occupational specialization or ‘division of labour’, the phrase popularized by Adam Smith. Occupational diversity came out of the variety of functions a town performed. Urban living also multiplied and complicated economic and social interactions: even in the Middle Ages the rate of litigation over debt was far higher in towns than in the countryside. Catering to the need for legal, medical, and educational services from the fifteenth century, towns also developed sophisticated retailing, notably...
of high-value products, and they were the locus of the first great consumer revolution in the eighteenth century.

These developments largely bypassed eastern Europe, whose towns remained small, thinly spread, and dominated by the secular or ecclesiastical lords from whom they had derived their existence and their commercial, fiscal, and jurisdictional privileges. Moscow dominated Russian urbanization with 150,000 inhabitants in 1750, but even important regional centres like Kiev numbered only 15,000. Examples in the east of successful ecclesiastical or military foundations, which also acquired trading functions, are Poznan, Danzig, and Stettin; like Danzig, Warsaw and Prague boasted the Baroque palaces of magnates though all were poorer than cities of equivalent size in the west. As well as a low level of urbanization, towns in eastern Europe were like many of their smaller counterparts in the Mediterranean world, containing significant numbers of people whose main occupation was farming. Known in German as Agrarstädt[e], these were communities on and of the land, even if in the kingdom of Naples and Sicily, for example, roughly a third of the population lived in towns during the sixteenth century. Alternatively, like their counterparts in Ottoman-occupied Europe, they serviced primarily military and administrative needs.

Across Europe, some townspeople owned landed estates and were thus able directly to engage in the expropriation of agricultural surplus that lay at the heart of the early modern economy. In Denmark and Norway towns established themselves as substantial landowners, rewarded with manorial estates for supporting the introduction of absolutist monarchy during the Danish coup of 1660. Yet towns and townspeople did not have to own land to control what happened in their hinterlands. They had legal privileges, jurisdiction over an Italian contado or Spanish tierra enforced by princes; Lombardy and Tuscany were effectively ruled by their cities. Though less powerful, some German cities also exerted influence over satellite settlements, notably Cologne, Nuremberg, and Ulm; their hold on a wide range of activities, from industrial competition to political life, did not weaken here or in Austria, Spain, or France until the eighteenth century. In England and the Low Countries the development of a purely economic or market nexus between town and country, based on the exchange of goods, services, and labour for money, came no later than the early sixteenth century, in Scotland and Switzerland from the late seventeenth.

Forces sometimes adduced to explain this change coincided with rather than caused it. Known as ‘putting-out’ or Verlagsystem (rather than the traditional Kaufsystem), rural domestic production of cloth was the most dynamic branch of industrial production from the late Middle Ages until the coming of the factory. Its emergence and entrenchment struck at urban claims to a monopoly of manufactures, but it both consolidated the financial hold of towns over the rural world and strengthened their role in finishing,
marketing, and making up cloth. The eighteenth-century cotton industry around Barcelona, Rouen, and Troyes was, for example, controlled by merchants of those cities—perhaps just another example of what Marx called the enslavement of the countryside to the town. Manufacturing remained within some cities like Leiden and Liège in the Low Countries or Segovia in Spain, which were truly ‘industrial’ in the sense that cloth-making employed the majority of their seventeenth-century populations.

Social Structures and Social Relationships

Since the time of Adam Smith, if not before, towns have been seen as forces for change in both economy and society, the latter epitomized in the proffered hope that city air would make serfs free. Towns created opportunities for upward social mobility, but most people thought more in terms of maintaining their social and economic standing in a world beset with dangers and uncertainties; for example, marriages usually occurred within status groups like master craftsmen or between those of roughly equal wealth rather than across boundaries. Similarly the acquisitive and expansive entrepreneurial spirit of some artisans and traders needs to be set against the more common desire to limit competition and protect producers, for cartels controlled much early modern industry and commerce.

The most basic social division in towns was between those who had formal legal privileges (and responsibilities) and those who had none. The former were usually termed citizens, freemen, or burgesses (England), bourgeoisie (France), cittadini (Italy), or Bürgertum (Germany). With status based on their birth, marriage, long residence, purchase, or guild membership, burgesses exchanged obligations to govern, police, and pay taxes for economic, social, and political privileges set in law. Citizens formed the heart of urban society. On the continent many towns tried to create formal tables of ranks, shoehorning those of different birth, status, occupation, and wealth into a society of orders. At their simplest these distinguished men who traded from those who made; they also created niches for nobilities and for professionals like clergy, lawyers, and administrators. Yet there were often marked differences within elements of the hierarchy, just as there were distinctions between masters in different occupations, most obvious in large industries like weaving where an individual with a loom might belong to the same guild as a capitalist entrepreneur employing hundreds.

Indeed, the ranks of citizens were not closed: that only happened with elites based on birth, as with the 230 Venetian families entitled to sit on the Great Council. In the Italian cities there were urban nobles or signori who had commercial, political, and military presence. Landed aristocrats played, displayed, and politicked in capitals elsewhere in
Europe, but their power came from the acres they owned and the people they controlled. In France and Germany there were urban patriciates keen to have noble status and some German scholars write of the *Feudalisierung des Grossbürgertums*, suggesting that the upper middle class accepted aristocratic leadership in politics, society, and culture rather than developing a distinctive bourgeois ethos, as happened in Britain during the eighteenth century. Some historians of French towns also question if there was any truly ‘bourgeois’ mentality before the French Revolution.

A citizen usually belonged to a guild: an incorporation of men working in an occupation who had the right to employ labour; guilds existed to protect the interests of these ‘masters’. The word has connotations of grandeur and in Edinburgh there was only one guild proper, the merchants’, while all the other artisan associations created in the late Middle Ages were called ‘incorporations’. With strengthening oligarchy and plutocracy, legal change consolidated the lesser status of craftsmen across Europe. Frankfurt am Main, where guilds were never politically important, abolished artisan guilds in 1616 and dropped the term *Zunft* from official records in favour of *Handwerke*; Nuremberg never had guilds. In their different forms, these associations remained important to continental and Scottish social, political, and economic life until much later than was the case in England or Holland, where they declined after the sixteenth century. Associations of masters were also focuses of charity and sociability for members, commensality potentially as important as commerce.

Guilds were cartels, but they were part of a broader social vision. German guilds aimed to promote *bürgerliche Nahrung*—‘social justice, or more specifically the protection of a just standard of living through economic self-sufficiency’—and guilds ‘defended members against dependence on large-scale enterprise and kept as much of the labour force as possible in work’. Each citizen had a ‘respectable’ status which should be preserved. Civic authorities defended artisan production (and retailing privileges) against both rural producers and predatory urban entrepreneurs, fostering social corporatism rather than economic individualism. Maintaining honour and order through oaths and close supervision, German ‘home town’ guilds kept up ‘a satisfactory degree of equality, by penalizing or excluding the pushy, whether rich or poor, and by mutual agreements among the membership that restrained expansion and promised security’. Another manifestation of social conservatism is the vigorous enforcement into the eighteenth century, by German, Polish, and Austrian towns, of sumptuary and alimentary laws that demarcated status and gender. The Rhineland city of Speyer issued ordinances about wedding celebrations fourteen times between 1535 and 1599 alone, the frequent reiteration testimony to the enduring popularity of feasting—and the limited effect of attempts to control it.
**Life at the Margins**

Conservative social goals and mercantilist economic policies were easier to implement in settings where economic change was itself slow, notably in parts of the seventeenth-century German lands and Spain. The line was much harder to hold when new imperatives intervened, such as the desire by more entrepreneurial masters in the Low Countries to develop extensive businesses using intensive capitalist techniques. Against a cosy picture of respectability and belonging should be set the exclusivity of the core of citizens, who seldom formed a majority in any city; only a quarter of adult males in London were freemen in 1450. Towns had many layers of inclusion and exclusion, including what Scots called ‘indwellers’ or ‘residenters’ and Germans *Einwähner* or *Paktbürger* (‘outburghers’): people of all social classes who belonged, but whose sense of attachment, entitlement, and obligation was weaker than that of full burghers. Bolstered by differences in legal status, the rhetoric and politics of community created solidarity and agency for insiders, but simultaneously disempowered others.

Some towns like Amsterdam, Augsburg, Poznan, and later Riga were multi-faith communities, allowing Jews to live, trade, and worship, while others were multinational too, such as Lyon with its French, Italian, and German components or Rome, where a quarter of the population originated outside Italy. Non-whites were rare in northwest Europe until the extension of the slave trade in the eighteenth century, but different forms of racism pervaded European society: Scots were unwelcome in the towns of northern England; aspirant citizens of seventeenth-century central Europe might have to swear they were not gypsies, Jews, or Slavs; Spain reluctantly tolerated Moriscos (Muslims who had nominally converted to Christianity) after the culmination of the *Reconquista* in 1492, but eventually ejected them in 1609. Social exclusion was an accepted tenet of political life.

Those not formally excluded had to be brought within structures of authority. The basic unit was the household and the strongest bonds were familial. A ‘family’ was a grouping of kin, but it also encompassed a contractual relationship when it came to servants, apprentices, and lodgers. Apprentices were bound to a master for a term of three to seven years, the master taking responsibility for training and keep, the apprentice for working and obeying. Normally lacking bonds of blood, this arrangement was nevertheless more than economic. All units of residence were also part of the structure of authority where the head was responsible for the behaviour of members, not always easy with young men in their late teens or early twenties. Servants of both sexes were sometimes youngsters, but they too were more normally biological adults with minds of their own—and subject to fewer restrictions than quasi-familial apprentices.
Service or apprenticeship was a phase of life through which most young adults passed in the west. Ideally a time-served apprentice would become a journeyman as a precursor to attaining the independent status of master, marrying, and taking his place in a guild. In that sense even the dependent could see themselves as stakeholders in urban society. In reality, however, progression was far from assured. Two-fifths of sixteenth-century London apprentices stayed on to become masters, but an equal proportion did not (the remainder died during their term). Some trades like goldsmiths always had high barriers to entry; unless a young man came from a wealthy and well-connected background he could not expect to commence, let alone progress. In other occupations the distinction between masters and men hardened from the sixteenth century. Associations of journeymen known in France as *compagnonnages* or in Germany as *Gesellenverbände* became more important in defending the interests of employees as the opportunities for social mobility became more restricted.

The groups just discussed were not part of the inner circle of citizens, but nor were they necessarily poor. Urban poverty was, however, unique in its scale and immanence, swollen still further by temporary immigrants in the harshest times. Perhaps 10 per cent of the population were sick, scarred, injured, or deformed at any one time, these uniquely visible, affecting, and infecting within an urban environment. Under- and unemployment, accidents, old age, dearth, warfare, and even having large numbers of young children could create hardship: downward social mobility was as likely as upward. Roughly 5–10 per cent of a town’s population received regular relief, but a fifth to a third may have had hand-outs at some point in their lives; roughly half of families paid no direct taxes on account of their low incomes. Guilds, confraternities, the Church, and a wide assortment of lay charities helped those who had clear entitlements rather than needs and this left many outside any safety net except casual begging, neighbourly help, or the margins of crime.

The major towns of continental Europe had faced particularly acute social problems at the height of the medieval population boom in the late thirteenth and early fourteenth century, when Europe had more people than it was to have again until c. 1750; their solutions were creative and often effective and there were further developments in the fifteenth century. After c. 1520, however, many large towns instituted systematic, and broadly similar formal schemes to alleviate poverty and control the poor; they sought to curb promiscuous begging, especially by strangers, and organized provision for their own settled, respectable poor, including compulsory rating as a supplement to private charity. The issue was pressing for Protestants because the Reformation removed an important layer of lay charity as well as religious provision by regular clergy; it also downplayed the efficacy of good works and denied the point of praying for souls. Yet Catholics faced the same social welfare issues and responded in comparable ways, the
main difference being the contrasting relationship between good works and salvation and the greater Catholic support for institutions that alleviated the effects of vice, notably foundling hospitals and homes for repentant prostitutes.

Some cities like Lyon tried amalgamating the intricate patchwork of existing provision into common pools of money or they founded public institutions much larger than medieval ‘hospitals’ (places of hospitality or refuge). Lyon had the first French hôpital-général in 1614 and its Parisian successor, in the time of Louis XIV, may have housed 10,000 sick, old, mad, orphaned, or merely idle. After the mid-eighteenth century dépôts de mendicité emerged, conceived as quasi-penal workhouses. England initiated one of the most durable systems in Europe in 1598, consolidating earlier measures, and went on to institutionalize large numbers of the poor during the eighteenth century. By contrast, out-relief remained the norm in much of Europe, notably Spain, as an assortment of public and private institutions struggled to cope with the many faces of poverty.

The bulk of those in receipt of regular relief were women and indeed many European towns were predominantly female thanks to employment opportunities in industry, domestic service, and the provision and sale of food and drink. Women outnumbered men two to one in the great cloth producing towns like fifteenth-century Ghent and eighteenth-century Lyon because four or five women (and children) were needed to prepare yarn for every male weaver at his loom. The proportion of urban households headed by women (10–20 per cent) was much higher than in the countryside. Most of these were widows for urban mortality was high and around 1600 nearly a half of all London marriages were remarriages following bereavement. Regardless of age or number of children men usually remarried quickly, whereas a woman with fatherless children could expect to wait years before finding a new spouse. Urban sex ratios in southern Europe were less slanted towards women since servants to the upper classes were more likely to be men (a demonstration of status and control) and the institution of service in general was less menial in the late Middle Ages than it would later become.

When labour was in short supply, in the century and a half after the Black Death, women were drawn into a range of occupations, only to be excluded in the sixteenth century when population rose and male unemployment started to grow. Towns like London allowed women unusual latitude in employment and in the late seventeenth century two in every five married women who worked had an employment different from that of their husbands. For all this, there were structural differences in attitudes to women’s work in town and country alike, their status and independence powerfully influenced by the wider societies in which they lived. Work patterns in the Mediterranean were more clearly segmented by sex because male honour dominated, patriarchal authority
strong, and single women had fewer protections; the same was true to a lesser extent of many parts of continental Europe. In theory, and frequently in practice, females occupied a subordinate position determined by law and social conventions.

They were not the only ‘minority’. Urban populations were youthful and there are signs of a ‘youth culture’ among apprentices and journeymen, evident in contemporary condemnations of idle and undisciplined young people, in riots and charivari, and in some types of popularized learned literature such as chapbooks that often catered for their age-group and lifestyle. In late medieval Bologna and Paris students comprised perhaps 10 per cent of the population and Elizabethan London had about 20,000 apprentices, a comparable percentage. While learning to be independent, the characteristic experience of youth was, however, dependence. Full or ‘social’ adulthood did not normally come until marriage and the establishment of an independent household—when most northwestern Europeans were in their mid-twenties and when Italian men were in their thirties. The young were vulnerable in towns. Often away from home for the first time, they were subject to temptation and exploitation. Prominent among those arrested on criminal charges, their lack of integration into the community worked against them at trial and sentencing.

**Government and Politics**

At the heart of political life for townspeople was their right to govern themselves. Councils drawn from adult male citizens by election or co-option controlled all chartered towns collectively, emerging and proliferating during the thirteenth century. During the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries broad participation by citizens in town government gave way to oligarchic rule by often self-perpetuating elites. Wealthy and well-connected, these magistrates or governors came to dominate routine decision making.\(^{19}\) In Barcelona, the patriciate, which consisted of a hundred families, was known collectively as ‘honoured citizens’ and Venice had a comparable system.\(^ {20}\) Formed around different versions of ‘civic humanism’, ruling elites had a strong sense of their importance and identity: Dutch city fathers of the Golden Age immortalized themselves in group portraits by their own great artists, becoming a special community within a larger body; individual burghers who made good commissioned portraits of themselves and their families with growing frequency during the seventeenth century.\(^ {21}\)

Town government became increasingly specialized as communities grew and their problems and projects became more complex. This development both reflected the growing intrusions of the princes from the fifteenth century and gave them an opportunity directly to intervene in urban life. The presence of senior law courts like
French *parlements* created an additional, independent layer of government by judges: what Michel Foucault termed *legalité* rather than *gouvernementalité*. The widespread revival and codification of Roman law in the Renaissance and a growing propensity to use the courts for administrative as well as civil and criminal purposes made lawyers increasingly important to town life. Rather than offices circulating among citizens of suitable wealth, status, and experience, towns came to be administered by bureaucrats. Voluntary amateur participation in office-holding weakened in all areas of urban life. Civic militias like the Dutch *schutterij* declined, to be replaced during the eighteenth century by professional municipal police forces. Yet for centuries towns were run by men from many walks of life, enforcing rules and making decisions in a way that gave them a voice and a stake in urban government: a sort of ‘unacknowledged republic’.

The other pathway to riches for those with legal training—or simply the right birth or patronage—was in holding, by gift or purchase, a crown office, tens of thousands of which were created during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Louis XIV had ten times more *officiers* than Francis I. In Britain office-holding usually meant some fiscal post whereas on the continent venal offices permeated the law as well, offering a salary, perquisites, a means of saving if the office was transferable, and tax privileges. Other than from commerce the other main source of wealth was collecting and lending money.

The development of urban autonomy in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, when the princes of western Europe were relatively weak and the Holy Roman Emperor especially so, saw the emerging independence of the sixty-five *freie Reichstädte*, like the great city states of Italy, Flanders, and Switzerland, which became largely autonomous. Later on, but also in a decentralized polity where rulers had a light touch, the Convention of Royal Burghs of Scotland (as opposed to less privileged baronial foundations) was set up as a political lobby group during the 1550s to meet the growing demands of the crown; it was not abolished until 1975. Urban freedoms were more normally eroded or at least reordered from the Renaissance onwards as descending theories and practices of government (power comes from crown or state) replaced ascending ones (authority comes from the people). After the defeat of the largest urban revolt in early modern Europe, the *Comuneros* of 1520–21, the Spanish crown worked to free smaller municipalities from the control of large cities and great lords, with all urban communities coming under the growing direct power of rulers through officials such as the *corregidores*; in France *intendants* were the instruments of centralization, working through royal *prévôts* and *baillis*. Thanks to their more limited privileges in an already strong and centralized state, English towns had a looser and more harmonious relationship with the crown, which chartered both corporate and individual privileges in exchange for undertaking governmental functions. Symbiosis is a better description of
this process than subordination, for the ruled sought to involve the state in their affairs as much as central government tried to impose its will on localities.

The expansion of government benefited capitals. As political theorist Giovanni Botero remarked in the late sixteenth century, ‘the greatest means to make a city populous and great is to have supreme authority and power; for that draweth dependency with it, and dependency concourse, and concourse greatness’.\(^\text{25}\) Capitals accounted for more than a third of all European city growth during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Some of these primate cities were ancient, like Paris and London; a number owed their existence or success to associations with royal power, such as Madrid (1561), Berlin (1701), and St. Petersburg (1703); others were colonial cities, offshoots of empires, like Dublin or Naples (part of the Aragonese Mediterranean empire). Economically they were boosted by the growth of royal courts and state bureaucracies, the influx of great landowners, and the multiplication of luxury industries and services. Political centralization made the capitals of Denmark and Sweden particularly ‘top heavy’, with important regional centres of the kind found in other northern countries like Scotland largely absent. With 40 per cent of its inhabitants reliant on crown service, Copenhagen had 9 per cent of Denmark’s population in 1672 and no other town had more than 5,000 inhabitants. The direct impact of princely residence on city life varied. London was largely self-governing, though deeply affected by the presence of the royal court, whereas in Paris the crown intervened directly in municipal affairs and appointed a military governor to defend the capital.

Oligarchic rule of the city; plutocratic administration of guild and parish; patriarchal control of the family: all sometimes sat uneasily with the desire of the governed to negotiate the terms of their subordination. Independent, integrated, and organized citizens could use conventional political mechanisms like petitioning or the law: continental artisans were as likely to take to the courts as the streets in pursuing their vision of what was right. Germans called this the ‘judicialization’ (Verrechtlichung) of social conflict. Using a court was, of course, costly, but even the weak had weapons, their voices raised and their bodies massed to make a point. Most urban protests were about political rather than economic issues as interest groups sought to influence decision making directly or bring lords or princes into their struggles; in the late-medieval German towns, where risings were especially common, contests were usually between different conceptions of governing and being governed among citizens, rather than between haves and have-nots. Rituals could be orchestrated, cathartic, and integrative, but they could also get out of hand and become promiscuously violent and socially destructive—as at Romans in the Dauphiné (1580).\(^\text{26}\)

Alternatively protesters might oppose the fiscal military state when it tried to impose taxes. Major tax riots convulsed dozens of seventeenth-century French towns and some of the most vigorous urban protests in early eighteenth-century Britain were against excise...
duties. Because urban dwellers in northern Europe were largely removed from agricultural production and had to buy provisions in the market, food rioting was endemic. Protests may have been piqued by hunger, but the complaints were less about want than injustice, more about human than natural failings. The central criticism in most food riots was hoarding of grain, or its movement out of an area of high prices, or the machinations of a middleman allegedly profiting from manufactured shortages. Far from a visceral response to dearth, protesters (women prominent among them) reminded civic authorities of their duty to protect consumers, making some riots look like measured demonstrations rather than anarchic outbursts.  

Urban Identity and Culture

A variety of oppositions helped forge urban identity. They included sometimes long and bitter contests over rights and privileges waged by the late medieval cities of the southern Low Countries against princely hegemony, or between city states for control of regions and with towns’ own hinterlands to ensure economic and sometimes political dominance. From as early as the thirteenth century, sophisticated literary oppositions with landed nobilities and cruder caricatures of boorish peasantry also solidified urban identity, stereotypes easy to sustain when peasants not only looked distinctive, but also spoke quite differently. In predominantly Ruthenian-speaking (and illiterate) areas of sixteenth-century Poland, for example, towns were islands of Polish-speakers (and literacy) and across east-central Europe towns were ethnically different from the countryside. For their part many country-folk found a cityscape of strangers and secrets unfamiliar and intimidating, assaulting to their senses.

More positive constructions might accompany perceptions of ‘otherness’. As early as the fifteenth century the important towns of Germany and Italy had their congratulatory chronicles, histories advertising the community and its facilities or celebrating the achievements of its governors and people, sometimes with a religious or political message. Towns were also shaped by harder forces like the dictates of defence, imposing and enduring military architecture as a response to the needs of endemic and often highly destructive warfare. Substantial fortifications replaced thin medieval battlements, to protect against heavy gunpowder weapons. The ‘military revolution’ is inscribed in imposing walls of Brussels, Lille, Marseille, Nîmes, and many other cities of France, Germany, and the Low Countries, associated with Vauban and others. In southeast Europe a string of fortified towns formed an increasingly effective sixteenth-century frontier against the Turks. Some western European towns de-fortified (a little too early) in the mid-eighteenth century.
Towns therefore looked different. Throughout the early modern period the largest single category among etchings and woodcuts of the natural and built landscape was the town view illustrated by the likes of engraver Matthäus Merian. These images along with property records reveal that most pre-modern towns were low-rise. For example, more than half the houses in seventeenth-century Antwerp and Madrid had only one or two floors and were designed for the occupancy of a single family. In contrast, contemporary Edinburgh had buildings up to twelve storeys high and two-thirds of houses in eighteenth-century Lyon had four or more storeys, the poorer artisans living on the top floors (as in contemporary Paris or Nantes) and only the very rich owning separate buildings. Eighteenth-century Berlin was another city in northern Europe with prominent high-rises. Most medieval buildings were made of wood and continued so in Scandinavia and eastern Europe; elsewhere brick and stone became more common from the sixteenth century along with slate and tile roofs that were both more durable and better proof against fire. Conflagrations could have compensations, however, most famously the rebuilding of much of the City of London after the Great Fire of 1666.

Medieval churches were prominent landmarks and parishes important focuses of local identity within a unified Christendom. After 1517 religious divisions changed urban culture and character, sometimes drastically. Protestantism flourished first in Germany’s towns and its early spread relied on the wealth, education, and communications networks that came with urban centres. Some historians call the new faith an ‘urban theology’, the Reformation ‘an urban affair’, and they debate the importance of a grassroots desire for religious change. Advocates of doctrinal change had to win over the governors; Lutheranism would never have succeeded without either the support of a territorial prince or influence on political decisions in the town itself. Just as the medieval church had been a political force (as well as an important economic presence) the Reformation was both a weapon and a prize in sixteenth-century urban politics. With Protestantism came important social change too, notably the creation of new schools, court systems, and social welfare schemes.

As time went on fragmenting Protestantism found its greatest expression in towns. French Calvinism was disproportionately urban and, while it lasted, had strongholds in a hundred fortified towns like La Rochelle; in the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth too it was almost exclusively urban. Calvinism took root in the towns of what became in 1579 the Dutch Republic (recognized by Spain in 1648), its origins there during the 1560s marked by spectacular bouts of iconoclasm. The proportion of Protestant ‘dissenters’ from the established Church living in seventeenth- and eighteenth-century English towns was twice that of the countryside and they formed a majority in communities like Coventry. Co-existence was sometimes uneasy and sects like British Quakers might find
themselves a persecuted minority while the Anabaptists who took over the German city of Münster in 1534 were eventually massacred.

The Reformation shows the sheer variety of urban life and politics, even within the German-speaking lands. Not all towns turned Protestant and Catholics forcibly reconverted some that did within a few decades, notably in central Europe; most of those in France remained staunchly Catholic; Protestants were almost absent from many Italian or Spanish towns. The most vigorous and visible manifestations of Counter-Reformation Catholicism were themselves urban. Glorious Baroque churches bear witness to the wealth and religiosity of the communities that built them and they celebrated the renewed visual emphasis within Catholicism. Other Catholic resources concentrated in the towns, including sermons, education, both secular and regular clergy, and dynamic episcopates, allowing the promotion of the basic tenets of the revived faith: intercessory theology, masses, sacraments, good works, processions, and saints. Socio-religious institutions like god-parenthood remained strong and the Counter-Reformation gave impetus to tens of thousands of reshaped and revived confraternities or prayer societies that had their roots in the intense upsurge of individual piety during the late Middle Ages.

Indeed late medieval Christianity was in rude health and both Reformation and Counter-Reformation were aspects of the periodic regenerations of Christianity that have occurred over the last two millennia. Major pilgrimage sites like Santiago de Compostella had tens of thousands of visitors a year, creating abundant demand for food, lodging, and memorabilia. Church and civic authorities alike were alert to the economic benefits of religious objects and observances, contributing to a flourishing trade in relics. Much fine art of the Renaissance was religious, made by urban craftsmen for town-dwelling clients, these not only churches and lordly patrons, but also an increasingly broad spectrum of wealthy lay citizens. Thus one of the most influential studies of the origins of cultural change, Jacob Burckhardt’s *Die Kultur der Renaissance in Italien* (1861), looked mainly at the city states and the role of individualism and social élites in the cultivation of the aesthetic.

Renaissance culture was more broadly based than might be thought. Even smaller towns arranged musical performances as a means of expressing and strengthening civic identity and status; any town worth the name had its own minstrels. The development in the Baroque of public performances and large urban halls was important in the development of instruments and musical forms, such as the concerto, and contributed much to the professionalization and commercialization of music as an aspect of consumer culture. The first performance of Handel’s *Messiah* was in Dublin (April 1742). Styles in theatre too evolved in response to the social differentiation associated with the cities; eighteenth-
century music-hall songs and ballads reflected something of how ordinary inhabitants viewed a city.

Mediterranean towns could compel attendance from their rural dependents just as they could control the prices at which they sold produce in urban markets. In the northwest, magistrates saw that visual and audible spectacle were valuable attractions for outsiders, who came by choice, and a way of stimulating the urban economy. Urban governments also recognized that music, processions, and festivals could be used to make political statements and increasingly appropriated legitimate concourses for this purpose. Late medieval events had been broadly participative, symbolic of the diverse but integrated dependencies of the city’s component communities. Expressing ideas of Christian fellowship, Corpus Christi processions, for example, often embraced the whole citizenry. From the sixteenth century, however, civic rituals changed from articulating the idea of an urban body politic to demonstrating the power and social superiority of a ruling group or sometimes just an individual prince. The immanence and power of rulers and the continuing importance of warfare may explain why continental urban culture retained a martial component that faded early in the more peaceful societies of Britain, Ireland, and Scandinavia. Cultural change may have been imposed as part of the search for order and stability, but all social ranks adapted creatively to what they saw and heard around them, assimilating, appropriating, or rejecting.

Few northwestern towns could boast the scholarly academies and societies which blossomed in German and Italian cities during the Renaissance. Or at least not before the Enlightenment, when salons, clubs, and societies flourished both in national capitals and in lesser cities like Aberdeen and Edinburgh—significantly both university towns (Aberdeen had two colleges). The new university foundations of the Renaissance were usually in towns, including Cracow (1364), Cologne (1388), and Glasgow (1451). When Latin was the universal language of European learning (and teaching) and when political boundaries were relatively fluid, students (and teachers) could move between universities, creating a truly international republic of letters. After the Reformation this movement became more confined to a faith, though religious divisions promoted new foundations in Protestant lands (like Calvinist Leiden in 1575 or Pietist Halle in 1694).

With renewed expansion in the eighteenth century, students and their teachers came to represent a ‘modernizing’ element in some towns, a counterbalance to traditional guilds and civic governments. More generally the emergence of Öffentlichkeit or a ‘public sphere’ of articulate and informed lay political and intellectual opinion owed much to the concentration of communications that existed in towns, where markets multiplied opportunities to establish and create meaning or express identity. Whether this criticism and debate was new to the eighteenth century is less important than the undeniable ferment of competing ideas, views, and comment in the age of Enlightenment.
as towns synthesized old and new cultures and social hierarchies: ‘the city now seemed to promise progress, peace, profit, pleasure and the erosion of ignorance’.  

Technology helped. Beginning in northern Italy and southern Germany in the late fifteenth century, print spread to most major German towns by 1520, then to the Low Countries and eventually to Britain and France. With a population of about 100,000 in the 1570s, Antwerp had 300 artists and 400 printers, the most famous of whom, Christopher Plantin, produced 1,500 different works and employed, at the height of his fortunes in 1574, sixteen presses and fifty-five printers and journeymen. Plantin summed up Antwerp’s attractions.

No other town in the world could offer me more facilities for carrying on the trade I intended to begin. Antwerp can be easily reached; various nations meet in its market-place; there too can be found the raw materials indispensable for the practice of one’s trade; craftsmen for all trades can be easily found and instructed in a short time.

Plantin flourished in the southern Netherlands’ main intellectual entrepôt. The northern Low Countries had its equivalent in Amsterdam and none of the ‘Randstad’ or ring of towns was more than 25 kilometres from another. Amsterdam was a commercial centre that linked several regional and national networks of commerce and finance. It became a focus for the exchange of information, which was a pre-requisite, by-product, and commodity of trade, the seventeenth century seeing an expansion of the postal service, of specialist information-brokers, and of commercial newsletters such as the *Hollantsche Mercurius*; one early seventeenth-century English resident described the city as ‘a great Staple of News’.

Towns and cities concentrated literate people, presented them with schools, writing, and books in relative abundance and demanded of them greater familiarity with reading, writing, and counting. This is not to say that towns were a uniform social or cultural environment: it might be better to talk of multiple public spheres, informed by orality as much as literacy. Nor was literacy equally high in all quarters. Printers and booksellers concentrated in certain parishes or even in specific streets. Shops of German *Briefmaler*, who printed single-leaf woodcuts for an artisan and peasant audience during the seventeenth century, often located in the suburbs of cities since it was cheaper to have premises there and easier to reach potential customers. More up-market, the booksellers of Dublin were mainly found in Castle Street and Skinners’ Row.

Towns almost invariably enjoyed superior literacy. In central London during the 1750s, 92 per cent of bridegrooms could sign their names in full and 74 per cent of brides, levels not attained nationally in England until more than a century later. Size was
important in determining the extent of the gulf between urban and rural signing, with illiteracy in smaller towns remaining close to rural levels. The high literacy of European towns in the early modern period can be attributed to two principal causes: the type of people who lived and worked there, and the ‘hothouse’ effect of urban living thanks to the concentration of cultural facilities. Artisans, tradesmen, and professional men were more literate than the average peasant and concentrations of such people produced a uniquely literate environment. Urban job opportunities encouraged the more dynamic rural dwellers to take their skills and aspirations into the towns. Enhanced urban literacy cannot, however, be attributed entirely to the composition of town populations, for in these concentrations of people men and women were constantly in contact with the instruments and the products of literacy.\textsuperscript{36}

Yet the cultural balance sheet is not all positive. Fast population growth, especially that brought about by the immigration of unskilled workers into the manufacturing towns of the north of England, central Scotland, north Germany, ‘Belgium’, and northeastern France during the eighteenth century, tended to reduce aggregate literacy levels. Ghent saw a one third decrease in the number of children receiving formal education between 1650 and 1789 despite an increase in the total population.

Environment and Geography

The social problems of early modern towns worried contemporaries and Hume thought cities could be ‘destructive to society, beget vice and disorder of all kinds’.\textsuperscript{37} The dysfunctions also look depressingly familiar to modern readers, but they can be exaggerated. Against the legacy of Belle Epoque sociologists like Emile Durkheim, who argued that the mobile and impersonal nature of urban society left individuals socially or personally isolated, modern historians have stressed just how knowable, integrated, and controlled urban life could be.\textsuperscript{38} There was grand scale in processions and punishments, but life was often lived in microcosm. In a densely settled community day-to-day relationships could be encompassed by sight and sound in a radius of 50 metres or subsumed within networks of about 150 people (the number of acquaintances that most people can keep track of) focusing on streets, open places, wells, fountains, and landmarks like churches or clocks; house numbering only began, in the biggest towns like Madrid, after 1750. Early modern people understood and appreciated privacy, but it was hard to achieve and men and women had to accept a level of intrusion and supervision, by family, neighbours, and officials, which most modern westerners would find intolerable. Throughout the period a majority of town dwellers were first or second generation immigrants, meaning the need for rule-making and enforcement, formal or
informal and by father, master, or magistrate, was doubly pressing. In social as in economic life, towns were highly regulated environments.

(p. 499) The intensity of urban life is exemplified in the witchcraft prosecutions that exploded across Europe in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, towns not only breeding new ideas, but also fears, suspicions, and hatreds. While most prosecutions and executions were rural, some of the most notorious episodes were urban (Loudun, Trier, Würzburg, Bamberg) and accusations disproportionately so in some countries (notably Poland and Finland), with witches seen as powerful and threatening members of a counter-culture based on a pact with the devil.\(^39\) At the same time punishments designed as much to shame as to pain were an integral feature of urban life, from the carting of sexual miscreants through whipping to elaborately staged executions that included spectacular witch burnings. Carrying messages about religious and secular authority, punishments were part of elaborate rituals that were particularly important in close-knit early modern towns. Innovations in and codifications of punishments (most notably the 1532 Carolina or penal code of Charles V for the Holy Roman Empire), the creation of culprits, and an increasing tendency to use the courts to secure order created a ‘theatre of horror’ in sixteenth- and seventeenth-century towns.\(^40\)

Towns had multiple, sometimes separate, sometimes overlapping subdivisions for religious, fiscal, policing, legal, defensive, or representative purposes. Quarters housed particular trades like tailors, tanners, or tallow chandlers; markets for different produce; recreations, including the sex industry; the particular sound of a church’s bells; aspects of hills, water, or public buildings. Towns also had complex jurisdictional geographies for the boundaries between parishes, the extent of commercial privileges, and the purview of court jurisdictions constituted frameworks of entitlement, belonging, exclusion, and control. Townspeople had ‘mental maps’ of familiar and unfamiliar space based on actions, objects, sights, smells, and sounds that were sometimes radically reshaped by changes in architecture and town planning in the Baroque and Enlightenment.

Prior to their seventeenth- and eighteenth-century re-buildings, towns were often irregular, congested warrens of narrow streets, alleys, and courtyards that had emerged organically to meet changing needs. Their development was not, however, haphazard. Most showed the remainders of their medieval planned origins—some in quarters, others like the three parallel streets of the Scottish burgh of St. Andrews—and all established communities had long regulated construction as well as curbing public nuisances as diverse as careless waste disposal and speeding carriage drivers. As in classical times, developments in police (polis or civic government) are most conspicuous in towns, including a wide-ranging and growing concern with environment, health, and public order. In the late Middle Ages towns were hit hardest by the Black Death, yet from the late seventeenth century they were best able to institute increasingly effective quarantine
regulations to prevent periodic re-infection. Still, private enterprise funded much urban development, like cobbled streets in richer quarters during the fourteenth century or new water supplies in the eighteenth.

A unified conception of how the town was to appear and be experienced, an integrated vision of urban improvement, only came with the rediscovery of the works of Marcus Vitruvius in the early fifteenth century. Seventeenth- and eighteenth-century absolute monarchs realized his vision most completely; Turin is a great early example where the classical ground plan was extended. Vitruvius’s radial concept is perhaps best achieved in Palma Nova, Venezia (1593) while the similar Residenzstadt of Karlsruhe (1720s) and the grid pattern of the Rossio in Lisbon (rebuilt after the 1755 earthquake) exemplify later developments. The reordered and reshaped townscape was more open and regular, with a clearer division between public and private space marked by imposing new public buildings, residential or decorative streets and squares, more uniform aspects, and wider thoroughfares. As well as an emerging distinction between east and west in larger cities such as London and Paris in the early seventeenth century, all show distinctive concentric circles of wealth: rich people commonly resided in the urban heart close to core activities like markets, rivers, and courts, while the poor lived in the less salubrious suburbs, Rouen and Strasbourg being examples. Social geography might be more complex on the ground with the well-off living on thoroughfares or squares whereas the poor huddled in dark, crowded alleys, as in Lübeck or Amiens.

Physical geography mattered not only to a town’s aspect and the success with which it countered problems ranging from water supply to waste disposal, but also its economic fortunes. Most successful towns had access to the sea or a navigable river or canal, for it cost at least five times more to transport bulk goods by land than by water. Geographic factors were certainly important in the rise and fall of Europe’s major trading and financial centres. The Mediterranean–Rhineland axis of the late Middle Ages gave way to one focused on the Atlantic seaboard in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Yet geography alone cannot explain why a well-endowed maritime nation like France did not match the urban development of the Netherlands or Britain. The reason may lie less in agricultural productivity than in differential restrictions on labour markets and mobility (even more pronounced east of the Elbe where serfdom was common) and the selective role of what Epstein calls ‘territorial coercion’. Similarly, Baltic trade thrived from the sixteenth century onwards, but the Hanseatic League, a cartel of trading cities based on Lübeck which seemed geographically well placed to benefit, lost out to the financial, commercial, seafaring, and technological skill of the Dutch.
Historiography

The successors to late medieval urban chronicles were the town histories that blossomed in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, panegyrics by antiquarian- and civic-minded local scholars termed in German Heimatgeschichte. Durkheimian interest in urban social pathologies did not translate into a significant body of social historical research and early twentieth-century academic town studies, looking for patterns rather than focusing on particularities, were mostly written by geographers; this was still true during the reinvention of urban history in the 1960s and 1970s and geographical perspectives continue to be both methodologically rigorous and theoretically informed. A more broadly social-science orientation is clearest in North American writing, reflecting the role of sociology, geography, and economics in framing many historical questions in the mid-twentieth century. Scholars from this tradition, most notably the ‘Chicago School’ of symbolic interactionism that flourished between the World Wars, tended to wear their conceptual apparatus more proudly than their empiricist British equivalents, though the gap is narrowing.

Urbanization is sometimes used as a synonym for modernization by sociologists who invoke it as a cause of change rather than a process to be explained. Towns expand markets and are the loci of government, thus helping to create a ‘modern world system’ during the sixteenth century through unregulated, large-scale, and long-distance commerce. In fact towns did not necessarily bring about the suite of interrelated changes that modernization implies; instead they accentuated the social, economic, and political characteristics of their host systems and polities. Nor were they behind any ‘civilizing process’, a set of social and psychic changes since the late Middle Ages proposed by Norbert Elias. For Elias greater self-control and the regulation of human interactions took the place of what the early twentieth-century Dutch historian Johan Huizinga saw as the simple, raw, and visceral emotions of medieval people; the threshold of embarrassment changed. Some contemporaries thought towns could bring about such a transformation—or at least make the countryside less politically dangerous. After the flight of key Catholic landowners from Ulster in 1609, James I handed over large tracts of the north of Ireland to twelve London companies, known collectively as the Livery, to be managed in the interests of Protestantism and the Stuart dynasty: part of an enduring equation between cities and civility. For a time ‘urban Ireland became an archipelago of more or less undiluted Englishness and Protestantism’. In his second volume, translated rather later into English, Elias discussed the interaction between personal behaviour and the wider processes of state formation, notably the pacification associated with what Max Weber called the ‘monopoly of the legitimate use of physical force’, another underlying theme in all early modern historiography.
Modern continental scholars tend to eschew sociology, approaching urban history from a more purely humanities standpoint framed around social and political relationships, law, culture, and religion; some have turned against quantitative and functionalist models taken from geography in favour of more specific analyses that are alert to the distinctive context of late medieval and early modern countries and regions and to the significance of individuals and social groups in mediating change. The interest in law, administration, and politics explains why, for example, north Italian cities (and especially the city states, of which multi-volume histories now exist) have attracted far more attention than those of the south, which lacked their political and legal privileges (and wealth). In northern Europe too late nineteenth and early twentieth-century urban histories were partly the work of scholars with a legal, constitutional, and administrative interest in the liberties and governmental responsibilities of towns as institutions and in their relationship to the emergence of both state and nation; Pirenne came out of this tradition.

Social history was a minority subject in those days, usually the preserve of committed (in Britain 'Fabian') socialists—or the few women who made it into the almost closed world of male academia. Pirenne had, of course, privileged geography and social formations; the inspiration for the work of the *Annales* was Paul Vidal de la Blache’s *Annales de Géographie* (1891). Only after 1945, however, did the *Annaliste* ‘turn’ really become influential. Jean Delumeau’s study of Rome (1957–59) was a milestone *histoire totale*, followed by other French studies on a similar model, notably Bennasser on Valladolid and Deyon on Amiens (both 1967). Influenced by the early establishment of geography and sociology in French academia, these were integrated *Annaliste* studies of towns (and their hinterlands) rather than ‘urban histories’. Other landmark studies around this time had more specific interests, like Brian Pullan’s in social policy. Much of the best work of the 1960s and 1970s on late medieval and early modern German and Swiss towns, which also opened up their social history, came out of American scholars’ interest in the origins and progress of the Reformation. The publication in 1968 of the proceedings of a seminal symposium organized by H. J. Dyos at Leicester set the agenda for a self-consciously distinct area of study, a development consolidated by the founding in the early 1970s of English-language periodicals, *Journal of Urban History* and *Urban History Yearbook*. Established at a time when historians of all kinds banded together to defend their subject, the European Association of Urban Historians (1989) holds biennial conferences that signpost developments in what has become a flourishing field.

Reflecting a move to the political right and disenchantment with the (rural) working class who were the main focus both of the *Annales* and of the British ‘new social history’ and German/Austrian *Alltagsgeschichte* of the 1960s onwards, the recent historiography of
urban society has looked more closely at the ‘middling sort’. In Germany this was always the case because of concerns with the workings and eventual fate of the Bürgertum and with the changing personnel and practices of bürgerliche Gesellschaft or civil society; debates on urban society and politics of the ‘long eighteenth century’, fuelled by grand (sometimes ideologically divided and competing) research projects in the continental tradition, have one eye on political and social change between the Napoleonic era and 1848—and beyond.

Urban history is done all over Europe, but some areas like Germany, France, and Britain are better researched than others. Early modern Irish urban history has suffered from a lack of the main sources available to other European scholars, though it is currently flourishing—as are studies of the Low Countries and central Europe. In Ireland, as in Scandinavia and Russia, the low level of urbanization before the late eighteenth century shifts attention elsewhere, to lordship, kinship, and ethnicity as the bases of social and economic life. Traditional historiography focused on large towns, but first in Great Britain and Germany (where small settlements of 2,000 or less dominated urbanization) then more recently in France, research has pointed to the vibrancy and adaptability of small towns not only as commercial and social hubs, but also as manufacturing centres in their own right. E. A. Wrigley once estimated that London drew in and retained at least 8,000 people every year between 1650 and 1750, and that one person in six in England had lived there at some point in their lives. For most Europeans, however, the characteristic urban experience was inhabiting or visiting a much smaller town and historians are trying to chart the economic and social relations between these lesser urban communities, their surrounding rural areas, and other nodes within urban networks.

Studies of whole towns and of urban systems, which were important in the 1960s, 1970s, and 1980s, seem less fashionable now as all historical research becomes more thematic and less integrative, not so much concerned with what Charles Tilly calls ‘the big changes’. Yet the role of towns in bringing about ‘the great transformation’, whether in the way philosopher-turned-political-economist, Karl Polanyi, understood it (from social priorities and communal forms to impersonal market exchange) or some other variation on a Marxist model, remains behind much writing. Like Adam Smith, Marx believed that ‘[t]he greatest division of mental and material labour is the separation of town and country’; Weber thought the same of towns in the west while Fernand Braudel likened them to ‘so many electrical transformers’. More recently historians have begun to treat town and country as part of a continuum, where towns marketed rural produce and provided concentrated sources of demand and supply; the relationship was symbiotic rather than parasitic, complementary rather than discrete. For all this, scholars still tend to differentiate between urban and rural mentalities (Marx wrote of ‘the brutalising
narrowness of country life’) and to privilege cities as a catalyst of economic development, cultural improvement, and social change.69 Marino Berengo’s L’Europa delle città: il volto della società urbana Europea tra medioevo ed età moderna (1999) is an example, an ambitious survey (Braudelian in its panoramic scope and traditional methodology) that deals with three central themes: urban politics; urban society; the role of the Church in city life. Also comparative, but covering a longer time span and written from an architectural and spatial viewpoint is Leonardo Benevolo’s The European city, which carries on the early urbaniste spirit of Pierre Lavedan.70

The interdisciplinary nature of urban studies led more easily in the past to engagement with the social or human sciences than with the arts, but this is changing as economic and demographic history become less prominent in all recent historiography, social and cultural history more so. Scholars of Renaissance and later high culture have produced pleasing studies of the towns of northern Italy, Germany, and the Low Countries, some bodies like the Krems Institut für mittelalterliche Realienkunde Österreichs venturing more widely into material culture (Sachkultur) and consumption in everyday life.71 Art-historical interest in ‘appreciating’ the beautiful sometimes sits uneasily with the much newer environmental historical project to explore: mundane (and often messy) interactions between people and the natural world; human attempts to regulate involvement with nature; and how mankind sees its relationships with nature. Locating people in their built environments has been an enduring concern of historical geographers, receiving fresh impetus from the new ecological perspectives and methods.72 American scholars have again led the way here, perhaps because their own urban history is so closely contextualized by both nature and frontiers.73 Long-running historical atlas projects, their publications now covering more than 300 towns in eighteen European countries, demonstrate and help explain urban forms, space, place, and landscape.74 Always important to understandings of classical and medieval urbanization, archaeology has opened up new horizons for appreciating (p. 504) domestic and industrial buildings, burial patterns, urban morphology, and consumption of both food and objects in the early modern period too.75

**Further Reading**


**Notes:**


(28.) W. Meyer, *Villes en Europe occidentale*, 163-175.


(41.) H. Diederiks and D. Reeder, eds., *Cities of Finance* (Amsterdam, 1996).


(44.) For example, H. Carter, *The Towns of Wales: A Study in Urban Geography* (Cardiff, 1965).


(74.) In 1955 the International Commission for the History of Towns recommended the publication of a series of European national historic towns atlases to help recreate a unified vision of Europe. The first volume (on Britain) appeared in 1969, followed in 1973 by the first volume of the Deutscher Städteatlas. The Irish Historic Towns Atlas project has been running since 1981 under the auspices of the Royal Irish Academy.


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Abstract and Keywords

Industry was the most dynamic sector of the European economy in the early modern period, during which it was characterized by both specialization and diversification. This chapter explores the various industries of early modern Europe, examines their forms of organization, and investigates the causes of their differing regional distribution and growth trajectories. Historical scholarship has mainly focused on the causes of industrial growth, especially with regard to later factory industrialization. Starting with theories of 'proto-industrialization' and the 'industrious revolution', this chapter examines the preconditions for early modern European industrial growth by analysing their effect on costs. To this end, it investigates the roles played by nature, rural society, and urban society. It finds that natural endowments had considerable effects on a number of early modern European industries, but ultimately the strongest impact was exercised by the comparative costs of sociopolitical institutions.

Keywords: Proto-industry, industrious revolution, Industrial Revolution, guilds, putting-out-system, transaction costs, opportunity costs

Manufacturing in Early Modern Europe

Given that over 80 per cent of the population in most parts of Europe still worked in agriculture as late as 1750, it might be thought that manufacturing and industry played an unimportant role in the early modern economy. If one looks at the question exclusively from the perspective of factory industrialization, however, then one might derive the superficial impression that centralized and mechanized mass production in factories was
the result of a linear development from the Middle Ages onwards. Alternatively, the opposite might be the case, namely that after centuries of stagnant development, eventual factory industrialization was largely accidental and truly constituted a \textit{revolution}.

All three points of view have a certain amount of validity, but none of them tells the whole story. Industrialization certainly unleashed an enormous process of economic change, whose consequences differed greatly from earlier developments. On the other hand, this did not take place as suddenly or as generally as the word ‘revolution’ implies. Before 1800, industrialization occurred only in Britain. Even there, it did not initially cover the entire country, but was highly regional, and located in a handful of centres: Lancashire, parts of Yorkshire, Tyneside, the Midlands, and southern Scotland. Industrialization began in other countries, such as Belgium, Switzerland, and France, several decades after England. Western Germany began industrializing in the 1830s, the Dutch Republic only after 1850, and Russia and large areas of central and eastern Europe not before the end of the nineteenth century. For large parts of Europe, the early modern period continued long after 1750 and is difficult to distinguish it clearly from the later, modern centuries.

Before the advent of industrialization, technological innovation was slow and played a minor role in manufacturing. Labour remained the most important input and could not yet be easily replaced by capital. But output could be increased by changing labour organization, for example by increasing the division of labour or devising new products. If a ‘modern’ economy is defined as one in which output increases significantly at the same time as prices fall, then this was already taking place in some parts of early modern manufacturing. In reality, manufacturing in Europe was accelerating by 1500, if not before. Both the quantity and the range of goods produced were increasing significantly. Regions emerged in which an above average proportion of the population produced and exported industrial products, while other areas specialized in producing food, which was imported by the manufacturing regions. This involved a rise both in the proportion of industrial goods in total output and in the number of people working in manufacturing. After c. 1650 this process became increasingly self-sustaining and ultimately contributed to factory industrialization.

Between the mid-fourteenth and the mid-eighteenth century, against the background of an expanding global economy and a growing European population, Europe experienced regional specialization of production, an expansion and diversification of the range of goods produced, and a transformation in patterns of consumption. In addition, the organization of manufacturing changed. This affected not just the location of industries but also the role of merchant capital and the division of labour in manufacturing. Europe’s economic centre of gravity shifted from the Mediterranean and southern central
Europe to the northwest. At the same time, the continent was increasingly divided into an industrial west and an agricultural east, with the River Elbe as the approximate boundary. A global division of labour emerged, with Europe providing the world with finished goods, Africa exporting slaves to America, and Europe’s overseas colonies producing agricultural raw materials for Europe. For many people, this specialization and diversification had dramatic consequences. For some it meant comparative freedom, social mobility, education, and rising consumption, while for others it meant serfdom, exploitation, and grinding poverty.

Overall, therefore, manufacturing during these centuries was not stagnant and unchanging, but nor did it lead in a linear way to factory industrialization. The early modern centuries certainly prepared the way for later industrialization. This development began around 1600 at the latest, but only in parts of Europe. Industrial growth was affected by a complex interplay of different factors, including technological innovation, population expansion, natural resources, education, the prevailing legal framework, war, epidemics, famines, the state, towns, rural society, market opportunities, entrepreneurship, investment costs, labour organization, and many more. Early modern manufacturing in Europe thus raises a whole array of questions and rival explanatory approaches. But before we address these questions and compare different explanations, we must first consider the nature of manufacturing itself.

**Manufacturing and Production**

Contrary to what might be suggested by its Latin derivation, from the words *manus* (hand) and *facere* (to make), the term ’manufacturing’ means not just work done by hand, but rather all activities which involve the processing of raw and partly finished materials into goods destined for the market. In this, it was unimportant whether production took place in the form of work carried out purely by hand, work done using tools, or even work done with the assistance of fairly complex pre-industrial machines such as fulling mills. By contrast, there is a very fluid dividing line between activities which count as industries and those which do not. Mining and salt-making, for instance, although they are non-agricultural, really consist of the extraction of raw materials rather than their processing into goods. Typically, however, these activities were counted as industries because they were often associated with direct and time-consuming further processing of raw materials into marketable half-finished goods.

Early modern industries were highly variegated both in the things they produced and in their organizational features. One way in which they can be distinguished was by ownership of the means of production. This lies behind the stylized differentiation...
between four types of manufacturing which existed side-by-side: cottage industries, crafts, putting-out systems, and manufactories.

**Cottage Industries**

Most people in early modern Europe lived in the countryside and produced for themselves a large proportion of the goods they consumed—not only food but also many other everyday items. The female members of the household, in particular, carried out a great deal of baking, beer-brewing, butter-churning, cheese-making, spinning, sewing, knitting, weaving, and so forth. The equipment needed for these activities was also typically produced by families themselves. Beginning in the Middle Ages, and increasingly after 1600, however, many rural households began producing goods that were intended for customers outside the household. Industrial work was typically embedded as a by-employment into the rhythm of agrarian work, which meant that it mainly took place in the agricultural slack season. Textile production was by far the most widely practised cottage industrial activity. By the mid-eighteenth century, yarn and other textile products were being produced almost everywhere in Europe in almost unimaginable diversity. But metal, glass, and wooden wares were also produced by cottage industries: cutlery in Solingen in Westphalia, needles in Altena (also in Westphalia), wooden toys in the Ore Mountains (the present-day border between Germany and the Czech Republic), so-called ‘splint boxes’—wooden boxes for storage and packaging—in the forested regions of the German-speaking Alps and their foothills.

**Crafts**

The term ‘craft’ refers to an enterprise which specialized in producing a particular item. Most early modern industrial producers worked in crafts—considerably more than in putting-out systems or in manufactories. The craftsman was typically the owner of his means of production. Depending on the industry, he often provided the raw materials and (if he had one) the workshop, too. Some craftsmen worked at the homes of their customers and received a wage for their work, as in the case of masons or carpenters. Others produced items in advance for sale at weekly or annual markets. Craft output was usually destined for the local market and enterprises were mostly quite small, although they could be expanded beyond the craftsman’s own family by the inclusion of apprentices and journeymen. This mainly took place in towns, with the result that urban enterprises were on average larger than in rural crafts, where one-person businesses predominated.5
Rural crafts, only became important during the early modern period. Since the Middle Ages, most manufacturing, especially in the towns, had been organized into privileged guilds which regulated almost all aspects of production and access to markets. By 1600 at the latest, and more intensively from the eighteenth century onwards, an increasing number of craftsmen settled outside the towns, thereby seeking to circumvent guild control. First and foremost, this affected the ‘mass crafts’, that is, the most widespread craft occupations, in which approximately two-thirds of all craftsmen worked, typically tailors, shoemakers, smiths, millers, joiners, and carpenters. Bakers and butchers also belonged to this very large group, but were rarer outside the towns because of the rural population’s high degree of self-sufficiency. This development is also evident in crafts that were tied to particular locations, such as mining and glass-making. With growing urbanization and global economic expansion during these centuries, industrial diversification also took place. New crafts such as those of clockmakers, wigmakers, papermakers, and bookbinders now joined the established crafts. But compared to those that produced everyday things, these new crafts remained for the most part quantitatively unimportant.

**Putting-out Systems**

The spread of the putting-out system arose from the desire to market goods outside the producer’s immediate vicinity, or in situations where producers no longer obtained raw materials directly but instead purchased or imported them. In the putting-out system, the producer worked in response to orders delivered by a merchant. In extreme cases, the producer no longer sold the product, but rather only his own labour in return for a payment for each item supplied. Where a strong division of labour prevailed, the producer no longer actually saw the finished product. Instead, the merchant retained ownership of the goods throughout the entire production process.

The medieval period saw the emergence of the first putting-out systems, but it was after about 1600 that this type of industrial organization became widespread, partly because of the spread of rural cottage industry. Even though the putting-out system was also to be found in urban industries, it was more important and more fully developed in the countryside. This was because wages could be lower there since manufacturing took place alongside agriculture, enabling production costs to be kept down. Decentralized, rural cottage producers produced the goods, and then the merchants bundled them together and sold them on. In this way, the merchants typically obtained substantial profits, partly because they often had legal monopolies over trade, and partly because they were better informed about markets and prices, and could ensure that the goods were produced flexibly in response to economic trends.
Within the putting-out system, industrial producers often became dependent on merchants. Where producers did not themselves provide raw materials, credit relationships arose because the merchant advanced the raw materials or guaranteed a loan for their purchase. Many cottage-industrial households relied partly on agriculture, often on marginal soil. Especially in the eighteenth century, against the background of rural population growth, this development often led to heavy dependence on industrial by-employment and therefore on the putting-out merchants. By contrast, the merchants required sufficient capital to bridge the interval between production and sale. The putting-out system, therefore, promoted capital accumulation by merchants, which is regarded as a precondition for later factory industrialization.

The putting-out system was not typically observed in industries where the producers retained ownership of the raw materials. Instead, we find what is called the ‘artisanal system’, in which the producer remained largely autonomous and sold the finished product himself. But putting-out systems and artisanal systems varied considerably in nature, according to the extent of dependency between producers and merchants, and which of them owned what.

Manufactories

The situation was much more clear cut in ‘manufactory’ enterprises, in which the producers no longer owned their own means of production. Instead, they sold their labour in return for wages to the owner, which was frequently the state. In a manufactory, a much greater division of labour prevailed than in other types of early modern industrial enterprise. The flow of work was broken down into many individual work-stages or tasks. This enabled output to rise and wage costs to fall, because only the most important stages had to be undertaken by highly specialized skilled employees, whereas for simpler activities it was possible to employ cheap and untrained workers, even children. State manufactories—especially spinning works—were not infrequently established in close proximity to orphanages or poorhouses, whose inhabitants were compelled to provide the workforce.

Only in centralized manufactories, however, was all production concentrated in one location. There were also decentralized manufactories, in which only the most important stages took place under the same roof, while other tasks were outsourced to independent workshops. Even when the work in a manufactory mainly consisted of manual labour, it was often facilitated by machines, mostly driven by water power. As a result, it retained its predominantly craft character. The move away from craft work became significant only around 1800 in the first of the true factories, in which human labour was
Manufacturing

increasingly replaced by motor-driven machines. Nonetheless, the early modern manufactories, based on the principle of increasing efficiency through a reorganization of the work process, can be regarded as the forerunners of later industrial capitalism.

After the mid-seventeenth century, the number of manufactories increased greatly. Capital cities, in particular, contained many of these enterprises, which were mainly oriented towards production for the court. State enterprises were often granted legal privileges protecting them from competition. Manufactories were established particularly for products that were unusually expensive or could be produced only in a costly and capital-intensive way, that is, which required very expensive equipment or utilized very valuable raw materials. This was the case, for example, with calico printing, damask production, silk spinning, mirror manufacturing, and the processing of tobacco.

Europe’s Major Industries

Given the huge diversity in early modern Europe, any presentation of the geographical distribution of particular industries, or even a listing of the most densely industrial regions, can only remain approximate. Even for individual countries, there are hardly any detailed surveys. Where such surveys have been attempted, they have found an abundance of dense manufacturing regions. For instance, one study of the German territories alone between 1650 and 1800 found thirty-nine regions with an above-average industrial density and a large share of production for markets outside the region. For England, France, the Low Countries, Switzerland, and Italy, similar lists can be drawn up. Such surveys reveal that regions where manufacturing predominated were not evenly distributed across Europe, but rather followed a pattern which extended from Normandy through northern France, Belgium and the Dutch Republic, the west German Rhine valley, across Westphalia into the upland regions of Saxony, and somewhat further in the south from southern Alsace across southwest Germany into northeast and western Switzerland. South of the Alps and east of the River Elbe, by contrast, only a few proto-industries established themselves, for example in Bohemia, Catalonia, and Lombardy.

The concentration of industrial regions in northwestern Europe also reflects the post-1600 geographical shift in production and economic activity from the south to the west and north of the continent, that is, from the Mediterranean to the North Sea region. In this period, overseas trade began to replace the caravan trade from Central Africa and from the East via Constantinople. Spain, northern Italy, and southern Germany declined in importance compared to England, France, the Netherlands, and Sweden. At the same time, in eastern Europe manufacturing declined and was replaced by increased grain production. And finally, beginning in the late Middle Ages, a gradual shift of
manufacturing from the town to the countryside began in many parts of Europe. Its organization, however, differed from place to place, from industry to industry, and from one time period to the next. Complicated relationships between guild-controlled towns and their rural hinterlands arose, as when half-finished goods were produced in the countryside and then finished in the town. Overall, however, there was a noticeable increase in the establishment of rural industries which lay beyond guild regulation, in areas with structural unemployment, and in proximity to agricultural regions producing surpluses.

This uneven distribution applied not just to manufacturing in general, but also to sector-specific concentrations of industrial production. Textile production was by far the most important of these, particularly in dense industrial regions, followed by mining and metal processing. These three spheres of production were also the ones that first profited from mechanized industrialization in the late eighteenth century. All the remaining industries, such as the production of glass and pottery, food and luxury goods, shipbuilding, and so on, played a much smaller role, even though they also contributed to the overall increase in industrial production.

**The Textile Sector**

In textiles, linen and wool predominated, but a notable diversification of products occurred during the early modern period. Cotton in particular played an ever greater role after the mid-seventeenth century. England for a long time mainly produced wool-based cloths, ranging from true ‘woollens’ (made from short-stranded, carded wool) through ‘worsteds’ (made from long-stranded, combed wool), to hybrid woollen–worsted fabrics. During the second half of the sixteenth century, the proportion of conventional woollen and worsted cloths declined in favour of lighter mixed fabrics in all imaginable combinations of short-stranded wool, long-stranded wool, flax, silk, and cotton. A further key aspect of the textile industry was the production of fustians (linen–cotton or linen–wool mixes), which gained ground in the later sixteenth century after information about their production was introduced into England by Flemish religious refugees. These émigrés came from a region which, since the Middle Ages, had been the most highly industrialized in Europe as far as textile production was concerned. All possible fabric types were produced there. Alongside fustians, there was a special focus on linens, as well as fulled woollen fabrics (broadcloths) and lace which was exported to Spain and its colonies in South America. The Low Countries long remained hugely important for the finishing of cloths. The bleaching operations in Haarlem—also an important location for linen production—were indispensable for the European linen industry until well into the eighteenth century.
France’s textile industries were less concentrated and dynamic, on average, than those of the Netherlands and England. Nonetheless, textile production was widespread in many French rural regions. Here, too, woollen broadcloths, lace, cotton fabrics, and the new draperies (light woollens and worsted) were produced. From the end of the sixteenth century, the silk industry in Lyon was among Europe’s best, and that city also developed into a centre for brocade and velvet production. In this process, Lyon surpassed the previous silk centres in northern Italy—Milan, Genoa, and Florence. Northern Italy did not just produce silk, however. The textile industry was very highly developed in many regions of Italy and also produced linen and woollen fabrics and, from the seventeenth century onwards, fustian. Overall, however, textile manufacturing declined in the Italian peninsula during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries.

In the German lands, which contained some of the most important linen-producing regions, the focus of production shifted in the seventeenth century from southern Germany to the Lower Rhine, Westphalia, Lower Saxony, and especially Silesia. All possible varieties of linen—garment linen, packing linen, and sail linen made from hemp or flax—were exported through the German and Dutch North Sea ports, especially to England and from there overseas. Other textile industries—producing woollen cloths, knitted stockings, ribbons, embroidery, lace, and even silk—were likewise widespread in many German regions. The Württemberg Black Forest developed a worsted industry, for example, dominated by the influential Calwer Zeughandlungskompagnie, while on the neighbouring Swabian Jura, linen weaving became very widespread.11 This competed with the Swiss linen industry around St. Gallen, whose linen inspections exerted influence far beyond the limits of that town’s territory. Other textile industries were also highly developed in Switzerland. Further east, Bavaria had an important woollen cloth industry, rivalling that of Austria. Besides this, the textile industries in Bohemia and Moravia gained in importance from the beginning of the eighteenth century onwards, encouraged by landlords whose powers under the ‘second serfdom’ entitled them to extort feudal dues from serf weavers. Manufacturing in Spain was varied in nature. In the first half of the sixteenth century, Spain still exported a large proportion of its indigenous wool output, but from mid-century the domestic production of woollen cloths expanded. Simultaneously, Spanish linen production declined. At the end of the seventeenth century, the region around Barcelona developed into an important centre of cotton production. But outside these regions, the textile industry played a much more modest role in Spain than elsewhere.

Technological change was relatively unimportant in most textile industries. Innovations often spread quite slowly, due to guild influence. Textile manufacturing was particularly extensive in the European countryside, mainly organized in the putting-out system. In this
way, it contributed to the creation of an ever larger, mostly rural stratum that was partly or wholly dependent on wage labour.

Mining and Metallurgy

Wage labour was something the textile industries had in common with the mining and metallurgical industries, whose importance increased steadily throughout the early modern period. In the metal industries, unlike in textile manufacturing, technological changes, especially mechanization, were important. Such innovations helped to overcome the problems that had caused the extraction of many ores to stagnate around the mid-sixteenth century. In many locations, the available extractive technology had reached its limits. New technologies were required to enable the building of deeper and longer tunnels and overcome the challenges of ventilation and drainage, in order to exploit the remaining ore deposits. The development of water-mill technology, in particular, played an important role in this process. Water-driven mills drove pumps, lifts, and ventilators in the mining industry, moved bellows for smelting furnaces in metal production, and drove forge hammers in metal processing. The improvements in mining in particular required considerable capital, which typically could not be brought together by small-scale miners. This led to the involvement of entrepreneurs, merchants, companies, nobles, and sometimes even territorial princes. The result was enhanced efficiency: smaller, often exhausted mines were closed down, while larger and more abundant mines were exploited more intensively. In addition, the proportion of wage-dependent workers in mining areas increased. Large investors, such as the Fuggers of Augsburg, often controlled the entire operation from the extraction of the ore to the sale of the finished metal wares.12

Europe’s principal mining locations varied according to the type of ore extracted. Though iron ores were found in many parts of the European continent, England was one of the countries where its extraction and processing were most advanced. When wood supplies declined there, the first experiments were made with coal as a fuel for smelting furnaces, but it was the eighteenth century before success was achieved. After the mid-sixteenth century, Sweden developed into the most important iron exporter in Europe, with England as its principal market. But other European states also produced iron on a large scale. Whether it was knives from Thiers or Solingen, wire from Iserlohn, weapons from Brescia or Toledo, scissors from Schmalkalden, whether sheet metal, nails, wire, scythes, or iron for shipbuilding—everywhere in Europe there were metal-working industries employing a large proportion of the rural population and providing growing markets with increasingly high-quality wares.
This was by no means limited to iron products. Gold and especially silver were extracted, mainly in central Europe, and in many cases lay under the control of large-scale south German investors. Gold mining, carried out for example in Carinthia, Silesia, and the Harz region of western Germany, was relatively modest, however. Silver extraction, with its main locations in the Harz, Saxony, Silesia, around Salzburg, in Bohemia, and in Slovakia, was more important. But European gold and silver extraction faced stiff competition from Spanish silver imports from South America after c. 1550 and was already in decline by the first half of the seventeenth century.

Other metals took their place. There was an increasing demand for copper, both to mint coins and as a raw material, especially for alloying since copper was the most important component of both bronze and brass. Bronze was used for making bells and, even more importantly, for casting cannons. Sweden was Europe’s largest copper producer and profited from rising demand until well into the eighteenth century. Copper was also produced in a whole range of localities, mainly in central Europe, once again with important assistance from south German investors.

(p. 518) Alongside copper, other metals were quite widely produced. Zinc was also required to produce brass, and substantial deposits of this metal turned Aachen and Stolberg into centres of brass production by the mid-seventeenth century. Tin was to be found especially in Cornwall, Bohemia, and Saxony, where it could even be extracted by open-cast mining. Many household goods were made from tin, which was also important for sheet metal. Lead was increasingly used for the frames of windows and for roofs. It was extracted in a number of places where silver was mined, especially near Cracow, in the Ore Mountains, the Harz, Upper Silesia, and the North Eifel. Mercury was particularly important for the Habsburgs: in Almadén in Spain and in Idria in Slovenia the Habsburgs had the largest deposits of mercury in the world. Finally, we must also mention cobalt, extracted especially in the Ore Mountains and used for applying blue colouring to ceramics and glass. All these metals represented the raw materials for a variety of different industries, which became increasingly diversified during the early modern period.

Such diversification, side-by-side with specialization, was also to be found in glass-making, which took place in a number of centres across Europe. Venice’s elaborate glass products were very famous, subsequently joined by those from Bohemia, which in the eighteenth century also produced high-quality crystal glass for mirrors. By contrast, larger panes of glass, especially for windows, were made in Normandy and the Dutch Republic. In Germany, the glass industry put down roots in the low mountain range of the Mittelgebirge.
Ceramics were made in Moorish and Ottoman patterns in Spain, Portugal, and Italy as early as the first half of the sixteenth century. Northern European states such as France, the Dutch Republic, and the German territories followed suit after 1600. Delft, for instance, became known for its blue tiles. In the meantime in Saxony, Johann Friedrich Böttger succeeded in reinventing porcelain, while in the eighteenth century Gouda produced clay pipes as tobacco consumption increased. From the beginning of the fifteenth century onwards, increasing numbers of European buildings were being constructed from stone, which increased demand not only for natural stone, but also for bricks, stimulating both quarrying and brickmaking.

Wood had a multitude of uses. It was, in the first place, a universal construction material for buildings of all types, ships, carts, barrels, furniture, and tools. Secondly, in the form of both wood and charcoal it constituted the main fuel for Europe’s furnaces and chimneys. Thirdly, it provided other essential raw materials such as oak bark for tanning, potash for glass-making, and pitch and tar for shipbuilding. A growing scarcity of wood in central Europe increased the importance of large rivers as routes for its transport. At the same time wood scarcity, from the early sixteenth century onwards, created incentives for the extraction and utilization of coal. England, Scotland, and Wales soon became the most important production locations for coal, followed by the regions around Liège and Aachen as well as the Ruhr region of western Germany. Coal transportation was one of the factors that encouraged shipbuilding in England, alongside overseas trade, the expanding navy, fishing, and whaling. The large ocean trading powers—England above all, then Spain, Portugal, the Italian city states and, in the course of the sixteenth century, the Dutch Republic—maintained numerous shipyards, from which an ever greater diversity of ships was launched. From the seventeenth century onwards, Sweden occupied an increasingly important position in shipbuilding as a result of its rich endowments of raw materials.

Hardly anything has marked the history of recent centuries as much as the invention of printing with moveable type and the printing press, which took place around 1450. This early modern media revolution would have been impossible without cheap paper, however. Italy had developed into a centre of paper production during the late Middle Ages. But as early as 1390 the first European paper mill north of the Alps was established in Nuremberg. From then on, Germany developed into one of the leading European producers of paper, followed in the eighteenth century by the Netherlands. With the spread of printing throughout Europe, there was an increase in demand for paper everywhere and this led to bottlenecks in obtaining raw materials.

Even though book production increased by leaps and bounds during the early modern period, for a long time books remained a luxury. But precisely in the realm of luxury goods, the early modern period saw intensive specialization and diversification, which
caused new industries to pull ahead of simple crafts, particularly in the towns. This affected the production of items as diverse as ornaments, coaches, furniture, wigs, perfume, porcelain, wall-hangings, silk, and other precious fabrics. It also encouraged production of utensils for the enjoyment of new and exotic wares such as tobacco, sugar, coffee, and cocoa, which were becoming ever more widespread in early modern Europe.

Against the background of population growth and expanding shipping fleets, the European fishing industry expanded its catches. This enhanced the importance of salt, extracted from seawater on the coasts, from salt springs, and from subterranean salt deposits especially in northern Germany. Salt was increasingly required for the preservation of food, whether as provisions for ships’ stores or for long-distance overland transportation. Food industries also experienced growth: while the classic food producers in the towns hardly changed and continued to be organized into guilds, new industries arose for the mass production of particular foodstuffs. Beer-brewing expanded into an important export industry and took root in Dutch and north German towns as well as Copenhagen and London. In the sixteenth century advances in distillation led to the rise of the spirits industry in many parts of northwest Europe. Originally introduced to make use of low-quality grain, the various spirituous liquors soon began to compete with beer, leading to social problems.

Explanations for Industrial Diversification

What explains the differing trajectories of manufacturing between the late Middle Ages and the beginning of industrialization? Why did factory industrialization develop very early in some regions but not others? These questions have long attracted historians’ attention. One of the most important and fruitful debates of recent decades has concerned ‘proto-industrialization’, a theory which emphasizes the importance of rural cottage industry for the later process of industrialization. A contrasting approach is offered by the concept of the ‘industrious revolution’, which focuses attention on changes in labour intensity and consumption within early modern households. Both approaches are explained in what follows, before we explore the concepts of opportunity costs and transaction costs as an additional structural dimension of these issues.¹³

Proto-industrialization

In his studies of 1969 and 1972 on the early modern Flemish linen industry, which have become classics, Franklin Mendels developed his theory of ‘proto-industrialization’ as a
The specific mode of operation of proto-industries focused on four points in particular.

First, proto-industries are seen as causing considerable growth of population and fragmentation of landownership, by enabling people to establish families even if they lacked sufficient agricultural land for subsistence. This was because proto-industry broke the self-regulating mechanism of traditional rural society—the chain linking inheritance and reproduction. This, in turn, is supposed to have dissolved the feudal regime and created an unlimited supply of cheap labour, creating a pool of workers for factory industrialization. Second, alongside the transformation of demographic behaviour, proto-industrial growth—as a basic precondition for industrialization—led to capital accumulation by entrepreneurs. Third, the proto-industrial process also encouraged the emergence of merchants with expert technical knowledge as well as experience with supra-regional and international markets, which it is believed were necessary for later factory industrialization. Fourth, proto-industrialization stimulated a complementary specialization between economic regions, so that proto-industrial areas concentrated on cottage-industrial mass production for supra-regional markets, making them increasingly dependent on food imports, which stimulated the commercial production of foodstuffs by regions able to produce surpluses. In this way, proto-industrial growth is believed to have brought about agricultural commercialization, which subsequently enabled urbanization and factory industrialization.

Numerous researchers took up Mendels’s theory, above all the Göttingen historians Peter Kriedte, Hans Medick, and Jürgen Schlumbohm, who in their 1977 book transformed the concept of proto-industrialization into a general model of social and economic change between the Middle Ages and the nineteenth century. They focused on the central role of the household as the unit of production for proto-industry, and emphasized early marriage and child labour as central preconditions for production of this kind. In a slightly different way to Mendels, these three historians believed that proto-industries were linked to population growth independently of economic trends.
Proto-industrialization by no means always led to demographic growth. Rather, proto-industrial regions manifested a diversity of different demographic patterns. Moreover, no clear link has been established between the disappearance of traditional social systems and their replacement by the market. The commercialization of agriculture also appears to have taken place largely independently of proto-industrialization, in many cases occurring much earlier, and was more strongly associated with the development of urban centres. And finally, the existence of proto-industries did not automatically result in industrialization, but often led to de-industrialization and re-agrarianization.

**Industrious Revolution**

A more recent theory, put forward by an American historian of the Dutch Republic, Jan de Vries, emphasizes a transformation in the economic behaviour of households beginning around the mid-seventeenth century. European households, he argues, increasingly allocated more time to market-oriented activities, and stopped spending most of their time producing goods and services for their own consumption or engaging in leisure. More and more labour—especially female labour—was allocated to wage-work and the production of goods for the market. In addition, a change in values is supposed to have been involved: traditional values, such as respect for ancestors, honour, legal status, or membership in a guild or particular social stratum, declined in importance, and were replaced by the values of material consumption and hard work. The medium-term consequences are supposed—according to de Vries—to have been enormous. The growing supply of labour for the market, in combination with an increasing demand for manufactured goods, are regarded as the causal factors behind the agricultural revolution, proto-industrialization, commercialization, and ultimately factory industrialization, and at the same time are supposed to have brought about an enormous improvement in living standards.

The concept of the ‘industrious revolution’ is probably the most comprehensive recent attempt to explain Europe’s pre-industrial economic growth. It has encountered serious empirical problems, however. Sources which reveal how long people worked and whether their working time increased are extremely rare. Whether and how consumption changed can be observed to some extent from inventories of people’s possessions, but the explanatory power of these sources varies greatly according to time period, locality, the group of persons inventoried, and the detail with which possessions were recorded. In addition, inventories have hitherto been investigated mainly for England and the Netherlands. In those countries, there are indications hinting at the postulated ‘industrious revolution’. By contrast, there are hardly any studies of whether an ‘industrious revolution’ also occurred in the other states and regions of Europe before
their industrialization. Available studies certainly suggest that an industrious revolution did not affect all regions of Europe in the same way at the same time.

The concepts of ‘proto-industrialization’ and the ‘industrious revolution’ have several features in common. Both seek early modern causes of industrialization, endowing it with an ‘evolutionary’, not a ‘revolutionary’, character. Beyond this, both direct attention to households, believing their economic decisions and market participation were of the greatest importance. Thus the idea of an ‘industrious revolution’ is based fundamentally on changes in the relative prices of goods. From about the mid-seventeenth century industrial wares could be produced so cheaply that in many places it was less expensive to buy them than to make them oneself for one’s own consumption. This became possible partly because households allocated their labour in a different way. But it was also the result of technological innovations, cost minimization, commercial improvements, changing socio-economic practices, and institutional conditions, which varied greatly across Europe, both nationally and regionally.

These considerations direct attention to another possible way of examining the differing developments in Europe in a structured way, namely the concepts of opportunity costs and transaction costs.

**Opportunity Costs**

Opportunity cost is a concept from economics, which relates to the input of resources such as work, machines, time, money, and so on. It is not concerned with costs in the narrow sense of the term, but rather the benefits that an alternative deployment of a resource could have brought but which were foregone. Thus, for example, in land-poor early modern households, women frequently carried out work in the family’s own agricultural enterprise, while men worked as day labourers on the farms of other peasants. There were two reasons for this. First, men were mostly used for hard physical work—tasks such as ploughing, mowing, and land-clearing. Men tended to be better suited to such tasks than women because of their physique and physical strength, and could therefore get more done in the same time. But these tasks were also better paid than simpler activities. Secondly, women were often subjected to gender discrimination in wage rates, since even for the same activity they were absolutely and proportionately paid less well than men.\(^\text{19}\) The opportunity costs of a day wage for a woman were thus typically too high: perhaps the man would have been able to cultivate the family farm more efficiently and would therefore have obtained higher yields, but in day-labouring the woman would have been able only to earn substantially lower wages, so that the overall income of the household would have been lower.\(^\text{20}\) This approach
implicitly assumes that pre-industrial households and individuals behaved in an economically rational way and tried, within the framework of the opportunities they faced, to maximize their well-being, by which is meant not only material earnings but also non-material benefits such as social esteem or legal status.

**Transaction Costs**

Transaction cost is a key concept in the economics of institutions and, in the simplest terms, refers to the costs of market participation. It is based on the idea that all transactions are associated with expenses. These include costs for transport, obtaining information, making and enforcing contracts, and so on. Participation in the market is significantly influenced by transaction costs, which can—as in the case of state protective tariffs—be so high as to prevent market participation altogether. In this case, a government policy directly affects transaction costs. But other institutions can also exert such influence. Transaction costs—particularly the costs of trade and communication—are also affected by natural resources and geographical endowments. Furthermore, natural and institutional factors seldom operate in isolation, but rather often work in association with one another, exercising a combined impact on transaction costs.

What institutions actually are, how they arise, when and why they change, and how they function, all continue to be vigorously debated. But here we are interested in how industrial activity is influenced by particular natural and institutional conditions. Opportunity costs and transaction costs offer powerful tools for doing this, and facilitate a deeper understanding of the development of different industrial regions. In what follows, natural and socio-political conditions will be examined more closely with reference to their costs. After all, these location factors influenced, directly or indirectly, any industrial activity. And costs were the decisive variable in deciding whether an industry arose, survived, grew, or declined. The relative cost structure in different regions created comparative advantages and disadvantages for the emergence and development of manufacturing. Any change in conditions required existing industries to adapt. During the early modern period, European manufacturing was increasingly exposed to competition in international markets and subjected to ever increasing cost pressures. If an industry did not succeed in minimizing costs, then in the medium term it had no chance of survival. In what follows, therefore, it is worthwhile to try to cast light on specific location factors for industry by analysing how these affected costs.
Natural Resources and Geographical Location

No causal factor is ascribed a greater importance for industrial development than natural resources, at least by some scholars, some of whom even assign primacy to this factor over all other influences and ultimately trace the entire development of society and the economy to nature. According to this view, European industrialization was ultimately a consequence of a unique combination of specific climatic conditions, soil fertility, natural transportation routes, and raw material deposits—and thus in the final analysis a matter of accident.

Manufacturing in the early modern period was certainly much more dependent on natural and geographical conditions than it is today. The most important of these had little to do directly with most industries: soil quality and climate. These—especially precipitation levels—were crucial because they strongly influenced agricultural productivity. And high agricultural productivity meant high opportunity costs for alternative industrial activities. Densely industrial regions—proto-industries—therefore often developed in areas that were hilly or infertile. In such regions, agriculture produced little and employed few, so that structural unemployment and underemployment were relatively high, and the opportunity costs low.

Opportunity costs relative to agriculture were only one dimension, however. Over and above that, the relationship between industrial growth and nature could turn out very differently from one industry to another. For instance, transportation opportunities and obstacles were very important. To move goods over extended distances was very expensive in the pre-industrial period. So transportation was, after labour, the most important cost factor in production. Proximity to navigable waterways could reduce transportation costs and thus transaction costs to such an extent that adequate profits could be obtained by trading in manufactured goods. Geographical obstacles, conversely, increased transportation costs. In general, transportation by water was cheaper than by land. It is claimed that England’s island position with its many protected coves and navigable rivers reduced its transportation costs and thus favoured industry and trade. In addition, England’s mild, rainy climate provided good conditions for agriculture. Furthermore, its island position meant a certain amount of protection against enemy invasions and good preconditions for the development of a strong central state, which in turn reduced transaction costs both directly and indirectly. And finally, England had large and relatively accessible coal deposits, the decisive energy source for factory industrialization. In this perspective, geography and natural resources combined to make an essential contribution to England’s industrial ascendancy.
Manufacturing

As a result of high transportation costs, it was mainly light wares and luxury goods that were transported over longer distances. In addition, it was less expensive to transport finished products than raw materials. So proximity to raw materials was much more important for certain industries than for others. Metallurgical industries, for example, were located near ore deposits. But this alone was not decisive. The metal industry also depended on energy sources—above all, abundant wood to produce charcoal for smelting. So metal manufacturing was often located in forested regions with ore deposits. The increasing wood scarcity in central and southern Europe makes the rise of Swedish iron extraction in the seventeenth century understandable, given the rich deposits of ore in Sweden and the huge Scandinavian forests.22

This combination of conditions—raw materials, transportation costs, and presence of energy sources—especially affected production which required high temperatures. In addition to the metal industry, these included ceramics production, which also required clay deposits, and glass production which in addition to wood needed silica and chalk. However, wood was needed not only as an energy source or for construction, but also as a raw material for industrial production, for example oak bark for tanneries or wood for turners, coopers, joiners, and so on.

The availability of water was equally important in determining location for many industries. Like wood, water was both energy source and raw material. Water power was the driving force behind many different types of mill. What sort of industry located along a waterway depended on what sort of waterway it was and how steep its downward slope. Paper mills, for example, required very strongly flowing water. In the north German plain there were hardly any smiths, because the water power was not sufficiently strong to drive the mill hammers and wind power could not completely substitute for it. Tanners, by contrast, required large quantities of water for cleaning the hides and filling the tanning pits. However, not only the presence of water mattered for industry, but also its reliability. Droughts, floods, and ice brought industrial production to a standstill. As a result, sufficient and reliable sources of water power for industry were to be found mainly in hilly and mountainous regions.23

Sometimes the role of nature was indirect. Cattle-raising regions generated animal hides for tanners, and cadavers, bones, hooves, and other animal waste products for lime production, reducing costs for those industries and encouraging them to locate there. Arable agriculture, conversely, generated straw for plaited products, encouraging rope-making, mat-making, basket-making, and so on. Paper production required large quantities of rags, which were mainly found in towns or around textile industries. Certain industries thus depended on the growth of other industries.
In the linen industry, things were somewhat different. Its raw material costs were certainly lower if the soil was well suited for growing flax or hemp. But cultivating textile crops was very labour-intensive and used land that could also be employed for other kinds of farming. Furthermore, raw materials for linen were both cheaper to transport and less energy-intensive to produce than for metal. Linseed, flax, hemp, and even yarn could be imported—or exported. It was far from inevitable that soils suitable for growing textile crops attracted dense linen production. The presence of fertile soil thus had ambivalent effects. Nature affected the linen industry more through the opportunity costs of agricultural inputs than through transportation costs.24

Geographical obstacles might increase transaction costs, but could also offer protection. In contrast to England, the territories of the Holy Roman Empire had a precarious geographical location from the viewpoint of economics and strategy. Surrounded on all sides by powerful rivals who repeatedly waged wars on its territory, it was also politically fragmented. This increased transaction costs directly and indirectly, via trade restrictions, tolls, and the like. But this process no longer had much to do with nature or geography; instead, it was mainly socio-political.

In the German case, paradoxically, nature might as a result have remained more important for industry than elsewhere.25 In Europe as a whole, however, the importance of nature for industry gradually declined during the early modern period, both because transportation improved and thus became less expensive and because the growth of trade gradually reduced the importance of locally available raw materials. This meant industries could arise in areas lacking the necessary natural resources. Conversely, an industry might not develop in a region even if it had the ideal natural preconditions.26 Overall, available natural resources played an important part in whether industries located in that region, but not a determining one. Nature was more decisive in the early stages of the production chain (in iron-smelting or in spinning, for instance) than in later ones (in metal-processing or weaving). This was because the value of the outputs increased so transportation costs fell.27

Nature’s influence also depended on the kind of industry. It could change over time, as well, for example through transportation improvements which reduced transaction costs. Other factors such as agricultural systems, serfdom, inheritance laws, guild privileges, merchant privileges, and so forth, could also exert considerable influence. So for example natural availability of inputs might be unimportant when socio-political factors blocked access to them, prohibiting the establishment of an industry, or where legal monopolies prevented its growth. Conversely, state initiatives such as canal-building could make industry very attractive by enabling raw materials which were not present locally to be imported much more cheaply.
Social influences such as these could exert just as large an influence on opportunity costs and transaction costs as nature could. They can be broken down into those existing in rural society, those in urban society, and those created by the state.

**Rural Society**

In the eighteenth century the overwhelming majority of Europeans still lived in the countryside and worked in agriculture. From the late fifteenth century onwards, however, manufacturing had increasingly located in the countryside, not least because of higher rural population growth. More people worked in rural proto-industries, rural crafts, and rural manufactories in aggregate than in urban crafts. The preconditions for rural manufacturing depended both directly and indirectly on rural institutions. These mainly surrounded agriculture, but nonetheless often hugely influenced the opportunity costs of industrial production, since they regulated how inputs could be used. Besides the state (see later), landlords and rural communities together determined whether rural industry developed—or not. Their power varied hugely, both geographically and chronologically. Rural communities in the German territory of Württemberg, for example, remained very strong well into the nineteenth century, while their counterparts in England and Flanders had long lost most of their influence.

In many parts of eastern-central and eastern Europe, landlords were able to increase their power from the second half of the sixteenth century onwards. This took place against the background of many decades of price inflation, fuelled by the precious metals imported from Spanish America, exploitation of European silver mines, increased circulation of money, coinage devaluation, and demographic growth. Population expansion both increased demand for agricultural and industrial goods and expanded the labour supply, which caused wages to stagnate or grow much more slowly than prices. Over the longer term a classic scissors relationship developed between the growth of prices and wages, which was exploited by elites who were able to increase their share of resources. Landlords’ ability to profit from this process was influenced by agricultural and industrial opportunity costs as well as their own relationship with territorial rulers. Consequently, the institutional position of landlords diverged between eastern and western Europe along a dividing line running roughly through the Elbe and Saale rivers, with weaker landlord powers in the west under what was called Grundherrschaft (literally ‘landlordship’) and stronger ones in the east under Gutsherrschaft (‘demesne lordship’ or, sometimes, the ‘second serfdom’). These two types of feudal lordship had different effects on the conditions for industrial growth.  

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Grundherrschaft (which does not have a precise equivalent in English) is the term used to describe weaker manorial and lordship structures, usually accompanied by strong peasant property rights, low or non-existent forced labour services, and rents paid in money or kind rather than labour. The diversity within this system was huge, as the situation in Germany reveals. On the Lower Rhine, manorial ties had already become very weak by the late Middle Ages, with numerous tenancies, low labour services, but relatively high rents. Yet only about 200 kilometres to the east, Paderborn had labour services almost as high as under eastern European demesne lordship, and these were only commuted into rents during the eighteenth century. In southwest Germany and Switzerland, by contrast, most landlords became rentiers, charging fixed rents in money and kind, which inflation reduced even further. The situation was hardly less diverse in the rest of western and southern Europe. England, Spain, Italy, and France saw a wide variety of different developments, with estates held by wealthy landlords, the nobility, the Church, large-scale farmers, or bourgeois landowners who rented out land to tenants. Rises in rents and dues increased the number of landless and land-poor households, which were increasingly dependent on day-labouring. In France, both large landowners and medium-sized farmers profited. In the Netherlands, by contrast, quite moderate dues and rents benefited a broad social spectrum of peasants.

Western Europe’s manorial system encouraged the growth of industry, since the growing number of households no longer subject to labour services and increasingly dependent on wage labour created cost advantages. A consolidation of landowning facilitated the introduction of new farming methods and enabled more flexible land use, especially in England. As early as the sixteenth century, English landowners responded to market opportunities offered by the rising price of high-quality wool and transformed large acreages of arable land into pastures for sheep-raising. In such regions, the expanding numbers of landless and land-poor households also increased demand for agricultural products and encouraged the rise of markets. Overall, a manorial system that was relatively weak appears to have had favourable consequences for manufacturing growth. The spread of proto-industries, as sketched out earlier, often coincided with regions where landlord powers and guild intervention were weaker.

Manorial rights could also influence industrial development in other, indirect ways. The linen industry in Westphalia and southern Osnabrück provides a good illustration. Inheritance systems typically followed customary law, but also reflected landlord interests. In these two regions, undivided inheritance of farms (‘impartibility’) had been established. This guaranteed a landlord the maintenance of the operational capacity of the farms and protection against fragmentation of ownership. At the same time, the sale of land required approval by the landlord and was extremely costly. A free market in real estate, therefore, did not develop; for broad strata of the population, access to land was
only possible through inheritance or marriage. But impartibility created landless younger sons, who formed a cheap labour pool. This, together with an absence of much land to buy, encouraged the development of a linen industry, using hemp grown locally. The resulting limited opportunities to buy or sell land, and the low incentive to invest in moveable possessions such as tools or cattle, cleared the path for the linen industry to develop. For the farmers, proto-industry offered both a cheaper alternative to employing day-labourers and satisfied the need for cash, which could be used to pay the higher rents and taxes.

A much stronger manorial system called *Gutsherrschaft* (demesne lordship) prevailed across eastern Europe. Characterized by strong landlords, less freedom for rural people, heavy labour services, and large demesnes, it appeared inimical to industrial development. Demesne lordship resulted from an international division of labour, in which eastern Europe specialized in the profitable export of grain to western urban and manufacturing centres. Where demesne lordship prevailed, the opportunity costs of industrial development were often very high, especially in agriculturally fertile regions, and the economic freedom of large numbers of the rural population severely restricted. This did not mean that demesne lordship was wholly incompatible with industrial development. In infertile regions, opportunistic landowners could and did promote mining, glass-production, cultivation and processing of textile crops, spinning, and weaving, and even encouraged the rise of manufacturing enterprises of all kinds: putting-out systems, manufactories, and proto-industries, as occurred in Silesia, Bohemia, Moravia, Poland, Bulgaria, and parts of Russia. The presence of rural export industries does not demonstrate that demesne lordship was weak, but rather that these regions had a type of demesne lordship involving very strong extra-economic powers which could be extended into non-customary economic activities such as industry. Some eastern European landlords secured considerable income from their peasants’ industrial activities, by means of loom dues, revenues from the sale of legal monopolies over proto-industrial trade, and price regulations. The over-riding aim was to profit from rural industries by using seigneurial coercion to depress labour costs artificially.

This was also the great weakness of this manorial system as far as long-term industrial development was concerned, however, since landlord power favoured a stance that was structurally conservative and hostile to innovation. When factory industrialization led to machines supplanting labour power, cheap workers and raw materials were no longer the crucial factors behind manufacturing success. Training, capital, flexibility, and openness to innovation were now crucial. The legal privileges linked to landownership led landlords to invest their capital in landed property and not in machines, so that their proto-industries had disappeared by around 1800 at the latest. The structures of demesne lordship, however, continued to exercise long-term effects in most parts of eastern
Europe. In Russia, the violent social distortions they created were still visible over large areas at the beginning of the twentieth century.

The second institutional pole of rural society was the village community. Rural communities had developed, encouraged by customary law, since the fifteenth century in many parts of Europe, where they functioned as institutions of peasant self-government. Even when landlords had direct rights of intervention, it was often village communities that took the decisions about use of agricultural resources, crop rotations, common lands, water use, rights of way, and even the selection of local officials. In this process, however, women were typically excluded. Besides gender, wealth was crucial for the hierarchy within rural society, leading to the dominance of the large-scale farmers over the village community. These substantial farmers also controlled village common lands and thus had the deciding voice about the use of woods, heaths, moors, pastures, and so forth.  

Considerable controversy surrounds the role of village communities in industrial development, which varied throughout Europe according to the nature of the legal system, the authority of the territorial ruler, and the extent and importance of common lands. In general, influential village communities are assumed to have impeded economic progress, since they could hinder both the redeployment of agricultural land and the introduction of new farming techniques. Common lands, in particular, could often mean inefficient use of available natural resources. Powerful village communities developed where landlords were relatively weak or where territorial princes had equipped them with extensive rights by granting them administrative or fiscal privileges. They were, therefore, more often found in regions of Grundherrschaft on the western European model than where eastern European demesne lordship prevailed.

Rural industries seem to have grown more successfully where village communities were relatively weak and common lands were abolished. This was particularly the case in England, where the influence of rural communities was greatly reduced during the seventeenth century. The influence of the village community was permanently weakened by the enclosure movement, with the fencing of the common lands, and this facilitated the introduction of new agricultural techniques. In the Low Countries, Switzerland, the Rhineland, and Saxony, weak village communities were associated with industrial growth. Proto-industries could, however, also develop in areas with strong village communities. Württemberg was one example, where natural conditions favoured the development both of an important zone of worsted-weaving in the Black Forest and of a significant linen region on the Swabian Jura. Here, as in certain parts of Westphalia, proto-industries developed but ultimately the power of village settlements and the late division of the common lands became an obstacle to industrial growth and thus
contributed to eventual de-industrialization. Strong communities were thus obstacles, but not necessarily complete hindrances, to industrial development.

The Role of Government

How did the state influence the development of manufacturing? Here we must draw a distinction between its direct and indirect impacts.

The state exercised direct influence through its industrial and economic policy, which in early modern Europe was shaped by mercantilist theories. What this meant concretely varied from one country to another, sometimes quite considerably. Divergent assessments of the effectiveness of state action can be found in previous scholarship. An older perspective assumes that government policy had a positive impact on industrial growth. The founding of state manufactories, state encouragement for the establishment of certain industries, protectionist measures such as tariffs, prohibitions on importing or exporting certain items, granting of trade monopolies, setting up quality inspections, and so on, are all supposed to have successfully encouraged industrialization.

Other assessments, such as those advanced as part of the theory of proto-industrialization, assign the state merely a walk-on part. The state determined the legal framework and ensured security, and could also influence the context within which economic developments took place—by prescribing the locations of markets, for instance. Only occasionally did it grant legal privileges to certain groups and thus intervene directly in the market.35

More recent studies view the impact of government rather more critically.36 In most cases, state policy was quite unsuccessful. France under Colbert probably conducted the most active government economic policy in early modern Europe. It assisted the establishment of manufacturing enterprises through legal privileges, including interest-free loans, tax breaks, exemptions from state services, the award of local legal monopolies, and so forth. Ultimately all these manufactories remained dependent on royal assistance, and this included not only those that were directly operated by the state, such as the carpet-weaving manufactories in Paris and Beauvais. Even though at the beginning of the 1680s the French state threatened draconian penalties to prevent specialized craftsmen from emigrating, the Revocation of the Edict of Nantes in 1685 led to the expulsion of the Huguenots from France and thus to a demographic and economic bloodletting and a huge loss of industrial know-how.

Elsewhere, the successes of economic policy were likewise very modest. State-operated enterprises such as the Spanish Mañufacturas reales mainly produced luxury
goods for the royal court on which they remained dependent. In Sweden, state direction of metal production failed badly, while in England, as early as 1614 state intervention in cloth exports proved unsuccessful and damaged those sectors for years to come. State support for the Berlin silk industry harmed its counterpart in Prussian-ruled Krefeld. Throughout the entire seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, examples of such unsuccessful interventionism by government are evident throughout Europe.

State-supported enterprises could often only survive by means of auxiliary protectionist measures, and sometimes not even then. Government intervention was frequently misconceived, and state monopolies often damaged even the enterprises they were designed to help, as well as increasing the costs for the rest of the economy. Legal monopolies enabled the monopolistic producer to increase prices since it was the sole supplier of the product. The lack of competitive pressure resulted in inefficient use of resources, lack of innovation and flexibility, and, not infrequently, corruption. For consumers and industries dependent on this production, goods were made more expensive, which hindered demand and so restricted growth. Overall, prices no longer accurately reflected market conditions. The legal monopolies granted to state manufactures could only be enforced domestically. As a result, the legally privileged industries of early modern Europe were less and less able to compete as the costs of international trade fell. Legal monopolies, protective tariffs, and import prohibitions typically failed to protect state-supported industries against competition over the longer term. Mercantilism thus reduced costs for certain interest-groups (nobles, owners of enterprises, merchants), but in turn burdened others, increasing their costs or discriminating against them. Cottage-industrial workers, itinerant traders, and especially women were typically victims of government attempts at regulating manufacturing. Although their effects varied across different sectors of production, in most cases such measures turned out to be expensive failures.

The indirect impact of the state on the development of manufacturing was primarily the result of military activities. War was frequently an engine of change and a strategy rulers adopted to advance their own interests. The conflicts which resulted not only had huge consequences for economic life, but also meant that the state became a customer for large quantities of industrial goods, such as gunpowder, cannons, and clothing for soldiers, as well as foodstuffs for the army, materials to build ships, and so forth.

Between 1450 and 1800, European states participated in well over a hundred separate conflicts, many of which were fought out on continental soil. Though other factors were probably more important, the Italian wars (1494-1559) and the Ottoman expansion in the Mediterranean and across the Balkans into central and eastern Europe both contributed to Europe’s economic centre of gravity gradually shifting to the northwest. During the naval wars between the western states—England, the Dutch Republic, France, Spain—the
technological development of ocean transportation accelerated. The creation of large fighting navies also contributed significantly to wood scarcity in the affected states, with consequences for transaction and opportunity costs. Through its effects on commercial shipping, naval warfare increased transaction costs for trade to the colonies. The impact was not limited to the actual belligerents: thus for example a large part of the northwest German linen industry, whose products were shipped via Hamburg and London to America, found itself unable to compete in the market, even though no German ruler was involved in this naval struggle.

Violent and wide-ranging conflicts such as the Thirty Years’ War (1618–48) led to devastation and depopulation of broad swathes of the countryside in the south and east of the Holy Roman Empire. In the east, this contributed to the intensification of serfdom, with consequent effects on manufacturing. Overall, the conflict advanced the political fragmentation of Germany. This indirectly increased production costs in various ways. The vastly increased costs of maintaining and supplying armies were imposed on ordinary people through the military taxation system. Above all, many territorial rulers were driven to secure the cooperation of various institutions and interest-groups by granting them privileges and then guaranteeing their enforcement. In Württemberg, for example, the ruler strengthened local communities and actively promoted the interests of craft guilds and merchant associations. The indirect consequences of warfare thus often involved a large increase in transaction costs for the wider economy in order to benefit particular groups and institutions.

Distortion of this kind could not be made good by enhanced state demand for industrial wares. Typically, the resources to pay for state purchases had to be transferred from other sectors of the economy. Previously unused resources were not mobilized, which might have stimulated industrial growth, but merely redistributed between sectors of the economy: it was a zero sum game. This often favoured particular sectors and interest-groups at the expense of the wider economy.38

The overall balance-sheet on the consequences of government action for industrial growth was thus strongly negative. State industrial policy was usually expensive and often positively harmful; at best, it might be ineffectual. As a result, many industries developed precisely in places where state penetration and regulation were at their lowest. This was especially the case for the Dutch Republic and England compared to the rest of Europe. Other branches of industry flourished successfully even though they enjoyed hardly any government support, as in the case of almost all the western European regions where linen manufacturing became established.
Urban Society

In early modern Europe, even though economic growth took place primarily in the countryside, it was unimaginable without the towns. Ever since the rise of towns in the Middle Ages, a rich network of relationships between the rural and the urban sectors had developed. Towns provided markets for industrial and agricultural produce. They were the centres of trade and the main sources of capital. The merchants, who could provide the means to bridge the gap between purchase of raw materials and sale of goods, were urban dwellers. The town was also an important marketing location: for many rural producers, demand from urban customers was an important factor in their economic calculations. But towns were much more important market centres than this: they saw not only the sale of rural industrial output to the urban population, but also the sale of foodstuffs to proto-industrial regions and of manufactured goods to agricultural regions. To the extent that this took place, a town functioned as a link between several rural regions, thereby also influencing the costs of production in the countryside.

All possible products were traded in towns, and many industrial goods produced. Above all, industries which were highly capital-intensive were based in towns: those that processed expensive raw materials (goldsmithing, silk production), needed special expert knowledge (clock-making, fine woollen cloth production), required expensive tools or machines (paper mills, calico-printing), or needed to react quickly to market changes, such as new fashions. The urban environment offered cost advantages for these industries. Expensive raw materials were more secure in towns than in the countryside. The transmission of industrial skills was possible through master craftsmen and training institutions. Urban personnel and organizations (such as the Westphalian linen Legge) undertook quality inspections and monitored production processes. And, finally, information about trends in the market and the wider economy was easier to collect in towns. For crafts, therefore, the urban environment worked in a number of ways to reduce transaction costs, thereby offering numerous benefits.

Urban industry was also linked to a European phenomenon, the study and assessment of which has led to numerous studies and much controversy. This was the phenomenon of craft guilds, which had dominated urban and, sometimes, rural manufacturing in many parts of Europe since the Middle Ages. Widely differing scholarly assessments about the importance of guilds exist, partly because of their widely varying forms. There were powerful guilds, for example in Württemberg, but also very weak ones, for example in England, the Dutch Republic, and (to a lesser extent) the southern Netherlands. There were long-established guilds, which had been in existence since the Middle Ages, and there were new guilds that were only established at the end of the seventeenth century or
even well into the eighteenth. A widely held view regards the early modern centuries as a period during which urban crafts and guilds gradually declined because of competition from rural export industries and manufactories, together with falling wages in the putting-out system. According to this interpretation, guilds definitively lost their importance as a consequence of the industrial freedom which resulted from the political transformations that took place from the second half of the eighteenth century onwards. More recent studies, however, do not confirm that guilds experienced such a linear decline. Guilds certainly declined in England and the Netherlands, but elsewhere such decline was the exception rather than the rule. Especially in Germany after the Thirty Years’ War many guilds increased in importance, while some types of guild—for example those for joiners—arose in substantial numbers only during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Further empirical studies of this phenomenon and its economic effects are needed before any definitive assessment can be reached.

Some studies emphasize the positive role of guilds. In this, one widespread argument rests on assumption rather than proof. Since guilds arose throughout Europe and existed for centuries, the argument runs, they must have performed an indispensable function within the economy, which no other institution at that time could provide. Where individual positive functions are listed, these highlight the role of guilds in ensuring production standards through quality controls, which later provided good examples for rural export industries. Guilds are also said to have defended intellectual property rights and, through the type of training they provided, to have guaranteed the efficient transmission of expert knowledge. Guild law is also supposed to have created a relatively inexpensive framework for resolving industrial conflicts. And finally, guilds are supposed to have corrected weaknesses in the capital market.

Other studies, however, regard the influence of guilds on industrial growth as much less important, since they were frequently not in a position to exercise any effective control over the market. Guilds are not supposed to have imposed low wages on their employees, excluded outsiders, or created any restrictions on women and young people. Finally, they are not supposed to have imposed any limits on output or any regulation on prices, and also not stood in the way of any new techniques or forms of production.

Critical study, however, reveals that many guilds actually did uphold the restrictive practices just listed. According to this viewpoint, the guilds opposed progress, maintained an inefficient use of resources, upheld the exercise of legal monopolies, facilitated cooperation between craft and town oligarchies, and discriminated against outsiders. This perspective traces a causal link between the weakening or disappearance of guilds and the success of industrial production. Industrial growth, it argues, was greatest in places where guilds ceased to have important economic effects, especially in England and the Netherlands. Conversely, strong guilds must have hindered growth. Examples abound
in recent research of guilds’ actions which seriously hindered the development of manufacturing: in 1527, the so-called Elberfeld ‘Garnnahrung’ (a powerful guild) prohibited the use of new-style, pedal-driven spinning wheels; in 1586, Anton Müller in Danzig was forbidden by his guild to operate an improved loom; in the seventeenth century, many German Imperial Cities prohibited the use of ribbon-looms on which up to twenty-four ribbons could be produced simultaneously; in 1685, there was even an Imperial Edict banning this, renewed in 1719; in 1730, Hans Hummel of Basel was forbidden to operate a water-driven ribbon-loom. In England during the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries machines for processing woollen cloths (combing and shearing) had repeatedly been prohibited. The anti-innovative or at best sceptical attitude of the guilds to new production processes is shown by the fact that technological innovations were introduced especially in manufacturing sectors which lacked guilds: in mining and smelting, in the weapon-making industry, and in rural crafts. Many additional examples of similar anti-innovative actions by guilds can be found.\textsuperscript{41} There are also numerous documents which demonstrate how guilds consistently and quite successfully intervened in many places in the production of and trade in industrial goods until well into the second half of the eighteenth century.\textsuperscript{42}

Far from all towns were dominated by guilds, however. A particular town’s social, political, and economic structures were a product of its function. There were capital cities, commercial and manufacturing towns, archiepiscopal and university towns, port towns, and garrison towns. Towns thus varied in being dominated by merchant guilds, craft guilds, or by quite other social groups and political forces. From the beginning of the sixteenth century, however, there was a tendency in many European towns towards securing themselves against upward social mobility and perceived penetration by outsiders. The influence of some urban interest groups was so great that they affected the development of entire territories or regions. Thus the German Hanse is nowadays viewed less as an urban association than as an interest-group of the leading mercantile towns of northern and central Germany. It was a social network of patricians, who conducted their own wars and whose influence in the earlier sixteenth century impeded the development of an autonomous native commercial sector in Scandinavia, so that after the Hanse’s disappearance the nobility took over trading functions there.\textsuperscript{43}

Urban manufacturing during the early modern period still requires considerable detailed research. The precise forms which craft guilds and merchant guilds assumed remained very diverse and their influence varied considerably. More empirical studies are required in order to reach a more accurate and detailed assessment of the role of these urban interest-groups. Where such studies exist, however, most provide evidence of craft guilds and merchant guilds creating or defending structures or practices that benefited their
own members but impeded growth and substantially increased the costs of manufacturing.

**Conclusion**

What were the reasons for Europe’s differentiated industrial developments? And why did the rise of manufacturing in some early modern regions lead to ultimate factory industrialization, whereas in others it resulted either in de-industrialization or a stronger orientation towards agriculture? Historians continue to answer these questions in different ways.

Some argue that natural resources crucially influenced economic development. England’s unique path, according to this view, was caused by its fertile fields and pastures, its mild climate, its surplus of water, its large coal and ore deposits, and its island position—factors that were not all found in combination in any other European country. This line of argument can be extended even further: the key step towards industrialization, the argument would run, consisted crucially in overcoming the early modern energy crisis caused by wood scarcity, by exploiting coal resources. Other states with flourishing early modern industries, such as the Dutch Republic, were not able to make the transition to factory industrialization because they lacked these natural endowments.

A different perspective, by contrast, seeks to identify structural features which distinguished England from continental states. It emphasizes England’s large landholdings and widespread wage-labour. These are supposed to have encouraged faster growth of agricultural productivity, and promoted both an early shift of labour and capital into industry, and England’s unusual concentration on textile and metal production, which did not occur in any other country. The economic expansion which resulted occurred much more slowly in England, it is pointed out, than in other states, which had England’s development path as a blueprint.44

A third perspective regards the growth of manufacturing less from the perspective of England and factory industrialization, and instead focuses on population growth and the context of regional variation. According to this view, demographic growth created problems and opportunities which resulted in widely differing conditions for the expansion of manufacturing in different European states. Population rise increased demand for food, prices of foodstuffs, and rents for land, but reduced wages because it increased the supply of labour, the most important input into manufacturing. Governments, the Church, and private interest-groups such as craft and merchant guilds sought to profit from the growing polarization of wealth.45 In eastern Europe the result
was the ‘second serfdom’; in the west, proto-industrialization. A final perspective combines all these factors, adding proximity to markets to the previous emphasis on population growth, labour supply, and the availability of raw materials.\textsuperscript{46} Still other approaches deny the possibility of a Europe-wide explanation, and conclude that the whole process of industrial growth was so complex and dynamic that it made ‘any neat and tidy analysis virtually impossible’.\textsuperscript{47}

In the most general terms, therefore, the varied development of manufacturing in early modern Europe was the result of structural differences between regions. Yet this is a very unsatisfactory conclusion, and we should instead ask how these various structural features affected the costs of manufacturing. Such an approach demonstrates, first, that natural resources and geographical location exerted considerable influence on whether manufacturing developed in a particular region, which industry it was, and what its prospects for growth were. But innate cost advantages were not the whole story. As transportation costs fell in the course of the early modern period, manufacturing depended less on its location and local situation. Nature cannot explain why Germany, for example, with its rich supply of raw materials, good soils, navigable rivers, access to two oceans, plentiful water power, and easy links to international markets, was economically much less developed than England by 1800.

Industrial costs were crucially affected by social institutions, we have seen. Everywhere in Europe where traditional institutions such as craft guilds, merchant guilds, village communities, and feudal landlords remained strong or obtained legal privileges, manufacturing costs were higher than they needed to be. These institutions influenced where industrial production could take place, how much of it was possible, who was permitted to work in it, how large its output could be, what price could be charged for its wares, and at which markets it could aim. In some places, social institutions such as these regulated all aspects of market participation. Where this happened, it typically took place at the expense of marginal social groups: poorer strata of the population, foreigners, Jews, and especially women. This meant that in many parts of Europe more than half the population was restricted in its decisions about production and thus also in its capacities as consumers. It also meant that social institutions such as craft guilds, merchant guilds, the manorial system, the village community, the Church, and so on could redistribute resources toward powerful groups in society, often by means of an interpenetration between political and economic power. This ensured that special-interest groups obtained artificially high profits, but it increased the costs of production and damaged competitive capacity, especially against the background of early modern globalization. Only when the power of such institutions was restricted or destroyed altogether, putting an end to the economic marginalization of numerous groups in
society, was the way clear for successful growth of manufacturing—and, ultimately industrialization.

Further Reading


Kriedte, Peter, Hans Medick, and Jürgen Schlumbohm. Industrialization before Industrialization (Cambridge, 1982).


Notes:


(3.) Jan de Vries, The Industrious Revolution: Consumer Behaviour and the Household Economy, 1650 to the Present (Cambridge, 2008), 7–9. See also the section of the present chapter entitled ‘Explanations for Industrial Diversification’.


(6.) Reininghaus, Gewerbe in der Frühen Neuzeit, 7 (generally), 20 (on rural guilds, which have hitherto hardly been studied).

(7.) This was the case, for example, when a linen-merchant provided a number of spinners with flax, sometimes also with spinning-wheels, purchased the yarn from them at a previously agreed price, produced linen cloth from it, then took the linen cloth to a bleachery, a dyer, and so on.

(8.) Peter Kriedte, Hans Medick, and Jürgen Schlumbohm, Industrialization before Industrialization (Cambridge, 1982), 201–224.

(9.) Reininghaus, Gewerbe in der Frühen Neuzeit, 4f.


(12.) On this and the following sections, see Hermann Kellenbenz, ‘The Organization of Industrial Production’, 488–543; in addition, Reininghaus, Gewerbe in der Frühen Neuzeit, 18–23; Luise Schorn-Schütte, Geschichte Europas in der Frühen Neuzeit.
(Paderborn, 2009), 48f; and Günter Vogler, *Europas Aufbruch in die Neuzeit: 1500-1650* (Stuttgart, 2003), 27.


(19.) *Absolutely* worse paid means that women were paid less for one hour of work (for example). Here one could still argue that as a result of their physique they could achieve less in one hour than men. But women were also *relatively* worse paid, by which is meant that they also received significantly lower wages than a man for the same output. See also Merry E. Wiesner-Hanks, *Early Modern Europe, 1450–1789* (Cambridge, 2006), 191.

(20.) Admittedly, this example leaves out of account several other factors. For instance, it might also have been the case that women tended to pursue domestic activities because in their culture it was expected that females would care more about looking after children
or ill or elderly household members. Another possibility is that laws excluded women from certain activities. This example also excludes other alternative resource inputs, for example the opportunity of undertaking cottage-industrial spinning or weaving.

(21.) See, for example, E. A. Wrigley, *Energy and the English Industrial Revolution* (Cambridge, 2010).

(22.) Kellenbenz, ‘The Organization of industrial Production’, 503-505.


(24.) For instance, in the Westphalian region of Tecklenburg, a very dense linen-producing region in northwest Germany, during the crisis of the linen industry in the 1830s the population shifted over to some extent from selling linen cloth to selling raw hemp: the opportunity costs of engaging in industry rather than agriculture had become too high because of the decline in linen prices. Küpker, Weber, *Hausierer, Hollandgänger*, 135–155.


(26.) Examples are the Dutch shipbuilding industry, which arose in a country without significant forests, and the many western European textile industries (especially cotton-producing ones), which imported raw materials or yarn. See also Ogilvie, ‘The Beginnings of Industrialization’, 278f.


(30.) See the section in this chapter entitled ‘Europe’s Major Industries’.

(31.) For more on agrarian developments in eastern-central and eastern Europe, see ch. 16, this volume.


(34.) From the very extensive research literature, two titles are especially important. The first is Michael Kopsidis, *Agrarentwicklung: historische Agrarrevolutionen und*
Entwicklungsökonomie (Stuttgart, 2006), which compares the English agricultural revolution with the Westphalian one and provides a survey of the most recent literature. The second is Stefan Brakensiek, Agrarreform and Ländliche Gesellschaft. Die Privatisierung der Marken in Nordwest Deutschland, 1750–1850 (Paderborn, 1991).

(35.) In general on this section, see Ogilvie, ‘The Beginnings of Industrialization’, 290–296, which provides many examples of the consequences of state intervention. For other parts of Europe, see Kellenbenz, ‘The Organization of Industrial Production’, 480–483 and 488–543.

(36.) For Germany, see Ogilvie, ‘The Beginnings of Industrialization’, 290–296.

(37.) One example of this was the introduction of excise taxes in Prussia. The Prussian excise was an urban consumption tax, a sort of internal customs charge on foodstuffs, drinks, manufactured goods, cattle, and many other items. The Prussian excise law compelled all sales of the goods affected to take place in the towns, at whose gates customers had to pay the tax. The Prussian excise caused a drastic increase in food prices and burdened the marketing of manufactured products. In addition, it increased transaction costs for industries in a number of ways. First, all goods had to be transported into towns (and often back out again to rural consumers). Second, the excise created incentives for smuggling, which acted like an increase in costs via the threatened penalties. The administrative costs for collecting the taxes, the monitoring, the imposition of penalties, and the consequences of issuing town privileges to small localities all consumed a large share of the revenues. And since the excise taxes were particularly heavy on foreign wares, they burdened trade with neighbouring territories and provoked those states to implement counter-measures. In combination, all these effects were so harmful that recent assessments have concluded that the revenues would have been higher without the excise than with it because the economy would have flourished so much more in their absence.

(38.) Ogilvie, ‘The Beginnings of Industrialization’, 293f.

(39.) Reininghaus, Gewerbe in der Frühen Neuzeit, 15f.


(41.) See, for example, Ogilvie, ‘The Beginnings of Industrialization’, 287.
(42.) Many cases can be found, for example, in the essays in Heinz-Gerhard Haupt, ed., *Das Ende der Zünfte. Ein europäischer Vergleich* (Göttingen, 2002) on Germany, Austria, the Netherlands, France, Italy, Spain, Sweden, and Hungary.

(43.) Schorn-Schütte, *Geschichte Europas in der Frühen Neuzeit*, 73f.


(47.) Kellenbenz, ‘The Organization of Industrial Production’, 548.

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Abstract and Keywords

This chapter reviews major themes in the history of Western Christianity from the onset of the Western Schism (1378) to the opening of the Council of Trent (1345). Topics include late medieval reform movements, trends in lay religious belief and activity, the papacy and conciliarism, the dominant schools of philosophical and theological thought, heresy and orthodoxy, Renaissance humanism, the early Protestant Reformation and contemporaneous Catholic renewal, and the relationship between Church and state. The scope of the chapter encompasses developments within Western Christianity as well as in its relationship to Eastern Christianity, Judaism, and Islam, as well as its expansion into Asia, Africa, and the Americas. The chapter also considers the effects of general historiographical developments over the last century on church history, such as overarching trends within intellectual and institutional history on the one hand and social and cultural history on the other.

Keywords: Christianity, Church and state, heresy, papacy, Reformation

Early Modern Christianity: What’s in a Name?

A chapter about Christianity’s long fifteenth century. Historians of Europe more commonly speak of a ‘long’ sixteenth century. The usage is in part inspired by a general desire of historians to liberate themselves from the tyranny of the even century. That particular usage is inspired in part by a recognition that the remarkable changes of what is called the Reformation can only be understood within a broader chronological field of view that includes developments in the earlier century and outcomes in the subsequent
one. ‘Long’ can also suggest that the defining themes and characteristics of the century
developed in ways tortuous, tortured, even exhausting ... what, from so many
perspectives, the sixteenth century surely was for Christians and their Church. By many
lights, so too the fifteenth century.¹

Demonstrating the full historical coherence of Christianity in this period is an impossible
task. The risks of oversimplification, overstatement, and contrivance are great. Through
most of the twentieth century historians did not bother to try. The centuries before and
after the fifteenth have generally struck scholars as the more eventful. Even today more
is written about the fifteenth century as a prelude to the sixteenth than for its own sake.²

Alternatively, medieval histories have commonly taken the thirteenth century as a
highpoint. One such volume, now a century old, is titled without sarcasm *The Thirteenth:
Greatest of Centuries.*³ A more typical, recent work on what is known as the high Middle
Ages begins at the turn of the millennium with a set of reforms instigated by German
emperors, French abbots, and Italian prelates and concludes with a section on the
fourteenth century that highlights ‘famine and plague’, ‘political and social violence’,
and ‘the Church in crisis’. With tags like that who wouldn’t want to leap over the
next few generations and get straight to the Reformation!⁴

The betwixt-and-between lot of the fifteenth century leads sometimes to its being linked
along with the fourteenth century to the Middle Ages and called ‘late medieval’, and
sometimes to being considered the harbinger of developments to come and called ‘early
modern’. How the fifteenth century began being taken more seriously on its own terms is
a complicated story and in any detail beyond the scope of this chapter. Reference to two
scholarly works will hopefully suffice. Huizinga’s *Autumn of the Middle Ages*, first
published in 1919, is not a history of late medieval Christianity per se and did not argue
that the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries were a happy time. Huizinga did understand
the late Middle Ages to be, as the title of the work suggests, a fruitful period. The work
disputed that the so-called Renaissance represented a clean break from the Middle Ages.
*The Autumn of the Middle Ages* opened the possibility of studying the ‘later Middle Ages’
on its own terms with an eye to both the origins and the consequences of late medieval
fruitfulness.⁵ The other much later work, Francis Oakley’s *The Western Church in the
Later Middle Ages* (1979), was more properly a history of Christianity. In it, Oakley
sketched a way of understanding developments in the Church as more and other than
those of decay; indeed, Oakley found considerable vitality. The work also brings together
analysis of multiple dimensions of religious experience—institutional, devotional, and
intellectual. Moreover, Oakley’s tone and judgements reflected an uncommon scholarly
objectivity regarding the religious disputes of the era, avoiding the confessionalized
apologetic that characterized so much writing on church history up to that point.⁶
Once events of the fifteenth century are legitimated as worthy of their own proper evaluation—more than the detritus of plague, social violence, and ecclesiastical crisis and beyond the shadow of the sixteenth century Reformation—questions emerge as to how to approach the period positively. Responses vary according to historical method and topic, as other chapters in this book testify. The topic of Christianity as assigned to this chapter includes a set of challenges proper to it. They begin with the complexity of terms like ‘Christianity’ and ‘the Church’. Neither lends itself to unequivocally succinct definition. Either can be analysed with distinct methods and for answers to narrower thematic questions. An intellectual historian, for example, might focus exclusively on theological and philosophical ideas, highlighting, say, the struggles within universities between the Realists and the Nominalists. While such a history would not likely concern itself with parish organization, missionary efforts, or the intrigues of church–state relations, the results could still succeed in giving a reader rich and genuine insight into the era.

The approach of social history that developed beginning in the 1960s had a tremendous effect on the study of historical Christianity. It highlighted how incomplete most church history had been up to that point by privileging doctrinal matters. Social historians moved beyond the writings of ecclesiastical and theological elites and turned to investigate Christianity as experienced and practised in broad swathes of medieval society. Social historians have been especially attentive to particular social cohorts sharing such common characteristics as class and occupation, gender, family membership, and so on. Social historians worked on the assumption—once novel, now self-evident—that the experience of Christianity for a baker in Tours was different from that of a prince-archbishop in Mainz, and the differences were worth uncovering and studying. Furthermore, social historians had the sense—again at first innovative, but today obvious—that such issues as the finer points of the relationship between God’s absolute and ordained power, a hotly disputed topic among fifteenth-century theologians, did not make much immediate difference in the daily religious life and musings of either the baker or the prince.

The challenge was to figure out what did. An important consequence of the social historians’ efforts has been the seriousness with which popular religion—religion from below, as it were—is now taken. In this regard, the fifteenth century has been the beneficiary of the expanding interests of Reformation historians, among the most influential of whom was Robert W. Scribner. Indeed it is due to social historical approaches (and yet later methodological changes that led to the new ‘cultural history’) that Christianity is, in fact, more studied as ‘religion’ than as a body of doctrine, and that historians of Christianity in any epoch are more inclined to describe themselves today as historians of religion than as church historians. Topics that appeared scarcely, if at all, in a volume of church history in the nineteenth or early twentieth century now stand at the
heart of twenty-first-century attempts to understand medieval and early modern Christianity: for example, religious movements, whether rejected outright by the papacy like the Wyclifites, or brought into the mainstream, like the Modern Devotion; the structure and development of municipal religious organizations like parishes and confraternities; and pious practices and devotional tendencies particular to certain kinds of Christians (lay women, nuns, soldiers, and so forth).¹⁹

The development from the study of church history to the history of Christianity has thus made coherent overviews, even of only a single century, more rather than less difficult. This chapter begins with a pope’s return to Rome from Avignon in the 1370s, an event of great institutional and political significance that promised to solve one problem, namely the absence of the bishop of Rome from his diocese, but created another, the Western Schism, on account of an ensuing competition lasting four decades between multiple claimants to the Chair of Peter. The chapter concludes with the celebration of a Mass in the cathedral of the modestly sized imperial free city of Trent on 13 December 1545. The Mass marked the opening of a church council convened to solve new issues of ecclesial and theological disunity within the Church, whose most famous instigator, Martin Luther, died two months later on 18 February.

Neither the Protestant Reformers nor the council fathers at Trent achieved the unity they sought. Yet from a perspective outside of confessionalized apologetic, unity is not necessarily a virtue; nor division a vice. Indeed the ability to sustain variety and discord without devolving into social chaos, as we shall see, was among fifteenth-century Christianity’s most striking characteristics. As papal claimants competed for support from the crowned and mitred of Europe’s elite, religious congregations across the continent found themselves expanding and invigorated by newly reconceived ideals of religious life. New mystics like Julian of Norwich were receiving their revelations, and the insights of older ones, like Johannes Tauler and Bridget of Sweden, were enjoying attention as never before. Expanding confraternities, growing chantry burses, and urban, ecclesiastical building projects indicate deepening levels of religious participation among the laity. Movements like the Modern Devotion and the Beguines indicate a kind of creative instability that in the final analysis bespeak vitality, rather than decline. The following pages will examine several aspects of this fifteenth-century vitality, it is hoped, without exaggerated insinuation of their interconnectedness or distorting anticipation of the tumultuous events of the sixteenth century. These include debates over the organization of the Church, religious movements within the orders and among the laity, theological conflicts and creativity at the universities, and reform movements under the auspices of the Roman Church and outside of it.
The Chronological Bookends

The return to Rome from Avignon of Pope Gregory XI (1329–78) was more the realization of an eventuality than the dramatic repudiation of what was already in the fourteenth century called the Church’s Babylonian captivity. Born in a small village in Limousin on the frontier of a conflict between the English and the French called the Hundred Years’ War, Pierre Roger de Beaufort entered the service of the Church during the reign of his uncle Clement VI (r. 1342–52), who created him cardinal, as was the custom of papal uncles up to the eighteenth century. The conclave that elected Pierre pope in December 1370 consisted largely of his countrymen from Limousin. He had himself ordained a priest on 4 January 1371 and was crowned pope the following day, taking the name Gregory. Among his earliest diplomatic ventures was a failed attempt at reconciling the French and English kings. His most noteworthy enterprise other than his return to Rome was his condemnation of propositions associated with the Oxford theologian John Wycliffe (c. 1330–84) in five bulls. The condemned propositions concerned the nature of the sacraments and the valid exercise of the priestly office, the legitimacy of monastic and mendicant religious life (monks, nuns, and friars), and the lawfulness of church control of property. The bulls likewise affirmed the authority of popes in temporal matters and the right of secular authority to intervene in ecclesiastical affairs.

Gregory XI solemnly entered Rome on 17 January 1377. He had returned to pacify the civil unrest that had destabilized his control of the Papal States. The Papal States provided the popes, in addition to political autonomy and financial resources, with recurrent challenges even since the eighth century when Frankish kings first constituted the region, offered it to the papacy, and promised their support and defence. Thus had begun the peculiar entanglement between German emperors and the papacy that lasted until Napoleon’s dissolution of the Holy Roman Empire of the German Nation in 1806. The immediate impulse behind Gregory’s return was linked to Florence’s part in the latest unrest, the city’s subsequent severe suppression by the cardinal legate in upper Italy, Robert of Geneva (1342–94), and the mediation of, among others, the Dominican tertiary and religious visionary Catherine of Sienna (1347–80). Once in Rome Gregory found that political tranquility did not come as easily or quickly as he had hoped and considered following the example of his predecessor, Urban V (r. 1362–70), who managed only three years in Rome before returning to Avignon in disgust. Gregory died, however, before he could either bring peace to the Papal States or return to France.

The conclave following his death in March 1378 took place under threat of violence from Romans who feared a return of the papacy to Avignon. The consistory, including its French majority, voted unanimously for a Neapolitan clerical bureaucrat, Bartolomeo
Prignano, who took the name Urban (1378–89). A notable Catholic Church historian of
the nineteenth century called Urban capricious, violent, and imprudent. The French
cardinals consequently withdrew about 100 kilometres to the southeast of Rome in late
summer and repudiated their election of Prignano on the grounds that the threatened
violence of the Roman mob had put them under duress during the consistory. Then they
voted into the Chair of Peter the very cardinal whose rough treatment of the Florentines
had necessitated Gregory’s return to Rome in the first place. Robert of Geneva took the
name Clement (r. 1378–94), and his election marks the beginning of the Western Schism.
Princes and bishops, religious orders, and monastic houses were called on to pledge their
loyalties to one or the other of these popes. Briefly a third came into play. Latin
Christendom was not to be religiously unified under a single undisputed claimant to Saint
Peter’s throne until the Council of Constance (1414–18). Appealing to the earliest
imperial traditions, the German king Sigismund of Luxemburg (1368–1437) deemed it
fitting to intervene. The council cardinals elected Odo Colonna pope, who became Martin
V (r. 1417–31).

Although at first glance this sketch of this chapter’s starting point foregrounds high
ecclesiastical politics in the older tradition of church history, the transition from
Babylonian Captivity to Western Schism in fact allows the foregrounding of a far broader
range of issues pertinent to European Christianity. These include theological conformity
and dissent at both learned and popular levels as the reforming movements within the
religious orders and beyond that debated what the Christian life should look like.
Catherine of Sienna’s cameo raises the issue of women’s religious experience. The
reactions to multiple simultaneous papal claimants highlight not only political division but
regional variations within European Christianity. In short, even the barest sketch of the
Church’s political history draws the historian of Christianity immediately into issues of
broader social and cultural concern.

**Conciliarism**

A glance at either the Western Schism or the Council of Trent draws into view issues of
church structure, a theme which occupied Christians extensively in the fifteenth
century. The desire to heal the Schism stimulated a debate over whether a church council
—a meeting of bishops, abbots, senior prelates, and possibly in some capacity even
powerful lay figures—had the authority to depose a pope. The debate went to the heart of
the Church’s constitution: who, in the earthly order, had the last word in matters of
governance? The idea of convening a council to solve the problem of the schism soon
emerged among theologians at the University of Paris. A second generation of these
theologians—most influentially Pierre D’Ailly (1351–1420), Jean Gerson (1363–1429), and
Francesco Zabarella (1360–1417)—instigated a sustained and ultimately successful campaign for the convening of a council.

The meeting of roughly a hundred prelates of both Avignonese and Roman obediences in Pisa in 1409 with the intent of solving the schism by council suggested that the conciliarist position had gained the upper hand. Justifying themselves with the principle that ‘the salvation of the people is the highest law’, the council fathers voted to depose the two sitting popes and elected a new pope in their place. Large parts of Europe subsequently switched their allegiance to him. Neither of the two sitting popes, however, accepted the council’s authority. Now with three simultaneous papal claimants, the king of Germany (and soon to be Holy Roman Emperor) Sigismund began advocating for another church council. John XXIII, who had presided over Pisa and was the second in its papal line, acceded, summoning a council to Constance in southwestern Germany, with the expectation that he would be affirmed as the one legitimate pope. The council fathers at Constance, voting for the first time in national blocks rather than as individuals, proceeded to force Gregory XII, the pope in Rome, to resign, to depose John XXIII and have him imprisoned, and to excommunicate Avignonese pope Benedict XIII. Before electing a new pontiff, the council passed two decrees pertaining to the authority of councils. The first, *Haec sancta synodus* (1415), asserted the supremacy of a general council over a pope. The second, *Frequens* (1417), defined specific intervals at which councils had to be summoned. Once the council adjourned, the new pope Martin showed no interest in fostering in practice the conciliarism called for in those decrees. Moreover, more radical conciliarists alienated moderate sympathizers both during the council and after. Several major proponents at Constance retracted their support of conciliarism in later years. One of them, the famed humanist Enea Silvio Piccolomini (1405–64), became pope in 1447 and issued the decree *Execrabilis* in 1460, which condemned all future appeals over a pope to a general council. The Fifth Lateran Council condemned the theory itself in 1516.

Despite the declining influence of conciliarism as a model for governance in the Catholic Church, the legacy of conciliar theory is considered important in several respects. First, conciliar theory foreshadowed new ecclesiastical structures developed by Protestant Reformers in the sixteenth century. Second, within the Catholic Church, conciliar theory continued to inspire resistance to the idea of total papal hegemony, an extremist position that had never been effectively claimed in the Middle Ages but was recurrently turned to from the sixteenth century on. And third, the debates between conciliarists and papal supremacists are regarded as an antecedent to later debates between absolutists and constitutionalists in the realm of secular politics.
Reforming Movements

The debates over church structure that culminated in the council of Constance were part of a larger and more complex concern to reform the Church 'in head and members', in the words of the council's own decrees. The call for reform in Christianity is as old as the religion itself. One is hard pressed to identify a more enduring or more ubiquitous Christian tenet than that the empirical reality of the Church fails to meet its creedal ideals...but should. The Western Schism was a scandal because it was an obvious crime against the unity of the Church. In the fifteenth century reform movements were everywhere. Among the most important were those cultivated in the established religious orders. These reform movements were often inspired by a concern that the life of the members of the order did not live up—collectively or individually—to the ideals articulated in the founding documents of the order or models of Christian life drawn from the Bible. Areas of consistent attention among reformist monks and mendicants include the management of property by individual religious and communities, the strictness with which cloister was kept (that is, the ease of departure from or access to the monastery precincts), and the standards of communal and personal prayer. Reformers commonly took their ideals for religious life into the streets and marketplaces to spread their reforming programme more broadly throughout the Church.

Observantism—as these fifteenth-century reform movements are called—spread within religious orders in a variety of ways. Monastic reform movements, such as the Bursfeld, Melk, and Kastl reforms, began in single monasteries and spread house by house voluntarily. The networks established mechanisms by which the sustained reform of individual monasteries could be monitored and reviewed. In the case of mendicant orders, Observance movements were encouraged by central authorities. Although at the beginning the Dominican Observance spread, for example, house by house, a reforming model was ultimately adopted by the whole order and implemented within provinces. Highly charismatic figures emerged from the reforming mendicant orders whose impact went well beyond the walls of their own priories. Bernadino of Siena (1380–1444) was an Observant Franciscan whose public sermons condemning luxury, witchcraft, sexual licence, etc. filled the largest marketplaces with listeners. He organized enormous 'bonfires of the vanities' at which citizens turned over their mirrors, playing cards, extravagant clothing, and other 'occasions of sin' to be burned in great public spectacles. The Observant Dominican Girolamo Savonarola (1452–98) famously persuaded the city of Florence to implement a stringent moral code. Gangs of enforcers roved the streets, and neighbours spied upon and denounced one another. Not just ascetic moralists, Bernadino and Savonarola encouraged their listeners to a deep, affective relationship with Christ through prayer and insisted that genuine love of God express itself in charitable
treatment of the neighbour and the needy. The influence of such popular reformers could be far-reaching and inspired ambivalent reactions among the powerful. Indeed, the range of reactions is exemplified by what happened to Bernadino and Savonarola themselves: the former was canonized; the latter, executed.

Concurrently, movements were developing outside of the established religious orders. The most important such movement is the so-called ‘Modern Devotion’, whose origins are to be found in the life of Geert Groote (1340–84) and the Sisters and Brothers of the Common Life. Educated in Paris, Groote left a successful teaching career in Cologne to become an itinerant preacher in Utrecht in 1379. He spoke so energetically against the corruption he saw in the clergy that the local bishop revoked his licence to preach. Although he died shortly thereafter, he had organized female followers into a voluntary association—the Sisters of the Common Life—that allowed them to pursue the religious ideals and way of life he had taught but without vows. Some years later a first house for male followers was founded, also in the Low Countries. The Sisters and Brothers of the Common Life became increasingly involved in schooling, which became a way that their religious ideals spread. Some of the brothers founded a religious house in Windesheim that combined Groote’s mysticism and religious ideals with the more traditional form of religious life of the Augustinian canons. Their model spread, first in the Netherlands and then to Germany and Switzerland. A group of sisters later followed suit.¹¹

The Brothers and Sisters of the Common Life and the Congregation of Windesheim were the chief representatives of the Modern Devotion. Its classic expression is The Imitation of Christ, likely written by Thomas à Kempis (1380–1471). The Imitation is a collection of prayers and spiritual reflections designed to encourage personal holiness. The book’s four sections offer advice on the spiritual life and prayer, encouragement to the virtues and away from vices, and reflections on dispositions of the soul; the last section is a meditation on the Eucharist. Roots of the Modern Devotion have been identified in Carthusian monasticism and forms of mysticism that flourished in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries in the Rhineland and Lowlands, the male and female mendicant religious houses, and the Beguines. Especially through the schools of the Sisters and Brothers of the Common Life, the Modern Devotion inspired many mendicant and monastic Observants and influenced such leading churchmen as the philosopher Nicholas of Cusa (1401–64), the humanist Erasmus of Rotterdam (1466–1536), and the founder of the Jesuits, Ignatius Loyola (1491–1556).

The religious vitality of Observantism and the new religious associations finds its lay analogue in the confraternities. Confraternities were voluntary associations of prayer and mutual aid for lay Christians. Confraternities had existed throughout the Middle Ages but reached their highest level of significance in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries. Each confraternity developed an identity for itself based on a freely chosen set of spiritual,
liturgical, and charitable obligations. Confraternities were associated with particular festivals, processions, and religious practices. Preparing for the afterlife and praying for the dead were key attractions of the confraternities, but these associations were also fully involved in the social, political, charitable, and cultural life of their communities. They cared for widows and orphans, sponsored hospitals, and supported local parish life. They were principally lay, but could include clerics and religious. Only a few, such as the Dominicans’ Rosary confraternity, were fostered by religious orders. The vitality of the confraternal movement continued into the sixteenth century. Although Protestant Reformers viewed its emphasis on good works and prayers for the dead with antipathy, in Catholic Europe confraternities were central to the early modern renewal.

Some popular movements failed to gain approval from civil and ecclesiastical authorities. Among these, the followers of John Wycliffe (1320–84) and Jan Hus (1369–1415) stand at the forefront. Lollardy was England’s first heretical movement of significance. It was inspired by Wycliffe’s critique of the Church’s teaching authority and its claims to mediate between God and humanity through the sacraments. He and the Lollards were vociferously critical of monastic life and the Church’s material wealth. A debate in Parliament in 1410 over a Lollard proposal to deprive the Church of its wealth suggests that the movement had significant support in fifteenth-century English society. A failed uprising ultimately inspired the crown to a diligent prosecution of Lollardy as heresy. Lollards suffered recurrent persecution throughout the fifteenth century.

Hussitism, like Lollardy, was inspired by a university professor and gained significant regional appeal, in this case in Bohemia. Hus followed Wycliffe in rejecting papal authority and identified the Bible and only the earliest doctrinal speculations as the ‘Law of God’. The Hussites’ demand to receive Communion in both species (consecrated bread and wine) became an emblem of the movement as a whole. Hus himself was tried, condemned, and executed for heresy at the council of Constance. Bohemian Hussites consequently rose up in open rebellion. Although several times splitting into moderate and radical branches, the Hussites, whose supporters included significant portions of both noble and common strata of Czech society, maintained their resistance. Through negotiations first at the council of Basel and then with the emperor, they succeeded in establishing an alternative ecclesiastical structure within which they followed Hus’s teachings and worshipped more or less unmolested by the Catholic hierarchy.

Technological developments fostered much of this religious vitality and reforming energy. The single most important was of course Johannes Gutenberg’s invention of moveable type. The industry for manuscript reproduction had been steadily growing since the twelfth century. Expanding publishing houses allowed the reproducing of written material to increase exponentially. While Gutenberg (1395–1468) is especially famous for his early printing of the Bible, the treasury of religious texts reproduced in this period is...
of great variety. Liturgical manuals, sermon collections, and theological treatises were among the most reproduced volumes of the late fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries. So too books intended to inspire personal holiness: for example, prayer books, collections of psalms, saints’ lives, Ludolph of Saxony’s *Vita Christi*, and the *Imitation of Christ*. The printing press enhanced the popularity and accessibility of medieval catechisms too, such as Gerson’s *A.B.C.’s for Simple Folk* in French, the English humanist John Colet’s *Cathecyzon* in Latin, and Dederich Goelde’s *Mirror of the Christian* in German. These handbooks of Christian doctrine continued to be composed and widely printed in the sixteenth century. Martin Luther and Peter Canisius were masterful composers of catechisms as instruments in the Protestant and Catholic efforts to win and educate adherents in Germany; similarly the *Heidelberg Catechism* was a collective effort produced for Calvinists. The printing press was also used for broadsheets, which were single sheets, that could pair verbal exhortation with didactic illustration. As competition among Catholic and Protestant confessions developed in the sixteenth century, broadsheets became an important medium for the dissemination of denominational apogetics and polemics.14

**Latin Christianity in Relation to Others: Old World Jews, Muslims, and Greeks**

In the fifteenth century European Christians were encountering religious difference within Europe and beyond in ways more sustained than ever before. Closest to home, and intermingled in their own society, were Europe’s Jews. Jews had been expelled from England in 1290 and from France in 1394. By the fifteenth century, the largest concentrations of Jews in the Latin West were in Spain and the Rhineland with additional populations on the Italian peninsula. The history of the Jews in late medieval Europe is that of an established minority gradually losing its standing and being turned into the ultimate outsider. The year 1391 is customarily taken as an especially lamentable turning point in the relationship of Christians and Jews in the Iberian peninsula. Anti-Jewish persecutions and riots broke out in Spain. Pressured conversions began in unprecedented numbers. The general tendency of co-existence (convivencia) forged during the Muslim period on the peninsula (al-Andalus) and sustained in complex ways in the Christian High and late Middle Ages yielded to the popular and legal hostility of an increasingly inward-focused Spanish Christian society. This synopsis has undergone significant critique and revision in the last decade; nonetheless, the crown’s entrusting to the Spanish Inquisition and other levers of state power the task of eradicating Jewish religion and culture beginning in the late fifteenth century indisputably ended what peaceful co-existence and Jewish enculturation had characterized earlier times.15 In a related vein, a new
intellectual curiosity arose in the late fifteenth century among the Renaissance humanists in Hebrew, which along with Latin and Greek was recognized as one of the three sacred languages. Proponents of Hebrew studies, nonetheless, often faced bitter opposition for advocating the study of Hebrew language and literature; and most, including most famously John Reuchlin, ultimately understood its benefit functionally for the sake of understanding Christianity and with the potential benefit of increasing Jewish conversion to Christianity.\(^{16}\)

The encounter of the Christian West and Mediterranean Islam was similarly complex. The regular points of contact in the later Middle Ages were of three kinds: military, such as through the eastward incursion of crusaders into the Levant and the westward incursion of the Ottoman Turks into the Balkans; social, principally interactions with the remnant Muslim population on the Iberian peninsula; and commercial, transactions along the southern and eastern rim of the Mediterranean. By the fifteenth century little was left of what the crusaders had achieved from a military or political standpoint: Cyprus remained in the Western sphere of influence until 1571, and pilgrim traffic continued with little molestation. In contrast, the military successes of the Ottoman Turks gave rise to varying political, religious, and cultural concerns. The Turks had a firm foothold in the Balkans by the end of the fourteenth century, occupied the city of Constantinople in 1453, and were playing a third-party role in European power politics by allying with the French against the Habsburgs by the 1540s. Christian intellectuals owed an enormous debt of gratitude to Islamic scholars of Greco-Roman antiquity who had inspired significant reworking of Christian theology and philosophy in the high Middle Ages, but in the fifteenth century the Christian learned position on Islam was that it was a false religion, at best perhaps a further distorted version of the Arian Christian heresy of late antiquity.

The fall of Constantinople to the Ottomans in 1453 caused great consternation. From the West’s perspective, it marked the end of the Roman empire and the loss of an ancient centre of Christianity. Humanists called it ‘Homer’s second death’, and Pope Pius II unsuccessfully attempted to raise a new crusade. The event draws attention to the troubled late medieval relationship between the papacy and the Greek Church, whose institutional centre had been Constantinople. The two branches of Christianity had considered each other in schism since the eleventh century. In 1438–45 representatives of the two churches met in Ferrara, Florence, and Rome in hopes of reconciliation. It produced a decree of union (‘Let the heavens rejoice’) which articulated mutually acceptable propositions on topics that had theretofore separated the two churches: on the Holy Spirit, the kind of bread used for the Eucharist, purgatory, and papal supremacy. The Western representatives also agreed to military assistance for the Byzantines against the Ottomans. However, when the Greek representatives returned home, a synod of their leaders rejected the reconciliation. All the while, papal legates
were also negotiating with Orthodox Christians in the Middle East to accept direct papal jurisdiction in some form. Agreements were reached with Syrian Monophysites, Egyptian Copts, Chaldeans, and Maronites among others in exchange for papal recognition of their liturgies and a political protection that the Byzantines could no longer guarantee.17

Latin Christianity in Relation to Others: The Age of Exploration

The first sustained effort to spread Latin Christianity beyond the Mediterranean world of its origins also began in the fifteenth century. The ecclesiastical efforts progressed hand in hand with the globalization of European political and economic power. Theological motivations were central to Columbus’s own voyages: he hoped to outflank the Muslims by circumnavigating the globe, regain Jerusalem for Christendom, and thereby usher in the Second Coming of Christ. The Spanish, who funded his voyages—to be sure with a full complex of political and economic motives of their own—could not help but also be moved by a similar religious desire, having just occupied the last Muslim stronghold on the Iberian peninsula in 1491. On his second voyage to the West Indies in 1493 he brought with him five priests, charged with the spiritual care of the voyagers and with the evangelization of the natives. In 1504, Pope Julius II (r. 1503–13) established three dioceses on the island of Hispaniola that were shortly thereafter merged into the diocese of Santo Domingo, now in the Dominican Republic, and joined by that of San Juan, Puerto Rico, two dioceses that exist to this day. With the requerimiento of 1513, conquistadores read aloud to the Indians a religious justification for the Spanish advance and demanded that they convert to Christianity freely or face assault. At the invitation of King John III, the Jesuit Francis Xavier (1506–52) arrived in Goa in 1542, the capital of Portuguese India and an episcopal see since 1533. Xavier used Goa as a base from which to evangelize the Indians of the Fishery Coast before turning to southeast Asia and reaching Japan in 1549. Christianity, especially Roman Catholicism, developed in globalizing directions at times through the power of persuasion, at times with threats of violence. Either way, the rhetoric of a global church developed well ahead of the reality; and interest in the missionary activities did not surface at all during the Council of Trent. The topic’s absence serves to remind of the limits of the council’s purposes since the immediate benefits for the Catholic Church of these expansions were nowhere in doubt.18

Learning and Ideas

The dominant philosophical approach in the fifteenth century was still scholasticism. Scholasticism is best understood with reference to its method, that is, its application of
rules of logic drawn from the ancient Greek thinker Aristotle to all areas of human knowledge, including theology. Scholasticism placed great confidence in the capacity of human reason to discern the truth and fostered a culture of learned argumentation. It was developed in the schools and universities of the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, a time when the writings of Aristotle and his Jewish and Muslim interpreters were attracting energetic intellectual interest in the Latin West. By the fifteenth century scholastics were divided into two major camps. One camp maintained a strong confidence in reason in matters theological as, for example, the followers of Thomas Aquinas (1225–74); the other, following upon the logical and semantic innovations of William of Ockham (1287–1347), was sceptical of what human reason could actually ascertain about God. The distinction between the camps was founded on the latter’s development of ‘terminist logic’ for the meaningfulness and truth of sentences. Sentences had to conform to strict rules or they were not taken to be meaningful, much less true. Much high medieval theology did not conform to these rules as conceived by late medieval adherents of terminism. The upshot was that fewer ‘truths of faith’ were held to be provable, and so scepticism set in, but only for those who adopted such logic. Thomists did not, Ockhamists did.

The theological consequences became increasingly significant in the later Middle Ages. Gabriel Biel (1420–95), a canon of the Windesheim Congregation, for example, reevaluated the important theological questions of his day through a terminist lens. Limiting his affirmation of God’s attributes to omnipotence and mercy, he eliminated the Thomist distinction between God’s Intellect and Will. Martin Luther and other Protestant Reformers, who will be discussed later, followed in the terminist tradition of Biel. These more sceptical scholastics still insisted on accepting the truths of faith, not because reason demanded it but because these truths were revealed.19

Criticism of the medieval theological project and of scholasticism more generally came from yet another corner, namely, from the Renaissance humanists. Humanism was a literary and educational movement that gained strength in fourteenth-century Italy and by the late fifteenth century could be found throughout the Latin West. Humanists preferred the study of poetry, history, and moral philosophy to the study of theology, law, and natural philosophy. They also favoured the rhetorical forms of the ancient masters, such as Cicero and Quintilian, over the Aristotelian logic of the medieval scholastics. While the incompatibility of humanists and scholastics has often been overdrawn, on the matter of how a genuinely Christian life was to be led a consistent humanist critique of scholastic theology did emerge. The tension might be expressed in terms of the key learning methods that distinguished the scholastic and the humanist, that is, logic and rhetoric. The former is directed at figuring out what is true and convincing the rational
mind; the latter is directed to advocating for the good and moving the human heart. Genuine Christian discipleship, the humanists insisted, is such a movement of the heart. Erasmus stands as the most influential representative of this humanist approach to Christianity. Devoted to the careful study of ancient languages, he encouraged careful study of the Bible and produced a critical edition of the Greek New Testament (1516). He deplored many popular religious devotions as superstitious. He wrote scathingly against the preposterous claims made of many saints, even as he composed poems to favourite saints in exquisite, classicizing verse. In *The Praise of Folly* (1511) he condemned scholastic theology for devolving into empty word games and mocked corruption and hypocrisy among churchmen. Drawing heavily from the Gospels and the epistles of Saint Paul, Erasmus also developed a model of Christian living which he called the philosophy of Christ. He favoured an interior life developed through prayer and reflection on the life of Christ over the external observances of medieval practice. Erasmus developed his ‘philosophy of Christ’ in the *Handbook of the Christian Soldier* (1503) and in many shorter works and essays. Although Erasmus himself remained Catholic after extensive correspondence with Martin Luther and other Protestant Reformers, the humanist critique of medieval religion and scholastic theology and Erasmus’s philosophy of Christ found resonance across all sixteenth-century Christian divisions.

**Church, State, Nation, Region**

The Medieval Church, rather than a monolith, had effectively cohered as a confederation of tribes and cultures that appropriated in a variety of ways the Christian faith. This balance began to undergo significant transformation during the long fifteenth century, and by the end of the sixteenth century the regionalization of Christianity was quite different from what we found in the 1370s. The developments correspond to the evolution of the early modern state. As states coalesced and centralized around princely courts through the fifteenth century, the age-old conflict over a prince’s role in church affairs passed into a new stage. That conflict had gone through a previous watershed in the eleventh century, when the emperors and the popes had fought over the right to appoint certain higher prelates to offices that had both spiritual and temporal authority. That conflict—known as the Investiture Controversy—was resolved in a way that preserved the integrity of the emperor’s authority in temporal affairs and the pope’s in spiritual ones, even as in given circumstances the pope or the emperor could gain the upper hand in the filling of a particular office. In the long fifteenth century, the balance shifted decidedly in the favour of the secular rulers. This development was due both to the increasing capacities of the temporal authorities and to the damaged credibility of the papacy. The
latter problem had manifested itself already before 1370 with the reach of several less capable popes exceeding their grasp, and culminated in the Western Schism.

The complex institutional and political developments are somewhat beyond the scope of this chapter. Suffice it here to highlight several developments that are representative of the expanding jurisdiction of civil authorities and the growing frustration with claims of papal supremacy in seemingly secular affairs. In 1438, during the Council of Basel, Charles VII of France in consultation with his bishops issued the Pragmatic Sanction of Bourges. The decree affirmed tenets of conciliarism, condemned appeals to the papal court, restricted papal interference in the distribution of benefices, expounded on the nature and administration of the sacraments, and called for the reform of the Church. Bishops and abbots were to be chosen by election; lesser offices were to be chosen by the local ecclesiastical authority. While by the letter of the law the king could only intervene with his prayers and the pope’s supremacy was acknowledged, in practice Rome found it impossible to assert its authority consistently, and the crown’s influence over appointments increased. Negotiation between the king and the pope finally led to the Concordat of Bologna (1516), which more precisely stipulated the pope’s rights over ecclesiastical revenues but also affirmed the king’s right to be involved in the appointment of major prelates. The Concordat also strengthened the king’s hand against local church officials. Both documents are considered foundational to Gallicanism, a nationalized form of Catholicism in France.22

Similar movements towards nationalizing the Church can be found in Europe’s other major powers: Ferdinand V and Isabella of Spain persuaded Pope Sixtus IV to issue a bull establishing an institutional inquisition for their realms. The Spanish crown controlled its Inquisition directly and employed it with the specific goal of fostering a homogeneous Christian, Spanish society. To that end they used their Tribunal of the Holy Office of the Inquisition to rout out ‘Moranos’, nominally converted Jews, and ‘Moriscos’, nominally converted Muslims, as well as Erasmians, Alumbrados, and Protestants.23

In England and Germany the nationalizing of the Christian Church is associated more closely with the Protestant Reformation. The Act of Supremacy (1534) established the Church in England’s independence from the papacy and the crown’s ownership of all church belongings. The Act in Restraint of Annates (1534), the Act in Restraint of Appeals (1534), and the Submission of the Clergy (1532) expanded and solidified the crown’s claim of sovereign jurisdiction over ecclesiastical matters. Finally, with the Treason Act of 1534 King Henry VIII brought the medieval separation of spiritual and temporal authorities to an end by making theological assertion against the crown’s headship over the Church a high crime against the body politic.24
In Germany, which developed as a state in ways markedly different from the others, ‘nationalization’ proceeded at its own pace. The prince-bishops of the Holy Roman Empire were the legacy of the Concordat of Worms, which had brought the Investiture Controversy to a close. Worms maintained the principle that the temporal and spiritual authorities, though both coming from God, were distributed in the world and exercised distinctly. An example of fifteenth-century frustration in Germany at perceived papal heavy-handedness, however, can be found in the Gravamina of 1455. Gravamina—lists of grievances of a religious nature—were recurrently drafted at councils and other meetings of high officials in the empire. The Gravamina of 1455 were drafted by an official at the court of the archbishop-elector of Mainz, who was also arch-chancellor of the empire. They complained of heavy and arbitrary papal taxation, obdurate Roman curial officials, papal violations of conciliar decrees, and interference in ecclesiastical appointments. A half century later, the emperor requested new gravamina from the noted humanist Jacob Wimpfeling in 1519, who revised the list of 1455; these gravamina spread across Germany thanks to the printing press. In other contexts Wimpfeling was a strong advocate of secular princes’ active reform of the Church in their regions. A new framework for the Church’s place in German principalities came in 1555, when the Peace of Augsburg authorized each prince to determine which of the two confessions allowed in the empire, Catholicism or Lutheranism, was to be practised in his territory. While not stipulating a particular role for a princes in ecclesiastical affairs within his territory, the Peace of Augsburg did grant to the German prince what would have been unthinkable in the model set out by Worms—the right to choose what variety of Christianity bound his people. This power opened up a new kind of discussion between princes and churchmen for generations to come; and Augsburg unleashed the process of confessionalization, that is, a process of ‘confession-building’ as Catholics and Protestants competed to establish their faith more firmly in their respective territories.²⁵

From Reform to Reformation

The word ‘reform’ has come up repeatedly so far in this chapter and been applied to theological and philosophical developments, religious movements in religious orders and among the laity, and matters of education and curriculum. Now we turn to a complex of religious developments that began in the early sixteenth century and is known as the Reformation. Defining the Reformation—causes, content, and effects—is a vexing task. In the following paragraphs the terms reform, reformers, etc. will, unlike in the preceding paragraphs, be capitalized to the extent that they share three characteristics: the rejection of the medieval ecclesiastical authority headed by the pope, a notion of ‘salvation’ that rejects the human capacity to participate in the process, and a turn toward austerity in religious ritual. It is important at the same time to keep in mind that
The Evangelical Reform

The first of these reform movements is called ‘Evangelical’, a name derived from the Greek for ‘Gospel’, and was instigated by Martin Luther. Luther is a remarkable personality especially in that he represented many of the most important characteristics of fifteenth-century Christianity. A miner’s son in northern Germany, he became a friar in a reforming branch of the Augustinians, as the story is told, after having made a vow to Saint Ann for protection in a storm. He was trained as a theologian with terminist sensibilities at several of the newer universities in Germany. The 95 Theses took issue with the Church’s teaching on indulgences, a form of remission of punishment for...
forgiven sins, especially as being advertised by the Dominican friar Johann Tetzel (1465–1519). Luther’s objections as expressed in the 95 Theses were novel neither in form—university debates were commonly announced in this manner—nor content. Thanks to the printing press and their translation into the vernacular, the theses were available as a pamphlet across Germany and in distant corners of Europe within months. The Theses touched a nerve and elevated Luther’s profile across the empire. He advanced gradually more radical critiques of the theological and ecclesiastical status quo and made his formal, public break with Rome during a disputation in Leipzig in 1519 against, among others, Johann Eck (1486–1543). A turn in the debate led Luther to reject expressly the primacy of the pope and the authority of church councils. The rejection of the teaching structures of the ancient and medieval Church painfully forced the large number of learned observers who shared among themselves a great concern for reforming the Church ‘in head and members’ to choose between reforming the governing structures in place and abandoning them, with Luther, in favour of new structures altogether.26

In 1520 Luther published three treatises, which are taken to express the foundation of his reforming programme. In the first, ‘To the Christian Nobility of the German Nation’, he called upon the German princes to reject the medieval division between spiritual and temporal authority and to take a more active role in guiding the Church within their territories. In the second, ‘On the Babylonian Captivity of the Church’, he sketched a series of theological criticisms against common medieval practices such as the denial of the consecrated wine to the laity. He acknowledged only Baptism and the Eucharist as sacraments and rejected the doctrine of transubstantiation and the idea of the Mass as sacrifice. In the final treatise, ‘On the Freedom of a Christian’, Luther elaborated a doctrine of justification as the doctrine by which the Church stands or falls. Justification is the process in Christianity by which one comes into good standing with God. Luther departed from medieval theology in teaching that one was justified ‘by faith alone’, that is, by God’s initiation (of grace or of love), not dependent on the human person’s cooperation, and ‘by grace alone’, this is, without reference to one’s ‘works’ or good actions, which encompassed by medieval reckoning participation in religious rituals and charitable deeds.27 Luther continued to develop his theological ideas and to cultivate broader support among theologians and humanists. The faction of Luther’s supporters (and opponents) grew dramatically in response to these three treatises. Among the humanists who joined Luther’s camp was Philipp Melanchthon (1497–1560), who is often considered the Evangelical Reform’s co-founder.

Condemned in 1520 and excommunicated in 1521 by the pope, Luther defended himself unsuccessfully at the Diet of Worms, which declared him an imperial outlaw. The elector of Saxony and prince in Luther’s home region, Frederick the Wise, stepped in to protect Luther. Increasing support for Luther among the imperial princes was crucial to the
continuing development of Evangelicalism. Without Frederick’s intervention after Worms, Luther would likely have been executed like Jan Hus. With the commitment of a significant number of princes—and the actual number shifted throughout the sixteenth century—the movement he inspired became embedded in German society. The Diet of Augsburg of 1555, while not ending the theological disputes and tensions that had distressed the Empire for four decades, resulted in a significantly political solution: the individual princes within the Empire were authorized to determine for their own regions, which one of the two confessions, Catholic or Evangelical, could be practised.

The Radical Reform

Thomas Müntzer (1489–1525) and the Peasant War (1524–25) exemplify, within the early history of the Reformation, what could happen to reform movements without powerful worldly allies. Müntzer also serves as an early representative of the Radical reforming movement. His background includes both scholastic theological training, which he acquired in part at Wittenberg, and a humanist’s skill in ancient languages. Although Luther and Müntzer were likely on collegial terms early in Wittenberg, the relationship soured as Müntzer accused Luther of half-heartedness and became increasingly mystical and apocalyptic in his own theological stances. Müntzer rejected the notion of a common, literal Biblical interpretation, such as was favoured in Evangelical Wittenberg. He favoured the idea of an ongoing revelation in the Church worked by the Holy Spirit within the heart of the individual Christian. He further rejected infant baptism and any idea of Real Presence in the Eucharist. Luther took issue with the levelling political implications of Müntzer’s apocalyptic ideas. Müntzer eventually came to see in a series of civil insurrections known as the Peasants’ War a foreshadowing of the Endtime. The unrest, whose beginnings antedated Müntzer’s participation in it, may have initially found encouragement in Luther’s idea of a priesthood of all believers but was also more directly inspired by the appalling economic and social conditions of the German peasantry. As the revolt spread Luther became increasingly vocal in his criticism of it and of Müntzer’s participation. In 1525 Luther condemned the revolt in a pamphlet entitled ‘Against the Thieving and Murderous Horde’. The princes, regardless of where they stood on Luther, organized to suppress the revolt. Müntzer and his peasant army met the princes for the last time in May 1525 at the Battle of Frankenhausen, which Müntzer expected to usher in a new apocalyptic age. It ended, however, with the decimation of his forces and his execution.

This did not, however, mark the end of the Radical Reformation. Its hallmarks included minimalist communal organization, limited sacramental theology, and a belief in the individual’s direct inspiration by the Holy Spirit. Its insistence on ‘believer’s baptism’,
that is, baptism of adults, was among its most characteristic doctrines, from which the
term ‘Anabaptist’ derives, meaning re-baptized. Millenarianism, a confidence in the
imminent end of the world, was another common doctrine. Some Radicals, such as John
of Leiden (1509–36) and his followers in Münster, advocated the use of violence to
achieve their religious goals and adhered to anti-nomianism, a doctrine that the saving
action of Christ has freed Christians from any moral law. In contrast, Hutterites and
Mennonites were strictly pacifist and adhered to austere moral codes. Especially these
latter movements developed a strong conviction that religious community should keep
careful distance from secular society.\(^{29}\)

**The Reformed Movement**

Emerging between the Evangelical and Radical movements was the Reformed movement.
Huldrych Zwingli (1484–1531) and Jean Calvin (1509–64) are its best known exponents.
Not only were there theological resonances among the various leaders of the Reformed
movements, there was a structural tendency for Reformed churches to be strongly
associated with individual cities. Zwingli’s early career included a pastorate in Swiss
Glarus and a chaplaincy with Swiss mercenaries. After having served several years in
parishes in Glarus and Einsiedeln, he was elected in 1518 to a preaching post at the
Great Minster in Zürich, and in 1519 began delivering sermons that departed from
medieval Catholicism on issues such as the veneration of saints, purgatory, priestly
celibacy, and the superiority of monastic life. Zwingli was subsequently drawn into a
series of public debates in 1523 on these and related issues that led to strengthened
popular and municipal support in Zürich. In consequence the city council declared their
religious independence from the local bishop and empowered Zwingli to implement a
reform of Christian belief and practice. Active correspondence between Zwingli and
Luther in the early 1520s led to the expectation that their new and common theological
vision could transform all Christendom. Zwingli’s ideas, however, began to depart from
the Evangelical consensus developing in Wittenberg, most importantly regarding Christ’s
‘Real Presence’ in the Eucharist. Zwingli held that there is no metaphysical
transformation in the bread and wine, as was held by the Catholic doctrine of
transubstantiation and Luther’s doctrine of consubstantiation. By Zwingli’s lights, the
faith of the believing member of the congregation brings Christ’s presence to the
Eucharist. A Reformation summit was held in Marburg to reconcile the two movements,
but in vain. Looking to the Radicals, Zwingli rejected the Anabaptist position on baptism.
His theory of a unified Christian society, governed in religious and civil matters by a
single magistracy, \(^{(p. 562)}\) rather than of two separated authorities, civil and
ecclesiastical, contrasted with both Evangelicals and Radicals. Zwinglianism was soon
adopted in imperial cities such as Strassburg and Constance. Imperial opposition halted and even reversed its spread in the southeastern Empire by 1540. Zwinglianism spread to neighbouring Swiss cities in the 1520s until concerned Catholic states formed an alliance, 'the Five States', against it. The tensions led to recurrent military conflicts between the Five States and Zürich with its allies. Zwingli was killed on the field of battle in 1531.  

Jean Calvin made two entrances into Geneva. The first occurred shortly after the city council’s call in 1536 for a religious reform that would bring it an ecclesiastical autonomy from the local prince-bishop akin to the political autonomy it had enjoyed from the duke of Savoy since the 1520s. The council invited first Guillaume Farel (1489-1565), an itinerant French preacher, and then Calvin. Both were expelled in 1538, but Calvin was brought back in 1541 and began instituting what was to become the most internationally portable form of Protestantism. Calvin’s theological magnum opus is his *Institutes of the Christian Religion* (1536, and then, revised, 1539). The work’s logical structure and elegant Latin bespeak Calvin’s exposure to both scholasticism and Renaissance humanism. Like other reformers, Calvin argued against papal and conciliar authority regarding the interpretation of the Bible and the teaching of Christian doctrine; for justification by grace through faith; and against the mediation of saints, the sacrifice of the Mass, and so forth. Calvin’s Sunday service, which all but eliminated the Lord’s Supper in favour of a preaching on Biblical passages and themes, was among the most austere in all Western Christianity. Calvin, like other Reformed theologians, was more iconoclastic than Luther: images were removed from churches and music was eliminated from services except for the singing of simple hymns. Calvin diverged from both Luther and even his fellow Swiss reformer Zwingli on the doctrine of double predestination. While the three agreed on the total depravity of man, justification by grace alone, and the inscrutability of God’s judgement in electing some to salvation and leaving others to damnation, Calvin went further by rejecting the idea of God’s desire for the salvation of all.  

Calvin’s reform of church governance in Geneva, especially in relation to the civil authority, has attracted much scholarly attention. In principle, church and state were separate authorities seen as working together effectively for the common good. The ‘Ecclesiastical Ordinances’ (1541) implemented a presbyterial system of church governance, without bishops and with mixed clerical and lay involvement in decision making. Four ecclesiastical offices were defined: pastors, teachers, elders (to provide discipline), and deacons (to care for the poor). Calvin headed the Company of Pastors, whose responsibility it was to govern the Church; and the Consistory was established as an ecclesiastical court to work with the civil magistrates in maintaining civil order and to enforce church discipline for the common good. The relationship between the Consistory and the civil magistrates was a challenging one, and the use of civil authority to enforce
Calvin’s stringent moral code has earned Calvin’s Geneva a reputation for oppressiveness through the centuries, that is, if not wrong, exaggerated.\footnote{563}

The Reformed movements, especially Calvinism, excelled in two characteristics: their international expansiveness and their commitment to education. The second of these developed more substantively after the period covered by this chapter, but the international potential is apparent from the beginning. It started as cities like Geneva became havens for refugees of religious persecution elsewhere. The French religious dissenters who found refuge in Geneva in the 1540s, for example, founded the first underground Calvinist Church in Paris in 1555. Visitors to Calvin’s Geneva, which was earning a reputation as a new Rome, returned home to implement what they had seen. Early Reformed theologians were also persuasive advocates of their new programmes: the ‘Second Helvetic Confession’ (1562, 1564), a founding document of the Reformed movement drafted by Zwingli’s successor in Zurich, Heinrich Bullinger (1504–74), was adopted by Protestant communities in Scotland, Hungary, France, and Poland. In England the early reformers Thomas Cranmer and John Hooper were among those much influenced by the theologians in Zwingli’s circle.\footnote{564}

**Anglican Reform**

By 1550 religious developments in England were at some remove from the mature Anglicanism that emerges from the brutal efforts of two half-sisters to impose religious conformity in the sixteenth century and the roiling distress of extended, religiously motivated civil conflict through the entire seventeenth century. Because religious settlement in England took longer than in any other major European power, distilling what happened in the first half of the sixteenth century to salient points is premature. Nonetheless, even if what is discernible by 1550 is neither a new systematic theology nor stabilized religious practice, a number of developments in the 1530s and 1540s correspond to concurrent activity on the continent and have obvious roots in early decades of the long fifteenth century: the concern to expand royal authority over ecclesiastical matters and assert sovereignty against intrusive, albeit traditional claims of papal jurisdiction; the secularization of the monasteries and considerable church property; and the ambivalence among England’s religious leadership as to what religious goals to pursue or reform to implement.

More than in any other region, study of the English Reformation has undergone significant revision in the last quarter century. An emphasis in older literature on an alienation between ecclesiastical structures and burgeoning lay Christianity has largely been displaced by a picture of overall vibrancy and health in the decades leading up to
1529. That is the year in which King Henry VIII stopped waiting for the pope to declare the annulment of his marriage to his brother’s widow, Catherine of Aragon. He summoned parliament, deposed his noncompliant chancellor Thomas Cardinal Wolsey, and then over non-payment of a fine he had imposed on the Convocation of Canterbury demanded the English prelates recognize him as ‘sole protector and Supreme Head of the Church and clergy of England’. A series of parliamentary acts advanced Henry’s goal of sovereignty over the Church in England, the most definitive of them, discussed earlier, being the Act in Restraint of Appeals, which denied any papal jurisdiction over ecclesiastical matters in England. The dissolution of the monasteries, which began in 1536, provided the royal coffers with major financial resources that were simultaneously deprived of the Church. It also served to exclude from the Church in England (as similar moves did in other parts of Protestant Europe) a significant participant in the religious dynamism of medieval Christian society: monks and other religious had beforehand consistently been the seedbed for creative religious ideas and movements, as we saw earlier in this chapter and as other chapters will show in the fully fledged Catholic reaction to the Reformation.35

Although Henry was single-minded in his pursuit of unchallenged sovereignty, he was less than consistent in pursuing a theologically inspired reforming vision for what was slowly but surely becoming his church. The two Reformers with greatest influence in this period were Thomas Cromwell (1485–1540) and Thomas Cranmer (1489–1556). Cromwell, a lawyer who rose to prominence in large part because of his efforts on behalf of the king’s divorce, made three crucially important contributions to religious developments in this period: first, he orchestrated the dissolution of the monasteries; second, he promoted dissemination of Tyndale’s English translation of the Bible; and third, he worked hand in hand with Cranmer, who did have a new theological vision for Christianity in England. Cranmer, like Cromwell, rose to prominence on the king’s petition for an annulment. In return, Henry named him archbishop of Canterbury. Cranmer had cultivated numerous contacts with Evangelical and Reformed theologians on the continent. At his invitation Martin Bucer and Peter Martyr Vermigli took refuge in England. He had his greatest impact in drafting new religious services in the vernacular, The Book of Common Prayer. Cromwell was executed in 1540 for treason and heresy on Henry’s orders. Cranmer was executed in 1556, likewise having been convicted of treason and heresy, but under Henry’s Catholic daughter Mary.36

Catholic Reform

The revision of historical perspectives on the Reformation in England has been most closely matched by the burgeoning field of early modern Catholicism. An earlier era of
church history writers might pen triumphalist, if premature obituaries for the Great Whore of Babylon, as the Roman Catholic Church was characterized in a certain kind of Protestant polemical literature. Catholic Church historians would lionize a late sixteenth-century rolling back of Protestant expansion; more evenhanded Catholic authors would bemoan certain less than ideal developments in the fifteenth century that Luther accurately identified but ultimately overreacted to. The hoary debates over whether the developments in Catholicism in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries constituted a Catholic Reformation or Counter-Reformation have given way to a consensus that Catholicism was deeply affected by the same intellectual, social, cultural, and political impulses of the long fifteenth century, and that Catholicism’s strategic responses to burgeoning Protestantism must always be evaluated in tandem with broader developments in sixteenth-century society that would have been there with or without Protestantism.37

Where the Catholic reform stood in 1550 is well represented by the Society of Jesus—the Jesuit order, which represents much of what early modern Catholicism has come to mean. It has certainly attracted considerable scholarly attention in the last two decades. In the order’s earliest history, many echoes from the fifteenth century can be heard. In 1534 a group of seven scholastically trained theology students at Paris took vows. Their goal was to either make pilgrimage to the Holy Land or submit themselves to the authority of the Roman pontiff. They had been brought together as a group through their making of a sustained sequence of meditations, developed by their leader, Ignatius Loyola. His Spiritual Exercises drew from distinctive aspects of fifteenth-century devotion: an emphasis on method in prayer in addition to content, a focus in meditation on scenes from the life of Christ, and the use of the imagination to personalize these meditations. Ignatius himself had been deeply influenced by the Imitation of Christ and the popular thirteenth-century collection of saints’ lives, The Golden Legend, and yet ever so obviously reached beyond them. When the pope authorized their founding of a religious order in 1540, there was no mention of combating Protestantism. Although by 1550 members of the order were already involved in attempts to win back populations from Reformation movements, especially in central Europe, at the time the order’s first superior general Ignatius Loyola died in 1556, in over 6,000 pieces of his correspondence fewer than a dozen explicit references can be found to the Protestant Reformers. Jesuits eventually became most famous for their schools and their international missions: Francis Xavier departed from Lisbon for the Far East in 1541, and the first Jesuit school was founded in 1548, in Sicily.38
1548

That same year—three decades after Luther posted his ninety-five theses on the church door in Wittenberg and one and a quarter centuries after the election of Martin V, Giovanni Maria Ciocchi del Monte, then cardinal-bishop of Palestrina and later Pope Julius III (1550–55), celebrated a Mass of the Holy Spirit in the cathedral of Trent to open a council that was charged with restoring unity and integrity to the Church. Though his part at Trent was different from his predecessor Sigismund’s at Constance, the emperor Charles V (r. 1519–56) had tremendous stakes in the successful conclusion of the council. His French counterpart Francis I (1515–47) did as well, even if primarily as Charles’s international rival. The council sat, off and on, until 1563. Details of the council are addressed in a subsequent chapter. We know it had profound reforming and transforming influence on Latin Christianity, in the early modern period and to the present day. Yet it did not achieve the sought-after unity: Latin Christianity remained divided over the question of the religious authority of the bishop of Rome. In 1548, as opposed to 1378 at the outset of the Great Schism, the argument was not over competing claims to the Chair of Peter, but over the validity of such a claim in the first place.39

Further Reading


Brady, Thomas A. German Histories in the Age of Reformations, 1400–1650 (Cambridge, 2009).

Bynum, Caroline Walker. Wonderful Blood: Theology and Practice in Late Medieval Northern Germany and Beyond. Middle Ages series (Philadelphia, 2007).


**Notes:**


2. One recent history of the Reformation, for example, begins in 1490 so as to provide twenty-seven years of background before Luther’s posting of the ninety-five theses in Wittenberg and concludes in 1648 with the Treaty of Westphalia, which ended the Thirty Years’ War and has long been taken as marking a watershed in the relationship of states to religion. And yet, then acknowledging the inadequacies of those extensions to the
telling of the complete Reformation, the author, a British historian, adds what he calls a coda in order to fit a half century of religious-political development that distinguishes England from the rest of the continent. Diarmaid MacCulloch, The Reformation: A History (New York, 2004). A British edition of MacCulloch’s work published by Allen Lane, a Penguin imprint, adds the dates ‘1400–1700’ to the subtitle; and a later work on Christianity in general brackets the period 1300 to 1800 as ‘Western Christianity Dismembered’: Diarmaid MacCulloch, Christianity: The First Three Thousand Years (New York, 2009), 551–765.

(3.) James Joseph Walsh, The Thirteenth, Greatest of Centuries (New York, 1907).


(5.) Johan Huizinga, The Autumn of the Middle Ages (Chicago, 1996).


(7.) Two classic examples of this kind of history related to Christianity are the following two works, the one authored by a Catholic and addressing philosophical questions, the other authored by a Lutheran and addressing theological questions: Etienne Gilson, History of Christian Philosophy in the Middle Ages (New York, 1955); Jaroslav Pelikan, The Christian Tradition: A History of the Development of Doctrine (5 vols.; Chicago, 1973–90).

(8.) Bob Scribner was a Reformation historian. He had a greater interest in the events of the sixteenth century and their impact into the seventeenth. His approach, however, has had tremendous influence on how the religious history of the fifteenth century has been investigated: Robert W. Scribner, ‘Is There a Social History of the Reformation’?, Social History, 2 (1977), 483–505; Robert W. Scribner, For the Sake of Simple Folk: Popular Propaganda for the German Reformation, Cambridge Studies in Oral and Literate Culture (Cambridge, 1981); Robert W. Scribner, The German Reformation, Studies in European History (Atlantic Highlands, NJ, 1986).

(9.) There are numerous social and cultural histories of the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries. An incomplete sampling of the very good and very recent: Caroline Walker Bynum, Holy Feast and Holy Fast: The Religious Significance of Food to Medieval Women (Berkeley, 1987); Caroline Walker Bynum, Wonderful Blood: Theology and Practice in Late Medieval Northern Germany and Beyond (Philadelphia, 2007); John H. Van Engen, Sisters and Brothers of the Common Life: The Devotio Moderna and the World of the Later Middle Ages (Philadelphia, 2008); Miri Rubin, Corpus Christi: the Eucharist in Late Medieval Culture (Cambridge, 1991); Sophie Page, ed., The Unorthodox Imagination in

(10.) The expression may derive from epistolary remarks of the father of humanism, Francesco Petrarca (1304–74).

(11.) Van Engen, Sisters and Brothers.


(20.) Charles Garfield Nauert, Jr., Humanism and the Culture of Renaissance Europe, 2nd edn, New Approaches to European History (Cambridge, 2006); Erika Rummel, The Humanist–Scholastic Debate in the Renaissance and Reformation (Cambridge, MA, 1995); Ronald G. Witt, The Two Latin Cultures and the Foundation of Renaissance Humanism in Medieval Italy (Cambridge, 2011). For a stimulating reflection on the contrast between the culture of logic and that of rhetoric, see John W. O’Malley, Four Cultures of the West (Cambridge, MA, 2004).

(21.) Gregory D. Dodds, Exploiting Erasmus: The Erasmian Legacy and Religious Change in Early Modern England (Toronto, 2009); John W. O’Malley, ‘Introduction’, in Spiritualia


(25.) Thomas A. Brady, German Histories in the Age of Reformations, 1400–1650 (Cambridge, 2009).

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Abstract and Keywords

This chapter argues that European history must be seen in a broader, de-centred global perspective and Protestant religion as discontinuous and contingent. It has supported diverse geographies of adherence, alliances between state and church or para-churches, patterns of adherence, internal hierarchies, inter-faith relations, attitudes towards science, or moral discourses on issues such as social inequality or ethnicized politics. It has since the Reformation often fostered its own intense preoccupations with sin and demonization, which has, for instance, explained illness or different mental states through sinfulness which allows evil to take control and corrupt the body and mind. Another enduring characteristic has been its many emotionally fuelled arguments about the contents of biblical scripture as well as who has authority as religious specialists. Accounts of the Reformation movements must attend to the pluralities of arguments and practices and move away from their assessment as either success or failure, ‘medieval’ or ‘modern’.

Keywords: Materiality, gender, religious pluralism, modernity, senses, emotions

Protestant Prophecy

1545 found the Protestant reformer Philipp Melanchthon relieved from his usual teaching duties at Wittenberg University. He occupied himself by posting a woodcut to friends, which depicted ‘our town, or rather our village’. An accompanying Latin poem evoked the Saxon university town as a cool, northerly, isolated place on the banks of the shallow river Elbe. It set out that just as nobody would have known the small house of the...
widow who cared for the Biblical prophet Elias on the Mediterranean coast of Sidon, so God had decided to make Wittenberg rise from its dim circumstances to radiate evangelical light into so many regions of the world. Martin Luther was a new prophet, who returned people to worship God alone. A prayer beseeched God to protect Wittenberg’s church and university in future. Luther contributed a German poem to reiterate that God lent greatness to the insignificant. He had made Wittenberg a safe little guesthouse of Biblical scripture, the *Evangelium*.1

This early modern equivalent of a postcard in an effort of heritage formation encapsulates much of what is so distinctive about Lutheran ‘Protestants’—a label initially given to those who insistently ‘protested’ to push for religious reform in the German lands in 1529. They were the first religious movement in the world to operate through a university town, in which they trained young, male students from mostly non-aristocratic backgrounds with an exciting new curriculum to challenge traditional hierarchies and learning. It assured them that the end of time was near and only a renewed faith of the Wittenberg kind ensured eternity. God might have emplaced revelation through the Holy Spirit anywhere, but he had chosen a new university, which had only received its statutes in 1508. This remote place on the fringes of Germany was set apart and given special significance as the sacred location for the future of a religion which Martin Luther and Philipp Melanchthon as star scholars called ‘evangelical’. They presented it to adherents by advocating a simplified focus on essentials: worship of God and the Bible; scripture ‘alone’. This was done with great attention to themessage’s persuasive medialization through memorable images and a range of linguistic styles which, it was hoped, would appeal both to highly educated and less literate audiences.

As all other forms of Protestantism, Lutheranism was underpinned by the creation of binary categories to oppose a powerful and financially greedy Roman Church, headed by spiritually dubious, elected popes, who were spoilt by southern European habits and an indiscriminate lust for prostitutes and young men. If Catholicism needed elaborate props, including awe-inspiring buildings, armies of subservient attendants, luminous vestments, and luridly invented rituals to cover up its illegitimate claims, then Wittenberg was proud to be poor and completely dependent on God’s grace to even exist. Martin Luther (b. 1483), its religious leader, could not have been elected. His authority was legitimized in charismatic terms. Like all the other Biblical prophets before him—and in the course of his career the Wittenberg reformer identified not just with Elias but several of them—he had been chosen by God to authentically mediate his truth from the wilderness to the world.

Luther died in February 1546, six months after Melanchthon had circulated their Wittenberg woodcut. According to his disciple Justus Jonas’s famous account of the reformer’s death, instantly published in March, Luther several times rose and as he...
stepped over the threshold, on his way to bed, he uttered these words: ‘I place my soul in thy hands, for thou, God, hast truly redeemed me.’ He crossed and re-crossed his room, once or twice. As he put himself down to rest, he complained of very severe pressure on his chest.\(^2\) As a result of these ritual spatially circumscribed incantations, ‘his heart did not pain him’.\(^3\) A whole genre of tales soon dwelt on the supernatural power this sacred leader could wield through the efficacy of the Biblical word.\(^4\) Stories recounted how Luther worked as God’s tool and ‘miracle-man’, how he had fought off the devil with hymns or Biblical quotations, how his prayers once had saved Melanchthon from dying, how psalms spoken by him had extinguished fires, or how his prayers had alleviated a community’s dearth.\(^5\) Wittenberg Bibles, Luther’s printed words, hymns, or portraits disseminated the sacred to mediate hope far away from the Saxon university town. For centuries to come, this lodged the sacred in public and domestic practices of looking, reading, singing, speaking as well as holding and placing Bibles in cradles or stables to secure protection from the misfortunes of death and disease which so persistently plagued the early modern world.

It is against this specific background of Lutheran beliefs in Germany, rather than any generalized European Protestant culture, that the historian Bob Scribner influentially argued that such objects and stories ‘promoted piety, confessional solidarity and self-confidence’ in a culture characterized by ‘syncretism with Catholic forms’.\(^6\) That is, Scribner did not repeat Catholic polemicists, who of course had argued right from the sixteenth century that Luther himself wished to be revered as a saint.\(^7\) He emphasized that the Lutheran Reformation fused innovation and tradition. This fusion of continuity and rupture, it is now widely agreed, was integral to important strands within Lutheran belief and sustained through a collective oral, written, and visual culture right into modernity.

The challenge remains neither to homogenize this tradition, nor to overstate its ‘Catholic’ connections. Instead, we need to nuance the very notion of the ‘Catholic’ tradition itself by reconstructing plural Lutheran and Protestant confessional cultures in relation to equally plural medieval traditions, which adapted and gradually continued to re-make their founding reformers’ legacies with selectiveness in different milieux. This means telling a story of possibilities and responses rather than a tale of a lost, unified Catholic culture. It is not a story of ‘Christendom destroyed’.

**Protestant Changes**

Protestantism undoubtedly initiated fundamental changes. These ranged from claims about the centrality of the Bible for faith to an endorsement that sacred knowledge
should be substantially mediated in non-classical languages, for the benefit of the majority of people, who were illiterate and only knew their own tongue. The idea of purgatory was abolished as greedy invention. This went along with a greater emphasis on God’s grace, the reduction in the number of sacraments from seven to three (baptism, Eucharist, and the confession of sins as visible elements through which God offers the forgiveness of sins), and an insistence that the Eucharist must be offered to the laity in ‘both kinds’ through bread and wine (malmsey or claret in England). Those confessing their sins were not required to enumerate individual sins, there was no concern about degrees of contrition, and no penance was imposed. Preaching and communion gained a new centrality in church services alongside vernacular singing by the congregation. Convents, monasteries, and confraternities were abolished to normativize heterosexual family life in busy households. The sheer size of the clergy was thus dramatically reduced. Clerical learning was controlled through university education in which the contents of learning had greatly changed. As Protestantism argued that the papacy as an institution was heretical, it briefly empowered laypeople as legitimate interpreters of the faith and then forged new church hierarchies. These continued to allow access only to heterosexual men—but their social background began to matter less than their education, and scholarship systems for expanding schools and universities allowed for some social mobility even from the lower middling classes. High-ranking clergymen were no longer appointed by Rome, but required to be theologians. Feast days were gradually reduced to Sundays and key holidays, while pilgrimages and processions were abolished. So were indulgences or the official sanctification of individuals. Clerical possessions were taken over by secular authorities who thereby received new resources. In some areas, the power of church courts was eventually reduced and this helped to centralize secular power in the process of early modern state formation.

Despite these changes, it makes no sense to think of Protestantism in essentializing terms as an invariably more modern, or individualizing, liberating belief which distinguished Europe’s advanced civilization and constituted a complete break with the past. Leopold von Ranke’s (1795–1886) view in 1854 that ‘Protestantism, as evolved in Switzerland and Germany’ did not suit ‘Southern nations, and less cultivated countries as such’ remains testimony to the chauvinism which has often coloured historical judgement of a movement which many writers continue to feel deeply emotional about and evaluate as a watershed for Western civilization. For Ranke, the Reformation had been the German nation’s task to restore the purity of revelation. Three decades later a Pennsylvanian pastor announced on the 400th anniversary of Luther in 1883: ‘If there had been no Luther in Germany, there would have been no Washington in America.’

Current scholarship increasingly turns away from these or other linear grand narratives in which the Reformation provides clear stepping stones towards modernization. Its key
interest is to better understand the spectrum of experiences and ideas involved in what it meant to live as a Protestant during the early modern period. Put briefly and in conceptual terms, it deploys notions of the relational (by exploring how religion is lived in specific contexts by specific actors), the indeterminate (assuming that outcomes can be multiple as well as reversible and include the indifferent), of becoming and emerging possibilities (rather than defined forms as shaping uni-linearly constricting life) as well as the corporeal, emotional, sensate, material, and performative dimensions of humaneness, which include imaginative and intuitive forms of engagement (instead of analysing religious humanity solely as expressed by rational, cognitive thought mediated through language in texts). This chapter sets out how current research applies these categories.

**Defining Religion**

Concepts of ‘religion’ are historically situated and often political in their use. I propose the following definition, which is anthropologically and sociologically inspired to avoid confessional value judgements and nationalist commentary: religions are specific ways of investigating what cultures take to be the supernatural. Basic human concerns feed into interest in particular religious themes at particular times. These concerns break down into a long list of aspects, which demonstrate just how complex religions are as intense human manifestations of intellectual as well as affective engagement, which encompass anxieties as much as hopes. Religions often encompass questions about the role and interpretation of sacred texts, about the nature of evil and protection from misfortune, definitions of sin, modalities of punishment and forgiveness, distinctions between the pure and impure, signs and the ‘real’, as well as about relations to sacred places, ancestors, gender, sexuality, bodily fluids, the cosmos, weather phenomena, plants, stones or animals as signs of divine order and disorder, the presence of the divine in humans and thus transcendence, appropriate spaces and media of veneration, temporality, assurance of salvation, the relationship between religion and a social ethics as well as the connection to other faiths. Historians can chart how these multiple concerns are re-worked and renewed throughout time in intellectual debates as much as in concrete practices, who has had agency in these processes, and how they have shaped societies.

This interest in lived religion relates to a key historiographical shift since the 1970s. Since then, scholars have become increasingly fascinated by what Protestantism meant for ordinary adherents in daily life. Believers are no longer seen as passive recipients of doctrine but as cultural agents, who responded to and shaped religious resources in different ways and could have hybrid identifications. First inspired by work on ordinary...
men and women’s involvement in the German Peasants’ War of 1525 as well as the most violent moments during the French Wars of Religion, such perspectives were soon extended to ask how villages and towns in interaction with their local pastors and schoolmasters as well as church, civic, and state authorities mutually made the meanings of belief relevant in relation to more ordinary problems of order and routine rhythms of life. This eventually inspired historians to look not only at the early phases of religious upheaval or the implementation of reform, but to trace long-term transformations in belief from the fifteenth to the eighteenth century. Despite some charges that social and cultural historians overlook theological contents and church politics, there have been many attempts to integrate different factors, ranging from ecclesiastical and secular politics to pious lay practices, charity regulations, law courts, university arguments, and the household as microcosm of the state, to elucidate how particular religious concerns arose and were elaborated. Helped by a new history of thought, this had also been advanced by a study of specific arguments which involved different religious experts and social groups, to show how they came ‘to grips, both intellectually and emotionally, with the circumstances and conditions of their lives’.

Such an approach highlights that religious identifications were linked to specific ideals about ways in which believers located themselves on earth in relation to the divine. As the example of Luther’s death showed, they typically implicated the religious self physically as well as intellectually, so that we need to reconstruct how the senses and body were part of different Protestant traditions. This gives voice to the distinctness of a historically situated set of investigations into the nature of the divine and evil, formed in specific sites, through particular interpretative networks, institutions, and media of communication, rooted in interaction with symbols and the imaginary of the time across a broad Protestant spectrum.

The term ‘network’ is often useful to replace the more conventional notion of ‘community’, which tends to imply too much coherence and continuity in what are often assumed to be larger consensus groups. Interest in Anabaptists, for instance, has shown that it makes no sense to focus on shared norms as pluralities prevailed. The female Strasbourg reformer Katharina Schütz Zell thus has traditionally been identified as a follower of a man called Caspar Schwenkfeld, but turns out to be characteristic of many laypeople during the first decades of the Reformation movement. She was determined to study the Bible and proclaim spiritual truth rather than trying to adhere to any leader. Historians of music tell us that many Protestants retained a marked love of polyphony alongside plainchants—the internationally famous Catholic composer Orlando di Lasso (1532–94), for example, was invited by the Lutheran August of Saxony to work at the Dresden court. Such music lovers formed their own networks through patronage, instrument practice, singing, book-buying, and correspondence. Other historians
increasingly note realms of confessional ambiguity and the extent to which the demand for confessional orthodoxy was linked to specific situational contexts and actors. They attempt to track down more precisely what was seen when, where, and by whom as a mark of confessional difference or indifference and how this was made to matter. It emerges that increasing confessional differentiation led to ever new conceptualizations of orthodoxies and heterodoxies, in a continuous cultural process of producing and re-producing difference. This makes sense of findings in a recent study of Transylvania, a territory bordering onto Poland and the Ottoman Empire which by 1568 officially recognized Anti-Trinitarians, Calvinists, Lutherans, and Catholics. It simply asserts the region’s ‘internal pluralisms’ which evolved ‘over varying periods of denominational differentiation within the main movements’.

Re-writing Reformation History

This new emphasis on plural religious debates and practices, with their underlying assumptions about the nature of being and salvation, easily facilitates comparative studies of world religions in the past and present. Protestantism is nothing that is locked in an early modern past and European story—its varieties enjoy tremendous popularity in Asia, Africa, the United States, and Latin America. Between 1965 and 2000, for instance, the number of Protestants in Africa rose phenomenally from 21 million to 110 million people. The ‘average Anglican nowadays is a 24 year old African woman’, reports the Sunday Times, while born-again Africans often want to missionize the West to rescue its overly liberal Christians from its ‘supposed apostasy’. Creationist movements have become increasingly vocal in the United States. It makes little sense to isolate Europe’s Protestantism as a homogeneous point of ‘pure’ origin and authenticity for strands of global Christianity. ‘Tradition’ and ‘modernity’ once more fail to work productively as binary categories.

Rather, the challenge remains to see European history in this broader, de-centred global perspective and think of Protestant religion since the Reformation as discontinuous and contingent as well as able to support very diverse geographies of adherence, alliances between state and church or para-churches, patterns of adherence, internal hierarchies, inter-faith relations, attitudes towards science, or moral discourses on issues such as social inequality or ethnicized politics. It has since the Reformation often fostered its own intense preoccupations with sin and demonization, which has, for instance, explained illness or different mental states through sinfulness which allows evil to take control and corrupt the body and mind. Another enduring characteristic has been its many emotionally fuelled arguments about the contents of Biblical scripture as well as who has authority as religious specialists, for example by prophesying through the ‘gift of the
Spirit’. These concerns explore possibilities of how the divine is experienced in the human body and mind. Protestantism has frequently been characterized by an emphasis on prayer and music to seek spiritual comfort in relation to concerns with family life, the life-cycle, health, and work. Protestants, finally, have repeatedly endured persecution, either through displacement or death, and this, too, could distinctively shape expressions of their faith.

Such perspectives in turn enable Reformation scholars and students of diverse religious or non-religious backgrounds to better appreciate the debates, paradoxes, and tensions European society lived through during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries by so intensely engaging with the supernatural. The Protestant Reformations in all their variety, and with their important ‘radical’ wings, must be understood as one of the lasting long-term historical transformations in Europe and, subsequently, significant parts of the world. We therefore need to capture as fully as possible the extraordinary dynamics of Protestant change in order to understand its possibilities for the early modern period and its inspiring as well as unsettling legacies for our time.

**Medieval Concerns**

Christianity first developed in the Middle East. It then spread further into the East as well as into the Roman empire, in particular Roman North Africa. A foremost theologian by the end of its fourth-century transformation into a state religion was St. Augustine, bishop of Hippo (396–430), in what now is Algeria. Throughout the Middle Ages, all of Europe was gradually Christianized and Ethiopia remained Christian. A first major and enduring division was launched when Eastern Orthodoxy and Roman Catholicism separated in the eleventh century. Eurasian Eastern Orthodox Christians lived in the Balkans, Russia, and Greek archipelago. In the West, several movements successively challenged the Roman Church. Twelfth-century Waldensians created one of the largest ‘heresies’ the papacy prosecuted enduringly and in response to which it refined its own notions of orthodoxy. By the thirteenth century, canon law had been reorganized to provide authoritative guidance on difficult legal problems raised by disputed marriages, illegitimacy, or heresy, to be implemented across Christian dioceses. Popes, nonetheless, still answered to thousands of petitions in response to legal decisions, and wielded power through dispensations. The Inquisition dealt with heresy and by the mid-thirteenth century saw a highpoint of activity. During the fourteenth century, the Oxford scholar John Wycliffe (1330–84) forcefully questioned papal authority, especially its presumption to define sacred knowledge. Wycliffe argued for the authority of the Bible as well as against the importance of indulgences, pilgrimages, and the dramatically extending cult of saints. His ideas influenced the young Prague preacher Jan Hus (c. 1370–1415), who
was burnt as a heretic at the Council of Constance in 1415. Hus’s legacy was the first
mass-movement for Christian faiths different to Roman Catholicism in western Europe
which galvanized a whole country in debate and introduced new practices challenging
clerical domination, not least through the demand that (p. 578) all laity should have
frequent access to Christ’s blood by drinking it from a chalice at mass as salvific.

The vibrancy of the Hussite movement was characteristic not of religious decline, but an
intensification of faith in the fifteenth century. Across Europe, it expressed itself in some
of the laity’s attempts to accumulate ever more indulgences, see the most precious
reliquaries, and complete challenging pilgrimages, all of which the Church as well as
local rulers knew how to exploit to accumulate greater power and legitimize themselves
as sacred. Great spiritual anxiety was caused by debates about Eucharistic presence.
These reached all the way back to seventh-century theological disputes about whether
Christ’s blood had risen in the resurrection. An abundance of devotional images showed
increasingly gory depictions of early martyrs and severed body parts. Much emphasis was
laid on death and decay as signs of moral corruption. One of the fifteenth century’s most
distinctive features in turn was a ‘maze of blood debates’ in the Church and the fact that
in northern Europe holy blood became ‘crucial’ for devotion.22

Recent historians reject categories such as ‘affective’ or ‘expressionist’ of such cultural
forms of religious life as merely descriptive and far too broad in view of the human issues
at stake. Caroline Walker Bynum, for instance, has written about the late medieval
fascination with holy blood as a phenomenon which needs to be understood through a
combination of specific economic, scientific, artistic, devotional, and theological aspects,
but also through recognizing ‘that a basic, yet historically contingent and specific
grappling with the riddle of life and death—that is of change and survival—lies behind
them’.23 It was about hopes for salvation rather than a psychologically strange indulgence
in violence. These concerns now were given unprecedented emotional expression through
’a kaleidoscope of pain and glory’. One preacher frightened his congregation with tales of
Christ flinging blood-clots into their faces,24 Flagellation became more prominent, either
as practice or in depictions for women to meditate on and empathize with violent self-
punishment for sin.

While it is obvious that one would wish to avoid a reductionist analysis of these
mechanisms as mentally abnormal, they still prompt the question of how religious
cultures shaped cognition and elaborated particular emotional regimes by creating guilt
and lending it such realistic internal force. An extreme emphasis on constraints in such
emotion cultures explains how the initial Reformation message against the necessity of
‘good works’ through God’s grace for evangelical believers could appeal through its
assurance of inner ‘freedom’. It also explains the continuity of metaphors and
iconographies which represented blood as purifying in the Reformation movement as well as the insistence on suffering as quintessential religious experience.

Everyone in late medieval and early modern societies encountered religious ideas primarily through preaching. Preaching not only happened in church, but at markets, not least through interesting itinerant characters. As Susan Karant-Nunn has shown, late medieval sermons and plays intensely focused on the Passion to stimulate repentance and weeping in their audience, as when Paul Wann in 1460 during Holy Week in Passau dwelt on the nail crushing Jesus’s skin, flesh, and bones, grimly imagining how this ‘frightened the blood back into the chamber of the heart and shocked all the nerves’ in his body’. The heart was regarded as the central location of feeling, so that human nature in its sinful state tended towards a lazy, dark, and cold heart. Late medieval affective piety thus cultivated empathy, love, and liveliness, as well as arithmetic skill: Christ was to have shed 97,035 drops of blood, while saints rarely received strokes in rounded numbers. Some relic collections began to amass particles in their ten thousands. In Wittenberg, Frederick the Wise displayed his collection of c. 19,000 relics every All Souls Day, of which there existed a printed catalogue.

Printing spread from the mid-fifteenth century onwards, and was overwhelmingly religious in contents. It circulated devotional and often highly visual literature, as much as critique and a broad range of clerical discussion about many aspects of faith. Debate usually drew on issues which had already preoccupied the early Church. They naturally evolved from a highly complex faith which was based on a text divided into an Old and a New Testament, told the extraordinary story of a Virgin mother and her son Jesus as incarnate God-man, foregrounded that death should bring life, that bread could become Christ’s body and wine his blood, as well as that humanity could be punished for sin in worldly life and afterlife and yet could also engage in practices of redemption. In addition, there was much disagreement about devotional practice. Some theologians thought that forms of worship which focused on ocular involvement (sight) were merely ‘external’ and neglected meaningful meditation, or even that relics were idols offering no access to the holy. Others held them to be what they represented in particles—Christ, for instance, as whole, continuing, eternal presence.

As a result, historians now highlight that there existed much ambiguity, even by members of the same group and even within the same person, about which salvific, holy phenomena could be seen, how they should be seen, or whether they were invisible anyway. This moves away from positing a clear divide between an educated spiritual elite and ‘superstitious masses’. These seemingly confused positions reflected acutely felt paradoxes. Nicolas Cusanus, for instance, in 1451 issued a decree which rejected pilgrimages to sites which preserved Christ’s blood, but nonetheless approved a
pilgrimage to miracle hosts at Andechs monastery, which were partly revered for their
blood spots and the fact that they did not seem to decay.\textsuperscript{27}

All this loaded key concerns for Christians during the late Middle Ages with unparalleled
complexity and made the Church chronically vulnerable to the easy critique that it was
riddled with contradiction, when plural practices and interpretations of necessity must
constitute religion. These plural practices were particularly evident in larger cities, which
typically housed a large proportion of diverse types of clergy, convents and monasteries,
lay confraternities and communities.

Such late medieval criticisms gained particular urgency through the fact that secular
rulers and civic authorities competed with the Church and pushed for policies to reduce
its privileges. The increasing consolidation of civic and state government during the
fifteenth century chronically rubbed against church authority. There was increasing
urban unease about the celibate clergy and civic brothels which resulted in attempts to
make married family life normative for all adults; likewise urban reform movements
demanded greater learning from their clergy to hear the ‘pure biblical word without any
additions’, as the catch phrase resounded in different European cities. A
reorganization of prostitution, poor relief, and a focus on economic fairness for citizens
added to key demands. As Thomas Brady has convincingly argued, popular reform
movements gained their greatest agency in areas where power was intensely localized
and central authorities weak—that is, in the German and Swiss lands and their large
cities.\textsuperscript{28}

In addition, the Church underwent a series of institutional reform experiments at its top
level through the councillor movements, which did not result in identifying feasible
processes of greater participation and decision-making processes towards reform
through General Councils (see David J. Collins, chapter 20 of this volume). At the
beginning of the sixteenth century, papal authority and the spiritual centrality of Rome
were reasserted and left a diverse spectrum of critics unsatisfied in their calls for reliable
reform mechanisms. For many, the symbol of papal renewal was the re-building of St.
Peter’s basilica under Pope Julius II (1503–13). Criticisms of Julius as a ‘warrior pope’
derived from competing values for male, aristocratic elites, which expected the nobility
both to show Christian humility and endorse chivalry. Monks, meanwhile, were frequently
derided as unlearned, lazy, and lecherous men. Peasants and artisan families typically
sustained life strained by frequent pregnancies, high maternal and child mortality rates,
and a couple’s hard work. Immoral monks could therefore exemplify irresponsible
masculinity, not least to the substantial reform clergy, who were at the forefront of
implementing change in a number of convents across Europe.
From this eventually followed arguments which disconnected faith from the notion of spiritual rank and hierarchies. Johannes von Staupitz, Luther’s mentor, preached in 1517 that ‘sometimes there was more virtue, contemplation and divine influence underneath a velvet gown than a cowl’. The emphasis on contemplation and sincerity was prominent in the Modern Devotion movement, whose lay adherents followed the tremendously popular teachings of Thomas a Kempis. Yet it still hinged on the notion that a more holy life could be achieved and implied removing oneself from profane activities. Martin Luther, by contrast, began to radically think about the spiritual equality of the clergy and laity, and moreover passionately endorsed that a Christian’s life was to be lived in households and families replete with mundane tasks and challenges ranging from changing swaddling clothes to making ale. And in that very year of Staupitz’s sermon, brother Martin would begin to become Luther—the initially thin, tonsured scholar who dared to say that the papacy itself was demonic.

**Conversion, Spiritual Suffering, and Martyrdom**

How did men like Luther make sense of their conversion to an evangelical faith and construct narratives dramatizing it? Reformers typically experienced conversion as a voluntary change of faith in search of truth. As in the case of St. Paul on the road to Damascus, conversion could be linked to a divine call, but it was always given expression through rhetorics of renewal, which frequently resolved into biographical narratives. It could either be portrayed as the outcome of a long spiritual progress, or, with greater effect, as sudden, dramatic change, or as a combination of the two.

Martin Luther provides a key example. He described his decision to become a man of religion as the consequence of divine intervention. While his upwardly mobile father had wanted him to study law, Luther as a student was once so frightened by a thunderstorm that he cried out to St. Anne for help and vowed to become a monk if she protected him. Aged 21, he entered an Erfurt convent. Now his true and extremely painful spiritual progress towards his second conversion began. Luther’s narrative underlined his belief that true faith was extremely difficult to reach and ultimately had to be granted again and again by the Holy Spirit after heart-felt spiritual tests and tribulations—Anfechtungen. Troubled fearfulness to attain grace would remain a key category of his theology. This shattering second conversion led him to endorse that a religious life needed to be lived outside convent walls, in the world.

As a consequence, Luther turned the convent into a site which combined spirituality and education with house-holding and hospitality. He moved to the Augustinian monastery in Wittenberg in 1512 to teach at its newly founded university, and in 1525 was allowed to
make it a home for his future family and students who lodged with him and his wife, the former nun Katharina von Bora. Many of his students experienced this as an exhilarating new model of life. Early modern society at this time strongly emphasized paternal authority and expected sons to eventually step into their father’s footsteps or further advance their lineage’s honour in other ways. Conversion offered a way for young students to escape such expectations by endorsing different values from the previous generation. As indicated earlier, they were also told to prepare for the imminent end of the world and their eternity. Luther came to believe by 1520 that the papacy as such was the ‘Anti-Christ’, a Biblically prophesied figure of evil who helped Satan to bring about this end. The reformer further held that this Anti-Christ would rage ever more fearsomely if faced with an evangelical countermovement. All this infused a new generation with a sense of urgency, drama, and danger in life. Wittenberg’s court painter Lucas Cranach delivered images which strikingly represented hoards of horrible beasts about to devour those who stood by the papacy.

As in so many religious conversion movements, innovative practices hence went alongside vigorously aggressive public repudiations of many traditional hierarchies, customs, or objects. These were meant to emphasize the sovereignty of God and ranged from the collective burning of the papal bull which excommunicated Luther to the carnivalesque profanization of previously sacred artefacts. Next followed extremely aggressive rhetorical abuse and daring visual satires against the Roman Church, for which Luther quickly gained a mixed reputation across Europe. He proudly announced that he used his opponent’s writings as toilet paper. Yet Luther was not just rude without any reason, but regarded crude invectives as the only way to further stir up as well as stand up to the devil as the world neared its end. In Germany, his words and woodcuts from the Cranach workshop were most successful when they contrasted the papacy as demonic and evangelicals as launching into an assured eternity.32

Alongside disgust against the papacy, Protestant conversion stories were further distinguished by their strong spiritual attachment to Christ and a heroic sense that one might need to suffer for one’s true faith like the early martyrs. Depictions and biographies of martyr-saints had been ubiquitous since the late fifteenth century, and they were frequently prayed for. The pioneering Swiss reformer Ulrich Zwingli never met Luther, but reported in 1519 that the Wittenberg scholar ‘preached of Christ steadfastly, is admired by everyone and determined that he would have himself crucified’.33 Zwingli, too, believed that the pope was the Anti-Christ and fostered conversion in others by writing out Biblical quotes as appeals: Christ had told his apostles that they would suffer fear in the world and would be hated by all humankind because of his name. This was quickly linked to the idea that those marked by Christ were recognizable through observing his, rather than human law, and were ready to fight for him. ‘I want to tell you
openly’, Zwingli hence penned to the Lucerne teacher Myconius in 1520, ‘I believe that just as the church emerged into life through blood, so it can only be renewed through blood.’ Clearly, this was nothing to do with a rational religion of the Word. Zwingli died in battle, as he himself led Zurich and other reformed cantons to fight the first European Civil War of Religion against five Catholic cantons from the interior of Switzerland in the disastrously planned 1531 war of Kappel.

Such ideas connected to a belief that such evangelical attachment to Christ, faith, and scripture morally purified. No further ‘good works’ were needed, but it was taken for granted that faith expressed itself through attitudes which the humanist Erasmus had already sought to cultivate under the label of ‘Christian soldiering’, as purely spiritual exercise to battle for spiritual comfort. At the core of the ‘routine’ were Christo-centric hymn-singing in the vernacular, keeping the Sabbath, attending sermons several times a week, daily prayers or pious reading, not least to meditate on the imminence of death. Of equal importance was good moral behaviour, such as being charitable to the resident poor and peaceful in the family and community. In addition, Protestants added a series of prohibitions and moral conventions. Brothels, for instance, were abolished. New sexual strictures were at the heart of mainstream Reformation movements. Meanwhile, many previous strictures were lifted. Fasting during Lent now appeared an unnecessary spiritual law, while the mandate of a regular married sex life to alleviate a deplorable inborn desire replaced previous notions that sins of the flesh polluted a Christian existence on feast days, for instance.

Before mainstream Protestantism constructed the heterosexual couple as sole creators of a Christian ‘family’, a flourishing rhetoric of brotherhood (and to a far lesser extent sisterhood) in the early Reformation facilitated the notion that all of the converted belonged to a bigger family. This became precarious as the evangelical movement divided into different strands, of which Anabaptists soon gained great popularity and operated with a language of siblinghood. Thomas Müntzer was the most important leader of what Luther marginalized as ‘radical’, sectarian Reformation. Müntzer announced his special spiritual status in a printed manifesto from Prague in 1521, which emphasized his long progress of education in addition to his early election: ‘I Thomas Müntzer, born in Stolberg and living in Prague, the city of the dear and saintly warrior Jan Hus, intend to fill the sonorous marching trumpets with the new song of praise of the holy spirit.’ This provided his writing with a sense of continuity and authority. Müntzer went on:

With my whole heart I make my testimony and raise a bitter complaint to all the churches of the elect … Christ and all the elect, who have known me from my youth, stand by this undertaking of mine … I have applied myself with special
diligence and utmost industry to reach a better understanding of how the holy, invincible Christian faith was founded than that of other men. Letters addressed him as ‘student of the divine sciences’, ‘servant of Christ’, ‘truthful and faithful proclaimer of the Gospel’ and, of course, ‘dear brother’. Müntzer explained to Luther with a host of Biblical quotes that Christ could only be gained through a violent struggle, constant suffering with God, and, quoting Psalm 44, not until a believer became ‘a sheep for the slaughter all day long’. He assured his parishioners that God would impart the ‘fullness of his illumination’ after a long time of despair if they did not deny him. Finally, in the midst of violent protests in April 1525, Müntzer exhorted them: ‘If you are unwilling to suffer for the sake of God, then you will have to be martyrs for the devil’.

Protestant Belonging

What had thus appeared as conversion to one evangelical movement therefore quickly became bound up with very specific choices to which of the surviving evangelical groups one wished to belong. Religious plurality quickly consolidated itself. Zwingli’s admiration for Luther thus waned, and by 1527 he personally accused the Wittenberg scholar of helping rulers to slaughter peasants. Swiss and Lutheran reform ideas moreover bitterly divided about the question of Eucharistic presence. German Lutherans, who tried to preserve their faith in as many territories as possible, would accuse Calvinists of being ‘devil’s martyrs’. Confessional doctrines were finalized for Calvinism in the Helvetic Confessions (1526, 1566), the Zurich Consensus (1549) as well as the canons of Dordrecht (1619), for Lutherans in the Confession of Augsburg (1530) and Book of Concord (1580). These agreements shaped catechisms, which were used in schools to educate children into their Protestant faiths.

Morally charged confrontations remained common in response to other Protestantisms as well as even within one’s own religious grouping. Among German Lutheranism there were soon more conflicts since 1555 than in other Protestant confessions; it is apparently not overstated to argue that these internal debates soon preoccupied ‘Lutheran theologians at times more than battles against Rome, Geneva, Zurich, the sectarians, the Jews and the Turks taken together’. Some historians point to the political consequences of Protestant pluralism more generally: the British empire, it has been asserted, was weaker than the Spanish as a result of such internal disunity. Rather than being based on ‘any shared conceptions of doctrines of salvation, the church or of Jesus’s divinity’ it ‘depended upon a common anti-Catholicism that was more negative in content than affirmative in structure’.
Yet the issue remains a theme of ongoing scholarly debate. Alec Ryrie, for instance, has recently argued that at least before 1640 divisions between Puritan and conformist believers in Britain should not be overstated. Devotional practices mainly united Protestants across the Isles.\textsuperscript{44} Bridget Heal argues that by the mid-seventeenth century, for instance, a new visual culture in Lutheran Saxony ‘constituted an important part of a confessional identity that was defined not only by what Lutherans were not, but also by what they were: members of a confession, a local community, a dynasty and/or a corporation bound together by particular memories, rituals and spiritual desires’.\textsuperscript{45} Relative homogeneity for larger sets of populations was obviously ensured by the fact that variant Protestantisms had become institutionalized by cities and states, some of them monarchies such as England or Denmark. For most people, conversion hence never became a voluntary process, even though some individuals did switch confessions several times. The right to leave a country whose creed one was not in accord with became enshrined in many areas.\textsuperscript{46} Most citizens nonetheless were made or born Protestant, and most would not decide to go into exile but remained Protestant and passed their beliefs on to new generations.

In turn, evocative common tropes of belonging certainly did emerge, at least for some periods and interpretative communities as well as alongside internally divisive rhetoric. Protestants often collectively saw themselves as chosen people, tested by God through suffering. Despite many internal disputes about how scriptures would need to be accurately translated and interpreted, Protestantism’s distinct branches moreover all insisted that their message was characterized by theological simplicity, purity, and clarity as well as a shared wish for unity in Christ or brotherhood in the Lord. The French reformer Jean Calvin would send international letters to high-ranking converts and congratulate them on joining men like him, whom God had ‘admitted to those through whose work he now tells the world about pure evangelical doctrine’.\textsuperscript{47} From 1555 onwards, pastors were sent secretly from Geneva to France and other European countries in order to further the mission of the ‘Church under the Cross’. They were told that all their suffering would be healed by God’s love and eternal life.

Next, there were attempts to construct a common transnational memory and unifying story for specific Protestant groups. From the 1560s onwards, Dutch, English, French, and German martyrologies recounting the lives of ‘holy, chosen witnesses and martyrs of God’ flowed off Europe’s presses for the next centuries. These included prominent reformers of different evangelical strands as well as abundant examples of ordinary laymen and -women. English popular publications, such as cheap almanacs, could offer an odd and extremely reduced version of history which even included Martin Luther as signal reformer. \textit{The Protestant Almanack, For the Year 1700}, for instance, listed dates for the creation of the world, the incarnation of Jesus, followed by: ‘England
received the Christian Faith’, ‘Martin Luther wrote against the Pope’, ‘Our first delivery from Popery by K. Edward VI’, followed by Elizabeth, the horrid Gun-Powder-Plot, the burning of London, and the third deliverance from Popery by ‘K. Will & Q. Mary’. Weather predictions and cosmological information were enriched by accounts of ‘principal’ martyrs, just as saints’ lives had figured in Catholic almanacs.  

In relation to dark, fearsome Catholicism, Protestants moreover triumphantly equated themselves to lightness. Craig Koslofsky has recently shown that the ‘straightforward “light versus darkness” imagery of the Reformation created a confessionally fractured world in which the night took on new sacred values’. He points to the fact that Anabaptists often met at night in secrecy, outside towns, excitedly exchanging passwords and listening to sermons by candlelight. For some spiritual writers around and after 1600, by contrast, darkness newly provided a path to divine revelation. Jacob Böhme, the Silesian spiritualist (c. 1575–1624), argued that night and day were not just dualistic, as God has created everything through and within contraries to complement each other. Art historians, however, tell us that this spiritual dimension was already explored in the Middle Ages through stained glass, as well as depictions of and prayers to St. Veronica, which underscored ‘both luminosity and darkness, finding Christ’s nature in this very tension’.  

This underlines that ideas within the Protestant spectrum can appear as selections and further adaptations of medieval engagements with transcendence, rather than entirely as new departures. All the same, there was also clear innovation. The Protestant mainstream’s newly invigorated celebration of light led to a remarkable idea. As it conventionally continued to hold that darkness invited Satan, and light created a visual environment fit for spiritual illumination, the very first book championing street-lighting in Europe was authored by a Lutheran minister. Johann Valentin Andreae’s Christianopolis, a comprehensive utopia published in 1619, admitted that ‘lamps burning in intervals’ would be extremely expensive. Yet they would prevent opportunities for ‘shady dealings’. In addition, street-lighting promised to calm the fears of people late at work, remind everyone of the ‘Eternal Light’, and reassuringly set people ‘against the dark kingdom and murky games of Satan’. Here was innovative thinking to realize the eternal dream of a godly city of light.

Protestant Material Cultures

As the example of street-lighting suggests, religious signification was bound up with material culture. This is particularly relevant for a new history of Protestantism, as this movement has often been seen to repudiate objects alongside rituals to endorse ascetism.
or, at the very least, ‘plainness’. Yet material cultures are crucial to understanding how people created Protestant everyday lives and moved from conversion to routines. Anthropologists of religion have no doubt that ‘things, their use, their valuation, and their appeal’ are bound up with religion rather than adding to it. They hold that ‘any antagonism between religion and things resonates with a set of related oppositions’. These oppositions ‘privilege spirit over matter, belief over ritual, content above form, mind over body, and inward contemplation above “mere” outward action’. Such categories produce a limited understanding of religion defined only as interior spiritual experience.52

The notion of ‘interiority’ hence is nothing given. We need to explore whether and how different groups of Protestants used such a concept. Protestantism certainly attempted to render many Catholic types of materiality insignificant and elaborated ideas of visual deceit.53 Yet this does not imply in turn that it was anti-material or iconophobic. It built up its own divergent notions of proper relations between people and religious things. We need to ask how these were shaped and transmitted as well as how they built on particular medieval ideas. When the laity, for instance, was to value images through distinct regimes of looking, mediating what is invisible to the eye,54 this developed the medieval idea that divine presence revealed itself through the mind’s eye—through informed imagination rather than sheer sensuousness, which had always been regarded as too profane, personal, and deceptive.55

An integral part of much Lutheran involvement with the supernatural therefore continued to express itself through material culture. Religious things made belief tangible, sensuous, and present rather than merely an interior phenomenon.56 Much remains to be discovered. Plainness, for instance, certainly did not characterize Lutheran aesthetics in the longue durée. By the eighteenth century, city councils in places such as Dresden created magnificent churches, where ‘theology and visual culture speak as one; scripture and images have been fully reconciled’. The confrontation with Calvinism, in particular, deepened this Lutheran attachment to visual expressions of faith. Theatrical altarpieces measured up to Baroque standards. Sermons promised spiritual rewards for those who donated artefacts or images.57

Even the paradigm that earlier Lutheran church art reduced the visual to words is based on mistaken evidence. A principal example that has often been used is a church retable installed in the town of Dinkelsbühl in 1537, which only shows text. While the art historian Hans Belting has repeatedly stated that the text retable represents the Lutheran iconoclastic non-image, Joseph Leo Koerner’s important 2004 publication on The Reformation of the Image first drew attention to the fact that it had in fact once been connected to a painted panel. The subject of both the text retable and altarpiece was the
Eucharist. Early Lutheranism thus already transformed rather than eradicated images, and here it did so in relation to divergent Lutheran and Zwinglian ideas about the Last Supper. It also turns out that many medieval churches owned panels which primarily depicted words. Current scholarship moreover increasingly turns away from church art to explore how other forms of materiality expressed and endorsed Protestant values of domesticity and civility. Andrew Morrall, for instance, has argued that furnishings, such as glass roundels with Biblical subjects and tile-stoves, ‘underlined the holiness of the household’. Drinking vessels, too, often carried Biblical scenes and therefore ‘reinforced the moral dimensions of the meal’. There were even ewers with scenes depicting the drunken Lot and his daughters in order to warn about the effects of drink. All these items were didactic and created, Morrall argues,

An atmosphere of sober probity suitable to the pious household ... the ordination of civility, the control of appetite, the transformation of nature by breeding and piety—we see, here how figurative ornament formed not just a visual equivalent but a concretization, a physical habitus of those ideals and beliefs.

Material culture, in other words, projected key Protestant values and constructed identities. More problematically, Morrall suggests that objects imparted these values invariably in the same way.

Protestantism, however, can certainly be said to have inspired a diverse design history. Clothes, for instance, were highly important symbolic tool-kits in early modern society, to transform the moral substance of a wearer, inspire awe, or express values. For Anabaptists, as Thomas Kaufmann has argued, questions of dress condensed the connection of ‘life’ and ‘teaching’. Luther himself first declared that dress did not matter, but in practice asserted his claim for charismatic leadership as Wittenberg doctor of theology through scarlet red items of dress associated with scholars. Protestantism thus founded different taste communities—a German Lutheran bourgeois urban mainstream valued new, but not excessive dress, whereas reformed burghers in the Dutch Republic combined a love of pristine white lace and dangling passementerie (tassels) with restrained, though sumptuous black fabrics. By the early seventeenth century, Protestant leaders of either Lutheran or Calvinist confession were increasingly taken by relaxed French fashions to mark their refusal of Spanish constricting styles associated with a whole cultural politics of tyranny. Across society, sermons and Holy Communion continued to be occasions for social display and thus required careful dressing across the social spectrum. Even English Puritans happily conceded that possessions could be God’s temporal blessings as ‘ornaments and delights’.
The Weber Thesis

Few historians therefore still subscribe to the utility of Max Weber’s (1864–1920) famous thesis that reformed strands of Protestantism cultivated ascetic practices, rationalized religion, and dedicated themselves to a remorseless ‘work ethic’ as well as a constant reinvestment of accumulated resources in enterprises. This ‘inner worldly ascetism’ led to Dutch and English economic supremacy. For Weber, Calvinists anxiously assured themselves that they had been pre-destined by God to reach eternity. Rationalization itself had become a passion. His pioneering sociology implied that daily practices ingrained a religious ‘spirit’ (Geist) which explained the origins of capitalism.

Weber developed this argument through his deep personal struggle with strict German Protestant notions that to perfectly fulfil demanding work obligations was a cornerstone of Christian life. He eventually found himself unable to cope with the pressure of holding a university chair. One of Weber’s troubled fears was that the Reformations might ultimately lead to a cultural development which forced people to even conduct their leisure activities only in the spirit of accumulating benefits and measured advancement, for instance through sporting exercise. The Reformations had moulded an inhumane modernity.

As Jan de Vries and others have shown, however, early modern Protestant cultures were not actually devoid of interest in enjoying expenditure, even if they disapproved of Catholic ‘old’ luxury in order to champion their own consumption as ‘new luxury’. Capitalism therefore was not advanced through ascetism, but through legitimizing moral forms of consumption. This argument presents a major breakthrough in our understanding of how attitudes towards religion and consumption spurred on more market orientated economic regimes by the seventeenth century.

Protestants typically identified ‘old luxury’ with papal, oriental, and monarchical splendour, which built up a false world of fantastic illusion and overwhelmed the eyes of onlookers. It served such narrow, non-meritorious elites trapped in a vicious circle of excessive self-love and greed. They were seen to cultivate extravagant and often unnatural, effeminate, and over-sensuous tastes, which meant that they needed a large class of adulating subservient people to consume in this vainglorious way. This was regarded as a cultural practice of vain pride, which engendered constant envy. It pertained to uncontrollable passions, rather than manageable emotion. As in ancient Rome, old luxury was doomed, set to lead to decline, and for Christian writers easily evinced the misery of human nature after the Fall.
New luxury and the defence of new ‘decencies’ could be declared virtuous. Dutch lotteries, for instance, fundraised for the poor or those regarded as ‘mad’ with prizes such as silver forks, plates, ewers, breadbaskets, mirrors, oil jars, and expensive petticoats. Such consumption was identified with a republican spirit and public gain, gentility, and politeness as well as different regimes of looking and cleanliness. The Dutch, in particular, cultivated a culture of spotless homes. This kind of consumption was ideally said to enshrine clear codes of honourable consumption, based on a regular self-examination of whether one needed something or was over-indulgent in unreasonably conspicuous consumption. The intention was to responsibly manage passions for possessions. Such new luxury models of consumption typically endorsed measured innovation and the notion of aesthetic pleasure. This connected to the notion that consumers should obtain a high degree of product information and hence cultivate taste based on knowledge as well as civil sociability rather than pompous tastes to advertise conspicuous wealth.

Beneficial Knowledge

This explains the importance of horticulture, on which much money was spent by rulers and burghers alike. It was a cultural practice which for seventeenth- and eighteenth-century Protestants sought nothing less than to ‘reverse the curse and recreate the earthly paradise of the Garden of Eden by perfecting nature’. This turned landscape itself into a ‘theatre of religious history’. Plants were particularly suited to gathering spiritual significance, as they were used in healing. Protestant gardening hence adapted the monastic garden into the princely and bourgeois sphere. It united a new interest in empirical observation and natural philosophy with a commitment to charity, natural beauty, and applied, learned sociability.

The Lutheran duchess Sibylla of Württemberg (d. 1608), for instance, consistently developed her medical and botanical expertise. This filled her role as Lutheran mother to her country, a Landesmutter, with Christian meaning. Like other rulers and noblewomen, she passionately experimented with purifying as well as inventing new drugs by distilling substances. High-born ladies were riveted by gardening and the challenges of constructing hot-houses, because the new plants with their unknown colours, smells, and other properties infused their sense of living with an exhilarating sense of change and advancing knowledge. The grandest of these early gardens, the Hortus Palatinus, was created from 1614 by the Calvinist prince Frederick V in Heidelberg for his English wife, Elizabeth Stuart. Protestantism hence inspired an intense spiritualization of such aspects of everyday life which were seen as God’s creation for the benefit of mankind. These were
thoroughly enjoyed in ways which appeared to appropriately merge understanding and the sensuous.

In turn it became increasingly common for middle- and upper-class women to transfer illustrations in Bibles, popular herbals, and botanical writings into embroidery for domestic uses rather than church worship. This custom is particularly well documented for England. The Tree of Life in the Garden of Eden, for instance, creatively served to reflect beliefs in God’s promise of Redemption, the abundance of his creation as well as the idea of the strong bond between humans and God and life itself as a process of fruition. The Fountain of Eden as a symbol of God’s saving grace as well as other themes of new life and resurrection were typically privileged over the story of the Fall and its grim consequences for men and women. Adam’s and Eve’s sin was depicted as equal.70

**Protestant Histories of Emotion**

Recent research on material practices thus focuses on how ordinary men and women embedded religion in their everyday lives beyond the Church to make spiritual ideas meaningful. This notion of agency and interpretation is all the more relevant as Protestant sermons can be seen to have ‘masculinized’ faith. Susan Karant-Nunn’s study of the ‘Reformation of Feeling’, for example, argues that German Protestant preachers equated sincere expressions of belief with an idealization of composure, tranquillity, and a corresponding fear of loss of control over emotions, embodied in the feminine and feeble. An idealized image of male self-control came to define proper behaviour and male figures provided the central experience of faith. She finds that Lutheran sermons moved towards a greater stress on divine punishment, the necessity of atonement, and a diabolization of feminine sinfulness during the seventeenth century. Protestant decorative programmes in churches nearly eliminated female figures. German Protestants polemically stereotyped Catholics as overwhelmed by feeling and vague in order to stigmatize them as feminized and inferior.

This provides an original analysis of the gendering of religious emotional languages in Germany, but also points to divergences in current scholarship. British historians, for instance, maintain that ‘Protestant piety tended to efface rather than emphasize gender distinctions.’ Yet surprisingly no authoritative study on gender in the English reformation exists. Work on women’s Bible reading or men’s sermons is unable to capture gendered practices and experiences of religious devotion more broadly.

Margo Todd’s religious ethnography for Calvinist Scotland likewise does not explore gender differences but is based on a broader source base than sermons and helps to
emphasize the specificity of local cultures which made up ‘Protestant Europe’. She portrays a reformed culture which encouraged emotional expressiveness in men and women. In Scotland, Todd argues, rituals remained crucial to mediate faith, answering people’s need to deal with guilt as well as their search for forgiveness and salvation. On Sundays, churches would be crowded and attendance was precisely controlled. After services, parishioners would split into groups and read the Bible, sing psalms, and learn catechisms. Their doctrinal knowledge would be conscientiously tested. At the same time, sermons were deeply emotional occasions. Pastors and their congregations would weep—hearts were to be moved. Sermons were structured around rhetorical questions inviting the response ‘Amen’, which involved the community in a dramatic dialogue with God. Christ’s crucified body was imagined so vividly in words that they substituted images. The annual spiritual climax was communion, which was preceded by a time of fasting and anxious meditations on a sinful life. Although the reformed tradition embedded a symbolic rather than sacramental understanding of divine presence in relation to the Eucharist, the ritual context in Scottish parishes charged communion and the Eucharist which followed it with a sense of divine presence. Feelings were collectively expressed and shared, as was the joy about the badges people received once they had confessed and been admitted to communion. Communion sermons were all about salvation and how the sacrament mediated an experience of the Lord. A Glasgow sermon, for instance, promised that all senses, gaze, touch, taste, and smell, would be satisfied through partaking in the Eucharist. ‘Are your hearts in heaven, Christians? ... Is it him? Is it him? ... He whom I saw in prayers and the sacraments?’, he then asked. Throughout the year, guilds frequently participated in decorating churches; fishermen donated boats and asked for special blessings; wealthy families built tombs with emblems and religious symbols; thus, no white and empty churches are to be found in early modern Scotland either, but decorative elements, which communal groups helped define. Elders regularly punished severe domestic violence, helped to mediate conflicts, made sure that schools were built, distributed alms, and got fathers to pay for the upkeep of their illegitimate children. They were clever enough to be lenient about people’s behaviour during festive occasions and fairs, and about leisure pursuits such as dancing, unless there was extreme rowdiness. Nor did they object to dancing, sport, and theatre plays on weekdays. People still believed in fairies and visited holy wells in May.

Karant-Nunn’s and Todd’s exemplary studies thus underline that historians are still in the process of building up a picture of Protestant experiences across Europe in relation to gender, the emotions, senses, and material worlds. It will be crucial for further research to capture as many aspects of life as possible, and not just to concentrate on printed sermons, but religious rituals as well as the symbolic construction of meaning in daily life. We certainly have much evidence to suggest that parishioners interacted confidently with their pastors. They often displayed resistance to those endlessly demanding
repentance during the Last Days. One German pastor sighed: ‘They demand brief sermons and long Bratwürste (sausages).’\textsuperscript{73} It is important to remember moreover that German Lutheran congregations had the right to elect their pastors. Anyone locked in conflict with parishioners was dismissed. Different concepts of authority within Lutheranism hence created a tension between a ‘clerical approach’ and a ‘congregational approach’.\textsuperscript{74} But as Todd has found for Scotland, pastors mostly seem to have adapted to local expectations, while particular groups of parishioners enjoyed agency to define religious practices.

**De-sacralization**

Such findings have increasingly challenged Max Weber’s idea that reformed Protestantism in particular ushered in a more rational, ‘disenchanted’ world view as anachronistic. Rather, debates about faith explored the nature of human sensory experience. A Protestant church, for instance, was meant to supply one cohesive acoustic space for sermons—even when competing services in side chapels or shrines were in progress. Disruptions from dogs or chatter were regularly disciplined. This was particularly important as many Protestants hoped that going to church would provide a ‘hot’ spiritual experience to affect and inspire everyone. The form of delivery mattered more than its content as preachers appealed to the senses and emotions through the way they read, spoke, or sang. Alongside sermons and liturgy, prayers were seen as cornerstones of a religious existence which aimed to move hearts through a connection with love, despair, empathy, and hope. All believers could now ‘touch any religious object’ as well as receive consecrated bread in their hands. At the same time, a recent study on reformed England finds that ‘confusion surrounding instrumentality, touch and visuality in sacraments and religious practices’ persisted because the senses always invited great anxiety about deceit, manipulation, and moral corruption.\textsuperscript{75}

Calvin continued to praise God’s sweetness, which implied that to know him one had to sense the intensity of such sweetness. Reformed believers in England often linked ‘sweet feeling’ to a language of fluids—one praised to be drunken with holy joy or filled with the pleasant wine of his love. Yet, as with medieval mystics, sweetness could never resolve into a steady state. British Protestants regarded affliction as a gift which had to be borne with patient suffering. ‘You did not search out affliction, but you watched anxiously to see whether affliction searched you out.’ Joy and sorrow, and an endless struggle with feelings of despair and assurance remained ‘the warp and weft of faith, woven together for the glory of God’.\textsuperscript{76} True penitence hence was likewise regarded as a gift of the Holy Spirit and expressed itself often through ‘earnest’ tears. These were longed for as they possessed an ‘almost automatic redemptive power’. Such release
brought joy, to be followed by groaning, zealous devotion, and so on. German theologians likewise sacralized suffering—it moved Christians to call upon God’s help and experience his blessing, though they could veer uneasily between an emphasis on suffering as divine punishment for sin and the promise of consolation for those whose hearts experienced true tribulations.

Congregational hymn-singing offered a further type of release which became particularly significant for the Protestant economy of the emotions, so that historians focusing on Protestant art as an expression of affective emotionality simply fail to look in the best place. Luther and Calvin both regarded music as key to opening the hearts of believers, and hymns or psalms furnished words to move the pious with appropriate sincerity and understanding. The sung word was no longer ‘verbal abstraction’ and complicates the notion of Protestantism as an ‘inward’ religion. As recent studies have shown, music therefore needs to be central to a new cultural history of an affective Protestantism which attracted broader groups of the populace.

Christopher Boyd Brown thus has challenged Gerald Strauss’s argument that the Reformation proved a failure by pointing to the vibrancy and inclusiveness of local musical traditions. He focuses on Joachimstal, a town on the border of Saxony and Bohemia. Hymns composed by its two most influential musicians were disseminated across Lutheran Germany in printed hymn books and accessibly summarized key doctrinal ideas. They ‘placed clear limits on the authority of the church and its ministers’, and justified individual disobedience to secular authorities in the name of conscience and God. Schoolgirls sang alongside boys in services, and hymns about John the Baptist or Christ were set to the tune of ring dances for girls. Many of the hymns addressed themselves to women to stimulate their active participation through Biblical role-models of heroines who instructed their children and servants in religion or comforted their neighbours. This was an economically buoyant area, so that rather than rigorously domesticating women, preachers announced that ‘God also dwells among virtuous businesswomen who support themselves by buying and selling, in faith, and also read their hymnal and catechism when they are not engaged in business or other work.’

This emphasis on virtuous womanhood nonetheless explains why the witch came to be so feared by Protestants as much as by Catholics. Indeed, the first visual depiction of witches attending a Sabbath and kissing the devil’s anus to make bad weather was made by a Zurich pastor, Johann Jakob Wick (1522–88). Wick filled hundreds of pages with pasted-in broadsheets and his own watercolours which recounted stories of horrid crimes and providential punishment. The witch was the opposite of a young housewife and mother. She did not nourish but poison those around her; she was envious and demanding, a woman who killed infants and acted as it pleased her. The witch often controlled men, and entered a world of dance, food, and pleasure at night.
Protestantism defined itself not least through fighting against this figure. Tübingen professors of divinity, for example, were careful enough to preach after every hailstorm that it had not been caused by witches. Even so, they also held that the devil deluded witches that they could cause hailstorms and thereby wield power over humans by causing them harm. Witches hence deserved to be burnt as apostates—as women who had fallen from Christian belief.

These strong emotional investments in ideas of good and evil explain why the witch as well as the angel remained part of the Protestant imaginary landscape until well into the seventeenth century. Of course champions of rationalism emerged. Balthasar Bekker, for instance, was a Dutch reformed preacher in late seventeenth-century Amsterdam who published a comprehensive account of demons and witches, *The World Bewitched*. Published in 1691–93, it was translated into French, German, and English. Bekker argued that learned beliefs in spirits were the same as popular superstitions, and mostly propagated by the clergy. They undermined monotheism. More specifically, Bekker argued that there was no clear information on angelic powers and certainly nothing to indicate that fairies were anything other than medieval folklore that had survived. Witches could not enter into contact with Satan. Yet Bekker’s four-part tome was immediately attacked for denying a belief in the devil or that God could influence the lives of people.  

Conclusion—Interpreting Religious Change

Has the Reformation as ‘Long Reformation’ just become an account ‘full of small events in small groups, plus some greater ones, but without a centre and lacking an engagement in dramas of great historical change, such as Cortés and Montezuma at Tenochtitlàn, Luther and Charles V at Worms’? Is it now the history of ‘a great many reformations’?  

To a large extent this is true. As this chapter has explored, the Reformation was linked to different milieus, media, and cultural practices. A leading historian of religion has recently summed up that Protestantism changed some things ‘very quickly, within a generation or two’, other things ‘only very slowly or in strong continuity to the fifteenth century, many things not at all, some only in the reformed, but not in Lutheran areas, some in towns and less so in the villages, some things for men, but not for women’.  

In contrast to this layered temporal approach, some historians nonetheless continue to argue for the Reformation’s significance as a movement which propelled Western culture in one direction. Brad Gregory, a Catholic historian, thus has recently tried to show that the Reformation provoked not only the division within Western Christendom, but also increasing secularization. He counts modern consumerism and capitalism alongside
relativism among its unintended, deeply problematic legacies. In Gregory’s view the
Reformation was prompted by an increasing divide between Christian ideals and
the realities of life for most people during the later Middle Ages. In response,
Lutheranism sought to strengthen the Church’s message by focusing on the Bible.
However, it soon became clear that the Bible allowed different interpretations of faith.
This unintentionally led to infinite conflicts among Protestants as well as between
Catholics and Protestants. In turn, liberal states eventually privatized religion. This left
little space for public debates about common values and more time for shopping. ‘In
combination with the exercise of power by hegemonic, liberal states’, Gregory sums up, ‘a
symbiosis of capitalism and consumerism is today more than anything else the cultural
 glue that holds together the heterogeneity of Western hyper-pluralism’—a development
that has reduced ecological and human possibility.\(^\text{84}\) The Reformation sparked off a failed
modernity which has reduced the quality of all our lives. A focus on the individual as a
rights-bearing subject and authority before God has led to a mass culture of outward
sameness and voided ethics, a divorce between market and morality.\(^\text{85}\)

Heinz Schilling, a Lutheran historian, on the other hand presents a very different
assessment of what he regards as the unintended consequences of the Reformation.
These can be divided into positive and problematic aspects. Positive aspects include a
new approach to how humans relate to God, the abolition of the notion of purgatory,
cultural enrichment in the areas of language and music, the furthering of a Catholic
reformation, the formulation of a right of secular resistance, the strengthening of
participatory political cultures, and the abolition of ideals of celibacy. Its horrific
consequences encompass the wars fought over religion, the great engagement with
notions of the demonic and witchcraft, ideological support for English colonialism as well
as the strengthening of anti-semitic arguments to expel (rather than extinguish) Jews.
Most of all, however, Schilling maintains that Luther was able to revive the ‘existential
power of religion’. He integrated this power into everyday life by sanctifying ‘a person’s
pro-creative marriage and dutiful profession’.\(^\text{86}\) Meanwhile Luther’s inability to
compromise about spiritual truth led to such a confrontation between the Christian
religions that societies eventually were led to religious tolerance and a positive
particularization of universal claims. This largely avoided religious wars.\(^\text{87}\)

2017 will commemorate the 500th anniversary of Luther’s ninety-five theses against
indulgences. This is likely to produce similar interpretations by historians of different
confessional allegiances which insist that the reformation must once more be restored to
a historical phenomenon with a capital R—a big Reformation, for which Luther remains
foundational. As Schilling himself emphasizes, it nonetheless remains important not to
write even such a history only through Luther and other Protestant reformers. One might
recall that a Catholic reformer and knight like Ignatius of Loyola, who founded the
Jesuits, became a pilgrim in 1522 and caught up on so much theological knowledge that he was allowed to study divinity in 1524. He founded his order in 1540, which soon would send out missions across the whole world. Would anyone really wish to weigh up whether Luther or Loyola did more to ‘revive the existential power of religion’, or ushered in modern developments, such as transnationalism?

(p. 595) An ecumenical history of the Reformation will therefore do well to abandon a focus on the question of which religious movement led to greater modernity. In addition, much recent work has emphasized the extent to which Christianity remained a key force in modern societies. As a result, and in contrast to other world religions, European Christians therefore mostly did not regard economic success as a result of spiritual achievement or God’s blessing. Charity and welfare developed as strong features of European societies from the Middle Ages on, which served precisely to temper the raw capitalism and contempt for economic failure Gregory deplores.

There is no doubt, however, that the Reformations confronted Europeans with the fact that Christianity contained radically different truth claims. This meant that the history and arguments of these claims were constantly reconstructed and questioned. Eventually this contributed to the emergence of a worldview which looks at every religion as a cultural system of meaning and explores its ideas, tensions, and limitations. Yet this is not the same as ‘hyper-pluralism’. Rather it pushed towards ‘a necessary de-mythologization of history’. The church historian Berndt Hamm has recently warned that

[m]acro-historical imaginations of epochs do more damage than good, because they feed the fiction of universal coherence and watersheds in relation to large periods of time ... By suggesting that there exist such essential, objective contents related parameters of identification they hinder research and lead discussions into the dead-end of obsessed labelling.88

Hamm sees Luther, for instance, as a reformer with as many novel as traditional aspects which in themselves can hardly be attributed to notions of the ‘medieval’ or ‘modern’, but are signs of their own complex time. In this view, which this chapter has built on, historians need to critically examine different traditions, including our own, from different perspectives. Each strand of the developments we can trace was replete with possibilities and limitations. Some strands became more dominant than others for a time, or lost and later re-gained significance. This means that history is not about one tradition, but permanent processes of adaptation, development, consolidation, and questioning of religious practices and ideas which we actively interpret from our particular position in the present.
Further Reading


Bynum, Caroline W. *Wonderful Blood: Theology and Practice in Late Medieval Northern Germany and Beyond* (Philadelphia, 2007).


Notes:

(1.) Thorsten Fuchs, *Philipp Melanchthon als neulateinischer Dichter in der Zeit der Reformation* (Tübingen, 2008), 350–360; the woodcut no longer exists.
Protestantism and its Adherents


(3.) The Last Days of Luther, 69.


(5.) Irena Backus, Life Writing in Reformation Europe: Lives of Reformers by Friends, Disciples and Foes (Aldershot, 2008), 11.

(6.) Scribner, Popular Culture and Popular Movements, 353.


(8.) Leopold von Ranke, Über die Epochen der Neueren Geschichte (Darmstadt, 1959), 102.


(10.) For an introduction to such approaches see Henrietta L. Moore, Still Life: Hopes, Desire and Satisfactions (Cambridge, 2011).


(13.) For the Peasants’ War the work of Peter Blickle and his doctoral students was decisive; for the best assessment in English see Tom Scott, ‘The Peasants’ War: A Historiographical Review’, Historical Journal, 22 (1979), 693–720, 953–974; among the first international historians who integrated the German reformation into local community studies rather than a study of imperial cities and larger towns was David W. Sabeau, Power in the Blood, while for France studies by Natalie Zemon Davis focused on large towns, especially Lyon, but pioneered through their attention to all levels of society
and themes such as violence, conceptions of time or gender. A pioneering collection for eastern Europe is Maria Crâciun and Ovidiu Ghitta, eds., *Church and Society in Central and Eastern Europe* (Cluj, 1998).


(17.) It further explains: ‘Intradenominational dissociation and negotiation processes are in evidence in the region, especially in the early phases of denominational consolidation, for example in the well-documented case of crypto-Calvinism among the Lutherans and of nonadorationism in the Antitrinitarian movement’, István Keul, *Early Modern Religious Communities in East-Central Europe: Ethnic Diversity, Denominational Plurality, and Corporate Politics in the Principality of Transylvania (1526–1691)* (Leiden, 2009), 5.


(19.) The existence of such variety across early modern Europe also explains why the ‘confessionalisation’ thesis advanced by Wolfgang Reinhard and Heinz Schilling is no longer regarded as useful by most researchers.


(22.) Bynum, Holy Blood, 112.

(23.) Bynum, Holy Blood, xvii.

(24.) Bynum, Holy Blood, 15.


(28.) Brady, German Histories, 4.

(29.) Berndt Hamm, ‘Normative Zentrierung städtischer Religiosität zwischen 1450 und 1550’, in Thomas Max Safely, ed., Ad historiam humanam: Aufsätze für Hans-Christoph Rublack (Epfendorf, 2005), 65; the term Samtschaube is mis-interpreted by Hamm.

(30.) Ute Lotz-Heumann, Jan-Friedrich Mißfelder, and Matthias Pohlig, eds., Konversion und Konfession in der Frühen Neuzeit (Gütersloh, 2007).

(31.) Martin Luther, D. Martin Luthers Werke (120 vols; Weimar, 1883–2009), vol. 48(1), 58–76.

(32.) Andrew Pettegree, in his otherwise excellent study Reformation and the Culture of Persuasion (Cambridge, 2005), has challenged the view that such images provided effective propaganda tools for a wider populace. He argues that they were highly complex and aimed at literate people. Yet his examples are not representative of the Wittenberg production as he ignores manifestly popular works, above all the Passional Christi Antichrist, an enduringly successful series of woodcuts contrasting the humble life of Christ with the pomp of a secular, evil papacy as Anti-Christ. Pettegree also simplifies Bob Scribner’s increasingly nuanced view, for which one needs to turn to the second edition of his classic work For the Sake of the Simple Folk: Popular Propaganda for the German Reformation (Oxford, 1994).
(33.) Hans-Ulrich Delius et al., eds., *Reformatorenbriefe: Luther, Zwingli, Calvin* (Berlin, 1973), 195, a letter to Beatus Rhenanus, 22.2.1519.

(34.) Delius et al., *Reformatorenbriefe*, 199.

(35.) The best introduction to the Swiss reformation is by Bruce Gordon, *The Swiss Reformation* (Manchester, 2002).


(38.) Matheson, *Works*, 57.

(39.) Matheson, *Works*, 140, my emphasis.


(41.) Heinz Schilling, ‘Confessional Europe’, in T. Brady et al., eds., *Handbook of European History*, vol. 2 (Leiden, 1995), 641–682, the most concise summary of Schilling’s wider argument in English.


(47.) Delius et al., *Reformatorenbriefe*, 357, to Edward Seymour in August 1548, my emphasis.


(54.) Birgit Meyer, ‘“There is a Spirit in that Image”: Mass-Produced Jesus Pictures and Protestant-Pentecostal Animation in Ghana’, in Meyer and Houtman, *Things*, 299.


(56.) This paraphrases Lorraine Daston and Peter Galison’s immensely useful approach to scientific objectivity, and thus the interaction with the natural, in *Objectivity* (New York, 2007), 52.


(61.) For plurality in an age which used to be thought of in terms of ‘Lutheran orthodoxy’ see Thomas Kaufmann, Konfession und Kultur. Lutherischer Protestantismus in der zweiten Hälfte des Reformationsjahrehunrds (Tübingen, 2006).


(64.) Jan de Vries, The Industrious Revolution: Consumer Behaviour and the Household Economy, 1650 to the Present (Cambridge, 2008), 58–72. This is with particular reference to Johan and Pieter de la Court, who since 1685 published in Amsterdam on the difference between ‘Monarchical’ and ‘Republican’ Luxury and influenced the Dutchman Mandeville.


(66.) Particularly relevant for this study is Karin Wurst, Fabricating Pleasure. Fashion, Entertainment, and Cultural Consumption in Germany, 1780–1830 (Detroit, 2005).


(68.) Alisha Rankin, Panaceia’s Daughters: Noblewomen as Healers in Early Modern Germany (Chicago, 2013).

(69.) The pioneering study here is Keith Thomas, Man and the Natural World: Changing Attitudes in England 1500–1800 (Harmondsworth, 1983), 226; most recently see Rankin, Panaceia’s Daughters.


(71.) Ryrie, Being Protestant, endorses Kate Narveson’s findings in her study of women as Bible readers, 472.

(72.) See the pioneering study by Margo Todd, The Culture of Protestantism in Early Modern Scotland (New Haven, 2002).


(81.) This famous Bekker controversy is discussed, for instance, by Euan Cameron, *Enchanted Europe: Superstition, Reason, & Religion, 1250–1750* (Oxford, 2010), 266-269.


(87.) Thomas Kaufmann, Göttingen professor of theology, supports this view in a particularly striking phrase. He argues that ‘especially in the horizon of global insecurity about religion in our time’ we learn from the many violent and divisive aspects of
Reformation history that ‘religion in its destructive potential can only be borne through its path to secularised transformation in European modernity’, Thomas Kaufmann, ‘Der Widerspenstigen Zähmung’, Süddeutsche Zeitung, 21 November 2012.


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Abstract and Keywords

When seeking to capture how religion shapes lay people’s expectations, a focus on formal theology and on ecclesiastical structures can leave much unexplained. Three concepts animated Renaissance Catholics’ understandings of reality, God’s purposes, and their own obligations: Real Presence, Immediate Accountability, and Divine Rhythms in Time and Space. The Catholic Church developed through later centuries along the lines of three broad movements of early modernity: the evolutions from Moving to Fixed, from Local to Universal, and from Action to Intention. Catholicism remained fully a creature of its times as it adopted these new emphases, some shared by Protestants and others emerging through the processes of globalization. The changes arose from and reinforce new institutional orderings traceable through political and social institutions generally. They were less the top-down impositions of an authoritative body, than the cultural evolution of a social institution which retained considerable internal variety of thought and worship.

Keywords: Early modern Catholicism, globalization, lay religion, confessionalization, Catholic reform

Look at the Catholic Church through the early modern period is to look at an institution, a set of beliefs, doctrines, and practices, and above all an extraordinarily diverse group of people found around the globe. All changed significantly from the fifteenth through the eighteenth centuries, shaped by intellectual and social forces similar to those reshaping every other early modern social body. The changes were less transformative than accumulative, so that a Renaissance believer transplanted to Enlightenment Europe would have recognized the institution and its clergy. She would have known where to go, what to do, and what to believe. The sanctuary that she entered
in 1750 would be recognizably the fulfilment of where she had worshipped in 1450, even if differently furnished. Yet the longer she lived in that new world, the more she would encounter unfamiliar elements in how its members related to each other and what they took to be their place in the world. She might detect, even in her locality, that what had been the gateway to heaven had become the largest transnational corporation on earth. She might not see, as indeed many did not, that the world’s first global institution, expanding rapidly through the period of Europe’s early modern imperial and colonizing expansion, would be one of the first victims of the turn against that *ancien régime*.

It is impossible to do full justice to the complexities of Catholic faith and corporate life in a short survey, and fortunately there are many recent monographs and collections which delve more deeply into both. In this piece we might instead start with what it meant to be Catholic in the fifteenth century, and then identify some of the deeper shifts in the faith and institution over the following three centuries. Work of the past few decades allows us to move beyond traditional studies that focused on high culture, politics, and doctrine to explore more broadly how Catholics lived in, shaped, and were shaped by the early modern world. Many older studies bore the imprint of traditional religious divisions. After Vatican II, Catholic historians began studying lay religious experience, though they still often located it within a clerical framework and subordinate to clerical direction. Those studying Catholicism today are less often driven by personal devotion, loyalty, or animosity, and so approach early modern religious phenomena and the institutional church as a research subject rather than a personal cause. As a result, current studies use anthropology, sociology, and psychology to explore the senses, material culture, sanctity, devotional consumption, space, and landscape in order to probe Catholicism as a world, an outlook, a way of living, and a people.

We can start with some characteristics that demonstrate how late medieval and Renaissance religion framed people’s understandings of the world, God’s purposes, and their own obligations. If we focus on formal theology, we may not fully capture how religion structured laypeople’s psychological horizon of expectations. We can instead identify three elements of the Renaissance religious worldview that defined that horizon: the concept of Real Presence, the conviction of Immediate Accountability, and the context of Divine Rhythms in Time and Space.

These understandings are not eliminated as we move through the later Renaissance and into the Catholic Reformation. Yet they are gradually obscured under later developments. New emphases, many of them shared by Protestants, begin to characterize the early modern worldview. They arise from and reinforce new institutional orderings which we can trace through political and social institutions generally. Current scholarship treats these not as the top-down changes imposed by an authoritative body, but as the cultural evolution of a social institution. The Catholic Church above all remains fully a creature of
its times, evolving along the lines of three broad movements of early modernity that for
the purposes of this review we can characterize as evolutions from Moving to Fixed, from
Local to Universal, and from Action to Intention.

These three developments group the changes that would eventually disorient our
transplanted fifteenth-century Catholic, even though each had its origins in the
intellectual and institutional life of her own times. Unpacking them briefly here allows us
to survey a rich field of recent scholarship that has transformed what we know of the
Catholic Church. Tracing the shift from Moving to Fixed allows us to see how the Church
was a leader in the movement across Europe to build capital cities whose monuments and
expanding bureaucracies pointed to a different sense of order, and whose new devotions
emphasized permanence and divine authority. Looking at the expanding scope of the
Church from Local to Universal shows it developing as indeed the first global corporation
marked by a more deliberate purpose and an emerging desire—not always realized—to
develop more standardized statements of doctrine and forms of worship that would better
distinguish the Catholic Church from its challengers. Tracking the shift from Action to
Intention highlights the early modern period’s increasing appreciation for human senses
and emotions as ways to reach and express the Will, and also to train and discipline it.
This kind of exercise inevitably simplifies subtleties and flattens diversity, both Catholic
and Protestant. Eliding these considerable distinctions here is not meant to deny their
significance, but rather to shift focus to some of the broader questions of how religion
shaped and was shaped by the early modern world. The sources cited in the footnotes
and bibliography offer more detail and nuance.

The early modern period opens and closes with fundamental and startlingly similar
challenges to the Catholic Church. The sixteenth-century Reformation and the
eighteenth-century Enlightenment and French Revolution stripped the institution of
powers and property and directly challenged its beliefs. Many wrote it off for dead both
times, and yet for all its apparent rigidity the Catholic Church demonstrated a
remarkable adaptability to its time and circumstances that allowed it to survive and even
to thrive. During the early modern period piety was professionalized, and the Catholic
Church became a religious institution, stripped of some of its secular and social
dimensions but more firmly in control of a distinct and bounded spiritual realm.

**Late Medieval and Renaissance Religion**

What was it to see the world as a Catholic? One of the most powerful elements of Catholic
thought and spirituality was the deep sense that transcendent and divine spiritual power
was not simply contained in a historical narrative or off in a distant heaven, but was
immediately present in the world. The first paradox of religion was that Christ, Mary, and the saints were very much in this physical world even as they remained very much in the spiritual world called heaven.

The core reality here was the Real Presence of Christ’s physical body and blood in the consecrated bread and wine of the mass. This theological doctrine moved fully into popular consciousness through the twelfth century, borne by stories of bleeding hosts and reinforced by allowing only the clergy to take the wine in communion. It was a doctrine framed in oppositional terms from the beginning as a way of directly challenging the anti-materialism of the Cathars, and authorities used fears of desecration and tolerated violence as means of spreading it. Christ was so immediately and really present that he needed to be protected from harm and disrespect. Jews were figured as enduring enemies determined to destroy Christ by stabbing, burning, and crushing consecrated hosts. Common lay believers were painted as so mindless of the real import of Christ’s body and blood that they might desecrate it by spilling. Aristotle’s distinction of substance and appearances provided the physics, but it was fear, suspicion, and scorn that shaped the imaginary and set the rules.

The imaginary went further to an even more electric reality: Christ was not just present miraculously in bread and wine which never changed their physical shape. He and the saints took human form and were really present here and now in daily life. Divinely mistaken identity was a common theme of saints’ lives like Jacopo da Voragine’s Golden Legend. The boy whom St. Christopher hoisted on his shoulders and carried across a river was Jesus; the beggar to whom St. Martin gave half his cloak was Christ. Christ had promised to interfere directly in life in the parable of the sheep and goats (Matthew 25), when he promised that any act of charity which believers extended to or refused to a beggar, a prisoner, a widow, or an orphan was an act extended or refused to him personally—and reciprocated at the Last Judgement. A conviction that enlivened stories also shaped images and re-enactments. North European artists like Pieter Brueghel and Albrecht Dürer painted the Flight into Egypt as though it were a trip from Antwerp to Bruges, and relocated the Massacre of the Innocents to Flemish towns. French and English mystery plays set Biblical dramas in contemporary times. At the same time, Corpus Christi processions brought Christ physically around town, and the saints in altarpieces watched their devotees. When these images toured towns, streets had to be cleaned and brothels closed to spare them the sight of garbage or immorality. In the great altarpieces of the period, commissioned by city governments for public spaces or cathedrals, rows of saints gaze gravely out or gather in small groups around the Virgin and Child as though in conversation. Saints watched and were watched by believers, and their gaze was so compelling that iconoclastic rioters of the Reformation and French Revolution alike scratched out their eyes to break this charismatic power.
The spiritual physics of Real Presence went further. In the pious movement expressed most vividly by Thomas à Kempis’s (d. 1471) *Imitation of Christ*, believers sought to be present in Christ and to identify directly with his suffering through imitation. Clergy began this move to imitative piety and it resonated with laity as well. Confraternal brothers practised flagellation and foot washing for the good of self and community, while condemned criminals imagined themselves executed at Christ’s side on Calvary so as to envision themselves redeemed at his side in heaven.²

God, Christ, Mary, and the saints were really present not just to see but also to judge, and they could hold believers immediately accountable for sinful actions. Plague, famine, and war were divine judgements on public sins that required collective acts of repentance. Whole communities violently expelled Jesus’s enemies the Jews after the Black Death of 1348, moved in procession through towns as in the 1399 Misericordia processions, and built votive shrines like Venice’s Madonna della Salute after the 1630 plague. When individuals defaced images of Mary, they could expect to be struck dead, see their hand wither, or go blind. This was usually the first scene in a three-act drama about Sin, Repentance, and Redemption, and those towns, blasphemers, or Jews who repented and converted might win immediate healing. The cast of this heavenly drama was a little unpredictable: God usually wrathful and judging, Mary begging grace for supplicants, and Jesus lining up with either Father or Mother. Saints taught believers strategies for approaching the Divine, and might intervene in the court of heaven if properly motivated. Popular piety sometimes recognized that threats might more effectively stir saints to action when devotion failed: individuals might shift devotion to a more responsive patron saint, and townspeople could deprive a saint of candles or even toss the image in the well for a spell. Saints’ status in heaven depended on believers’ devotion on earth.

Immediate and Real Divine presence gave contours to space and time. Some spaces and times were more spiritually charged than others, and Catholics shaped their motions around the former, and their days and years around the latter. Each reinforced the other: shrines and churches marked sites of historic martyrdoms or recent miracles as signposts of divine power in immediate localities. Cities like Lyons and Florence had major shrines marking key bridges and roads and on hilltops outside the walls, Paris and Venice had Marian images like surveillance cameras on every street corner, Bologna gained a protective ring of shrines in its city walls through a century when it was particularly threatened from outside. The geographies of Catholic shrines were meant for marking and for motion, since collective acts of piety sent believers and altarpieces moving processionally from one to the other, their routes at once willing and tracing the flow of grace through the community.
The schedule of religious feast days likewise traced divine and local histories in annual cycles on the map of time and memory. One set of feasts marked the life of Christ from his conception in March and birth at Christmas, through his death and resurrection on Good Friday and Easter, and his Ascension forty days later. Mary’s life passages were traced from her Immaculate Conception through her Annunciation and on to her Assumption. Many towns and even nations set New Year’s Day on 25 March, the day of the Annunciation when Mary had conceived Christ through the Holy Spirit; England would hold to this pious time-keeping until 1751. A second set of feast days marked the birth or death of individual saints, and were celebrated by individuals, groups, or towns that took these saints as their patrons. A third set marked the passages between temporal and spiritual worlds: All Saints (1 November) and All Souls (2 November) being days when it was possible to feel the chill that the dead brought from the other side, and Corpus Christi (ten days after Pentecost) when towns brought Christ in the Host round the town to encourage the warmth of God’s grace. Feast days did for time what shrines did for space. They were never passive markers. They triggered action and motion as believers re-enacted divine presence in the world and history. There was no forgetting or missing it. Each feast had its preparatory vigil; major feasts had preparatory holy weeks and sometimes a series of weeks (Advent and Lent), and each of these was triggered with a feast as well. Religious feasts scheduled sleeping and waking and all in between: a complex linking of the sacred, secular, and sexual told believers when intercourse was allowed or forbidden.

The map of Christian time followed pre-Christian calendars, so that lunar and solar cycles shone through this pious historiography, showing the animistic temporal rhythms in years, seasons, and months that the early Church had aimed to expropriate and sacralize as it was Christianizing Europe. Days, too, had distinctive rhythms, framed by the sun’s rising and setting and punctuated by eight times of prayer marked by bells. This abstract and regular way of marking time was appropriate to clerical schedules, and clergy adopted a sonic regime of clocks and bells that opened the way for the even more regularized and secularized time keeping that expands through the early modern period.

Each new devotional movement from the early medieval period added new forms and expressions of Real Presence, Immediate Accountability, and Temporal and Spatial Rhythms. Retracing the layering of exercises, feasts, and shrines that these movements generated is an exercise in the archaeology of Catholic piety that demonstrates the extraordinary diversity of late medieval Catholic practice. As we dig deeper we find a great flourishing of popular piety from the time of the medieval mendicant movements which thrived even when the Church as an institution was divided, weak, and ineffective. Yet it was the challenges to the institution that would shape the sometimes
wrenching efforts to reform and strengthen the Catholic Church that began in the late fourteenth century and that would reshape it through the early modern period.

**Early Modern Changes**

Plotting three movements—from Moving to Fixed, Local to Universal, and Action to Intention—puts the emphasis on dynamics rather than doctrines or institutions. These movements reflected the ways in which the Church adapted to the social and cultural movements of the period. Its commitment to its own traditions meant that new forms seldom abandoned or replaced older ones, but rather represented a new temper that overlaid and gradually overcame earlier practices.

The Catholic Church was fully part of its times, and it faced its most transformative challenge at the opening of the early modern period in the form of the Protestant schismatic reforms. These quickly grew in number and complexity, and at a certain level Catholicism evolved locally as responses to the particularities of diverse Lutheran, Anglican, Reformed, or Anabaptist beliefs and worship. The multiplying forms of Protestantism removed whole assumptions and whole territories from the Catholic worldview and world. Related geopolitical movements then reshaped where Europeans would go in their thinking and around the globe, and how they would interact with those they encountered and with each other. Both challenges brought an obligation to the Church to retool institutionally and to redefine or reaffirm intellectually.

Yet the Protestant schisms and the Catholic response had their roots in earlier and deeper changes. The early modern period was shaped fundamentally by European encounters with different cultures and religions around the globe, and the antagonistic patterns which would characterize European Catholic approaches to Judaism, Islam, and other expressions of Christianity grew through the fifteenth century and beyond. The rising tide of forced baptisms and purgations of Jews, Muslims, and Hindus, the numerous religious wars against Ottomans and Protestants, and the merging of religion and nationalism across all of Europe make this the period when the religious refugee emerges as a mass phenomenon. Hundreds of thousands of people suffered exile or forced migration for reasons of religious creed, which were often further complicated by economic, political, and racial factors. Over the course of the early modern period, these migrations would affect many millions directly and indirectly. Catholics no less than any others increasingly framed their religious identity in an oppositional context that was at once defensive and conversionary. The key to knowing what you were was knowing what you were not.³
In this more fractured and antagonistic religious marketplace, conversion came to be seen in a more threatening light. It had traditionally been welcomed as the gradual process of the believer’s maturing in faith; it came to be feared as the transfer of loyalties of an individual, a community, or a whole nation from one religion or creed to another, with potentially perilous effects. Conversion was no longer a gradual way but a sudden turn. Fear of conversion made confessions more explicit, detailed, and exclusive; it also made catechisms more necessary as a means of teaching and testing confessions. While ‘confessionalization’ has become an increasingly contested paradigm for early modern religio-political culture, it is certainly true that the process of clarifying confessions was driven by and drove an increasing clericalization of all religions. The stakes were higher in contexts of more overt competition, and this moved priests, pastors, rabbis, and imams into positions of greater responsibility as teachers and authorities in their own communities and as interlocutors with political authorities. The opportunities and challenges of the period promoted a professionalization of piety across all faith communities, with clerical status becoming more consistent, controlled, and exclusive. At this level, the finer complexities and distinctions between Catholicism, the many varieties of Protestantism, and even Judaism and Islam become less noteworthy than some of their remarkable similarities. The processes of confession, conversion, and clericalization were intricately linked, and the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries were the period when they converged.4

**From Moving to Fixed**

Medieval and Renaissance rulers seemed constantly to be on the move, and not only to pursue or avoid military challenges. After coronation, French kings gained their authority through joyous entries into towns and cities across the realm to formally receive obedience. English monarchs constantly toured around visiting their nobles. Until the end of the sixteenth century, European rulers and their hosts assumed that this cumbersome peripatetic rule was the cost of doing business; it was certainly the implication of more decentralized rule in elective monarchies. No monarchy had a capital city in the modern sense because no monarchy had a strongly centralized conception of government and authority.

That is, save the Catholic Church. Rome would emerge as Europe’s first real capital city, but it was a slow shift. Even before the papacy’s forced and temporary transfer to Avignon through much of the fourteenth century, popes were seldom resident in Rome for long. By some estimates, over the two centuries before Avignon, popes lived in Rome only 40 per cent of the time. That the Avignon papacy was even conceivable underscores that for all its symbolic resonance, the city of Rome was not yet the immutable spiritual
centre of the Catholic faith. More to the point, geographical fixity was not the main key to spiritual authority. Europe’s greatest empire could be both Holy and Roman when in fact it was neither. Bishops seldom lived in their dioceses, and in southern Europe the parish as a bordered space where believers concentrated their spiritual life was overshadowed by confraternities, guilds, mendicants, and towns as a whole. The city of Rome’s gradual evolution into the Catholic Caput Mundi was in part the practical consequence of the fact that through the course of the Avignon papacy clerical bureaucrats grew in number, responsibility, and importance. After the return to Italy, popes grew more reliant on Italian lands for income, and hence on Italian nobles and an Italian state and capital city for stability. Eugenius IV (1431–47) was the last pope to spend a significant amount of time in virtual exile from Rome, and the humanist Nicholas V (1447–55) the first to begin self-consciously remaking the city on a classical and imperial model as the capital of a new spiritual empire. The remarkable accelerating building campaign of 1450–1650 that laid out roads and bridges, raised palaces for nobles and cardinals, built churches for nations and new religious orders, and culminated in the dome and piazza of a reconstructed St. Peter’s Basilica (1506–1626) fashioned both the space and meaning of Catholic Rome on classical and imperial models.

These new buildings were the consequence and visible signs of shifting concepts of authority. Being in perpetual motion had been a medieval characteristic of office and sign of authority; being fixed in place became the early modern counterpart. The change emerged slowly: popes became resident in Rome from the fifteenth century, bishops became resident in their dioceses and priests in their parishes from the sixteenth, and by the seventeenth all of Europe’s monarchs were building palaces and staying put in capital cities. An architecture of magnificence based around palaces, squares, and public buildings on an imperial scale that were theatres for the rituals of public power transformed Paris, Madrid, London, Prague, Amsterdam, and Constantinople/Istanbul as much as they had Rome.

God’s vicar Julius II and his successors refashioned themselves as imperial priests, while monarchs like Philip II, Rudolph II, James I, and Louis XIII refashioned themselves as priestly kings. Our transplanted Renaissance Catholic would slowly come to realize that in eighteenth-century Europe practically all churches were now effectively state churches. Renaissance popes had fashioned a new language and rituals of power that early modern monarchs were better placed to employ, particularly after the ruptures of Reformation schism had made religious confession a key factor in dynastic and transnational disputes. The concept of a royal priesthood had ample medieval precedent in anointing oil, spiritual charisma, and thaumaturgic touch. Yet what anchored sacred kingship in the emerging propaganda of early modern absolutism was a classical Roman and Imperial concept of a divine destiny to conquer, control, and convert, and to rule
from a fixed, central, and magnificent capital. Catholic absolutism wedded the Catholic faith and institutions to national purposes in ways that were distinct in degree and detail—but not in kind—from Protestant state churches.

Studies of monarchical absolutism emphasize that in practice it was never as absolute, centralized, and authoritative as historians once assumed. They have explored the continuing strength of regional elites and centres, and their networks and negotiations of power. In studies of the Catholic Church this means looking beyond the Roman Seat of St. Peter to the cardinals, the bishops, and the religious orders. Recent work on cardinals has emphasized that this fast-growing group moved from being the Church’s Senate to its courtier nobility, a disproportionately Italian web of families whose palatial Roman residences were fixed points for the negotiations of curial bureaucratic power.\(^5\) The Cardinal Protector was a key power broker of the early modern Church, working of necessity in Rome, but maintaining continental and even global networks.

Historians have devoted even more attention to bishops, who as a group exemplified the change from Moving to Fixed even more clearly. From the mid-sixteenth century, it became increasingly difficult for bishops to hold more than one diocese, or to avoid living there. Mobile pluralist bishops had been the power brokers of the medieval Church, rising to the rank of cardinal or even pope. Resident pastoral bishops now animated the distinct administrative culture that developed with a more fixed and bureaucratic early modern institution. Bishops who commanded the resources of a single diocese only and who were under greater obligation to train and supervise clergy more closely could not help but be less active in distant courts and Roman curia than their medieval forerunners. The scope and scale of what they could do politically shrank, yet they exercised greater spiritual authority and continued in most cases to exercise great ambition. It was resident bishops who expanded cathedrals and built the monumental seminaries, hospitals, and missions that expressed early modern Catholicism.

Going from Moving to Fixed at the episcopal level extended beyond investments in architectural magnificence and artistic ritual to administrative structures and expectations. Numerous historians have explored the dynamics of how reforming bishops like Milan’s Carlo Borromeo and Seville’s Fernando Niño de Guevara held regular synods and visitations, gained a tighter grip on confraternities and institutional charities, and required higher standards of deportment and education in their priests.\(^6\) They removed vernacular bibles, forbade lay preaching, and established disciplinary tribunals to straighten out erring clergy. Earlier pluralist bishops had difficulty in getting their reforms to outlast their term, but resident bishops refined the bureaucratic hierarchies and procedures that could work deliberately over decades instituting change. This intense and consistent administrative activity more than any other single development gradually moved formal ecclesiastical structures and ordained clergy into the centre of
lay religious life. It would constitute the greatest change in the face that the Church presented to ordinary believers, in the demands it placed on them, and in the demands they would come to place on it.

The fixed resident bishop was the keystone of a new structure of professional religious that stretched over lay believers and encompassed all collective and individual expressions of their faith. But what was really at work here over the decades of the late sixteenth and seventeenth centuries was a gradual shifting of cultural expectations. An illiterate medieval priest who had apprenticed with his predecessor, memorized rituals, kept a concubine, and farmed a plot on the side was the social equal of his lay parishioners in all but ordination. His literate, educated, and likely celibate early modern successor was more clearly the social and cultural superior of his lay flock. The religious professional exercised greater social authority, but was subject to greater expectations as well; parishes demanded more from their priests, and used episcopal tribunals to get it. The resident bishop was key to a more professionalized clergy generally, and the spill-over effects in local social and spiritual life were immense. The professionalization of piety is likely the single feature that would have surprised our transplanted Renaissance Catholic the most.

Shifting from the Moving to the Fixed is something that we can also see in new early modern devotions. Even Jesus became fixed. The characteristic new corporate devotion of the later medieval period had been at Corpus Christi or Corpus Domini, coming sixty days after Easter and ten days after Pentecost, as a celebration of the Real Presence of Christ. On this day, Christ, in the form of a consecrated host, moved in procession around the city attended by all the civic officials, clergy, guilds, confraternities, and other corporate groups. The characteristic new spiritual exercise of the sixteenth century was the Forty-Hour devotion, where a consecrated host was placed in a monstrance on the altar and a team of confraternity members prayed in shifts before it for forty hours continually. Where Corpus Christi moved Christ around his community to receive devotion on every street and shrine, the Forty Hours enthroned him on the altar to receive the prayers of a select group of courtier confratelli kneeling before their king. As emphasized earlier, this was not a sequential shift in which Corpus Christi declined as the Forty Hours increased. On the contrary, both remained active and important parts of collective public piety, particularly as Protestant theologians rejected the Miracle of the Mass and the Real Presence in the Host. What we see here is that the new pious exercise shifted the spaces and dynamics of the relation between Christ and his devotees, from the Moving to the Fixed, from a community in procession to courtiers at prayer.

We see the same pattern in a new Marian devotion of the period: her formal coronation as Queen of Heaven. Marian piety of the later medieval period had increasingly
humanized her, loosening the rigid posture of the Byzantine Throne of Wisdom (Sedes Sapientiae) who was an adult human throne for a sombre and miniaturized adult Christ. By the fifteenth century she became the teenage mother of a sometimes squirming baby, with Christ’s penis and Mary’s breast both signs of a real and physical humanity that were not yet overwhelmed by the adult fate that awaited them. Early modern artists returned adult decorum to Mary, and early modern bishops aimed to return authority to her by enthroning her once again, though now in her own right. They staged formal coronations of popular Marian icons on the steps of their cathedrals. These ceremonies often quite literally layered Mary’s theological identity as Queen of Heaven over her human identity as a young mother by placing a thin gold or silver plate over the image with holes cut out such that only the faces of Virgin and Child remained visible. Elaborate gilded frames and crowns in precious metal completed this exercise of retaining charismatic images while completely transforming their meaning into something less human and mobile, and more authoritative and fixed. In the Americas, some new images adapted the royal motif to local cultural forms; the Mexican Virgin of Guadalupe’s (1531) blue robe and human form was recognizably European, while the Peruvian Virgin of Rosary of Guápulo (c. 1680) had Mary and Christ in matching conical gold robes and crowns that evoked the Andean goddess Pachamama.9

The newer Eucharistic piety and Marian devotions emphasized two doctrines—Christ’s Real Presence and Mary’s intercessory power—that Protestants explicitly rejected. In the oppositional climate that framed all Reformation theologies and that carried on well into the modern era, this was considered a good thing. Protestants retained the mobility of the divine, since they asserted that no human form could contain God’s power; all material or ritual forms were symbols, signs, or metaphors and not real forms of a physical divine presence. Catholics held that divine power was concentrated, instrumental, and best handled by professional clergy. By extension, many Protestant authorities also overtly rejected the notion of sacred spaces, even if many believers continued reflexively and implicitly to observe spatial distinctions. Recent work has explored the forms and uses of sacred space both inside and outside churches and shrines, emphasizing how these express the overt differences, the implicit similarities, and the gradually widening cultural spaces between the two confessions. Like the host in the Eucharist, sacred space represented for Catholics the immediate materiality of God’s presence. It directly countered the Protestant claim of offering direct and unmediated access to God.10

**From Local to Universal**

Pre-Reformation Christianity was profoundly local in its liturgies and deeply personal in its relations. The Milanese followed the Ambrosian rite, the English the Sarum rite, the
Irish a Hibernian liturgy which drew on the French Gallican rite, Spaniards the Hispanic or Mozarabic rite. Local forms of the mass and local saints and feast days comprised the strata of local pious archaeologies. They were the remnants and legacies of missionary campaigns, spiritual traditions, and patterns of settlement reaching back to the early Christian era. The language of brotherhood and sisterhood aimed to draw all believers into the same relation of holy kin obligation that bound together the Trinity, the Holy Family, and the saints. The emphasis on kinship ties shone through the very language of a Mother Church in which a Holy Father pastorally supervised the work of brothers and sisters in their vocations as nuns, monks, friars, and priests. Beyond those in vows, kinship language and ties framed lay piety and gave it an intensely personal and local shape. Those who were not actual blood kin could be fashioned as such spiritually by joining corporate occupational, military, or religious groups. As a result, localities had considerable latitude to worship as their confraternities, local religious houses, and locally born priests determined, not so much because of any deliberate policy, but in the absence of one.

At least some reformers of the early modern period saw local autonomy and lay agency as doorways through which the anarchy of heresy, pious fraud, superstition, and quasi-pagan practices entered the Church. The Albigensian or Cathar heresy had demonstrated this on a broad level, and devotions like that of the ‘Holy Greyhound’ Guinefort more locally. The ‘local option’ that had been allowed to the Bohemian Hussites, admittedly under duress, had only encouraged Saxons, Strasburgers, and numerous Swiss to head down a road which led too many Catholics out of the Church entirely. The technology of printing, the social revolution of expanding education, and the scholarly methods of humanism gave some reformers the vision for a return ad fontes which would counter populist Protestant fragmentation with the scholarly depth and spiritual cohesion of the Church Universal. This pious vision of a Church Universal animated more reformers and generated more of the changes that marked early modern Catholicism than the social discipline of a Church Militant, even if the religious politics of the day ended up giving considerable force to the latter.

Every major council or colloquy of the sixteenth century brought together proponents of Universal, Militant, and Local Catholicisms. John O’Malley’s history of the Council of Trent underscores how much their infighting, complicated inevitably by national and dynastic rivalries, paralysed these assemblies. As they rushed through their last sessions, the clerics at Trent forwarded ever more items into the future and over to Rome for final resolution. Thus it was that curial deliberation and standard-setting rather than conciliar horse-trading and compromise set many of the final forms for what would emerge as a more distinctly Roman Catholicism. Roman Catholicism applied standardized forms to nudge, reform, and in some cases supersede local Catholicisms: a Roman
catechism (1566), Roman breviary (1568), Roman missal (1570), and a new, authorized Vulgate translation (1590–92). They followed on the Holy Office of the Inquisition (1542) and the Index of Prohibited Books (1559), and were part of a curial bureaucratization that produced the fifteen administrative congregations of Sixtus V (1588), the Bull Quaecumque (1604) that put confraternities and archconfraternities under episcopal authority, and later institutions like the Propaganda Fide (1622).

Centripetal and centrifugal forces moved the spiritual goal of a Church Universal in opposite directions simultaneously. There was a steady move towards the centre in the architectural refashioning of the city of Rome, in the administrative refashioning of the Roman curia through new religious orders and congregations, and in the authoritative refashioning of liturgies and creeds that these reformed bodies undertook. This move towards uniformity was challenged by both the oldest and the newest forms of Catholic practice. Simon Ditchfield has traced how some dioceses were allowed to use traditional liturgies that could be proven to have long use, a loophole that stimulated both extraordinary historical research into the roots of contemporary traditions and a significant degree of pious fraud to fill the gaps that sacred histories could not bridge. More tellingly, there was an undeniable creative refashioning of newer images, learned worldviews, and popular pieties out in those many places around the globe where Catholicism was spreading thanks to successive waves of colonizers and missionaries. The growing indigenous churches that they fostered were often remote from Rome culturally even if they were linked to it administratively.

This is the paradox of the early modern Catholic Church Universal, and it is the subject of some of the most probing interdisciplinary work being done in Catholic studies currently. Old European localism was being curbed in some respects by an overlay of Roman forms, rituals, and tribunals which were slowly though inevitably replacing purely local forms. At the same time, global Catholicism was creating different liturgies, images, and rituals in Peru, Quebec, Goa, and the Philippines that often stretched much further beyond the European mainstream as missionaries aimed to draw in American, African, and Asian Catholics. Global expressions of Catholicism inevitably drew as much or more from local traditions and expectations as from the hopes of missionaries, and sheer distance made Roman oversight virtually impossible to enforce. In Latin America above all, where a small European elite co-existed with far larger populations of indigenous groups and enslaved migrants, visual, sensory, and ritual forms evolved quite distinctly, to the point that it is more accurate to speak of a variety of co-existing Catholicisms.

Modern scholars are aiming to capture the dynamics here, some using and some rejecting the language of ‘hybridity’. In the process they have differed radically on what Catholicism meant for early moderns, and some have challenged whether the emphasis on social discipline found in works of the 1980s and 1990s is overdone. The current
debates around the degree and effectiveness of ‘Catholic confessionalization’ sometimes seem to claim that exceptions to discipline prove that there was no effective discipline at all. This would have come as a surprise to most Catholic laity and clergy. Early modern Catholicism may never have achieved the degree of centralization and discipline that its contemporary and modern critics have charged, but Catholics definitely experienced more deliberation and discipline in their social and spiritual life.

The problem rests in part with how discipline was being framed within the paradigm of ‘confessionalism’. The early discussions of it by Heinz Schilling and Wolfgang Reinhard emphasized how confessions provided the doctrinal standards and tests that Protestant state churches used to force obedience to Protestant state governments. Confessions defined and legitimated political absolutism and animated religious nationalisms. In this top-down form, confessionalization was a tool of imposition and repression used quite consciously in a state-building process. Even as succeeding historians adapted the paradigm to fit the distinct realities of Catholic monarchies and Protestant republics, they retained the basic dynamics of social hierarchy and top-down external discipline. This narrowed both the meaning of confessional discipline and the possible tests for its presence and effectiveness. Self-discipline and collective, bottom-up social discipline in the form of rising expectations both tend to fall outside the model. This is particularly unfortunate when we see how much they transformed both personal piety and parish and associative life through the early modern period. Mark Forster’s studies of Bavaria and the work of Mack Holt, James Farr, and Phillip Benedict for France show ample evidence that Catholic laity and clergy demanded greater discipline of themselves and their leaders, and took this as a sign of confessional identity and positive reform. Most historians now find that a ‘weak theory of confessionalization’ that allows bottom-up self-discipline and that may have little connection to state-building is generally more persuasive. Confraternities and religious orders expanded in number, members, and sheer range of activity on a scale that makes it impossible to deny that this was a popular movement. Yet in both cases, what grew in early modern Catholicism was quite different from the medieval root stock from which it sprang.

We can track this multi-directional confessionalism as it reshaped confraternities through the early modern period. The lay brotherhoods had been the most common organizational form for lay Catholic activity since the thirteenth century. Historians have painted medieval and Renaissance confraternities as voluntary parishes that gave laypeople significant autonomy in how and where they exercised a Catholic spiritual life. Yet there was no canon law governing confraternities before the Reformation. They wrote their own statutes, or cribbed these from mendicants and guilds, and did not require a bishop’s approval for these or other activities. Like any other part of the Catholic Church, they embodied the full sorry range of local disputes, frauds, superstitions, and social
hierarchies. Through the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries reformers regularly triggered change, sometimes in concert with clergy and sometimes not. Numerous local studies track how papal and synodal legislation and regular episcopal visitations put all but elite confraternities under the supervision and at the service of parish priests. Look in any confraternal archive, and the changes through the later sixteenth century are consistent and unmistakable. Some of this was disciplinary: new statutes approved by bishops, regular episcopal visitations, and more discipline of members, even before papal legislation required standard forms. Fernando Niño de Guevara, Grand Inquisitor of Spain (1599–1602) and Archbishop of Seville (1601–09) suppressed and refashioned confraternities in Spain. But many changes were not only about upper clergy disciplining members and groups but also about members seeking to expand their devotional resources: we find many new temporal and plenary indulgences, particularly after Gregory XIII, impressive new quarters and furnishings, new members, and new devotions. We also see a new emphasis on putting the Church Local into the context of the Church Universal. Archconfraternities based in Rome (and later elsewhere as well) assembled extraordinary spiritual treasuries full of indulgences which they could share with affiliates, who drew new status, appeal, and resources from the Roman connection. A brotherhood in Warsaw, Seville, or Bologna that affiliated with a Roman archconfraternity gained a Cardinal Protector, services for its members on pilgrimage to Rome, and other practical and spiritual benefits in return for adopting the statutes of the Roman archconfraternity (which some did more assiduously than others). Christopher Black notes that through the sixteenth century, Rome’s S. Spirito in Sassia gained 170 affiliations in the 1580s and 1590s, and a further 164 by 1700. The Gonfalone would rise to have 250, and in the 1625 Jubilee 29,550 men from eighty-six of its affiliates came to visit. SS.ma Trinita gained 100, and the largest was the Orazione e Morte, which had over 1,000 affiliates by the eighteenth century.¹⁷

Religious orders similarly worked to refashion confraternal life around the spiritual aspirations of the Church Universal. Mendicant friars had stimulated confraternal growth from the thirteenth century, but without creating wide organizational networks. The Dominicans were the first to move in this direction with their Rosary confraternities, which grew from 1474 into a loose network numbering over a million members.¹⁸ The Jesuits took this a step further with their Marian congregations, made up initially of the alumni of their colleges, and established with a deliberate goal of underwriting charities, advancing education, and pursuing ‘Christianization’ according to a set of commonly accepted standards. Individual Marian congregations were led by Jesuit brothers and closely integrated into local Jesuit missionary work, just as many of the new parochial confraternities extended parish educational activities or eucharistic piety in collaboration with the priest. These confraternities did not function as voluntary lay parishes, but as lay auxiliaries to orders, parish priests, and the new state churches through which global
Catholicism was spreading. The Portuguese and Spanish established networks of Misericordia confraternities throughout their colonies to organize charity, worship, and local elites. Misericordia brotherhoods in Portugal and throughout the Portuguese empire had to follow the statutes of the Lisbon parent group which established administrative forms, devotional exercises, social duties, and the patronage of royal authorities. Spanish Misericordia groups adapted these Lisbon statutes. France had a similar albeit more loosely organized network of Holy Sacrament confraternities diffused through the nation and into its expanding empire. These brotherhoods remained as local as before, though not as atomistically distinct or self-determining. The earlier model of overlapping kinship groups was in many ways superseded by a newer model of capillary networks of confraternities that were linked to some centre—be it Rome, Lisbon, or Madrid—by ties of affiliation provided by an archconfraternity, a religious order, or a national church. We should not over-emphasize the central discipline involved, just as we should not underestimate the extent to which this network model reflected lay desires for more direct connection to some larger mission or higher authority. If the older kinship model reflected the social organization of communal societies that valued local agency and shared authority, the newer network model reflected the ambitions of courtier societies for connection, advantage, and privilege. The network was not the replacement of local social kinship, but the newly preferred expression of it.

The early modern period also witnessed an explosion of new religious orders that drew men and women into the charitable, devotional, and missionary work of the Church Universal, and recent decades have seen a parallel explosion of studies of them. These depart from older institutional histories written by members in being more alert to issues of gender, culture, and cross-cultural adaptation. A rich range of studies on nuns and convents demonstrates how active some Orders and houses remained in spite of the restrictions imposed by tighter enclosure; Ursulines, Visitadines, and the Sisters and Daughters of Charity became dominant players in charitable hospitals through the seventeenth century and regained some of their earlier political and intellectual roles in the next century. Among the male regular clergy, reforms generated a host of observant groups with the Franciscans, Dominicans, Augustinians, and Benedictines, new offshoots like the Capuchins, and a multitude of new Orders like the Somaschans, Piarists, Theatines, and Barnabites. The larger context for this burst of growth was the sudden collapse of the regular orders in the face of Protestant reforms through the first half of the sixteenth century: England’s 850 religious houses disappeared by royal decree, the Benedictine Order alone lost almost the same number of houses across Northern Europe (800 houses, representing over one quarter of their total of 3,000), and thousands of nuns and monks left their enclosures or their vows and secularized. Yet by the end of the century a new growth in vocations and Orders brought many thousands more into older and newer convents, monasteries, and friaries.
The Society of Jesus was far from the largest of these, growing from 1,000 members in 1556 to 15,500 in 1626 and 22,600 in 1749. Yet it has attracted the largest number and broadest range of studies, helped both by excellent archives and an evolving global mission which embraced education, theatre, art and architecture. Jesuit missionaries effectively adapted a vision of the Church Universal to local conditions and languages in different parts of the globe. They are the most characteristic early modern order as much for their demise as for their origins. No order was as directly involved in the re-Catholicization campaigns that recovered large swathes of central and eastern Europe and the Netherlands for the Catholic faith. The order’s close collaboration with Catholic nobles and monarchs offers an example of how the most effective confessional processes worked as much to foster new forms of Catholic education and popular piety as to marginalize and then eliminate Protestant ideas and elites that had come to dominate in these areas. Re-Catholicization campaigns harnessed the self-interest of Catholic elites as much as any devotional fervour, and brought the Jesuits more directly into the zero-sum game of court culture. As the strongest proponents of a Church Universal model, they were early beneficiaries of the efforts of Catholic monarchs to use religious institutions in order to secure a more exclusive and uniform religious identity in their states. As that model of church–state relations fell under increasing fire in the eighteenth century, the Jesuits became the first victims of a reaction which would aim to limit religious personnel and institutions to a purely devotional function.

The politics of saint-making have also been identified as a sphere in which the Church Local was superseded by the Church Universal. Peter Burke’s tongue-in-cheek ‘How to Be a Counter-Reformation Saint’ traced how the decentralized and quick medieval practice that had allowed localities to canonize charismatic spiritual exemplars turned into a drawn-out scholarly and judicial early modern process whose rigours were aimed at weeding out spurious miracles, questionable theology, and the occasional dog. When saint-making became a task that required time, deep pockets, and squadrons of lawyers and theologians, the results were not surprising: the early modern saint was almost universally male, upper class, and a member of some religious order. Simon Ditchfield later provided some necessary scholarly correctives to Burke’s breezy survey without completely overturning the analysis of long-term changes.

Here again, the real corrective may lie less in tracking canonization trials than in seeing how saints fashioned local spiritualities, particularly in the Americas and Asia. There were at least two ways in which saints figured prominently but ambiguously in early modern Christianization drives, and both echoed the experience of the early Christian missionaries to Europe. The early Church had faced the problem of how to give North and West European roots to an eastern Mediterranean religious movement. Legends and relics had provided the bridge: the legends had Mary Magdalen travelling to the South of
France, James the brother of Jesus sailing to the North of Spain, and the bones of Mark the evangelist being spirited in a barrel of pork fat past Muslim border guards in Alexandria and shipped on to Venice. Once Levantine saints were in European tombs, there was a rich store of relics to indigenize the charism of Christ’s kin. Early modern missionaries had less freedom to rework the legends, but in the wake of Reformation iconoclasm and suppressions of Catholic altars in Protestant states, they had a significant stock of displaced and rescued relics available to bring that charism around the globe. Relics reinforced deliberate topographic strategies, working hand in hand as the material and linguistic forms of saintly presence. Across the Catholic global empires, and particularly the Iberian ones, almost all major settlements bore the name of Mary or a saint. By contrast, most Protestant settlements were named for royal, noble, or capitalist patrons, while some aimed to remake old secular hometowns in a transoceanic setting as New Amsterdam, New York, New South Wales. Early modern saintly topography, reinforced by local images, transplanted relics, and new cults and shrines, aimed to translate saintly charism to early modern ‘new worlds’ just as legends and relics had in early Christian missionary drives.

To what effect? Early Christian missionaries had also deliberately redirected animistic cults by grafting saintly identities onto local deities, and the old powers and personalities often shone through in the timing of saints’ feast days, the location of their shrines, and the local turnings of their miracles and cures. Early modern missionaries witnessed the same processes at work, but were often more ambivalent and resistant when they saw indigenous believers following the same logic and turning the Virgin Mary, Jesus, and the saints into proxies for now-banned pre-Columbian gods and spirits. As we saw above, saints and the Virgin dressed differently when they arrived in Latin America, and throughout the early modern period this became a site for tension. Some of this was between Church Universal and Church Local, but much was within the organs of the Church itself, as missionaries favouring a more inclusive and mediating Catholicism tangled with those promoting an exclusive and ‘pure’ message. The latter could call in Inquisitorial tribunals, which were established across the Americas, Asia, Africa, and India to correct the processes of adaptation, interpretation, and hybridization that early Christian missionaries had promoted, and that some early modern missionaries wished to follow as well.23

Church Local and Church Universal were not opposite but reciprocal forms, and over the course of the early modern period the latter became a more conscious frame of the former. Certainly the missionaries and colonizers aimed to use saintly charisma to claim and sacralize the territories they were occupying, and this generated some of the deepest loyalties and also some of the deepest tensions within early modern Catholicism.
From Action to Intention

The questions that now most intrigue many of those researching early modern Catholicism have to do with senses, the emotions, and material culture, and above all with how these three braid together. Historians are delving more deeply into the interior life of early modern Catholics, and into the ways they apprehended, made sense of, and shaped the world. Even material culture, which may seem to fix on purely physical objects, explores external forms in relation to the inner spiritual states which they aimed to foster.24

Traditional studies of medieval spirituality certainly explored contemplative and mystic forms, but much of the historical work on pre-modern religion from the 1960s through the 1980s dealt with public rituals, processions, and charitable institutions. Historians were aiming to take the measure of what was variously called popular religion, local religion, or civic religion.25 No term was entirely adequate to describe these efforts to move beyond traditional church histories, often written by clergy, which started with doctrines and formal institutions and worked deductively from there. More inductive and anthropological approaches captured religious expression as a form of communal life that was shaped around collective rituals, public forms, lay priorities, and that focused on boundary-marking and protective impulses. The resulting phenomenologies of piety gave less attention to interior states, which some historians claimed were either beside the point or signs of purely regional dispositions. Expanding explorations of emotion and sense now invite us to reconsider how inner states and public rituals might relate, and so move beyond Action into Intention.

Early modern Catholicism was certainly expanding the attention paid to inner states in both clerical and lay spirituality. Much of medieval and Renaissance corporate charity had been oriented to fulfilling the seven acts of corporal charity: feed the hungry, give drink to the thirsty, clothe the naked, shelter the homeless, visit the sick, visit prisoners, and bury the dead. An extraordinary institutional infrastructure of guild, confraternal, and civic charities fulfilled these obligations across the Catholic world, not least because the stories, sermons, and images that constituted the Catholic imaginary placed them centre stage as the best way to save self and others. While these remained in place they were joined by a new early modern emphasis on seven acts of spiritual charity: convert the sinner, instruct the ignorant, counsel the doubtful, comfort the sorrowing, bear wrongs patiently, forgive injuries, pray for the living and the dead. Shifting attention from the body to spirit put a different level of engagement and obligation on laity in particular, who might legitimately feel themselves less well-equipped to promote conversion, education, and pastoral care than distributing clothes, food, or alms.
Bishops expanded the seminary training of clergy precisely in order to help priests better exercise spiritual charity among the laity. Their ministries were to move far beyond performing sacralizing rites of passage and overseeing sacramental observance, and into a far broader pastoral involvement in the lives of their parishioners, which they could transform with effective pastoral care. The Roman Catechism became the key test for clergy, and indeed many of the new forms of Catholic confessionalism were oriented not only to improving the theological literacy of those in secular or regular orders, but to refashioning their interior life. Jesuits emphasized intensive self-examination in the Spiritual Exercises as a means of refining intention and disciplining the senses and emotions before performing action. The Marian congregations aimed to offer a lay form of this devotional discipline. While only professional clergy could fully realize either the means or the end, new forms of art, architecture, music, and culture modelled it in Catholic public life and the imaginary.

Our transplanted Renaissance Catholic would have been raised in often dark churches under the gaze of grave and sombre local saints from every period of church history, who observed those before them with passive decorum. She awoke in a church more brightly lit, before paintings that told narratives involving subjects who interacted with each other in deeply emotional ways. Swooning saints demonstrated the transport of complete surrender, but if we emphasize the emotional and sensory dimension of Baroque churches and rituals, we should not forget that this dimension was highly focused and deeply didactic. Jeffrey Chipps Smith has shown how the Jesuits used the senses to get to the will, such that walking up the nave of a Jesuit church like St. Michael’s Church in Munich took an alert believer through the steps of Loyola’s Spiritual Exercises. Beyond this architectural catechesis, Baroque worship spaces aimed to move, impress, and delight, evoking awe, exuberance, and wonder, making the most of new building technologies (like stucco), extraordinary frescoes, and music to create spaces that would transport the worshipper.

Swooning Baroque saints modelled a far more sensory piety than a rigid Maesta or sacra conversazione. Saintly emotion and sense heightened lay devotion, and the stylistic progression from Guido Reni’s ‘St. Francis Adoring the Crucifix’ through Peter Paul Rubens’s ‘St. Theresa’s Vision’ and on to Gian Lorenzo Bernini’s ‘St. Theresa in Ecstasy’ demonstrated how artists responded to the challenge of conveying this pious sensory transport. These saints’ intense contemplation was rewarded with visions and heavenly favours far beyond what most people experienced marching in a Corpus Christi procession or spooning soup by a hospital bed. Yet it was hard not to notice that those most contemplative and most favoured with visions were secular or regular clergy. Could the laity also receive these transporting visions?
The emotional and sensory turn of Baroque piety seemed to fit well with the professionalization of religion, but it also triggered new problems that also forced church authorities more deeply into the difficulties of evaluating actions by judging intentions. So-called ‘aspiring saints’ stirred controversy with their sometimes contested sanctity. Were all those who fell into trances, swooned, levitated, had visions, made prophecies, and developed stigmata marked by the hand of God to be His messengers? Might some not be sent by the Devil to test the faithful with messages and miracles that skirted the boundaries of orthodoxy or even pushed directly into demon worship and witchcraft? The tension here underscored a central paradox that emerged when early modern Catholicism’s embrace of emotion collided with its suspicion of women as those whose emotions and weak wills could lead them into various forms of heresy. Most aspiring saints, like most accused witches, were women. Both operated, or were thought to operate, in an indistinct zone between the natural and spiritual worlds where divine inspiration and miraculous powers could contradict clerical authority and suspend ecclesiastical order. As aspiring saints and witches emerged across the early modern world and pushed the boundaries of orthodoxy and authority, they challenged authorities to find more rigorous ways of measuring inspiration and intention.

Early modern Catholicism developed a number of tools to test and discipline the very devotional energies it had unleashed. Recent work has looked at Inquisitions, books of manners, theatre and dance, and material culture as forms used to channel that intense devotional piety and ensure that what had been released would remain at least somewhat orthodox.

The inquisitio was simply a method of rational investigation, but in design and execution it tended to assume guilt rather than innocence. This gave Inquisitions an admirable, if somewhat skewed success rate, from the time of their first appearance in the late twelfth century through their revival and reorganization in the late fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. Though they had far more safeguards than contemporary secular tribunals, and thus preserved the lives of many of those who came before them, their assumptions and procedures drew on and reinforced a more disciplinary mindset that was suspicious of all unorthodox and unmediated spirituality. The measures they took to flush out false sanctity were thought to be equally effective in flushing out the devil’s minions. Many studies of witchcraft and the witch-hunt have emphasized how narrow the gap was between holiness and heresy in the fears of authorities. Witches and saints both aimed not just to bridge, but to operatively manipulate the gap between the seen and unseen worlds. Catholic authorities were alarmed at the prospect of ignorant lay amateurs or savvy clerical opportunists playing with fire in this way, since the inevitable conflagration could condemn souls and destroy whole communities. As a result, the steady confessional process of defining Catholicism more clearly found its mirror in a
parallel process that projected the inverse of doctrines onto those thought to be the enemies of faith. Catholic activists had used Jewish blood libels since the later medieval period in order to reinforce the doctrine of Christ’s Real Presence: if even Christ’s enemies believed in the power of Jesus’s blood, what business did Christ’s followers have in doubting it? Reformation doctrinal changes provided new foils for this exercise in projecting Catholicism’s worst fears as the central beliefs and rituals of its worst enemies. Once some Protestants began challenging the Real Presence in the Eucharist and Anabaptists began promoting believers’ baptism, Catholic figurations of the witch cult began expanding the imagined liturgies of the witches’ sabbat, with turnip-hosts for a black mass and profane forms of baptism and the kiss of peace as initiations into the demonic cult.\(^\text{28}\)

But words were not enough, particularly in a culture that was growing suspicious of how dissimulation and mental reservation might render them untrustworthy. The earliest Inquisitions had aimed by systematic questioning to identify heretical intent even in the absence of criminal action. The early modern Spanish (1479) and Roman (1542) Inquisitions similarly assumed that in the dangerous game of heresy, God’s enemies were working harder to cloak their destructive intent behind benign words and actions. Italy had a variety of Inquisitions which sometimes collaborated with and sometimes crossed Rome’s. Court and papal politics governed the ebb and flow of prosecutions, but over time they came to emphasize censorship and education, and used imprisonment and house arrest to shape broad obedience more than capital punishment to punish the actions of particular offenders.\(^\text{29}\) Spain’s Inquisition emerged as a state magistracy aimed at flushing out those Jews who had outwardly converted to Catholicism while continuing to practise Judaism secretly. It was the logical consequence of policies dating from the late fourteenth century that forced Jews to choose between baptism or exile. Despite the deep anxieties around the faith of those converted by force, Iberian authorities continued to impose the choice of baptism or exile on Jews in the 1490s, and on Muslims periodically through the sixteenth century and into the final expulsions from 1609–14. They also brought forced conversions to various parts of the expanding Spanish and Portuguese empires. Since Iberia’s forced Jewish converts were disproportionately represented among settlers in the American and Asian colonies, inquisitors and their formal tribunals soon followed: Mexico (1519), Peru (1539), Goa (1562), Brazil (1579), and Angola (1626).

Iberian anxieties were the self-inflicted result of a quixotic effort to secure religious purity by force, and they led inquisitorial investigations to focus increasingly on identity rather than action. Since those experienced in hiding their ancestral faith might be able to survive an oral interrogation in Catholicism, material signs became more critical markers of true identity: clothing, diet, and jewellery could flush out those secret
Judaizers, Islamicizers, or even witches who were the hidden enemies of the true faith. Other cultural signs of identity, from the names given to children, to the way clothes were washed, to when houses were cleaned, also betrayed the true intent that might underlie—and give the lie to—routine outward observance of Catholic actions and rituals. Inquisitorial tribunals existed to evaluate intention, and to distinguish it from action where necessary, and their processes and personnel were directed to this goal.30

Material culture could certainly betray impious intent. Yet many recent studies have aimed to explore how goods and objects could also reinforce orthodox piety, particularly when Baroque religious culture fostered what has been called ‘devotional consumption’. Silver monstrances and censors enriched worship services, and the many multiplying religious orders used distinctive habits in order to identify themselves. Consumption moved deeply into individual lay lives as well. Texts might serve as talismans, and rosaries, images, crucifixes, and other objects were employed by missionaries and others to better shape ritual action around spiritual intention. Devotional mandalas like the IHS starburst symbol were employed heavily by St. Bernardino of Siena in the fifteenth century and the Jesuits from the sixteenth, to be posted over doorways or held up during sermons. A new devotion to the Sacred Heart of Jesus, attributed to visions of the Visitandine nun and St. Margart Mary Alacoque in 1673–75, brought a new symbol useful for mediation. Federika Jacobs has studied how the spreading use of ex votos to memorialize personal miracles created a new industry for nuns making papier mache reproductions of those parts of the body that had been healed and for artists painting small panels, while Gauvin Bailey has tracked the output of a Manila workshop which produced printed images for distribution around Asia.31 Catholics used devotional images and objects as tools of teaching, memory, and orthodoxy to an extent far beyond Protestants, whose talismans tended to be limited to bibles and devotional images, making the material culture of faith a key marker of Catholics’ singular identity.

Conclusion

And what of Trent? Thus far it has been the elephant in the room. To save it until the end of this discussion is not to suggest that it was not important. Yet the Council of Trent was more strategic than generative. It built on, brokered, and reinforced deeper cultural changes, and many recent studies coming out of the 450th anniversary have demonstrated that its effects were profound. Yet they also remind us just how conflicted, opposed, subverted, partial, and frankly inconclusive the Council actually was. What was perhaps most important about Trent was how it set in motion processes that allowed broader movements in the Church to have a greater impact. I have chosen to focus here on those broader movements and how they shaped early modern Catholicism.
Grouping these as movements from Moving to Fixed, from Local to Universal, and from Action to Intention is similarly meant as a strategic and heuristic device meant only to gather together under a few themes the wide range of new approaches that have emerged in Catholic studies over the past few decades. In each case, it is important to remember that these terms are not oppositional in the sense that the institution, the beliefs, and the broad mass of Catholic believers move decisively from one mode to another. It is meant to distinguish newer approaches from existing ones, on the understanding that in many cases the older approaches remain in place for a very long time in some places and among some people. Medieval and Renaissance worldviews, and their concentration on Real Presence, Immediate Accountability, and Divine Rhythms in Time and Space remain operative in the early modern Church. Old processions and the realities of a Moving peripatetic clergy remain even as the newer forms of devotion and administration tend to be more Fixed. Across the Catholic world, the Church Local takes its point of reference from the Church Universal, and the universal thrust of common liturgies, processes, and saintly cults is adapted and expressed in firmly local forms. Action and Intention work together like the acts of corporal and spiritual charity. Catholicism absorbs new forms and themes without entirely sacrificing old ones, even if it does transvalue and translate the older. This brief survey necessarily flattens many of the distinctions and varieties within both Catholic and Protestant confessions. Yet it aims less to arrive at a new model for understanding early modern religion, and Catholicism above all, than to suggest ways of understanding the new dynamics within the Catholic Church and the new themes within recent research.

Early modern changes to Catholicism can be traced to some critical social developments of the fifteenth century. A subtle but critical one is the parallel development of broader bureaucracies in church and state at precisely that time when intellectual movements like humanism are reshaping the formation of elites that will be professionalized in Latin schools and that will internalize the values of rational critique, expert training, and personal and social discipline. The Catholic Reformation fosters a spiritual elite dedicated to a wide-ranging project of Christianization (moral and devotional reform) which is always far more than just a reaction to Protestant schism or to the perceived threats from Jews, Muslims, and others designated as enemies of the faith. These perceived challenges nonetheless help to clarify, reinforce, and strengthen a very traditional and doctrinal Catholicism, and tie institutional Catholicism to the education and interests of a more exclusive social elite.

Turning religion over to clerical professionals creates new corporations and new elites who will play important roles in government and intellectual life—they are too intelligent and well placed not to. The Catholic Church enjoys its greatest success as a fundamental element of the ancien régime. But it eventually becomes a victim of its own
success. A more aggressive secularization, which by the eighteenth century paired with a
growing distance from traditional religion entirely, spurred a series of challenges to the
Catholic Church’s social role. We pay attention to the anti-clerical jibes of the atheist
Voltaire, and the dramatic suppression of the Jesuits in 1773, and we see in them the
inspiration for the French Revolution’s aggressive suppression of religious corporations
that extends across Europe. Yet decades before this, pious Catholic monarchs in different
parts of Europe had begun stripping clerical privileges and expropriating and
repurposing church properties. Their drive to separate church and state was more deeply
secularizing than the dramatic gestures of the French Revolution—precisely because it
came from inside Catholicism, and was driven by the very Catholic rulers who took the
professionalization of piety to its logical conclusion. This would set the stage for a
modern Catholic Church to emerge from yet another series of adaptations through the
nineteenth century, which would draw on older traditions while embracing newer
cultural forms.

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The chapter traces the development of Orthodoxy by focusing on the Ecumenical Patriarchate of Constantinople and the Russian Orthodox Church in the early modern period. It is based on the premise that in both cases Orthodoxy faced three main challenges: imperial/political, intellectual, and financial. In both the Ottoman and the Russian empires, the Orthodox Church played important roles in the political, administrative, cultural, economic, ideological, and social lives of the Orthodox believers. Orthodoxy usually provided legitimizing ideological support to state authority, was forced to reckon with Western cultural and theological trends, and also proactively defended its economic interests. For most of the period, the Ecumenical Patriarchate and the Russian Orthodox Church maintained constant contacts, even in the face of mutual suspicions of each other’s motives. The chapter argues that early modern Orthodoxy proved adaptive, developed over time, and withstood the challenges it faced, ultimately keeping its symbolic capital largely intact.

Keywords: Russian Orthodox Church, Ecumenical Patriarchate of Constantinople, Orthodox monasticism, Westernization, confessionalization, religious Enlightenment

Modern Eastern Orthodoxy comprised a doctrinally united, but culturally varied world. Such variations resulted as much from political divisions as from a historical Orthodox toleration of linguistic and ritual diversity, as long as doctrine was not compromised. Orthodox churches were rarely micromanaged by the original four highest eastern ecclesiastical leaders, the patriarchs of Constantinople, Alexandria, Antioch, and Jerusalem. Byzantine Orthodoxy did not generally insist on Greek as a liturgical language, even when it successfully imposed administrative oversight. The mass and other church
literature were usually performed and written in local languages (some of which were first codified during conversion to Christianity), resulting in Grecophone, Slavophone, and Arabophone Orthodoxies, to name just the major linguistic groupings. The present chapter treats Orthodoxy in the Ottoman Empire (with emphasis on the Ecumenical Patriarchate of Constantinople or the ‘Great Church’) and in Russia between the fourteenth and the eighteenth centuries. Its guiding premise is that early modern Orthodoxy faced three distinct, but related, challenges: imperial/political, intellectual, and financial.

**Historical Overview**

Orthodoxy was located primarily in the Balkans, Anatolia (especially, its Asia Minor coast and parts of its interior), the Caucasus, parts of Egypt, Syria, and the Holy Land, Muscovy/Russian empire, and Ruthenia (Ukraine and Belarus) (see Map 23.1). Waves of Islamization led to demographic contractions both before 1350 and well into the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries (especially in Anatolia, but also in some Balkan areas). Additionally, the Ottoman government sometimes encouraged or ordered the migration of Muslims. All told, the heartlands of Orthodoxy were in the Balkans (including areas under Latin control), Russia, and Ruthenia. Orthodox believers were subjects of Muslim (Mamluk, Ottoman, Safavid), Roman Catholic (Venetian, Genoese, Polish–Lithuanian), or Eastern Orthodox (Russian, Moldavian and Wallachian, Georgian) multi-ethnic states in some of which the Orthodox were obliged to
develop a *modus vivendi* under non-Orthodox or non-Christian political and, often, social superiors. The exceptions were the Romanian principalities (Moldavia and Wallachia, semi-independent states under Ottoman suzerainty since 1472 and 1512 respectively), the Georgian kingdoms (since the early sixteenth century under Ottoman and Persian suzerainty), and Russia (until the late fifteenth century, under Mongol–Golden Horde control).

By the 1453 conquest of the Byzantine capital, the Ecumenical Patriarchate of Constantinople had already long dealt with non-Christian conquerors, since both Seljuks and Ottomans had allowed the Church to function in former Byzantine lands. In the late fifteenth and throughout the sixteenth century, the patriarchs set the pattern of administrative, spiritual, and judicial control over the faithful. Diocesan boundaries, monastic administration, liturgical, canonical, and pastoral questions, marriage and inheritance practices, and the return of apostates to Orthodoxy were among the issues that patriarchs dealt with. A 1484 synod officially annulled the Union of Florence of 1439. During these centuries, the patriarchate carefully navigated relationships with foreign courts and simultaneously faced a series of economic challenges as a result of the increasing taxation and monetary obligations imposed on it. Already in the immediate post-conquest period, lay officials (*archontes*)—hailing from important Byzantine families that had entered Ottoman service—meddled in the patriarchal administration through offices previously held by clerics, and influenced the selection of patriarchs. The patriarch wielded supreme spiritual authority in his diocese, selected or approved metropolitans and bishops, and also oversaw the so-called *stauropegial* monasteries (all other monasteries theoretically being subordinate to local bishops). The number of metropolitanates and bishoprics ebbed and flowed due to demographics, patronage, and/or imperial government policies. Ottoman expansion added Orthodox-populated regions to the patriarchal diocese (*klima*). Previously autonomous churches such as the Bulgarian Patriarchate of Trnovo (est. 1235), the Serbian Patriarchate (est. 1346, restored as the Patriarchate of Peć in 1557), and the Archbishopric of Ochrid were absorbed by Constantinople due to imperial policies, while others retained their autonomy, such as the Archbishopric of Cyprus.

During the seventeenth century, the patriarch’s authority over the ecclesiastical hierarchy was enhanced with the Porte’s support, leading some contemporary observers to refer to his autocratic ‘one-person rule’ (*monoprosōpos authenteia*). However, the frequent turnover of patriarchs undermined their power. The century saw (by some counts) more than sixty patriarchal changes. Sometimes, the same person held the throne on up to six separate occasions. These *allaxopatriarchies* (patriarchal alternations) resulted from internal clerical squabbles, interference by wealthy Greek patrons or Romanian princes, Ottoman pressure, and policy differences (or a combination thereof).
Foreign policy concerns weighed heavily on appointments since the rising number of European ambassadors resident at the Porte sought to promote patriarchal candidates whom they deemed friendly to Roman Catholic or Protestant causes. Representative is the case of Patriarch Kyrillos I Loukaris (locum tenens 1612; patriarch 1620–23, 1623–33, 1633–34, 1634–35, 1637–38), who became deeply involved in the European powers’ struggle for influence on the Ottoman Empire. Loukaris sought an anti-Polish alliance between Russia and the Ottoman Empire in support of the struggling Orthodox in the Polish–Lithuanian Commonwealth who faced pressures from both the Polish and the Uniate sides. He also embarked on a programme of educational, administrative, and spiritual renewal to defend Orthodoxy from Roman Catholic encroachments. He was attracted to Protestant doctrine, as evidenced by the 1629 publication of the eponymous Calvinist-inspired Confession of Faith and by his editing of the translation into demotic Greek of the New Testament by Maximos Kallil(ou)polites (published in 1638). Ultimately, most of Loukaris’s plans failed, due to missionary opposition, great power politics, and internal ecclesiastical resistance fomented by people in the payroll of the Latins. Loukaris’s doctrinal views were condemned in the Synods of Jassy (1642) and of Jerusalem (1672), the latter one branding Loukaris’s confession a forgery and issuing a new Confession of Faith by the Patriarch of Jerusalem, Dositheos (1669–1707). During the later seventeenth century, Dositheos was the behind-the-scenes administrator of the Constantinople patriarchate at regular intervals. One of his main concerns was to thwart Latin and Armenian attempts to wrest control of the Holy Land shrines from the Orthodox, who benefited symbolically and financially from the steady stream of pilgrims. Dositheos also countered Roman Catholic and Protestant propaganda by publishing doctrinal and polemical works, some of which he wrote himself. Through official correspondence and informal contacts, Dositheos courted the diplomatic and economic support of the Russian tsars and tried, unsuccessfully, to transform Moscow into a centre of Orthodox publishing. Loukaris’s efforts to establish a printing house in Constantinople had failed and the only other printing presses available to the Greek Orthodox were in the Romanian principalities and in Venice.

The late seventeenth and the eighteenth centuries witnessed the rise of Phanariots (wealthy Greek or Grecophone residents of the Phanar district in Constantinople, where the patriarchate had moved in the late sixteenth century) and of the guilds, through mercantile activities and political appointments in the Ottoman administration. As grand dragomans of the Porte and of the fleet, and, from the early eighteenth century, as princes of Wallachia and Moldavia, the Phanariots dominated the Great Church. For the first time, a series of patriarchs came from Phanariot families, the most famous being Samouel Chantzeres (Chantzerles, 1763–68, 1773–74).
In the mid-eighteenth century, the patriarch’s absolute authority was curtailed through the development of *gerontismos* (system of eldership). Initially four and later up to eight metropolitans of dioceses mostly close to Constantinople formed a group of elders who proposed candidates for the throne, checked the patriarch’s authority, and participated in decision making. This system replaced the haphazard practice of staffing the synod with hierarchs present at any given point in the Ottoman capital, and marked the synod’s first official recognition by the state. Concerted efforts were undertaken to improve the credentials of priestly candidates, to reform marriage practices, and to care for the liturgical and pious activities of Turcophone Orthodox believers in Cappadocia. In mid-century, the patriarchate proclaimed the need to re-baptize converts from other Christian denominations, unleashing a vicious conflict with social, confessional, and foreign policy ramifications. The second half of the eighteenth century witnessed a serious crisis in the symbiotic relationship between the patriarchate and the state. Local revolts by Orthodox populations of the Peloponnese broke out in conjunction with the Russian fleet’s presence in the Aegean Sea under the Orlov brothers and the patriarchate was obliged to condemn the rebels. Clergymen had previously expressed calls for liberation movements but such cases were sparse, since neither prelates nor Phanariots had generally doubted their allegiance to the empire. Russia’s rise to great power status provided an alternative and an increasing number of influential individuals were willing openly to side with their northern co-religionists.

Monasticism perhaps benefited the most during the Ottoman period. Before 1453, Orthodox monks had exploited Islamic principles and domestic policy interests of Muslim leaders to secure properties and to gain certain tax exemptions, a practice they continued throughout the early modern centuries. The monasteries of Mt. Athos and of Saint Catherine’s at Sinai are the most notable examples of pilgrimage and ascetic centres dotting the Orthodox sacred geography. Post-Byzantine monasticism was almost totally *idiorrythmic* (meaning that cenobiticism declined) until the late eighteenth century. Although monastics were not a local elite in the Ottoman social order, their spiritual status was unchallenged, and their economic and social significance considerable, since many monasteries boasted networks of dependencies in the empire and beyond.

Venetian-held territories practised multiple forms of ecclesiastical organization. In Venice itself, the Greek Orthodox community had its own metropolitan, nominally under the jurisdiction of Constantinople since the late sixteenth century. With the support of the Eastern patriarchs, the community became very active in countering union attempts by Metropolitan Meletios Typaldos in the early eighteenth century. The Venetians did not permit Orthodox bishops to co-exist with Latin ones, but were also loath to cede much control to a Rome-oriented hierarchy. In some Venetian Balkan possessions a *protopapas* (lit. ‘archpriest’), assisted by other clerics, wielded a modicum of episcopal power without
the bishop’s title. In certain cases, Venetians permitted the appointment of Orthodox bishops who were normally elected from the local nobility and then tacitly, or indirectly, recognized by the patriarchate. Churches were largely under the control of individuals, guild, or brotherhoods, thus allowing for substantial autonomy in pious expression and church financing, under the Venetians’ watchful balancing eye. Despite the numerous restrictions imposed on the Orthodox and the frequent expressions of confessional enmity, quotidian co-existence and toleration were the norm, with Orthodox and Latins participating, if not always equally, in civic pride celebrations organized by the Venetian authorities.10 In Crete, the Sinai monks played an important role in church affairs, as evident from the resistance that they mounted to bishops installed by the Ottomans after the final conquest of the island in 1669.11

Early modern Russian Orthodoxy was inextricably linked with Muscovy’s rise to prominence. By the late fifteenth century, the Muscovite princes consolidated their pre-eminent political position in northeastern Rus’. They manipulated Mongol-Golden Horde overlordship, effected the transfer of the seat of the metropolitanate of Kiev and All Rus’ to Moscow during the fourteenth century and, shortly after 1400, neutralized the Lithuanian state’s attempts to create a separate Orthodox ecclesiastical hierarchy. The Russian Church belonged to the klima of the Patriarchate of Constantinople, which imposed or approved the appointment of, usually Greek, metropolitans. After the Council of Ferrara–Florence (1437–39) and the resulting Union between the Eastern Orthodox and the Roman Catholic Churches, Prince Basil II utilized opposition to the union to gain de facto autonomy for his church. After 1448, the Russians elevated indigenous churchmen to the Metropolitanate of Kiev and All Rus’, and by 1461 the title lacked reference to Kiev. The division of the Rus’ Church into two metropolitanates was now established, with the one in Kiev reverting to allegiance to Constantinople by the 1470s. After 1453, contacts between the Muscovites and their Eastern co-religionists continued sporadically until in the early sixteenth century relations with the Patriarchate of Jerusalem and Athonite monasteries increased. The Russians had to fend for themselves in matters of heresy and piety. The efforts against the so-called Judaizing heresy in the decades around 1500, and the conflict (if indeed such it was) between the Possessors and Non-Possessors—supporters and opponents of large monastic landholdings respectively—in the first half of the sixteenth century proceeded without much input from the Eastern churches. Overall, absence of such input was rather rare in the early modern period.12 Contacts were rekindled during the 1510s, with the arrival of Maxim the Greek (Michael Trivoles), a learned monk who had studied in Italy and was invited by the Russians to help with the correction of liturgical texts, thus adding elements of Renaissance secular learning to an otherwise totally religious Russian cultural environment.13 In sixteenth-century Russia churches tended to be proprietary and their priests were employees of the estates or communities where they were located.
The economic, juridical, and real-life conditions of the parish clergy depended on their employers. The priest was little differentiated from the average peasant. The wide-ranging programme of the Stoglav Council of 1551 was never fully implemented, but it shows concern with education of both clergy and laity, administration of parishes, proper behaviour in church and outside of it, and organization of church finances. Despite opposition among Eastern hierarchs, the Russian government elevated the metropolitanate to patriarchate in 1589, ranking fifth in the order of honour among the Orthodox patriarchates. Throughout the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, the Russian tsars capitalized on their status as the only independent Orthodox rulers. The Third Rome theory that conceived of Moscow as the centre of true faith (given that the original Rome had fallen to heresy and the New Rome/Constantinople had fallen into infidel hands) does not seem to have driven Russian foreign policy. Moscow fashioned itself more often as the New Jerusalem, yet again in imitation of Byzantine prototypes. The Russian tsars extended patronage and alms to Eastern monastic and patriarchal institutions, welcomed their clerics to the Russian capital, consulted with them on ecclesiastical and foreign policy issues, and fostered an image as Orthodoxy’s protectors.

The seventeenth century witnessed a renewed Greek influence on the Russian Church and culture. It began with the trauma of the Time of Troubles (1598–1613), during which, amidst civil conflict and foreign invasions, Russia’s ecclesiastics contributed new understandings of political ideology by assigning legitimacy to dynastic continuity and to popular demands. With the selection of a new ruler, Tsar Michael (1613–45), the Russian Church found itself in a renewed position of strength since the tsar’s own father became patriarch. Patriarch Filaret (1619–33) reorganized and expanded the patriarchal administration into an elaborate system of chancelleries, streamlined the tax/fee obligations of black and white clergy, increased control over peasants on ecclesiastical lands, spearheaded a programme of revision of Russian liturgical books, and banished religious publications printed in Ruthenia on grounds of Latin tendencies. Patriarch Nikon (1652–66) followed in his footsteps, enhancing the reform programme to include ritual. Initially backed by tsar Alexei Mikhailovich (1645–76), Nikon lost this support when the Tsar and some nobles decided that he harboured notions of the supremacy of the spiritual over the temporal power. The Councils of 1666–67, in the presence of two Eastern patriarchs, deposed Nikon, but endorsed his reform programme. Opposition to the reforms initially came from among clerics in the royal court, monastics in and outside Moscow, and later from large groups of peasants who appear to have entertained both religious objections and social and other grievances. The result was an internal rift in the Russian Church, the Schism of the Old Ritualists. The Old Believers (as they are more commonly known) were soon further fragmented into various dissenting groups. Ioakim’s patriarchate (1674–90) was characterized by
sustained assault on the Old Believers and attempts to raise the Church’s badly dented prestige. Decisions meant to increase episcopal supervision over the priesthood had already marked the Council of 1666–67, meant to reduce lay influence over local parish churches. Ioakim further sought the consolidation of the Church’s monopoly on doctrine and ritual, placed in doubt both by the Old Believers and through a vicious polemical conflict over transubstantiation during the 1680s. Although fearful of foreign influences, Ioakim was no obscurantist and pursued policies that emphasized obedience to the Church but also valued informed faith. He supported the creation of the Slavo–Greco–Latin Academy in Moscow in 1685, and entrusted its operation to two Greek brothers, Sophronios and Ioannikios Leichoudes who had studied in Italy and employed a modified Jesuit curriculum in Orthodox guise. Concern with education was part of a wider trend of Westernization of Russian elite culture in the second half of the seventeenth century. With the tsarist court at its epicentre, this culture was fuelled by clerical immigrants from Ruthenia and the Orthodox East, who brought Western Baroque notions of literary production, morality, and pious activity. Belief in miracle cults, at least among the elite, was de-emphasized, and charity, orthopraxy, and individual virtue for an active courtier became the mainstays of the new teachings by educated clergymen, such as Simeon Polotskii. Sermon collections disseminated these messages to the provinces by century’s end. Both secular and religious knowledge, in combination, were valued as guides for the individual believer, in some ways preparing the Russian elite for the Petrine reforms.17

Peter the Great’s advent brought about more sustained efforts to harness the Church to state service. Once the last early modern Russian patriarch died in 1700, Peter left the throne vacant and entrusted the Church to handpicked clerics from Ukraine (with Stefan Lavorskii serving as a locum tenens), whom he believed to be more educated and cooperative than indigenous Russian prelates. In 1721 Peter abolished the patriarchate, replacing it with the Spiritual College, under a plan compiled by Feofan Prokopovich, another Ukrainian. Immediately renamed the Holy Governing Synod, this was a group of clerics under the supervision of a lay oberprocurator. During the Northern War against Sweden, Peter used the Church for propaganda purposes, milked it for financial resources, imposed several extraordinary taxes, and sought to take over tax collection and aspects of administration of bishopric and monastic lands. Peter’s and his immediate successors’ limits on the number of monasteries and their lands, and the imposition of age restrictions for ordination proved more successful than the attempts to entrust social and educational enterprises to the Church. The Spiritual Regulation sought to differentiate between superstition and true belief, and was the work of the Protestant-inspired Feofan Prokopovich. Excessive devotion to icons and saints was officially discouraged, and confession was used to spy on the people.18 Harnessing the Church to the state continued in Catherine the Great’s time, when she secularized monastic and bishopric lands in 1764. A sustained effort to improve the credentials and pastoral
performance of parish priests led to the creation of numerous seminaries, and the institution of clerical supervisors.

During the later sixteenth century in the Polish–Lithuanian Commonwealth, two rival reform programmes of the church hierarchy and laity culminated with the proclamation of the Union of Brest in 1596. The bishops sought to strengthen their authority, challenged by the power of lay brotherhoods, amidst polemical ferment among Protestants, Roman Catholics, and Orthodox. The result was the creation of the Uniate (later called Greek Catholic) Church, which recognized papal primacy and united with the Roman Catholic Church, but retained several distinctive features, such as married parish clergy and the Eastern liturgical typikon. The Union led to a rift among the Orthodox in Ruthenia, with the majority of the bishops joining it whereas the peasants and part of the gentry retained adherence to Orthodoxy. New brotherhoods were established, supported by the nobility to encourage educational initiatives and to strengthen the community in the face of persecution and increasing confessionalization. The Orthodox Church struggled to survive until its resurgence after the 1620s, which culminated with the reforms of Peter Mohyla from the 1630s onwards and the foundation of the Kiev Mohyla Collegium (later Academy). Following the partition of Ruthenia after the Cossack rebellion of 1648, Orthodoxy in Western Ruthenia declined in the second half of the seventeenth century. The Uniates’ quest for a distinctive identity led to more sustained Latinization, culminating in the Synod of Zamość (1720). The late eighteenth century witnessed one of the most dynamic expansions of the Russian Orthodox Church in the early modern period (the other being in Siberia and the lower Volga) in the partitioned lands of Poland, when the Uniate Church came under assault by Catherine’s government, with a first wave of forced conversions to Russian Orthodoxy, followed in the 1830s by a second one.

The Imperial/Political Challenge

The Byzantine Church had always been under some form of state control. The Justinianic combination of religious and secular power into a unit, based on symphonia, the agreement or concord between the two, remained the basic formulation. As the empire declined, several hierocratic theories claimed for the Church some degree of superiority or even primacy over the emperor, with varying degrees of success. In the first half of the fifteenth century a rift developed between the officials of the Patriarchate of Constantinople and the Byzantine aristocracy, who were more open to rapprochement with Roman Catholicism because of economic links with the commercial powers of Venice and Genoa. Expressed during debates over union of the Eastern and Latin Churches, this rift did not undermine loyalty to the institution of the emperor as such. Rather,
patriarchal officials closed ranks behind the idea of an ‘Orthodox utopia’ which would
shield the faith from association with the Latins, could aid the patriarchate in reasserting
its ecumenical spiritual authority, and might preserve its economic interests in lands
already under Ottoman control. They envisioned a potential accommodation with the
Ottomans as an alternative to union. The hierocratic ideas of activist clergymen had
provided much of the ideological preparation for such an orientation.20

Past understanding of Ottoman internal organization was based on the millet system, the
ethno–confessional groups supposedly recognized by the Sultanic government since
1453. The Orthodox millet included all Orthodox subjects (whether Greek, Slavic, or
Albanian) and was headed by the ecumenical patriarch as a milletbashi. The Orthodox
(much like the Armenian and Jewish) millet enjoyed internal administrative autonomy
with the patriarch wielding near complete administrative, juridical, and fiscal power over
believers. It is now evident, however, that the formal establishment of the Orthodox millet
occurred in the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, as a result of a long
developmental process.

Since Byzantine times, the Orthodox Church had been characterized by administrative
pluralism. Lacking a tradition of assigning universal authority to a single person, early
modern Orthodoxy remained administratively divided into four patriarchates, of
Constantinople, Alexandria, Antioch, and Jerusalem, with a fifth in Moscow between 1589
and 1721.21 Patriarchal territorial jurisdiction ebbed and flowed, due to political
vicissitudes. The Patriarchate of Constantinople alternated between adding territories (as
the Ottoman Empire expanded) and losing them to conversion or to other patriarchates
(such as the transfer of Ruthenia to Moscow’s jurisdiction in the late seventeenth
century). Patriarchal areas were divided into metropolitanates and archbishoprics, which
in turn were further subdivided into bishoprics, along Byzantine prototypes. Prelates
traditionally came from the monastic clergy. Their social origins are unclear, but, impactistically, it appears that the Orthodox hierarchy in the Ottoman Empire
consisted of uncles, nephews, and cousins.22 Parish priests came overwhelmingly from
peasant or lower urban strata, were married, often depended on additional work (usually
agricultural or petty trades) for financial survival, and were little differentiated from their
flock. The monopoly of celibate monks on ecclesiastical high offices was never seriously
challenged, in either the Ottoman or the Russian empires. In both cases, administration,
spirituality, and education were controlled by monks (or former monks who became
prelates), who also composed the theological literature of the time. Following a long
tradition, the monk’s role as a preferred spiritual guide and confessor retained its appeal.
Despite facing persistent and, sometimes, vocal critics and/or state policies seeking to
curb monastic landholdings, monastics remained the backbone of Orthodoxy. Early
modern Eastern Orthodoxy was a monastic church.
For the century and a half after 1453, the patriarch of Constantinople, his officials, and his appointees learnt how to co-exist with the ‘infidel’ power and assumed economic and social tasks, beyond their spiritual ones. Patriarchal selection and appointment was accomplished at the sultan’s will, or under the influence of important Ottoman officials. This precedent was established with Gennadios Scholarios, the first post-conquest patriarch of Constantinople, and a major opponent of union with Rome (although in the Council of Ferrara–Florence, as a state official he had been pro-unionist and only changed his stance once he became a monk). Contrary to much modern literature about privileges supposedly bestowed upon Scholarios by the sultan, the reality was rather more pedestrian. For the Conqueror, it was logical to reconstitute the patriarchate since it could provide services to a state combining Ottoman and Byzantine characteristics. The danger of a new crusade against the Ottomans made it politic to allow the Orthodox their own religious administration (since Islamic law accorded them the status of protected people) and to entrust the Church to a staunch anti-Unionist, thus staving off any rapprochement with the Latins.

The patriarchate became the nucleus around which an Ottoman Greek aristocracy of sorts coalesced. In the first three decades after the 1453 conquest, Greek notables acquired offices in the patriarchal administration. Some were clerics, but most were laymen, thus establishing a pattern of secular oversight over the Church. All appointees to prelate offices needed a berat (an imperial appointment edict) that had to be renewed with the advent of a new sultan. Islamic law did not recognize religious authorities as legal entities, therefore the berats reflected the personal relation between the sultan and the appointees. The prelates’ primary tasks were ministering to the faithful, acting as judges in matters of family and inheritance law, managing the Church’s real estate, collecting taxes for their own needs, and registering commercial and other transactions by laymen. Especially in matters pertaining to marriage, divorce, and inheritance, this was by no means a new role, since already in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, Byzantine bishops had carried out similar functions. The judicial and canon law manuals that the Church used in the Ottoman period were the works of late Byzantine clerical canonists. In the eighteenth century, the state ‘annexed’ the Church and fully incorporated it into its administrative machinery. This status was altered only in the mid-nineteenth century with the advent of the Tanzimat reforms.

Orthodoxy adapted in various ways to the status of non-state religion in the Ottoman Empire. Oikonomia (flexibility in dispensation of canonical matters) was regularly employed. Islamic domination, the variety of local custom, the right of Christian litigants to pursue resolution of certain cases in either Christian or in Islamic courts, and the quotidian realities of life amidst Muslim populations obliged the Church to adjust its canonical stance whenever strict adherence to the rules was not feasible or advisable.
Moreover, prelates employed various strategies ranging from excommunication to mild rebukes to penance to monetary fines to resorting to Ottoman authorities in order to resolve disputes and to impose their authority on recalcitrant believers. During the eighteenth century the patriarchate developed its own penal system, for the first time accompanied by its own prison for clerics and also by the patriarchal officials’ authority to condemn offenders to galley service.\(^{25}\)

Ideologically, the Church rationalized Ottoman conquest by developing two parallel but different discourses, beginning in the late fifteenth century. The first saw Ottoman control as enslavement, fully deserved because of sins, but one that shielded Orthodoxy from Latin contamination. The other discourse tended to view Ottoman rule as a continuation of Byzantine imperial authority, with the sultans being successors to the Byzantine emperors. Evident in chronographs, histories of the world from creation, and apocalyptic and prophetic literature, this second discourse complemented rather than negated the first. In such a reading, first broached by none other than Scholarios himself, the sultan acted as a tool of divine will. Besides implementing social and economic policy, therefore, the Church also served as an instrument of ideological legitimation for the Ottoman state by ensuring its flock’s submissiveness and loyalty to the empire.

In Russia, even though a multi-ethnic empire, Orthodoxy was the state religion. The ‘lived Orthodoxy’ of early modern Russians reflected general adherence to doctrinal, canonical, and pious prescriptions, if not necessarily widespread knowledge and understanding of dogma’s finer points. Orthodoxy suffused the daily lives of the elite and commoners in a cultural continuum that began at the princely/tsarist court and reached the peasant believer in remote regions. Orthodoxy conditioned marriage and kinship, the organization of time and place, rites of passage, legal practices, communal life, apocalyptic and millenarian trends, cults of holy people, political ideology and court ceremonial, the symbolic and rhetorical language of empire building, ideas about death and the afterlife, explanations of physical phenomena, and Russia’s self-image and its place in the world. To one degree or another, the intellectual, cultural, social, and political lives of Russians carried the imprint of Orthodoxy. The Westernization and growing impact of secular learning at court discernible from the mid-seventeenth century and accelerated by Peter the Great’s reforms created a secular elite culture. However, Orthodoxy retained considerable influence in the cultural, social, intellectual, and political spheres.

Mongol–Golden Horde rule does not seem to have seriously affected the Church’s function, especially after the initial onslaught of the thirteenth century. The fourteenth and fifteenth centuries witnessed a monastic renaissance in Russia, under the influence of imported Byzantine and South Slavic Hesychasm, though without much of the Palamite theology and mystical visions of the originals.\(^{26}\) In the late fifteenth century, Archbishop Gennadii of Novgorod attempted to standardize church literature, resulting in
the creation of the first Church Slavonic Bible (1499). The cult of saints (including holy fools), icon veneration, and the liturgy and other rituals punctuated devotional life. Until the mid-sixteenth century, most domestic canonizations were of monks. Despite state restrictions on monastic immunities and landholdings, and the apparent decline in the prestige of the ascetic life in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, Russian monastic communities thrived, and new ones were founded. In important cloisters, such as the Trinity-St. Sergius and the Solovetskii Monastery, spiritual and economic obligations were linked, and monks were urged to succeed in both. Monasteries served as centres of spirituality, developed distinctive textual and memorial cultures, sometimes successfully resisted patriarchal and tsarist encroachments, and contributed significantly to the defence needs and the economic, cultural, moral, and social life of their patrons, the surrounding population, and visiting pilgrims.

The Church’s moral authority informed a political culture that endowed it with a mediating role in disputes. Orthodox ritual, especially at the princely/tsarist court, assumed political dimensions and was suffused with political messages. Metropolitan Makarii and his successors aided the state in empire-creation by providing the symbolic language and the rituals that justified the wars against the Kazan and Astrakhan khanates in the mid-sixteenth century. The colonization of the newly conquered territories was partially secured through a network of churches and monasteries enjoying monopolies over local markets and through the invention of new local saints. After the conversions effected by Saint Stephen of Perm in the late fourteenth century, Russian missions were generally conditioned by the state’s colonial needs. Full-blown efforts towards conversion in Kazan started only in the late seventeenth century, once geopolitical security had been established and realpolitik issues had been resolved. In the late seventeenth century and throughout the eighteenth century, the state alternated between fiscal incentives and application of discriminatory laws, sprinkled with attempts at doctrinal education before conversion. Still, Islam survived largely intact. Neither church, nor state officially sanctioned violence in conversion, but proved unable to prevent it from regularly occurring at the local level. The violence or threat of it in the case of the Uniates during the late Catherinian period was a notable exception, perhaps because of strategic concerns.

Patriarchs Filaret, Nikon, and Ioakim were particularly interested in enhancing the authority of bishops. The state often supported such efforts and it may have occasionally spearheaded them since prelates could secure a modicum of control in a chronically under-governed society. Nevertheless, for a country as huge as Russia, the number of bishoprics remained small even after it was increased in the seventeenth century. The bishops’ power at the local level seems unrestrained. Revolts against them appear to have resulted from adherence to Old Belief, but may also constitute broader reactions to
the prelates’ efforts to impose set norms on their flocks. The bishops overwhelmingly did the state’s bidding after the schism and were not averse to employing violence. It is unclear, however, whether bishops’ authoritarianism was the norm or whether it was left unchecked by the state because of the struggle against schismatics.

The crisis in church–state relations during Nikon’s patriarchate and the Petrine ecclesiastical reforms have produced the image of the Russian Orthodox Church as a ‘handmaiden of the state’, but this is an exaggeration. The Holy Synod was the equivalent of the Senate for the ecclesiastical realm. Despite the Lutheran prototypes of Feofan Prokopovich, the Synod was an autonomous body and wielded real power, depending on the personalities of its members and their relationship with the monarch. Peter and his successors were interested in restricting the Church to spiritual and social welfare as well as to education. Anti-theocratic, but not anti-church, Peter remained a true believer in Orthodoxy, although he preferred a more practical, applied religion and had little time for theoretical discussions of doctrinal minutiae. He appears to have harboured ideas of the monarch’s sacral charisma which he tried to disseminate through the seemingly incongruous satire of the ecclesiastical hierarchy and religious rituals. Additionally, Peter and his successors built upon images of female sainthood in order to legitimize Catherine I’s succession to the throne and, more generally, to justify female rule. The late eighteenth century saw the development of an indigenous educated episcopal elite. Despite their parish clergy social origins from the mid-eighteenth century onwards, the bishops’ education, their career patterns, and their participation in court culture formed them into a separate clerical elite. Priests, on the other hand, although increasingly developing into a closed clerical estate themselves, remained economically dependent upon their parishioners and thus with limited authority over them in matters of pious practice. Still, the Church managed to retain or even increase control over a host of issues such as family, marriage, and clerical discipline, and in some areas may have run parallel to the state, not necessarily as a branch of it.

The Intellectual Challenge

Roman Catholic and Protestant doctrinal and polemical statements, associated missionary activities, the Enlightenment, and secular scientific thought constituted the main parts of the intellectual challenge. Eastern Orthodoxy, for its part, was generally reactive since it usually responded rather than initiating the discussion. Orthodox thinkers were literally dragged into debates on issues ranging from doctrinal matters (such as transubstantiation or purgatory) to papal primacy, the importance of tradition, and the role of scientific knowledge. Study in the West and increasing inroads of Western (mainly Jesuit) education provided some Orthodox polemicists with tools similar to those of their
opponents. Some modern scholars have labelled the resulting Orthodox theological and ecclesiological production as a pseudo-morphosis of Orthodoxy and a radical break with authentic patristic and Byzantine prototypes.

Eastern Orthodoxy has generally shown aversion to admitting or accepting doctrinal development after the end of the ecumenical synods’ era. The theology of Hesychasm may be the only exception to this rule. Still, in the face of determined polemical challenges, the Orthodox recognized the need for tools similar to those of other Christian confessions, since traditional apophaticism (humans were not able to understand or penetrate the essence and aims of the divine) did not serve them adequately in confronting their opponents. Western influences on Orthodoxy went back at least to the thirteenth century, when Byzantine scholars started reading the Latin theological compendia, and became particularly pronounced during repeated attempts at church union in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries. Though Ottoman expansion initially lessened the opportunities for such contacts, beginning in the late sixteenth century, missionaries (mainly Jesuits, but also Capuchins and others) set up schools in both the Ottoman Empire and among the Orthodox Slavs in Ruthenia. Moreover, both Roman Catholics and Protestants inquired about the basic tenets of Orthodoxy, if only in search of potential allies.

Though such official contacts on doctrinal matters were not continuous, they forced the Orthodox to respond formally on a variety of old and new topics. Patriarch of Constantinople Ieremias II exchanged letters with the Lutheran theologians of Tübingen in the late sixteenth century; Kyrillos Loukaris corresponded with Calvinists, and his protégé (and subsequently patriarch of Alexandria) Metrophanes Kritopoulos with the Anglicans; Metropolitan Peter Mohyla composed his confession of faith in response to the Roman Catholic and Uniate challenges; and the Russian Church responded to the Jansenist theologians of the Sorbonne in 1717–18, as did the Eastern patriarchs to the Non-Jurors in 1717–18 and again in 1722. The result was a series of Orthodox confessions of faith, both printed and expressed in official correspondence. Usually the result of church councils, some of these confessions were subsequently denounced or amended for doctrinal purity. The Orthodox were obliged to pronounce on purgatory, indulgences, the doctrine of transubstantiation, the cult of saints, the veneration of relics, and a host of other matters, always ensuring that they differentiated themselves from their opponents or potential allies. The central assertion was that the Orthodox followed patristic authorities and (the indeed nebulous concept of) tradition without changing anything. Frequently invoking apophaticism (characteristic of much of Byzantine theology), the Orthodox claimed that precision was not always possible in all matters of doctrinal theory or ritual practice. When they ventured to be more specific, the Orthodox adopted Western teachings (for instance, on purgatory and on indulgences) and manuals (for
example, on confession) but presented them as adhering to traditional, early Christian precepts (with the relevant patristic references duly adduced), which the Roman Catholics and Protestants had corrupted and the Orthodox had kept intact.

Some Western polemicists deemed Orthodoxy intellectually uninteresting, because it lacked both scholasticism and educational establishments. Beginning in the late sixteenth century, Greek graduates of Western universities and colleges began reclaiming the Greek classical past in response to assertions that learning had disappeared among the enslaved Greeks. Educated circles mainly attached to the Patriarchates of Constantinople and Jerusalem produced high-quality polemical works and articulated a historical discourse which viewed the past through the distinction between two spheres, the secular and the ecclesiastical/religious: the secular had fallen due to its own sins, whereas the ecclesiastical had survived and even thrived because it was above and beyond this world.34

Eastern Orthodoxy did develop over time and it did provide intellectual responses to the scholarly Protestant or post-Tridentine Roman Catholic challenges. In countering what he called the ‘foxes in the henhouse’ (that is, the Jesuit missionaries in Orthodox areas), Kyrillos Loukaris tried to chart a course for the intellectual reinvigoration of Orthodoxy through education and doctrinal reform. He failed on the doctrinal front but his legacy lived on in the educational realm. The philosophy of his friend, and a main collaborator in educational matters, Theophilos Korydalleus, remained influential in Orthodox schools of the Ottoman Empire until the eighteenth century, despite its initial condemnation by some conservative circles. The Patriarchal Academy in Constantinople functioned erratically, based on the availability of funds and teachers, but it was not the only educational outlet available. Many Greeks and other Balkan Orthodox were educated in the West at the time, particularly Venetian subjects of Eastern Mediterranean territories. Upon return to the East, they constituted a Western-educated, upwardly mobile clerical group that staffed both church bureaucracies and schools across the Ottoman Empire and beyond. The University of Padua, the Cottunian College (1653, also in Padua), the Planginean College in Venice (1662), and the Saint Athanasius College (Collegio Greco) in Rome (1576) were the main destinations for Orthodox thirsting for education. Another option was schools of middle and higher education (colleges) created by many of the graduates of Italian institutions across the Orthodox world. Until the end of the seventeenth century, and possibly even after that, many of these schools followed the pattern of Jesuit colleges, cleansed for doctrinal purity. The Kiev Mohyla Collegium, the crown jewel of Mohylan reforms, was similarly based upon Jesuit patterns. Early modern Orthodoxy partook of the pan-European phenomenon of Jesuit or Jesuit-imitated education.35 Qualitative natural philosophy remained dominant until well into the eighteenth century, when experimental physics slowly began to appear in some schools,
including the princely Academies of Jassy and Bucharest. At the same time, a number of English and especially German universities started attracting Greeks, where they were taught by Protestant academics.

In Russia, reactiveness is evident in the Nikonian reforms, whether they are interpreted as an assertion of patriarchal superiority and/or as pretensions to pan-Orthodox leadership. Patriarch Nikon’s programme was linked to trends within post-Renaissance philological activity that the Russians borrowed through Ruthenian scholars in the seventeenth century. The Eucharist conflict (1680s) in the Russian and Ruthenian Churches was a political struggle over questions of doctrinal authority but also part of a wider discussion on transubstantiation long underway in the West that had spilled across into the Orthodox world. Peter’s ecclesiastical reforms found inspiration in Western models, but his clerical collaborators were not united: Stefan Iavorskii’s faction adhered to Roman Catholic models, Feofan Prokopovich to Protestant ones.

The encounter between Orthodoxy and the Enlightenment was not simply a case of progressivism versus conservatism. Orthodoxy’s attitude to enlightened thought was eclectic, adaptive, and largely conditioned by the political framework. In the Ottoman and Russian empires, the social and political ‘authority’ of the Church was not seriously challenged. Religious Enlightenment generally focused on the content of education and on the impact of new scientific theories on virtue and proper pious behaviour. Thinkers adapted Enlightenment ideas concerning progress, morality, and tolerance and harnessed them to the Orthodox vocabulary. They sought to reconcile advancements in natural sciences with a benevolent God’s plans, arguing that Orthodoxy could and should be combined with the new science. Only a handful of radical thinkers placed science first and sought to displace religion from scientific knowledge.

In the Ottoman Empire until the late eighteenth century, most enlightened thinkers were clerics who were not extreme materialists, nor wished to challenge radically the Church as an institution. Their efforts aimed primarily at eradicating what they called ‘superstition’ and at reforming education. Some posited modern education as a prerequisite for political emancipation and even national liberation, while others espoused belief in ‘enlightened absolutism’. Established in the mid-eighteenth century with patriarchal support, the short-lived Athonite Academy at the Vatopedi Monastery was for a period staffed by teachers such as Eugenios Voulgaris who taught, among others, the ideas of Descartes, Leibniz, Wolff, and Locke. Whatever opposition he encountered seems to have been primarily from Aristotelian scholars, not from the official Church. Voulgaris also translated into Greek and published Voltaire’s *Historical and Critical Essay on the Dissensions of the Churches of Poland* and his *Treatise on Tolerance*. Although he referred to Voltaire repeatedly in his own works, he was eclectic in his approach and adopted a more restrained attitude to religious tolerance. The
patriarchate of Constantinople more often tried to achieve compromise rather than face a very public fight, particularly in debates over the school curricula. Moreover, the Church was not opposed to teaching innovations, and only reacted when it perceived a challenge to doctrinal matters. The situation changed after the French Revolution (the case of Iosepos Moisiodax notwithstanding), when social criticism, including of the Church, figured prominently in Enlightenment ideas and new approaches to time and space produced secularizing historical and geographical works. It was then that some radical Enlighteners (such as the layman Adamantios Koraes) openly accused the church prelates of allying themselves with Ottoman repression in virulent anticlerical tracts.

Since the late seventeenth century, a secular elite culture had been forming in Russia, and was given additional impetus by Peter the Great’s reforms. Bishops were at the centre of the religious Enlightenment but also very much partook of the developing secular elite culture. They were inspired by a mix of English and German religious thought, and focused on the definition of true learning, on reconciling revelation and reason, and on debates about religious toleration, all the while probing the limits of natural law and scientific empiricism. Their approach was eclectic and tended to avoid doctrinal matters. In the second half of the eighteenth century, theology in Russian academies and seminaries became a field of scientific inquiry. However, Russian clerics did not move wholesale towards rationalism, and certainly not deism, since they assumed a moderate stance between atheism and superstition. The resultant theology was derived from Protestant prototypes and found expression in theological treatises and in sermons that were delivered at court but were also distributed through print. Preaching focused on personal virtue and individual moral development rather than on societal reform.\footnote{Eastern Orthodoxy proved adaptive to Enlightenment ideas, but also hardened its stance when it perceived threats. After the outbreak of the French Revolution and subsequent upheavals, the Patriarchate of Constantinople forcefully defended the traditional Aristotelian curriculum and warned its flock against the dangers of secularization. Ironically, Korydalleus’s works that were initially condemned in the seventeenth century became the fallback orthodoxy of the eighteenth century. Another response came from the Athonite Kollyvades (from \textit{kollyva}, the boiled wheat used in memorial services). From an obscure group of monks who disputed the canonicity of memorial services on Sundays, the Kollyvades movement expanded its commentary to continuous communion, Athos’ independence from the patriarchate, the impact of science on religious belief, and the boundaries between doctrine and pious practice. Some Kollyvades remained deeply conservative and anti-Western, but others were scholars interested in the regeneration of Orthodoxy through patristic and ascetic writings and traditions. They sought to wrest from the prelate hierarchy and its sponsors control both over ritual consistency and doctrinal guardianship. Saint Nikodemos Hagioreites (1749–...}
1809) produced a manual of confession and treatises on spiritual life and on proper moral behaviour. These were adaptations of existing translations into Greek of Roman Catholic (mainly Jesuit) originals and reflected Baroque pastoral and spiritual theories and practices of the late seventeenth century. He also contributed a collection of canon law with commentary (Pedalion, The Rudder). Nikodemos and other members of the group, such as Saint Makarios Notaras (1731–1805), aligned themselves with merchants and craftsmen outside the circles of Constantinople, through family, social, and professional contacts, thus challenging the dominance of Constantinopolitan elites (prelates and the Phanariots). After their repeated condemnation by the patriarchate, the Kollyvades focused on publishing activities and teaching. In the late 1790s, they tried more consistently to counter Western, radical enlightenment, and secularizing ideas and were accused by their critics of being docile and obedient supporters of Ottoman tyranny.38

Some scholars argue that the magnum opus of Nikodemos and Makarios Notaras, the Philokalia (literally, ‘Love of Beauty’, Venice, 1782) was a version of Orthodox enlightenment aimed at guiding both laity and clergy towards a renewal of tradition.39 The Philokalic revival may indeed have been a ressoucement (as Kallistos Ware aptly put it),40 a return to the sources, but it consisted of mystical and ascetic texts, not necessarily appropriate for the laity. At least that is what the Ukrainian monk Paisii Velichkovskii thought when he transferred the Philokalia to Moldavian, Ukrainian, and Russian soil, in the process spawning starchestvo (spiritual eldership in a monastic setting) and contributing to the revival of Russian monastic spirituality. Velichkovskii focused on the inner life of monks, rather than of the laity at large, although the definition and purview of starchestvo subsequently developed other variants in the Russian empire. The synod of the Patriarchate of Constantinople long distrusted the Kollyvades and sought to rein them in before eventually (after the French Revolution and the radical calls for liberty that followed) adopting parts of their programme (especially with regard to the neomartyrs). The enlightened bishops of the Russian hierarchy, more secure in their social and ecclesiastical power in an Orthodox state, generally supported the elders as a way of reforming monasticism from the inside, even if the Holy Synod occasionally expressed suspicions and reservations about eldership’s potential to harbour dissenting tendencies, if left unchecked.

The Philokalia, as well as some other major products of Nikodemos Hagiorites and his acolytes (such as the Chrêstoetheia tôn Christianôn, 1803, a manual of proper moral behaviour meant for a lay audience), offered alternatives more readily applicable to a monastic environment. They were meant as a shield from secularization and (ironically, given Nikodemos’s attraction to Jesuit prototypes) Westernization (and even Islamization), but they appear poorly equipped to address concerns of the laity. Perhaps to compensate partly, the Kollyvades promoted the veneration of neomartyrs, believers
who refused to convert to Islam, or had apostasized from it, after a prior conversion. The cult of neomartyrs reflects growing confessionalization tendencies in the Ottoman Empire in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. The mainly Athonite monastic sponsors of the neomartyrs underscored that Orthodoxy had not lost its mettle and could still produce holy people, on a par with Western churches. Nikodemos Hagioreites theorized martyrdom into a valid path for salvation, edited the lives of neomartyrs into structured narratives in demotic Greek and published them in his Neon Martyrologion (Venice, 1799), thus providing the Orthodox flock with newly minted heroes, indeed impresarios, of the faith. He employed tools of modernity in order to disseminate a decidedly anti-Enlightenment message.41

The Financial Challenge

Orthodoxy was remarkably proactive in financial affairs. In both the Russian and the Ottoman cases, prelates and monks employed impressive wealth to maintain a high quality of life and to support their ‘enterprise of salvation’ in a manner commensurate to the symbolic capital they already enjoyed.42 At the same time, particularly in the Ottoman Empire, but also intermittently in Russia, the Church had to satisfy financial obligations to the state, which became progressively more onerous.

Financially, the ecumenical patriarchate depended upon income collected from believers, the largesse bestowed upon it by rich and powerful patrons (such as the grand dragomans, the Romanian princes, or the Russian tsars), as well as from the regular fees and contributions expected from newly appointed clergy and clerical officials. The patriarchate’s revenue included: annual collections per set number of households (transferred to the patriarchate from the local bishop), one-time fees for acquiring a clerical office, the zeteia (both in the sense of an annual contribution but also of ad hoc alms collections performed by patriarchal representatives), marriage fees, fairs, agiasmata (fee rights from shrines where holy water was dispensed), inheritance rights of intestate clerics, income from the immoveable property belonging to the patriarchal see, fees for confession and other rituals that the patriarch performed, and dues for the imposition and lifting of excommunication, as well for the issuing of patriarchal letters and divorce decrees. Beyond enabling patriarchs to meet financial obligations to the state, these fees also underscored symbolically the subordination of believers to ecclesiastical leaders. The patriarchate consistently viewed their collection as a matter of urgency, by threatening spiritual and/or civil punishment for late payers, often with the help of the Ottoman local or central authorities. The revenue sources of metropolitans and archbishops within their dioceses mirrored those of the patriarch. Parish priests also
collected annual dues as well as fees for performing the sacraments, but they had to fend for themselves as well in a variety of other ways.

Large sums were owed to the sultan and his officials at the end and the beginning of each patriarchal term in office, some of which burdened the successor. The peskes (the one-time donation instituted in the late fifteenth century and given personally to the sultan by an incoming patriarch/metropolitan, to be repeated upon the accession of a new sultan until the early eighteenth century) was not actually a sign of corruption when first implemented (after all, it was imposed on all Ottoman officials). However, the bidding competitions among rival claimants to patriarchal or bishop or even parish priest positions did translate into endemic corruption and simony at all levels. The other institutionalized financial obligation that the patriarch had to fulfil was the haradj, an annual amount of tax paid to the state in lieu of other taxes from which the patriarch was exempt, which in the early eighteenth century took the form of a tax farm for life, leading some scholars to conclude that the patriarch was a tax farmer of the state. In the early seventeenth century, an additional annual collection was established for the upkeep of the janissary corps guarding the patriarch.43

Monasteries in the Orthodox East tapped into tsarist, princely, and wealthy merchant patronage, but also relied on income from pilgrims, land and building rentals, and from their dependencies (a form of offshore enterprises) across the Ottoman Empire and outside of it. Important monasteries and even the perennially beleaguered Brotherhood of the Holy Sepulchre had dependencies and substantial landed interests across the Balkans (in particular in Moldavia and Wallachia). Faced with the late sixteenth-century Sultanic confiscation effort, Athonite monasteries creatively survived through repurchase of the lands and through manipulation of the institution of the vakf (pious endowment), which could be in landed property, buildings, or even shares in ships and in merchandise.44 The seventeenth and eighteenth centuries were the golden age of the monastic zeteia, alms-collection travels across the Orthodox world performed by monks. Increasingly, these trips took the form of precisely targeted, regularized travel to wealthy areas with a high concentration of Christian populations, or to Russia and the Romanian principalities where tsar and princes saw monastic patronage as a pious act in return for commemoration and prayers, and utilized it to project their authority and prestige both domestically and internationally.

The Russian Church fared much better in dealing with the financial challenge, at least until the Petrine period. By the mid-sixteenth century, the Church had become the second biggest landholder in Muscovy, after the Crown, owning perhaps up to a third of all arable land. Especially rich were important monasteries such as the Trinity St. Sergius and the patriarchal diocese. Occasional criticism of church landholding was
heard during the first half of the sixteenth century. The supposed Possessor-Non Possessor conflict seems to have been a dispute over the proper place of monasteries in secular life. Some monastic authors argued that monasteries needed lands to support themselves and their social welfare programmes. Other monks (as well as secular officials) saw the unfettered accumulation of landholding as an aberration from the true vocation of monasticism, which was removal from the affairs of this world, and as a tool of monkish resistance to episcopal authority. The debate is indicative of the unease that the Church’s wealth caused.

In the mid-sixteenth century, Ivan the Terrible sought to curb land donations to monasteries, with uneven results. By the second half of the century, the Church was already firmly established as a great landowner and benefited from limitations on peasant mobility that led, by the mid-seventeenth century, to the final establishment of serfdom. Russian expansion into Siberia and the central and lower Volga further increased church landholdings. Noble patronage of monasteries and donations to them by both clergy and laity continued unabated, even after lulls caused by state efforts at curbing them. Large monasteries were particularly active in commercial activities, such as the Solovetskii Monastery, which was involved in salt production from saline springs. Russian prelates enjoyed similar types of revenue to those of their counterparts in the East from appointments, performance of rituals and sacraments, and a host of other administrative duties, in addition to what they derived from the landed property and the taxes that the peasantry paid to them. Between the ascension of Filaret and the death of Adrian in 1700, the patriarchal diocese commanded enormous financial resources, underscoring the patriarchate’s impact on fiscal policy.

The state undertook more concerted efforts to control church income, especially through the Monastery Chancellery (Monastyrskii Prikaz, 1649–74, revived during Peter’s reign) in the mid-seventeenth century. Repeated registrations of monastic lands were conducted, especially in areas where the state sought to satisfy gentry demands for inhabited arable lands. The all-out assault came only in the time of Peter the Great, whose focus on state service left no tolerance for what he saw as idle and potentially subversive monks. In this regard too, Catherine the Great consciously followed in his footsteps, successfully wrestling control of monastic finances from them and closing many monasteries. The 1764 secularization of episcopal and monastic lands was indeed a major milestone in the state’s centuries-old attempt to limit church land acquisition, although its real impact on both church and state is unclear.
Whither Orthodoxy?

After the Hesychast controversy in the fourteenth century, Orthodoxy did not have to deal with mass heretical movements until the late seventeenth century. In the Orthodox East, the known cases of heresy that were prosecuted were precious few. Orthodox doctrine (even when not fully formulated until the confessions were printed and publicized) hardly came under any lasting assault in the Ottoman Empire during the period under consideration. Rather the main threats (in the eyes of their opponents) came from high-ranking prelates such as Peter Mohyla and Kyrillos Loukaris. Each was interested in reform (although through different channels) as part of a wider effort to counter the pro-unionists among their clergy and flock. Their efforts were as much religious as they were political.

Early modern heresy in Russia followed a different trajectory. In the fourteenth through the sixteenth centuries the relatively few accused heretics (the Novgorodian and Pskovian strigol’niki, the Novgorodian and Muscovite so-called ‘Judaizers’) came from the middling or lower middling strata and were overwhelmingly priests or monks with a sprinkling of government officials and a handful of high-ranking noblemen or princes. The main issues appear to have been the Trinity, simony, the efficacy of some sacraments, monastic abuses, and by the mid-sixteenth century, criticism of icon and relic veneration. In the early seventeenth century, a few Muscovite and Ruthenian clergymen were condemned by the Moscow patriarchate as heretical. It was only when the so-called Kapiton movement and the Old Belief appeared, that waves of popular resistance to church pronouncements dominated state and church concerns about heresy. The Old Belief was initially confined to a small group of elite clergymen. It seems to have acquired mass appeal and wider doctrinal ramifications only subsequently, with the appearance of distinctly different doctrinal and ecclesiological teachings among the various Old Believer groups. The state supported the official Church and alternated between restrictive and severely punitive measures against the doubters. Many dissenters self-immolated, others fled abroad or remained in self-enclosed communities. They lived under severe disabilities until at least the time of Catherine the Great in the late eighteenth century, when a more liberal policy led, temporarily, to the lifting of some restrictions in order to facilitate governmental settlement policies in the newly acquired territories of the northern Black Sea coast. Apart from the Old Believer dissenting groups and new sectarians that cropped up in the eighteenth century, the known cases of prosecution of heretics were few, although the same period also saw more sustained concern with witchcraft, given that reform of popular practices became a higher priority in the state’s attempt to control the population and eradicate ‘superstition’.
Early modern Orthodoxy was also permeated by a love–hate relationship between Greeks and Russians. Rus’ Orthodoxy was, from its inception, Byzantinish (rather than Byzantine). After Byzantium’s eclipse, the Russians steadily grew to viewing themselves as the sole arbiters of true faith. They patronized monasteries in the Ottoman Empire, and bought relics from itinerant Eastern clergymen, whom they often used as conduits of information and emissaries for foreign policy aims. The tsars undergirded the perennially cash-strapped Eastern ecclesiastics and (possibly) revelled in the paeans composed to them as the New Constantines. Nevertheless, the Russians (unlike the Ruthenians) were usually reluctant to venture very far theologically by themselves, instead frequently relying on Ruthenian or (translated) Greek prototypes. The Russians preferred an experiential and visual Orthodoxy, comprised of the liturgy and other rituals, the cult of saints, icon veneration, and devotional acts as well as generous donations to monasteries. Latent suspicion towards the Greeks, among both elite and commoners, erupted with a vengeance in the mid-seventeenth century, no less because of the Eastern patriarchs’ involvement in the reforms and the condemnation of Nikon. Peter the Great manipulated Eastern patriarchal decrees in order to secure his troops permission to eat non-Lenten food on campaign, or to ratify his synodal reform, of course by paying generously. The periodic flare-ups over re-baptism of converts witnessed the Greeks and the Russians occasionally at odds with one another. Until the mid-eighteenth century, the Russians suspected the Greeks of greed and corrupt faith, but frequently consulted them because they generally lacked indigenous human and theological sources of their own with the requisite prestige and/or sophistication. The Greeks, for their part, recognized Russian power, sometimes admired Russian piety, milked the Russians for economic support and at times harboured hopes that the Northern co-religionists might contribute to their liberation. However, they also responded in kind and expressed condescending views on Russian ritual practice, entertained occasional suspicions about certain Russian ecclesiastical practices, and repeatedly sought to reassert the doctrinal, ecclesiastical, and ecclesiological primacy of the Greeks.

In the eighteenth century the Greeks started losing their default role as arbiters, once the Russians matured theologically, ironically under (and perhaps because of) the influence of Roman Catholic and especially Protestant theology. Even more ironically, simultaneously the Russians started officially calling their church the Orthodox Greco-Russian Church (Pravoslavnaia Greko-Rossiiskaia Tserkov’). In the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, the roles were partially reversed, when the erstwhile teachers started turning into pupils. At the dawn of the modern age and as a result of geopolitical reconfigurations, some circles in the independent Greek state and around the Patriarchate of Constantinople capitalized on the rising theological prestige and sophistication of Russian Orthodoxy. Russians produced manuals and textbooks that were subsequently translated into Greek or other Slavic languages. Aspiring Greek (and other...
Balkan) clergymen steadily flocked to Russia’s theological academies. Intriguingly, their curriculum was also Western influenced, although it was also coupled by intense interest in the authentic sources of the Orthodox tradition, hence the publications of works by the Church Fathers undertaken by the Russians. The Greeks now had another outlet for Western-style theological education, in Russia.

In the early nineteenth century, the Orthodox servant of Lord Byron repeatedly uttered to his master the mantra ‘Our church is holy, our priests are thieves’. Similar views are not hard to come by among Greeks or Russians in the early modern period. Such an assessment reflects loyalty to the faith and simultaneous disapprobation of its clergymen. As such, it is indicative of Orthodoxy’s ability to inspire devotion and criticism in equal measure, through a conceptual decoupling of the holy Church from its corrupt clerics. Early modern Eastern Orthodoxy in the Ottoman and Russian empires retained the loyalty of the vast majority of its believers, at least in nominal terms. In addition to their confessional identity, Orthodoxy conditioned in large part their social mores and pious practices, their mentality, and way of life.

The period between the fourteenth and eighteenth centuries witnessed the decline of the Byzantine empire, the rise and beginnings of decline of the Ottoman Empire, and the rise of the Russian empire. Early modern Orthodoxy was imperial, often (but not always) obsequious to state authority, and certainly reactive to Western theological and cultural impulses. Beset by challenges, it also proved to be adept, adaptive, and adaptable. It survived the imperial/political, intellectual, and financial challenges and maintained its doctrinal distinctiveness, its pastoral practices, and its spiritual and pious roles (its symbolic capital intact, if occasionally badly bruised), despite the intermittent heavy-handed state interventions and the cultural and theological Westernization that it underwent.

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Notes:

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(21.) There were, of course, the Serbian and Bulgarian patriarchates, as well as the Church of Georgia.


(26.) Championed by St. Gregory Palamas, the monastic movement of Hesychasm emphasized mystical union with the divine through asceticism, visions of divine energies, constant recitation of the Jesus prayer and breathing control techniques. Paul


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(35.) Nikolaos A. Chrissidis, An Academy at the Court of the Tsars: Greek Scholars and Jesuit Education in Early Modern Russia (DeKalb, IL, forthcoming)


(42.) Petmézas, ‘L’organization ecclésiastique’, 507.


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The Transformations of Judaism

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Abstract and Keywords

This chapter addresses the primary transformations in Jewish civilization in the early modern era considering primarily the distinct histories of five large sub-communities—those of Italy, the western Sephardim (descendants of Jewish settlers from the Iberian peninsula who had primarily settled in Amsterdam, Hamburg, and Livorno beginning at the end of the sixteenth century), Germany and Central Europe, Poland-Lithuania, and the Ottoman Empire. It traces considers five primary markers in tracing the major political, social, and cultural transformations of early modern Jewry: mobility, migration, and social mixing; communal cohesion and laicization; a knowledge explosion, primarily the impact of print; the crisis of authority, primarily the impact of the messianic movement associated with Shabbetai Zevi; and mingled identities among Jews, Christians, and in some cases Muslims. These five major transformations allow one to describe a common early modern Jewish culture, one characterized by cultural exchange and interactions between diverse sub-communities.

Keywords: Jews, Judaism, Sephardim, Ashkenazim, Hebraism, conversos, Sabbateanism

1. Despite a plethora of new studies in the last several decades, there have been few attempts to define the period of the sixteenth to eighteenth centuries as a distinct epoch in Jewish history, distinguishable from both the medieval and modern periods. Some historians have remained indifferent to demarcating the period, or have simply designated it as an extension of the Middle Ages, or have labelled it vaguely as a mere transitional stage between medievalism and modernity without properly describing its distinguishing characteristics. A few historians have used the term ‘Renaissance’ to
apply to the cultural ambiance of Jews living in Italy in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries alone without delineating the larger period and the more comprehensive geographical area. I offer here my own preliminary sense of how one might speak about the primary transformations in Jewish civilization in this era considering primarily the distinct histories of five large sub-communities—those of Italy, the Sephardim (descendants of Jewish settlers from the Iberian peninsula, who settled in the West (for example, the Netherlands), and those who settled in the East (the Ottoman Empire)), Germany and central Europe, and Poland-Lithuania—in their broader connections with each other.

I consider five primary markers in tracing the major political, social, and cultural transformations of early modern Jewry as a whole. Each element needs to be examined over the entire period and across regional boundaries to assess its significance as a vital dimension of a newly emerging Jewish cultural experience. These categories overlap but, to my mind, they offer a most promising beginning in speaking about a common early modern Jewish culture. I would be the first to acknowledge that these markers are tentative at best, that they might describe inadequately and incompletely certain aspects of the larger landscape I wish to describe, and that some of the factors affected more people than others. I am also aware that in attempting to define a distinct epoch in Jewish history, I focus more on transformations and discontinuities in this chapter than on continuities with both the medieval period that precedes this era and the modern that follows. Nevertheless, I remain convinced that these signposts of the entire period represent the most meaningful way of describing the historical experience of early modern Jewry as a whole while focusing especially on cultural exchange and interactions between diverse sub-communities.

**Mobility, Migration, and Social Mixing**

The first element we might consider is that of mobility, migration, and social mixing. *Le juif errant* (‘the wandering Jew’), as myth and reality, permeates all of the Jewish experience. But the theme, whatever its cogency in other periods, reflects a particular reality in the early modern period, a period of enhanced mobility for all peoples but especially for Jews. Human movement in this era was connected to every level of life from the intimacy of individual family economics to the place of state colonial and mercantile policies across the globe. In a period permeated by intense warfare, political oppression, and religious persecutions, migrations of individuals and entire communities were constant.
Yet for Jews, there was an added dimension: the period was marked by radical population shifts engendered by governmental expulsions and mass persecutions. I refer to the expulsion of entire communities of Jews in 1492 and 1497 from Spain and Portugal, local expulsions in Italy well into the late sixteenth century, in the Holy Roman Empire, and especially the brutality of the Chemelnicki pogrom of 1648 in Poland, engendering major Jewish population transfers from West to East and then later from East to West. Both sephardic and ashkenazic (or Ashkenazim, Jews who lived in the region of the Rhineland during the Middle Ages, and who during this period generally inhabited the areas of central and eastern Europe) Jews who were compelled to uproot their lives and migrate for reasons of persecution and economic hardship need to be considered alongside the migration of individuals, especially carriers of culture and literacy, who were mobile for personal and idiosyncratic reasons not necessarily associated with communal upheaval and disruption. The ultimate result of these movements was the creation of new Jewish centres in eastern Europe and the Ottoman Empire, and eventually the return of the Jews to the West, precipitated by converso economic networks as well as the significant migrations of ashkenazic Jews and their own networks of trade.

At the centre of this story is the creation of the two large Jewish communities in the East. In some fascinating ways, the histories of these two Jewish migrations display remarkable similarities to each other. As in the case of Jewish migration to the Ottoman Empire, the highpoint of immigration of Polish–Lithuanian Jews emerged at the beginning of the sixteenth century although waves of Ashkenazim had reached eastern Europe as early as the second half of the thirteenth century. With the worsening situation of Jewish life in the German regions, Jewish migrants were prepared to start afresh in the East given the receptive attitude of Polish kings and landowning magnates to their settlement and economic integration in a similar way that the Sephardim were received by the Ottoman government. Thus on the eastern and southern boundaries of Europe, the largest concentration of world Jewry emerged in the sixteenth century, whose ethnic composition and cultural character were largely determined by immigrants who had come from the West. And both communities flourished under governments that became the most tolerant sites for cross-confessional exchange in Europe. Only the Dutch Republic in the seventeenth century, also a primary site for converso Jewish immigration, offered similar conditions for its minorities, including the Jews, to practise their own religion and to create their own semi-autonomous political structures without the interference of the ruling class.

The converso (a descendant of Iberian Jews who had converted to Catholicism, either voluntarily or under duress, during the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries) émigrés in the seventeenth century, who exited Spain and Portugal in search of refuge from persecution and, in many cases, new Jewish identities, constitute another critical dimension of the
Jewish history of migration in early modern Europe. They came to southern France, to Amsterdam, Hamburg, and London, to Italy and the Ottoman Empire. They crossed the Atlantic Ocean to the West Indies, Brazil, Mexico, and even North America. In their wanderings, they fulfilled a highly distinctive function in the commercial and colonial expansion of Europe well into the eighteenth century. They created Jewish commercial networks following maritime rather than overland routes, importing non-European products over long distances, becoming a vital link between East and West, between Northern and Southern Europe, and stretching from Amsterdam and Hamburg to Recife and Curacao, to Izmir and Aleppo, and even to the Far East. The wide-ranging migratory patterns of the conversos and their remarkable networks of communication offer a remarkable case study of the impact of mobility on cultural and religious identity. As agents in an international system of trade, they had reason to travel from place to place, covering long distances, crossing repeatedly regional zones of commerce and culture. Moreover, their commuting between confessions and cultures—Jewish, Catholic, Protestant, Muslim, and others—offered them an enormous challenge in defining themselves as well as a modicum of safety from religious scrutiny on the part of ecclesiastical and state authorities. Constantly in motion, they could escape the demands to define their social and religious identity strictly and conclusively.

One final part of the story of Jewish migration is the reversal of ashkenazic patterns of mobility. By the second half of the seventeenth century, the movement of ashkenazic Jews had shifted from an eastward direction to a westward one. After 1648, and especially in the course of the next decade, Amsterdam became a primary centre for the absorption of eastern European Jews, despite the ambivalence on the part of previously settled Sephardim in the city who now faced a major financial burden in supporting the new arrivals. For many of the ashkenazic vagrants and mendicants, Amsterdam represented only a way station as they moved through European cities, even returning to Germany, Bohemia, and Poland. By the 1650s, hundreds of Jewish refugees from Lithuania arrived in Amsterdam; but many moved on to Hamburg, Frankfurt, Italy, London, and Israel, while some were sent on to Danzig in the hope they would eventually return to Poland and Lithuania. Similar surges of eastern European migration to the West continued into the eighteenth century; most of the new immigrants were absorbed in Germany, most notably Polish rabbis. Other Ashkenazim migrated to Hungary, Romania, and the Northern Balkans, to the Ottoman Empire and especially to the land of Israel throughout the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries.

These movements surely engendered pain and hardship of uprooting familiar landscapes for alien cultures. Equally apparent were the necessary social and economic encounters the new immigrants were forced to endure with Italian Catholics and Muslim Turks, with the varieties of ethnic groups in eastern Europe, or with Protestant Christians in Ger-
cities, in Amsterdam, or in London. Intense social mixing between Jews of different backgrounds could be particularly perplexing for Jews of Provençal and ashkenazic origins, indigenous Italian and sephardic Jews within the close quarters of Italian cities. While Sephardim ultimately overwhelmed other local Jewish communities in the Ottoman Empire and the Ashkenazim similarly dominated their new Polish–Lithuanian communities, Jews of differing backgrounds lived side by side not only in Venice, Rome, and Mantua but also in Amsterdam, Hamburg, Frankfurt, London, Prague, Cracow, and Jerusalem. When the conversos migrated to Livorno and Pisa, and to northern port cities, they introduced a new element into the mix of composite Jewish settlements.

I wish to suggest one final point related to the intense Jewish mobility I have described: that Jewish intellectual life and cultural production were shaped to a great extent by peripatetic Jewish intellectuals who moved from place to place either because they were forced to move or also because of personal choice. This is not an easy claim to demonstrate but there appears to be a strong circumstantial case for making such a connection with respect to many prominent intellectual figures among early modern Jewry. Evidence of this plausible connection might include the following: the accelerated pace of writing in many languages; the emergence of new forms of literary creativity in law, kabbalah, belles lettres, medicine, history and biography, homiletics and more; or the concentration of Jews in itinerant professions such as medicine, performing arts, the rabbinate, and trade. Mobility also determined new linguistic enclaves. Ashkenazim spoke and wrote Yiddish in Venice, Amsterdam, as well as Poland–Lithuania, despite its strangeness among the majority of people living in these places. Sephardim spoke Ladino and published extensively in that language in a Turkish linguistic field, while conversos in Amsterdam assembled regularly in their newly adopted city for readings in Spanish and Portuguese and used these languages for communal business and literary composition rather than Dutch. Finally, mobility of persons went hand in hand with mobility of books. The printer, the proof setter, and the book dealer were highly mobile people whose business rested on their shuttling from place to place. In a society in constant movement, the publishing of books surely could accelerate changes in cultural patterns and in promoting new ideas while simultaneously preserving and storing the memory of the past and its traditions as an attempt, albeit elusive, to fix and stabilize the present.

Communal Cohesion and Laicization

A second element in describing early modern Jewish culture is the emergence of powerful structures of Jewish self-government throughout Europe and the Middle East. In the Netherlands and Italy, in Germany, in the Ottoman Empire, and especially in eastern Europe, Jewish communities appear to have become more elaborate and complex as
agencies representing their Jewish constituencies before host governments and as
providers of educational and social services to their individual members. This powerful
surge of communal development stands in sharp contrast to the decline and deterioration
of communal structures in the modern period.

Jewish communal organization in the long history of the Jewish diaspora can be traced
back to late antiquity and to the Middle Ages. The political and economic conditions
under which Jewish self-government emerged; the recognition by local authorities of
Jewish autonomy; the admission and exclusion of members; the range of educational and
social services the Jewish community offered; and the division of powers between lay and
rabbinic authorities are matters that confronted Jewish communities from their earliest
beginnings. Yet the Jewish communities of early modern Europe were different in some
major respects from those of previous eras. Jacob Katz long ago underscored the size of
early modern structures in his famous sociological overview of the period.\(^3\) His point of
reference was the elaborate organization of the so-called Council of the Four Lands in
Poland–Lithuania which clearly had no precedent in medieval ashkenazic society. Surely
size was also a factor in considering Jewish life under Ottoman rule, or in the large
territorial organizations governing Jewish life called *Landjudenschaften* in German lands,
or in the emergence of particular forms of self-governance within western sephardic
communities in Livorno or Amsterdam. Not only size but the longevity of these early
modern organizations distinguishes them from the occasional medieval synods which
temporarily brought smaller Jewish communities under one roof but quickly dissolved
after their collective deliberations had ended.

Early modern Jewish communities were also different because of the new political and
economic policies of early modern states, of absolutism and mercantilism, which helped
shape their evolution and limited success. No simple correlation between early modern
statecraft and the formation of Jewish communal life might adequately explain the variety
of structures that emerged from Amsterdam to Istanbul. Nevertheless, the new political
landscape of early modern Europe, its religious wars, the movement of populations, the
rise of new governments hospitable to the influx of new immigrants, and the struggle for
power between kings and noblemen are all relevant in understanding why early modern
governments not only tolerated self-administered Jewish communities, but in certain
instances even encouraged them to flourish. And because of these new circumstances,
the great historians of Jewish communities—Simon Dubnow, Salo W. Baron, and Jacob
Katz—were right to privilege this era as the one of most full-scale and intense Jewish
communal development.\(^4\)

An overview of Jewish communal development across the European continent as
well as the Ottoman Empire allows the historian to paint a common picture with distinct
regional variations. The unique setting of the ghetto system created by Catholic
authorities often strengthened and rejuvenated Jewish communal life in Italy despite their best intentions to the contrary. The converso leadership in Amsterdam, Livorno, Hamburg, and London established communities governed by both Jewish traditional values and mercantile commercial custom. Jewish communities in German lands were uniquely formed because of the existence of court Jews and territorial organizations initiated by local princes. The Ottoman Jewish community, though lacking official recognition, took full advantage of benign neglect to shape communal cohesiveness both on a national and local level. And the Jews of Poland–Lithuania were allowed the opportunity to form a gigantic federation of smaller communities, a government within a government unparalleled in Jewish history.

While each Jewish community forged constructive relationships with their host governments, no single formula can define them precisely as they ranged from the more interventionist case of the German principalities to the less invasive Ottoman government. Conditions also varied over time, as in the case of Poland, where the monarchy initially elected to appoint rabbis as royal officials but later lost its power to that of the magnates who then more directly shaped Jewish life. This was also the case in the Ottoman Empire with the rise of rabbinic power in the seventeenth century in contrast to the weaker status of rabbis in the sixteenth century. What we can then say, noting these obvious differences over time and place, is that the early modern period represented a culmination of Jewish communal development everywhere across the continent, emerging both because of the initiatives of strong Jewish leaders as well as the relatively tolerant policies of governments that recognized a certain political and economic utility in their continued existence.

At the same time, these elaborate communal structures did not necessarily bode well for the rabbinic leadership of the community who often found themselves in conflict with powerful lay leaders. They were often run by a small number of affluent families in an oligarchic and even despotic manner. In Italy, for example, despite the prominence of individual rabbis, the latter were generally beholden to the communities they served and to the wealthy families who dominated communal life, including the many confraternities enriching the social and cultural life of the ghettos. The prominence of wealthy merchants in shaping communal affairs also marked the collective life of Amsterdam, Hamburg, and London Jewries. The governing hierarchy of these communities scrupulously controlled the management of communal affairs and demonstrated a heightened sensitivity to the projection of a proper image and to proper collective demeanour before governmental authorities. In the Ottoman Empire, no chief rabbinate ever existed and the authority of the rabbis was always circumscribed by the dictates of Muslim law. Despite the growing power of the rabbis in the seventeenth century, their authority ultimately declined. Jewish communal life was weakened by the creeping penetration of merchant colonies of conversos in Ottoman port cities such as Smyrna and
economically powerful magnates continued to hold considerable power. The elaborate Jewish self-government of Poland–Lithuania emerging by the sixteenth century was strictly under lay, not rabbinic control. Communal rules and ordinances were not enacted by rabbinic authorities but by lay leaders who virtually controlled the Jewish communities. Some rabbis exercised power due to their exceptional expertise in Jewish law and their strong personalities, but more often than not they also derived their authority by virtue of their own affluence, either gained through birth or proper marriage, thus allowing them to become part of the oligarchic power structure themselves.

The implications of this general picture seem clear. The seeds of the crisis over rabbinic authority, usually associated with the late seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, can already be located in the sixteenth, at the very inception of powerful communal structures and at the very pinnacles of Jewish self-government and internal political life. The rabbinate was certainly not a spent institution in early modern Europe; it had not yet been drained of all its considerable legal and moral resources to direct the religious lives of the constituencies it served; and it certainly did not see itself as in crisis until the very end of this period. But its power had been eclipsed and rabbis were reluctantly obliged to function within a new reality of shared leadership with lay leaders for generations.

Knowledge Explosion

The third element, and perhaps the most significant in defining an early modern Jewish culture, I call ‘knowledge explosion’. By this I primarily mean both the impact of the printed book as well as the beginnings of university education for Jewish students. Although Jewish mobility explains in part the possibility of a shared cultural experience between disparate Jewish communities at great physical and psychological distance from one another, the mobility of books explains even more. Before print, no one could have conjured up the seemingly unprecedented merger of two legal traditions captured in the printing in Cracow in 1578–80 of the sephardic code of Jewish law of Joseph Karo, the *Shulhan Arukh* (‘The Ordered Table’), accompanied by the *Mappah* (‘The Table Cloth’), the ashkenazic marginal notes of Moses Isserles. And no one could have imagined the extraordinary layout of multiple commentaries from different eras and regions surrounding the core text of the Talmud and simultaneously appearing on the same page with it, or those of the rabbinic Bible, both first published by the Christian printer, Daniel Bomberg, in Venice in the first decades of the sixteenth century. As Elhanan Reiner has shown, the migration of these and other Hebrew books printed in Venice into eastern Europe created a crisis for the rabbinic elites of Poland–Lithuania. The printed text soon arrested the creative and open process of a fluid scribal culture, making the text
canonical and not subject to accretions and modifications. The text became the ultimate word, not the teacher, thus diminishing the authoritative capacity of the rabbi as exegete. In this new market of books originating in Venice, Amsterdam, and Constantinople, ashkenazic readers were exposed to the classics of the sephardic library, while eventually sephardic readers became aware of ashkenazic writing. Printing thus shattered the isolating hold of potent localized traditions and attitudes as one community became increasingly aware of a conversation taking place long distances away.\(^5\)

Another effect of the printing revolution was the emergence of secondary elites—preachers, teachers, scribes, cantors—who exploited the printing press to publish cheap books and to publicize themselves and their views. This dissemination of new publications ultimately shattered the exclusivity and hegemony of the rabbis, opening up new reading audiences. Books printed in Yiddish and Ladino, two Jewish languages that emerged in the early modern era in this new age of print, accelerated even more the wide dissemination of books and authors and the growing literacy of less educated males and females.

In the case of Yiddish, a wide reading public emerged across the continent truly creating a common European-wide Jewish culture transcending localized communities and linking especially the West and the East. While Yiddish books had initially been published in Italy, by the seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries, Amsterdam became the centre of Yiddish printing in the Jewish world. Attracted by the relative lack of censorship and by the liberal printing business that published books in many languages, it was not unusual for eastern European book dealers to travel to Amsterdam in order to publish their manuscripts and return home to sell their new library of printed books. This image of a Jew from Cracow travelling across the continent, with a variety of other Jewish merchants, to publish a Yiddish book in what had been the centre of the western sephardic diaspora is as good a snapshot as any of the actual existence of a trans-regional Jewish culture by the seventeenth century.

Ladino works in the Ottoman Empire began to appear considerably later than Yiddish ones but they too were widely distributed because of print and they helped to shape an entirely new Jewish reading public. Centuries after the first Hebrew books had been published in Istanbul in the late fifteenth century by the first generations of sephardic immigrants to the city, Ladino printing came into its own with the publication in 1730 of Jacob Ḥuli’s *Me’am Lo’ez*, an encyclopedic Biblical commentary and distillation of sephardic Jewish culture. It was followed over the next century and a half by a flow of popular Jewish books attempting to educate and to popularize Jewish knowledge. Ladino works represented a clear acknowledgement by rabbinic leaders of the need to communicate in the vernacular with Jews lacking sophisticated Jewish knowledge.
Alongside the publication of Jewish books in Ladino and Yiddish was the steady accretion of books written in Western languages by Jews, demonstrating the need for Jewish authors to speak to Christian readers beyond the immediate community of their own co-religionists. By the seventeenth century, this development of publishing in the vernacular took on added momentum with the emergence of apologetic works written either to convince conversos to return to the Jewish fold or to counter a negative image of Jewish religion and culture emerging in print among certain Christian authors.

Christians also sought out books in Hebrew, accelerating considerably the market of Hebraica written both by Jews and by Christians and purchased by both communities. Long before the early modern period, Christian scholars had sought out Jewish learning but in the Renaissance and Reformation periods, their interest in specifically Jewish texts, especially Biblical and kabbalistic ones, reached a new intensity. These intellectual and religious transformations in the study of Judaism by Christians were certainly enhanced and magnified by print. The first Hebrew books were printed in the last quarter of the fifteenth century first in Italy, and then in the Ottoman Empire. But eventually the centres of Christian printing of Hebrew books were concentrated north of the Alps in the German principalities, France, and the Netherlands. While the Italian and Ottoman Hebrew presses catered primarily to Jews, the northern presses focused on the needs of Christians, publishing, for the most part, works dealing with Biblical scholarship. In the case of Amsterdam, however, with its significant resources for Jewish publications often exported to the East, the distinction between Christian and Jewish presses becomes more confusing. In other centres of Christian printing in the North there existed a close correlation between the printing of Hebrew books and the presence of Hebrew professors at Protestant universities.

Christian Hebraism thus constituted an intellectual explosion fed by print and university learning; a Christian spiritual quest rooted in the essential notions of rebirth and reform propelling the intellectual and religious developments of the sixteenth century and beyond; and also an appropriation and aggrandizement of the Judaic element of Western civilization to be utilized and appreciated for Christians in their own right. As has been often remarked, the new Christian scholars were often infatuated with Jewish books with little regard for actual living and breathing Jews.

Print also represented a critical factor in modifying the very notion of what constitutes appropriate Jewish knowledge. Jewish intellectuals in dynamic cultural environments such as Mantua, Venice, Amsterdam, and Prague, were bombarded with new books in print, and like other readers, were encouraged to expand their cultural horizons, to integrate and correlate the vast range of sources and ideas now available to them with those of their own intellectual legacy. Eastern European Jewish intellectuals were less involved in contemporary literary, philosophical, and scientific currents than their...
counterparts to the south and west of them. Nevertheless, the boundaries between their local communities and the others were always porous because of the migration of books and the constant stream of travellers between eastern Europe, Italy, and western Europe.

Besides the knowledge explosion engendered by books, one precipitated through the unprecedented entrance of Jews and conversos into the university, starting with Padua in the sixteenth century, should also be noted. Exclusively studying medicine, the students found the university an enriching and life transforming experience, both in the sense of the formal knowledge acquired and in the socializing process that inevitably emerged as Jews invaded what had previously been almost an exclusively Christian space. While print ultimately was the primary agent in bringing individual Jewish communities closer together and offering a modicum of uniformity among diverse local cultural traditions, the emerging Jewish medical community, consisting of graduates of medical schools eventually throughout much of Europe, also served to shape a common Jewish culture and a common Jewish identity.

(p. 661) Crisis of Authority

I would call the fourth element of an early modern Jewish culture a crisis of authority, accompanied by the threat of heresy and enthusiasm, the latter term associated especially with trends prevalent across the larger European landscape during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. I would define this crisis in the Jewish world as primarily precipitated by the messianic movement of Shabbetai Zevi (1626–76), called Sabbateanism, emerging in the second half of the seventeenth century though reaching a crescendo in the first half of the eighteenth.

Shabbetai Zevi’s declaration of his messiahship in 1665–66 engendered an enormous reaction among followers and detractors alike. He was ultimately incarcerated and converted to Islam but, nevertheless, remained the focus of messianic aspirations within the Jewish communities of the Ottoman Empire and throughout Europe well into the eighteenth century. The phenomenon of this strange messianic figure became the basis of a new antinomian and nihilistic ideology constructed especially by Nathan of Gaza (1643/4–80) and Abraham Cardoso (1626–1706), his chief disciples, which challenged the very foundations of normative rabbinic Judaism.

Gershom Scholem’s masterful reconstruction of the history of Sabbateanism has dominated contemporary scholarship for many years but has recently been challenged by a younger generation of researchers, especially his insistence on seeing the roots of Sabbateanism as primarily an internal matter based primarily on the dissemination of the kabbalistic ideas of Isaac Luria and his disciples of the sixteenth century and generally
isolated from the larger European context where it can be meaningfully linked. Some have argued that Lurianic kabbalah was not particularly messianic in the first place, that is was not widely diffused by the late seventeenth century, and that mystical ideas, notwithstanding their usefulness to Nathan of Gaza and Abraham Cardoso in justifying the messianic apostasy of their hero, could not adequately explain the mass hysteria of a popular movement. Several recent historians have underscored the reception of Shabbetai Zevi within the Christian world, its intertwined connections with apocalyptic anticipations of seventeenth-century Christians, and the obvious and explicit connections between Sabbateanism and converso messianism. These latter connections are most obvious in the writings of the Sabbatean leader, Abraham Cardoso, former converso and leading publicist of the movement, who portrayed Shabbetai Zevi as a converso himself living with two separate identities, and constructing a syncretistic messianic ideology based on elements of both religions.

By the eighteenth century, with the fading memory of the apostate messiah, the rise of another messianic movement in Poland associated with the infamous Jacob Frank (1726–91), and the decline of Sabbateeanism within the Ottoman orbit, the history of this movement and subsequent witch hunt to root out Sabbatean iconoclasts in all corners of the European world can be more readily explained by recourse to the notions of enthusiasm and anti-enthusiasm. When the alleged Sabbatean prophet Nehemiah Hayon (c. 1650–c. 1730) evoked an unprecedented alarm among a remarkably impressive number of rabbis writing from all over Europe at the very beginning of the era, the charges surrounding him had less to do with his personal connection with Shabbetai Zevi and his ideology and more to do with his pretension to understand the divine essence as expressed in a Trinitarian form, that is, to understand the Godhead exclusively through his own innate powers. Similarly, the other great internal schisms associated with Sabbateanism in the eighteenth century, the accusations levelled against Moses Hayyim Luzzatto (1707–46) and Jonathan Eybeschütz (1690–1764), were primarily concerned with their explicit or implicit challenge to the authoritative structure of the rabbinate and the anxiety they and their followers generated over this perceived diminution of its actual power. Luzzatto’s profile as a self-proclaimed prophet and the bearer of divine illumination could not have failed to evoke the consternation of the same rabbis who had objected to Hayon.

The controversy surrounding the rabbinic figure Jonathan Eybeschütz emerged from accusations of his Sabbatean leanings voiced by his rabbinic arch-rival, Jacob Emden (1697–1776). This complex altercation involved a clash of strong personalities, professional jealousy, the zealotry and obsessive behaviour of Emden, and even elements of syncretism with Christianity apparently present in Eybeschütz’s own theological proclivities and those of some of his followers. As in the cases of Hayon and Luzzatto, the
connections between Eybeschütz and the messiahship of Shabbetai Zevi were tenuous at best. Rather, as all three cases exemplify, Sabbateanism in its eighteenth-century dimensions was simply a code word, a convenient label for enthusiasm, heresy, and the undermining of rabbinic authority.

The last and most radical of Sabbatean prophets, Jacob Frank, connected his own pedigree more directly to Shabbatei Zevi and articulated his own nihilistic messianic aspirations. But here too the inherent danger of the Frankists that persisted well into the next century was primarily their subversion of rabbinic norms and rabbinic authority. The Frankist sect negated the very essence of religious authority claimed by rabbis and church officials alike. Frankism simply confirmed in a most vivid and dramatic manner the initial suspicions articulated by the most prominent rabbinic adversaries of Sabbateanism, Jacob Sasportas (1610–98), Moses Ḥagiẓ (1671–c. 1750), and Jacob Emden that the menace of Sabbatean enthusiasm imperilled their very standing and legitimacy as religious leaders as well as the very foundations of their religious community.

Sabbateanism and anti-Sabbateanism and their vigilant rabbinic crusaders, as pan-European phenomena, underscore more than anything else the shaping of a truly early modern Jewish culture through books, emissaries, and a vast network of communication between advocates and detractors. Whatever else Sabbateanism engendered among early modern Jews, it created a real sense of their relationship to each other, their need to address either positively or negatively a predicament commonly shared by all and transcending regional boundaries. One might even speak about the emergence of a common front of ‘orthodoxy’ engendered by the anxiety created by Sabbatean heretics throughout the entire continent. Ironically, the European-wide rabbinic crusade to vilify Nehemiah Ḥayon and the publication of his heretical book in the early decades of the eighteenth century ultimately revealed not only a united front against a perceived enemy of the faith, but a common culture and a common fate. Sabbateanism left no doubt in the minds of its opponents that a threat to one rabbi or community was ultimately a threat to the entire fabric of Jewish faith and institutional life.

There is little evidence to suggest an equivalent contemporary reaction on the part of the Jewish community to the heresy of Benedict Spinoza as compared to that of Shabbetai Zevi. However, the common conditions under which Shabbetai Zevi and Benedict Spinoza emerged in the second half of the seventeenth century and the common results they achieved need to be stressed. Both were patently linked to the converso experience; Sabbateanism and Spinozism in general were nurtured in Amsterdam itself; and both generated ideologies that challenged the legitimacy of rabbinic norms and rabbinic authority. In the end, both converge in interesting ways although it is impossible to weigh them equally as factors in the collapse and decline of rabbinical authority, at least before
the late eighteenth century. The connections between this Jewish crisis and the larger social, political, and economic crises of European society as a whole described by European historians also appear to be quite opaque. Nevertheless, Jews and Christians living in early modern Europe, most notably their religious and political leadership, seem to have shared a common perception of living through a genuine era of crisis which they could neither control nor arrest.

Mingled Identities

The fifth and final element in my presentation of the constituent parts of a transnational Jewish culture in early modern Europe I term ‘the blurring of religious identities’ or ‘mingled identities’. By this I mean the recurrent and conspicuous boundary crossings between Judaism and Christianity (and sometimes between Judaism and Islam, as in the case of the Dönmeh, disciples of Shabbetai Zevi who followed his example by converting to Islam) on the part of a small but conspicuous number of Jews and even Christians. When Jewish identity became a matter of personal volition rather than imposed communal will; when apostasy was advocated as an agency of messianic renewal; when certain Christians attempted to recover their spiritual roots through an intense exposure to Judaism while certain Jews found social intimacy with Christians and spiritual nourishment in their faith more attractive than ever, the possibilities for Jewish–Christian syncretistic thinking and praxis were significantly enhanced. Decades before the late eighteenth-century Enlightenment, Jews and Christians were encountering each other in public and private places, in intellectual forums, and in radical and spiritualist movements. And certain individuals were actually shaping a personal identity drawn simultaneously from each of the faith communities. My goal is to describe succinctly in this section the simultaneous appearance of four interrelated groups: conversos, Sabbateans, Christian Hebraists, and individual converts. They each emerge as discrete circles but ultimately converge to create a new complexity, an utter confusion of confessional loyalties and religious identities within early modern culture.
perceptions of themselves were even more complex. For some, it was possible, even desirable, to return to Spain and Portugal if opportunity permitted.

The new Jewish identity of the conversos, whether leaning to Jewish or back to Christian orthodoxy, or waiving between the two poles, was unique because it was based on choice, on personal autonomy. Neither the Catholic Church nor the Inquisition nor the rabbinic authorities could impose it from above. A converso strove and often succeeded, either publicly or clandestinely, in creating his or her own self-definition. The returning New Christians also created their own communal structures and secured unique political arrangements with local authorities in Pisa, Livorno, Amsterdam, or Hamburg, often noticeably different than those of organized Jewish communities elsewhere. They were highly mobile, engaged in long-distance trading, multilingual, with often competing cultural loyalties. But above all, they were the first Jews to determine their own religious identity, the various components of faith and praxis they would choose to accept or reject, and whether to believe in any form of monotheistic faith or not. The conversos had been victimized by a Catholic Inquisition that could not tolerate their religious ambiguity. Rabbinic leaders faced with consternation this same ambiguity when these individuals attempted to return to the Jewish community. While most proclaimed themselves Jewish, many could not easily adjust to traditional norms and practices as obnoxious to them as those they had abandoned in Catholicism, or they remained indifferent to any religious ritual or doctrine whatever its origin. Others clung exclusively to a notion of ethnic or racial identity. Resembling notions of their own oppressors, they viewed themselves as members of the ‘Naçao’, distinguishable from their ashkenazic counterparts and from those Jews who saw their identity as primarily or exclusively confessional.

The Sabbateans too presented a new challenge in their own constructions of mingled identities. Resting on the authority of their alleged Jewish messiah, the Sabbateans converted to Islam (the Dönmeh) or to Christianity (the Frankists). In a bizarre manner, Jewish messianism was thus restructured to embrace its sister rival religions. The messiah had come to save the world by not only overturning all rabbinic authority but in reconfiguring Judaism in such a way as to reintegrate it with Christianity and Islam. The world could not be redeemed for Jewish believers without the direct mediation and involvement of the other two religious faiths. Sabbateanism, in its most radical manifestations, thus constituted a complete redrawing of traditional Jewish norms and beliefs as well as the breaching of conventional religious and cultural boundaries.

The religious identities and ideological agendas of Abraham Cardoso and Nathan of Gaza, as well as Barukhyah Russo (d. 1720), the leader of the Dönmeh, and Jacob Frank and his followers provide ample evidence of the integration of Christian and Muslim elements into Jewish messianic thought and activity. Besides offering a theological justification for Shabbetai Zevi’s apostasy and an open invitation for
widespread defection from normative Judaism, antinomianism, and even nihilism, each of
these outspoken apostles of Sabbateanism successfully fused their newly constructed
Jewish beliefs with others taken from Christianity, and to a lesser extent Islam, in often
bizarre formulations abhorrent not only to Jewish religious leaders but also to their
Christian and Muslim counterparts.

Along with the conversos and Sabbateans, Christian Hebraists might also be associated
with boundary crossings and religious intermingling. As we have already seen, Christian
Hebraism in early modern Europe constituted a new dimension of Jewish–Christian
relations. It was first and foremost an intellectual explosion of dramatic proportions
fostered in the print shop, in the university classroom, and even in the public press. But it
also had a deeper spiritual dimension: a Christianity in search of the roots of its own
identity. By gaining a fuller access to the riches of Jewish learning and spirituality,
Christians were enriching and enlivening their own intellectual and spiritual worlds.

Was the new Christian Hebraist a syncretist? Did his intense preoccupation with Jewish
texts diminish his Christian loyalties while bringing him closer to a Jewish core of his
identity? There is no simple and unequivocal answer to such questions. Christian scholars
who devoted their lifetimes to the study of sacred scriptures, Jewish languages, ancient
Jewish history and literature, and even, in some cases, the ethnographic study of Jewish
customs and ceremonies could hardly be motivated by intellectual reasons alone. Some
indeed saw their responsibility to reclaim an authentic reading of the Hebrew Bible for
Christians; others hoped to locate in their study the original, pure, and unpolluted
version of Christianity practised by Jesus; some were smitten by Jewish forms of esotericism
which they hoped to appropriate to replenish the wells of Christian spirituality; while
others even believed that early rabbinic Jewish culture and literature were the principal
keys in deciphering New Testament prophecies. Whether the new breed of Christian
Hebraists actually became more ‘Jewish’ in the process of their prodigious Jewish
learning or not, they were often perceived as such, as Judaizers whose seemingly
excessive exposure to Jewish sources had brought them unwittingly closer to Jews and
Judaism.

There was yet another group of highly complex individuals who were literally ‘boundary
crossers’, moving from Judaism to Christianity. These were the conspicuous numbers of
Jews who chose to be baptized and joined, sometimes quite publicly, a Christian
denomination, either Protestant or Catholic. We know especially of a large number of
converts in Germany but significant albeit smaller numbers are easily located elsewhere
in Europe. The individual convert, unlike the converso who generally left Catholicism for
some form of new Jewish identity, was usually engaged in the reverse crossing—from
Judaism to Christianity. Whether motivated by economic, (p. 666) social, or religious
reasons, or simply the victim of aggressive missionaries, the convert from Judaism had to
encounter an uncertain future where economic benefit or social acceptance or religious credibility in the newly acquired faith were often in doubt. The surest path for the more intellectually inclined was to become a so-called expert in Jewish affairs, a living testimony of the fallacies of the Jewish and the truths of the Christian faith. In assuming the role of Hebrew teacher and authority in Jewish texts, the convert often found himself in an uncertain and uneasy relationship with the Christian Hebraist who presumed to acquire a similar role by virtue of his consummate learning in Judaism.

The full history of all four groups is still to be told. We have considerable inquisitional testimonies about conversos who could adopt and discard different religious identities either out of conviction or lack of it, or for economic motives. There is scattered evidence of Jewish collaboration with radical Christian groups and rich documentation of Jewish converts and their ambiguous identities in early modern Germany, Great Britain, and elsewhere. The complex writings of Christian Hebraists, especially kabbalists who appropriated esoteric Jewish notions in reconstructing their own Christian identities, reveal even more. This fluid and ambiguous state of religious affiliation among all of these groups, and their constantly changing combinations and collaborations represent a central feature of early modern Jewish culture. These new expressions of religious and cultural identity surely reflect the weakened and fragile state of the Jewish and Christian communities and their religious leadership by the seventeenth century as well as the prominent search for spiritual meaning among members of both faiths in an unstable social and political climate.

Some Final Thoughts

Here then are the five elements which might allow us to describe the early modern period as a meaningful chronological unit for Jewish cultural history. These factors also helped to create, I would contend, a genuine consciousness of belonging to a worldwide Jewish community transcending local or regional boundaries. Mobility made Jews intensely aware of Jews from other lands and from other cultural settings. Complex communal organizations administering increasingly expansive areas, such as those in eastern and central Europe, naturally facilitated and encouraged constant contact and engagement with their counterparts across Europe and beyond. The printing presses broke down cultural barriers, enlarging the horizons of Jews even in the most remote and isolated of regions. The Sabbateans created complex networks of emissaries and followers over vast areas. Their campaign to organize a movement extending from the Middle East to the far corners of the West evoked in turn strong oppositional structures of rabbis and communal officials who were equally intense in a common cause against the ‘heretics’ crossing political and cultural borders. The mixed identities of conversos, Sabbateans,
Christian Hebraists, and individual converts, whatever their actual number and wherever they lived, posed a universal threat to those protectors of the communal norms and upholders of traditional praxis and belief. They were menacing to the very foundations of the entire Jewish community, and its leadership everywhere was forced to deal with a new reality destabilizing the long-established boundaries demarcating one religion from the other.

Accordingly, the markers described in this chapter signal both a distinctive age and cultural experience for Jews living in the early modern era as well as the presence of a vast community linked by common values, common circumstances, and common challenges to its very existence. These shared experiences emerge against a reality of cultural, social, and political diversity among Jewish sub-cultures. Early modern Jewish life was predicated on profound local and regional differences reflected in distinct languages, customs, political structures, and ritual life. But within this heterogeneity of recognizable local traditions and practices, there emerged a clear sense of connectedness. Jews were members of Polish, German, Ottoman, sephardic, and Italian communities while simultaneously in contact with and aware of their affiliation with Jews everywhere. In times of crisis and stress, such as that engendered by the Sabbatean heresy, this feeling was especially magnified.

Through a thorough examination of these markers across time and space, it might be possible to grasp more fully the unique nature of the Jewish cultural experience in early modern Europe, an experience both unique to the Jewish communities across the continent and simultaneously one shared with other European peoples. Finally, through the project of describing an early modern Jewish culture, we are in a better position to understand the modern era for Jews, its continuities and discontinuities with the period that precedes it. At the very least, historians of the modern Jewish experience can no longer study their period in isolation from what immediately preceded it. Mapping early modern Jewish culture provides an invaluable context and perspective for appreciating what modernity actually entailed.

**Further Reading**

Bonfil, Robert. *Jewish Life in Renaissance Italy* (Berkeley, 1994).


Yerushalmi, Yosef H. *From Spanish Court to Italian Ghetto: Isaac Cardoso, a Study in Seventeenth Century Marranism and Jewish Apologetics* (New York, 1971).
Notes:

(1.) This chapter relies heavily on my own recent interpretation of this period entitled *Early Modern Jewry: A New Cultural History* (Princeton, NJ, 2010). It can also be read profitably with my recent bibliographical essay, ‘Early Modern Jewish History’, *Oxford Bibliographies Online: Jewish Studies*, (2012), which refers amply to recent scholarship on each of the five sections that follow below and more. Accordingly, I have annotated this chapter very lightly.

(2.) Since my own dating of early modernity differs from that of the rest of this volume, it requires a word of explanation. If mobility, the radical shifts in population, and the subsequent displacement and restructuring of Jewish life they engendered represent primary factors in the shaping of Jewish culture in this era (as I argue immediately below), then 1492 represents a plausible beginning, although one should acknowledge that the first waves of ashkenazic migration from Germanic lands can be dated even much earlier.

I also recognize the impact of the Renaissance and Reformation on the construction of early modern Jewish culture in suggesting this dating. Accordingly, mobility first set in motion on a large scale in 1492, together with the impact of the Renaissance and the Reformation on Jewish culture and on Christian attitudes towards Judaism, all suggest the beginnings of a new and distinctive era of Jewish culture emerging by the late fifteenth or early sixteenth century. The end of this era for Jewish culture, as I describe it, more or less corresponds with the chronology of this volume so it is not argued here, but see my more elaborate discussion in *Early Modern Jewry*, ch. 6, where I consider it fully in relation to the beginnings of the Haskalah and the inception of the modern era for Jews.

(3.) Jacob Katz, *Tradition and Crisis: Jewish Society at the End of the Middle Ages* (New York, 1961) (retranslated and expanded by Bernard Cooperman (New York, 1993)).


(7.) On this, see Michael Heyd, Be Sober and Reasonable: Science, Medicine and the Critique of Enthusiasm in the Seventeenth and Early Eighteenth Centuries (Leiden, 1995).

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Abstract and Keywords

For reasons that range from historians’ lack of interest and political inexpediency of the topic to the lacunae in the sources and missing records, Muslims have been largely absent (and assumed non-existent) in the historical accounts of early modern Western Europe. However, recent research on Muslim slaves, mercenaries, merchants, diplomats, travellers, and scholars has begun to restore Muslim groups and individuals to the social and cultural landscape of early modern Europe, challenging the premise that Muslims’ integration in European societies is a very recent phenomenon. This chapter examines the latest research on the subject by focusing on Muslim communities’ experiences and legal frameworks created to accommodate them across the constantly re-imagined political geography of ‘Europe’, from the Iberian Peninsula, via various states of Western Europe and the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth, to the Ottoman Central and Southeast Europe in the period between the fourteenth and eighteenth centuries.

Keywords: Muslims, Spain, Ottoman Empire, Islam, slaves, merchants, travellers, scholars

Hiding in Plain Sight? Muslims in the Historiography of Early Modern Europe

UNTIL recently, the study of Islam and Muslims in early modern Europe dealt almost exclusively with their representations in European religious, scholarly, and political discourses rather than with the modalities of the Muslims’ actual presence. The reason for this has been a widespread view that by 1526, when the last Iberian Muslims were forcibly converted to Christianity, no Muslim communities remained in western Europe.
After this date, traditional historiography tells us, Muslims could be found only in the Balkans where, starting in the fourteenth century, an expanding Ottoman polity re-introduced Islam to Europe. At the same time, in the vast overland European territories that separated the Iberian and Balkan peninsulas, Islam and Muslims were simply a matter of a distant and scary ‘other’. The fact that this narrative typically overlooks a substantial and well-integrated community of Muslim Tatars living in the Polish–Lithuanian Commonwealth since the fourteenth century all the way through the early modern era points to the ongoing debate on how Europe should be defined and its experience with Muslims narrated and historicized.

In recent years, however, a significantly different picture has begun to emerge that restores previously overlooked Muslim groups and individuals to the early modern (especially western) European landscape, while at the same time underscoring the geographical and contextual unevenness of their distribution. This ‘unremarkable’ history, thus dubbed because it focuses on the everyday aspects of Muslim presence in European homes, cities, and provinces as slaves, merchants, travellers, diplomats, and scholars, had previously escaped the radar of historians for a number of reasons. The most important one is the patchy nature of the sources available for such research that arises from the fact that most (though by no means all) early modern European polities lacked a clearly defined legal framework for the presence of free (as opposed to enslaved) Muslims. This lack of official (in contrast to tacit, unofficial) frameworks for accommodating Muslims means that their residence or temporary sojourn in Europe sometimes entailed various strategies of dissimulation and making oneself invisible.

A further, and no less important complicating factor in the research into the subject of Muslim presence in Europe has been the question of who was considered or described as a Muslim, how, and by whom. Sources that historians have used to this purpose, ranging from police, baptismal, notarial, and mercantile records to slave lists and court rulings use a variety of identificatory labels that sometimes blend geographic, ethnic, racial, regional, and religious categories. For instance, taking Italian as the basis, while ‘Turco’ was the term for Muslims in general, it could also be used in a narrower sense for the Ottoman Turks or combined with other labels as in ‘Turco Arabo’, presumably to designate an Arab-speaking Muslim. If such a Muslim came from North Africa, he could also be referred to as ‘Moro’, but the same term carried the connotations of race and could imply dark skin colour. Other labels, such as ‘Levantini’, made it difficult to determine whether the individual in question was a Muslim or a non-Muslim from the Ottoman Empire. All of these categories reflected the ongoing attempts by different European institutions to articulate forms of alterity associated with the ‘East’ in religious, juridical, geographical, and ultimately civilizational terms that would come to have a
lasting impact on both Europe’s understanding of itself and its relationship with Islam and Muslims.4

However, perhaps the most decisive reason for overlooking the presence of Muslim slaves, merchants, travellers, and diplomats in Europe has been a historiographical bias that combined a reluctance to explore the history of slavery in Europe, on the one hand, with the myth of Muslim disinterest in trade and diplomacy with or travel to Europe, on the other. Attempts to overcome these myths and integrate Muslims into European history have been particularly intensive in the interdisciplinary study of the early modern Mediterranean, which has since September 11, 2001 become a sort of laboratory for testing new models of cultural and religious interaction beyond the ‘clash of civilizations’. This new historiography focuses on subjects such as ransom slavery, information gathering, translation, conversion, etc., that are central to the methodology of transnational (as well as trans-imperial and trans-communal) history.5

The following account of Muslims and Islam in early modern Europe builds on this recent research but also tries to overcome a bifurcation of that history perpetuated even in the most committed ‘integrationist’ historiography, between the Western (typically Iberian, but also Italian and French) and southeast/central European (Ottoman) contexts. It is true that in these two contexts Muslims faced dramatically different equations of power—they were a persecuted, enslaved, or ‘underground’ religious minority in the former, and the dominant power in the latter. However, rather than treating this asymmetry as a fault line, this chapter will highlight it as an essential feature and driving force of the history of Muslims in early modern Europe. Another asymmetry, in the management of religious difference between early modern Christian Europe, especially in the age of confession building, and early modern Islamicate polities that bordered it, is also crucial to the story. The chapter will explore these asymmetries in the broader context of a geopolitical balance of power between early modern Christian and Islamicate polities, especially the Habsburg and Ottoman Empires, and examine how these broader political (as)symmetries influenced the experiences of and legal frameworks created for Muslim slaves, merchants, diplomats, travellers, and scholars in early modern Europe.

Staying Muslim vs. Becoming Muslim—Muslim Communities of the Iberian and Balkan Peninsulas in the Fourteenth and Fifteenth Centuries

Similarities between histories of medieval Iberia and Anatolia are often invoked under the rubric of convivencia—a romanticized notion of religious co-existence that has recently been reconsidered in terms of configurations of power among communities living together—but more systematic and properly historicized comparisons are virtually non-
existent. However, comparing the two contexts and their respective extensions into North Africa and Southeast Europe sheds interesting light on the (a)symmetrical challenges faced by Muslim communities in late medieval/early modern Europe.

By the mid-fourteenth century, the Muslim-ruled al-Andalus was reduced to the small and densely populated Nasrid kingdom of Granada, while many Muslims continued to live in the Christian Kingdoms of Leon, Castile, and Aragon as protected tax-paying subjects (called mudéjars) whose freedom of worship and legal autonomy were guaranteed by the king. Historians estimate that in the first half of the fourteenth century perhaps one in six of the total population (around one million people) of the Iberian peninsula may have been Muslim. Christian legislation, such as the Siete Partidas of Castile’s Alfonso X (d. 1284) that was fully implemented only later in the fourteenth century, ruled that, ‘although the Moors do not acknowledge a good religion, so long as they live among Christians with their assurance of security their property shall not be stolen from them or taken by force’. As a general legal framework this arrangement was a mirror image of the dhimma pact that Muslim rulers of al-Andalus previously extended to Jews and Christians under their rule. In most Christian cities the Muslim community was relocated to its own neighbourhood, the morería. But many, if not most, Muslims lived in rural areas and worked as agricultural labourers. As such, they were protected not only by the king, as in the case of the largely urban Jewish community, but also by the nobility on whose estates they worked. That does not mean, however, that they were immune to violence. On the contrary, recent research suggests that periodic violence was an essential component of convivencia in late medieval Iberia.

Mudéjars experienced different challenges in terms of maintaining a communal identity vis-à-vis both other Muslims (especially those in Granada and North Africa) and Christians. The largest and most cohesive Muslim community lived in the Crown of Aragon, particularly in Valencia, where, due to the territory’s late date of conquest and proximity to Granada, it was easier to keep a closer connection with Islam. Muslims in the Crown of Castile, who made up a few small communities in a predominantly Christian environment, were much more vulnerable to assimilation. The question of whether or not it was lawful from the perspective of Islamic law for Muslims to live under Christian rule and whether or not they were under obligation to emigrate into Muslim territories was hotly debated by Granadan and North African jurists. Their opinions ranged from more pragmatic and moderate that recognized the merits of maintaining a Muslim presence in infidel territory, to outright denunciations of mudéjars as border-case infidels. Under these conditions, mudéjar faqis—that is, individuals learned in Islamic law who brokered the Islamic message and reconciled the principles of normative Islam with local conditions faced by the community—attained particular importance. In many cases they were denounced by their North African counterparts as disseminators of misinformation.
and ignorance whose mere decision to stay behind disqualified them from a position of community leadership. Yet, mudéjar faqihṣ constituted a crucial link between Iberian Muslims and the centres of Islamic learning (particularly of the Maliki school of law) and authority.¹¹

Yça Gidelli was one such faqih from the Kingdom of Castile whose written work captures the negotiation of learnedness in the Islamic tradition and local circumstances faced by the mudéjar community in a region where they were a small minority. In 1455/56 Yça translated the Qur’an into Spanish/Romance at the behest of Juan de Segovia, a Christian theologian who, spurred on by the Ottoman conquest of Constantinople in 1453, aspired to ‘solve’ the problem of Islam by means of peaceful disputation and conversion. Aware of the polemical context in which the translation would appear, Yça nevertheless considered it an ‘angelic task’ to make the Qur’anic message available to all who wanted to hear it. In 1462 he also authored a catechetical work in Romance, entitled Brevario Sunni, which aimed to instruct Castilian mudéjars, who had by this time begun to lose their Arabic, in the basics of Muslim faith. Yça was profoundly influenced by Sufism and prophecies about the impending end of time, some of which were related to the Ottoman conquest of Constantinople.¹² The issues of translation, Sufi influence, an intense polemical environment, and the pronounced eschatological framework evident in Yça Gidelli’s work as well as in other surviving mudéjar texts constitute important points of comparison with the nature of Islamic discourse and circumstances faced by Muslims in early Ottoman Anatolia and Rumeli (the latter being the Ottoman term for Ottoman territories in Southeast Europe).

During the early 1350s soldiers affiliated with the Ottoman emir Orhan and his son Süleyman crossed the Dardanelles into Rumeli. By this time Ottoman forces had already conquered the important cities of Broussa in 1326 (which became the first Ottoman capital of Bursa) and Nicaea (Iznik) in 1331 in Byzantine Bythinia, gradually eclipsing maritime Turkish emirates in the region and becoming a major player, along with the Byzantines, Genoese, and Venetians, in the eastern Mediterranean. They did not arrive in Rumeli uninvited: in the 1340s Byzantium suffered a civil war during which one of the contenders, emperor John Cantacuzenos, allied himself with Orhan and even betrothed his daughter Theodora to him in 1346. A dense pattern of alliances between the Byzantines and Ottomans, typically intended to check the ambitions of the ‘Latins’ as well as an array of various recalcitrant Byzantine and Ottoman princes, stretched all the way into the 1440s.¹³ Despite some serious setbacks, such as a civil war among the sons of Sultan Bayezid I between 1402 and 1413 stemming from Timur’s (that is, Tamerlane) routing of Ottoman forces at Ankara, the Ottomans took firm control over the Balkans by the mid-fifteenth century by outmanoeuvring the Byzantine, Albanian, Serbian, and
Bulgarian nobility in political calculations, overpowering their defences in numerous battles, and defeating crusader armies at Nicopolis in 1396 and Varna in 1443/4.

Ottoman conquests in Rumeli set in motion the process of establishing the Islamic religion and culture in the region. New mosque complexes, soup kitchens, Sufi convents (tekkes), bridges, markets, and caravanserais built through the Muslim legal institution of pious endowment (waqf) along with an improved road system visually heralded the establishment of Ottoman rule. Following Islamic legal tradition, the Ottomans extended the status of dhimmis or protected subjects (with guaranteed freedom of worship) to Christians and Jews of the cities and areas that voluntarily surrendered and paid the poll tax. Those who resisted were considered eligible for enslavement as well as the confiscation of their property, but the extent of this phenomenon in the early Ottoman period has not been studied in great detail.

The Ottoman conquest also prompted the conversion of the local population to Islam as well as the settlement of different Muslim groups in Rumeli. These groups arrived either voluntarily or through the Ottoman practice of forced resettlement (sürgün) that targeted politically and religiously recalcitrant elements of Anatolian society (such as the nomadic population known as Yürük). There were deep regional differences in the origins of Muslim communities in Ottoman Rumeli in terms of the ratio between local conversions and the settlement of Anatolian Muslims. While demographic figures from this era are notoriously contentious, it seems that before the sixteenth century the conversion rate was low and that at most 2.5 per cent of the overall population of Ottoman Rumeli became Muslim. Rather than conversion to Islam, the fifteenth century witnessed the conversion of people in Rumeli to the Ottoman political cause, especially among the former Balkan and Byzantine aristocracy and their retinues. Ottoman armies in the region contained raiding squads (akıncıs) comprised mostly of local Christians. Some of the earliest Ottoman fief (timar) holders in Rumeli were also Christians—often former nobility or capable fighting men. However, already by the late fourteenth century, in order to deal with a chronic shortage of able manpower, the Ottomans established the practice of devshirme, that is, a periodic levy of the children of their Christian subjects from rural areas. These children were converted to Islam and trained to become either Janissaries—the elite infantry corps—or leading administrators of the Empire, depending on their skills and intellect. As the only documented state-driven form of forced conversion to Islam, this practice has attracted considerable attention among historians and continues to colour popular perceptions of Ottoman rule in Southeast Europe. Nevertheless, in the context of the overall, much more multifaceted process of conversion in the Ottoman Empire, devshirme converts constituted a small numerical minority, albeit of great ideological and practical significance.
While Muslims were on the offensive in the Balkans unlike in the Iberian peninsula, they also faced the situation of being a minority among a Christian majority, with the authoritative centres of Islamic learning far off in Damascus, Cairo, and Central Asia. Although the first Ottoman religious college (*medrese*) had been founded in Iznik as early as 1331, Ottoman institutions of higher learning acquired prestige only in the sixteenth century. References to the exigencies of fighting ‘ignorance’ within the Muslim community and denunciations of ‘false’ preachers figure prominently in the prefaces to works of the key Ottoman brokers of the Islamic message from this period. Many texts of catechetical nature produced to this effect were translations from Arabic and Persian, both of which were largely inaccessible to Turkish-speaking nomads, as well as the Slavic-, Albanian-, and Greek-speaking Christian population of Rumeli. Their authors/editors/compilers, besides being learned in Islamic law and adherents of the Hanefi legal school, were often profoundly influenced by the conceptual language of Sufism and the work of Ibn Arabi (d. 1240), a thirteenth-century Andalusian mystic who migrated to Seljuk Anatolia. Furthermore, like their Iberian co-religionists, Muslims in the early Ottoman polity saw themselves as inhabiting a frontier with ‘infidelity’, which made them conceive of their own political and spiritual realities within a polemical and eschatological framework evident in the early Ottoman historical and religious narratives.16

**Islam and Muslims in Europe in the Age of Conversion and Imperial Competition in the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries**

In both the Iberian and Ottoman contexts the late fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries marked the rise of a new political imagination centring on the idea of a universal empire and unification of the world under the banner of one ruler, one law, and one religion. The creation of new Muslim communities and the disappearance of older ones from Europe throughout the sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries was intimately related to the religious and political aspirations of the two main contenders for the title of universal emperor, the Habsburg emperor and the Ottoman sultan, but also to the new religio-political realities in the aftermath of the Protestant Reformation. For Habsburg Emperor Charles V (King of Spain 1516–56, Holy Roman Emperor 1519–56) and his son Philip II (King of Spain 1556–98), the struggle against the Ottomans was an attempt to realize the medieval crusading idea of defeating the Muslim antichrist. However, over the course of the sixteenth century, this idea began to lose its appeal for other European rulers and diplomats as a consequence of the intensified mercantile contacts with the Ottoman Empire and North African principalities, confessional differentiation among Europe’s Christians, and increasingly commonplace alliances with Islamicate polities against other Christian states. Although publications on the Turkish threat were the
bestsellers of the early modern printing presses across Europe, in learned circles the Muslim antichrist and Turkish barbarian of medieval and humanist treatises began to co-exist with the Turk the ‘noble savage’ whose religion and customs were worthy of exploration for both military/strategic and religio-polemical purposes. The following section will focus on the rivalling Ottoman–Habsburg religio-political projects and how they shaped the experiences of the Muslim communities in the Spanish and Ottoman empires before addressing in more detail how other European polities dealt with Muslim groups and individuals in their midst.

The unravelling of the medieval convivencia, precarious as it was, in the Iberian peninsula began soon after the conquest of the Nasrid kingdom of Granada by the armies of Ferdinand of Aragon and Isabella of Castile in January 1492. The conquest marked the end of the Reconquista—the Iberian Christian rulers’ struggle against the Muslims of al-Andalus—and the beginning of the extension of that struggle into North Africa and the Mediterranean. The boost that the conquest gave to Ferdinand and Isabella’s pursuit of religious homogeneity within their domains is reflected in the fact that it was from the Granadan fortress of Alhambra in March 1492 that they issued the order for the expulsion of Jews from their territories, leaving conversion to Christianity the only option for those who wanted to stay. As for the conquered Muslims of Granada, although they were initially granted freedom of belief in return for paying heavy taxes, already in 1501 the entire Muslim population of the city was forced to either emigrate or be baptized, thus giving rise to the first community of Moriscos, or Catholic descendants of Iberian Muslims. The Christianization of Granada entailed not only the mass conversion of Muslims but also the removal of material and administrative evidence of their centuries-long presence in the city. Resisting this damnatio memoriae, in the late sixteenth century Moriscos tried to inscribe their own history and language into the newly created Christian history of Granada by falsifying what purported to be Christian relics from the apostolic age in an ostensibly ancient Arabic script. The so-called Lead Books affair that arose from these attempts is the subject of much fascinating recent scholarship that explores the place of Islam, Muslims, and Arabic language in Spain and Europe in the age of confessional polarization.

The reign of Ferdinand and Isabella’s grandson, Charles V of Habsburg, who made the struggle against the Muslims in the Mediterranean the cornerstone of his legitimacy as a Christian ruler, pursuing a ‘world-wide crusade’, led to further forced baptisms of Muslims and the realization of the early modern Christian ideal of ‘one emperor, one law, one religion’ within Spanish territories. After 1526, when the Valencian Muslim community was forced to undergo baptism, there were officially no Muslims left in Spain. New Christians of Muslim (as well as Jewish) descent were scrutinized for signs of secret commitment to their prior religion and tried by the Inquisition tribunals that were kept
very busy by the need to enforce orthodoxy and orthopraxy among those who were forcibly joined to the flock and who implicitly and explicitly resisted becoming Catholic Christians. This resistance was fuelled, in addition to the forced nature of conversion, by the lack of possibilities for social mobility and assimilation into the Old Christian community due to the ‘purity of blood’ (*limpieza de sangre*) laws that effectively made Moriscos (and conversos, Jewish converts to Christianity) second-class Christian subjects. What followed in the decades to come, especially in the aftermath of the Council of Trent (1545–63), was a gradual elimination of what advisers to the Spanish crown saw as the remnants of Muslim identity. This trend culminated in a royal edict of 1567 that banned ‘Moorish’ clothing, ordered the destruction of books in Arabic script and forbade the use of Arabic language, and required Moriscos to adopt Christian names and their children to be educated only by Catholic priests. These measures targeting Granada in particular led to the Morisco revolt of Alpujarras in 1568 that Spanish armies suppressed only after three years and with great difficulties.

In facing the threat of complete assimilation, the Moriscos focused their hopes and appeals for help on various Mediterranean Muslim rulers. In the early sixteenth century, the most concrete help for the Granadan Muslim refugees came from a local ruler in northwest Morocco, who encouraged the Andalusians to settle in Tetuan. The city then became an important centre for Moroccan attacks against Spain. Another important source of help came in the shape of the brothers Uruc and Hayreddin Barbarossa, Ottoman corsairs who established their powerbase in Tunis and Algiers in the 1510s and recruited the Andalusians into their ranks to fight the Spanish. After conquering the Mamluk Empire (that is, Syria and Egypt) in 1516–17, the Ottomans became a leading power in the eastern Mediterranean and started extending their influence westward by recruiting the Barbarossa brothers into the service of the state. Hayreddin Barbarossa and his successors who made Algiers the basis of the Ottoman operations against Spain continued to help the Moriscos by providing ships for the refugees, facilitating their settlement along the North African coast, and offering logistical help as well as military reinforcement for the uprising of 1568. By now Morisco hopes were focused firmly on the Ottoman sultan. In turn, Spanish authorities viewed the Moriscos as an Ottoman ‘fifth column’ in their midst.

After much debate on the best course of action, in an act that ultimately acknowledged the failure of the policy of forced conversion and assimilation, all the descendants of the Christianized Spanish Muslims, regardless of their actual religious convictions (for some of them were by now dedicated Christians), were expelled from Spain in the period between 1609 and 1614. Estimates suggest that around 300,000 people left the Iberian peninsula at this time, but the Morisco migration started much earlier, and the total number of displaced descendants of Iberian Muslims must be much higher. Like their Jewish compatriots more than a century before, they dispersed across the Mediterranean,
most of them finding refuge in North African principalities under the control of the Ottoman sultan who claimed them as his own Muslim subjects. For the second time in a century, a major population movement underscored the asymmetry in the management of religious difference between the Spanish and Ottoman empires—an asymmetry that was not lost on contemporaries. For instance, a Spanish feudal lord, Sancho de Cardona, seeking to protect his Morisco tenants from expulsion, argued in 1570 that the baptisms of the Moriscos had been forced, and that attempts to compel them to live as Christians ‘ran counter to all justice...’. He reportedly planned to send a Morisco agent to the Ottoman sultan ‘to procure that he write to the Pope, saying that since in his lands he allowed the Christians to live as Christians, it stood to reason that in Christendom they should leave the Moors to live as Moors’. For their own part, the exiled Moriscos who reached the Ottoman capital insisted that, in the spirit of reciprocity, the Ottoman sultan should turn the local Catholic churches in Galata into mosques and curtail the liberties of resident Catholic Christians. The implication that the Ottoman sultan’s treatment of Catholic Christians should mirror the actions of the Spanish monarch towards the Moriscos, and vice versa, that the sultan’s lenient treatment of non-Muslims should be emulated by the king in his dealings with non-Christians, underscores the common moral framework within which contemporaries often considered the two empires. While strategies for the management of difference in both empires drew on the specific local ‘moral economies’ of state building, one should also not overlook the dialogic aspect of these policies.

In the Ottoman context, the era of Mehmed II (1451–81) was particularly important for the elaboration of an imperial framework for the management of difference. His conquest of Constantinople in 1453 reverberated across Europe and the Mediterranean world, setting off a variety of apocalyptic scenarios and expectations of an impending Day of Judgement, including among Ottoman Turks themselves, who were aware of the old prophetic traditions (hadith) and legends stating that the conquest of the city by a Muslim ruler would usher in the end of days. The process of turning Constantinople into the Ottoman capital of Istanbul provides an interesting contrast to the roughly contemporary process of the Christianization of Granada. In both cases, the conquerors were faced with the challenge of ‘superseding’ the political and cultural traditions of the previous rulers, and in both cases the process was indicative of a particular imperial vision. While he strove to create a legible version of an Ottoman Constantinople articulated in the architectural language of both integration and domination, Mehmed II also aspired to present himself as the heir of the Roman emperors. In contrast to the Habsburgs, who embraced the Justinianic idea of a Christian Roman empire, Mehmed’s understanding of the Roman legacy was that of a rule that thrived on diversity as long as the ruler’s religion was accorded the greatest respect. The subjected Greek population was invited back and given housing, Jewish communities from throughout Ottoman...
territories were resettled in the city, as were some of the prosperous Muslim merchant communities from Anatolia.

Mehmed’s methods for achieving economic prosperity, which were premised on diversity in early Ottoman Constantinople, were initially met with a great dissatisfaction among Ottoman Muslims, some of whom even maintained that the infidel city should have been destroyed upon conquest rather than become the seat of the polity. However, subsequent decades witnessed a growing sense of pride and identification with the city among its Muslim inhabitants, who increasingly perceived themselves as ‘Rumis’ (urban, Turkish-speaking Muslims, often converts or descendants of converts) rather than ‘Turks’ (a label associated with a tribal and nomadic lifestyle). Ottoman engagement with the legacy of Rome embodied by Constantinople continued into the sixteenth century when during Sultan Süleyman’s reign (1520–66) the most emblematic imperial space of the Byzantine capital, the Hippodrome, became a central space for Ottoman imperial festivals. Hand in hand with this went Süleyman’s growing aspiration, now that he was in control of territories that in their vastness mirrored those of Charles V, for dominating the Mediterranean and the city of the popes, thus joining the two Romes.25

The phenomenon of conversion to Islam was crucial to the development of a Rumi cultural identity. The conquest of Constantinople marked a new phase of Ottoman governance: born Muslims from established families were increasingly excluded from key positions in the Empire, whereas converts recruited through the devshirme system or otherwise were appointed to the leading posts, including that of the Grand Vizier—the second in command in the Empire. Far from being second-class citizens like converts to Christianity in Spain, by the sixteenth century these so-called kulıslı or ‘slaves of the sultan’ became a powerful caste that virtually controlled imperial politics. They utilized their diverse linguistic, regional, non-Muslim religious backgrounds, and in some cases family connections within and beyond imperial borders, for the benefit of the Empire whilst consolidating their own power networks. For instance, one of the greatest Ottoman grand viziers, Sokollu Mehmed Pasha (d. 1579), a descendant of an Orthodox Christian family from Bosnia who was recruited through the devshirme, appointed his own cousins (who converted to Islam) to key positions in Rumeli, utilized his knowledge of the Slavic language to mobilize Christian populations in the Balkans to support the Ottoman cause in Hungary, and helped the Christian branch of his family establish the Orthodox Patriarchate in Peć in 1557. Similarly, Gazarfer Agha, the Chief White Eunuch of Sultans Murad III and Mehmed III, mobilized his Venetian background and family connections to advance his own power.26 The opportunities for social mobility open to converts to Islam in the Ottoman Empire, especially those with coveted technological, military, linguistic, or other skills, led to a steady rise in their number, making the sixteenth century the age of conversion in Ottoman Rumeli. By the 1530s, Muslims comprised around 22 per cent of
the tax-paying population in the region, or around 240,000 people. In North Africa, the phenomenon of the ‘Turk by profession’, that is, of conversion to Islam for the purposes of pursuing gainful economic activity through corsairing, further underscored the image of the sultan’s domains as the land of economic and social opportunity and likely reinforced a growing assumption that religious conversion also necessitated political conversion.

Beyond the highest echelons of power, conversion to Islam in Ottoman Rumeli was influenced by a multiplicity of factors that make any generalization about the phenomenon difficult. The nature of a particular region’s conquest and incorporation into Ottoman domains, local economic conditions and inter-communal relations, gender as well as the personal education and ambitions of converts all played a role in the process, thus giving rise to significant regional and case-to-case variation. However, some general trends are observable. Research with Ottoman census records suggests that conversion to Islam in Rumeli rose steadily throughout the sixteenth century, peaking in the mid-seventeenth century only to slow down and come to an almost complete stop by the end of the eighteenth century (except perhaps in Albania). It was more intensive in the cities than in rural areas. Despite theories that have emphasized ‘external’ agents of conversion, such as proselytizing Sufi mystics or an invasive and oppressive Ottoman state, both Christian and Muslim sources of different types and time periods suggest that family and social networks were the most important contexts of religious change and that the agents of conversion were usually the people with whom a convert-to-be was familiar. Often, people first converted and only later learned what it meant to be a Muslim, with families converting gradually, sometimes over several generations. Sources such as Ottoman court records and converts’ petitions suggest that young males were by far the most typical converts; however, women also availed themselves of the advantages offered by conversion, often to obtain divorce or escape abusive family conditions.

Mehmed II’s conquests in the Balkans pitted the Ottomans against the Kingdom of Hungary, their most formidable opponent in the region. While Mehmed II himself failed to defeat the Hungarians at Belgrade in 1456, his great-grandson Süleyman conquered Belgrade in 1521 and trounced the Hungarian army at the Battle of Mohács in 1526. After initially supporting the Hungarian nobleman János Zápolyai as the king of Hungary, after Zápolyai’s death, in 1541, Süleyman conquered Buda and established a direct Ottoman rule over Hungary for the following 150 years. The Hungarian territory was split into three parts: its eastern part, known as Transylvania, became a semi-autonomous principality under Ottoman suzerainty; central Hungary became the Ottoman province of Buda; and western Hungary came under the domination of the Habsburgs and figured as a thin buffer zone between Ottoman garrisons and Vienna, the administrative seat of the
Austrian Habsburgs. The Ottomans embarked on two campaigns to Vienna in the sixteenth century (1529, 1532), and failed to take the city on both occasions, although there are indications that these campaigns were intended more as shows of power rather than wholehearted attempts to conquer the Habsburg capital and risk an ‘imperial overstretch’. The third unsuccessful attempt to take Vienna, in 1683, spelled the end of the Ottoman presence in central Europe.

Ottoman rule in Hungary was maintained by Muslim garrison soldiers and administrators, almost all of whom were Slavic speakers from the Ottoman Balkans, especially Bosnia. The Slavic-speaking peasantry on both sides of the Danube and Sava rivers had been crucial to both Ottoman and Hungarian armies since the fifteenth century, and local languages, along with Hungarian and Latin, were used in the province’s administration and conduct of everyday administrative affairs. Ottoman Hungary thus experienced more of a colonization of Muslims from other parts of Rumeli than local conversions to Islam. Nevertheless, Ottoman administrators, especially the Pasha of Buda, made sure to build Muslim religious, cultural, and educational institutions that resembled other parts of the Empire, which would guarantee the high standards of learning and worship for the Muslim communities in the region, most of which were concentrated in the cities and garrison towns. Some of the baths, mosques, fortresses, and tombs built by the Ottomans still remain to this day in the Hungarian cities of Budapest, Egér, and Pécs. It is also worth recalling that the arrival of the Ottomans in Hungary coincided with the spread of Protestantism in the region. For Hungarian Protestants of various denominations Ottoman rule provided relative safety and protection from persecution, unlike in the neighbouring Habsburg-controlled ‘Royal Hungary’.

Across all the major fault lines that separated Islamicate and Christian polities in central Europe, along the coast and in the hinterland of the Adriatic Sea, as well as in the Mediterranean, there was considerable traffic, both forced and voluntary. The following sections will explore what crossing the border into a Christian polity could mean for a Muslim, and how the legal and political conditions of Muslims living in or travelling to different states in Europe were shaped by shifting inter-imperial diplomatic practices and power configurations.

**Muslim Slaves and Captives**

Although still in its infancy, the study of slavery in late medieval and early modern Europe has done much to open the discussion on the long-term, seemingly invisible presence of Muslims in European territories beyond Spain and the Ottoman Empire. According to one estimate, between 1450 and 1750, up to 400,000 Ottoman and
Moroccan slaves, along with around 800,000 East Africans and Sub-Saharan Africans passed through Portugal and Spain alone. Another study suggests that up to 2 million Muslims from the Mediterranean were enslaved by Christians during the early modern period, most of them captured at sea. Some scholars have speculated that this number roughly matches the number of Christian slaves in North Africa and the Ottoman Empire in the same period while others have argued that it greatly surpasses it. The majority of these Muslim slaves did not end up being ransomed but became part of the European social landscape, especially in the spheres of military and domestic service. The phenomenon of Muslim slavery became more prominent in the aftermath of the Battle of Lepanto in 1571, which also inaugurated the age of piracy, both Christian and Muslim, in the Mediterranean. As the key hubs of the region’s slave trade, Mediterranean ports like Livorno, Genoa, Naples, Marseilles, and various Maltese cities had particularly significant Muslim slave populations, with the Knights of Malta and the Knights of St. Stephen acting as the chief suppliers. Venice’s supply of Muslim slaves came from the borderlands with the Ottomans in the Adriatic and the Mediterranean. In central Europe, along the Ottoman–Habsburg border, daily skirmishes (the so-called Kleinkrieg or ‘little war’) were a constant source of Muslim captives (especially during the long peace of 1606–63), some of whom were ransomed, while others were sold as servants to Italian merchants or the Viennese nobility. Even as far inland as Munich it was possible for local people to delight in the sight of Ottoman captives, as, for instance, after the siege of Buda in 1686.

The historical record for the trajectories and destinies of individual Muslim slaves in Europe is patchy. Unlike the voluminous corpus of early modern Christian narratives of captivity in Islamdom that came to form a distinct genre marked by elaborate descriptions of suffering and humiliation as well as the occasional ethnographic discussion of the captors and their religion, the Muslim corpus captivitis, as Nabil Matar terms it, is characterized by brief mentions of falling captive and/or escaping, emphasizing rather communal belonging and one’s faith in deliverance by God. Indications are that the oral corpus on Muslim captivity was much more developed than the written one, although several extended Ottoman narratives of captivity survive, including a versified account by an Ottoman officer captured at the Battle of Lepanto (1571). However, the most important documentary genre left by Muslim slaves are numerous letters written to their families, captors, as well as Muslim rulers they petitioned for help.

These letters, along with other sources such as ransom lists, records of the council of war in Spain and Austria, baptismal records from France or the Venetian Casa dei Catechumeni, have allowed historians to begin to discern the contours of the phenomenon of Muslim slavery in early modern Europe. Two systems of slavery
interacted in this period, a more ancient one of domestic servitude and an early modern one, of slavery as an extension of a just war. While able-bodied men most of the time ended up serving on the galleys (especially French, Spanish, and Maltese), toiling on public works, or being converted to Christianity and sent to fight their former co-religionists (in Venetian colonies abutting the Ottoman Empire), women (and children) were largely destined for domestic service. In some contexts, such as Venice, conversion of captives to Christianity in the Casa dei Catechumeni, placement into noble households as servants and wards, and their eventual manumission led to the creation of alternative kinship ties for the slaves that could lead to a smaller or greater degree of integration into the lower strata of Venetian society.\textsuperscript{34}

In terms of integrating prisoners of war in the host society, the case of the Muslim Tatar community in the Polish–Lithuanian Commonwealth is exceptional. These Muslims began to arrive from the Golden Horde as refugees and prisoners of war in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries but gradually came to perform a vital military function for the Commonwealth that earned them the status of a protected community subject to its own, Islamic law. Over the course of the sixteenth century they were integrated into the noble estate (szlachta) and in the seventeenth century received full civil rights of the nobility. At this time, the Muslim community in the Polish–Lithuanian Commonwealth numbered at least 25,000 people.\textsuperscript{35}

The galley slaves’ integration into their captive society was rare, as they were often both socially and visually marked as ‘other’. For instance, naval laws stipulated that galley slaves should wear distinctive clothing and hairdos, and even upon conversion to Catholicism they were required to wear an iron footlock around the ankle like other Muslim slaves.\textsuperscript{36} Although Tridentine reforms recommended the baptism of slaves and their manumission within four years, the conversion of galley slaves was often resisted by galley administrators, and it typically did not lead to manumission, which was one of the essential differences with the Muslim system of slavery. For ransom slavery the captive’s social or military rank mattered because of the possibility of prisoner exchange or ransom. The ransoming of captives was based on customary law and often left no trace in the archives, especially when it functioned smoothly. The system, which entailed the captives being released upon paying a portion of the ransom to collect the rest among their co-religionists or family, was based on the principle of suretyship and trust among enemies, guaranteed by an array of intermediaries, royal bureaucracies, and legal agents.\textsuperscript{37}

Despite the symmetry in the ransom system across Muslim–Christian borders, Muslim slaves in early modern Europe were worse off than their Christian counterparts in North Africa and the Ottoman Empire, with less chance for manumission, freedom of movement,
or possibility for social advancement upon conversion. On some occasions Muslim slaves could use this asymmetry as leverage to better their condition, by writing letters to Muslim rulers and demanding that they exert influence on the Christian states with which they had commercial or diplomatic treaties, and to threaten that privileges would be withdrawn from Christian traders and slaves. Due to this kind of leverage, in the seventeenth century, at the heyday of the Catholic Reformation, cities which were particularly dependent on the trade with North Africa, like Livorno, Civitavecchia, or Genoa, had mosques in which local slaves, as well as passing Muslim traders, could pray under the guidance of a local imam, while ‘Turkish’ cemeteries existed in Marseille and Toulon in the eighteenth century. However, as the next section will discuss, for the most part these kinds of arrangements depended on configurations of power and economic calculations of the involved parties in a particular moment in time rather than explicitly articulated or theorized legal principles of accommodating Muslims within a Christian polity.

Muslim Merchants

The issues of symmetry, reciprocity, and terminology are particularly central to the question of Muslim merchants’ presence and activities in early modern European cities and ports. Christian commerce with Islamicate polities, and Muslim traders sojourning in Christian territories, were well-established medieval phenomena that continued into the early modern era, although under significantly changed circumstances. Particularly starting in the seventeenth century, Muslim merchants were a regular sight from the Italian ports of Ancona, Livorno, and Venice to French Marseille, Toulon, and Paris, to Habsburg Vienna. Recent historiography decisively overturns the myth of Muslim merchants being disinterested in trade with Europe or unlikely to accompany their merchandise there for religious reasons. Nevertheless, the number of Muslim merchants in European cities as well as the physical, legal, and institutional conditions of their sojourn (p. 684) there are obscured by the nature of the available sources and terminology used in them to refer to the traders from the ‘East’.

Trade between particular European and Islamicate polities was regulated by commercial-cum-peace treaties (ahdnama in Arabic and Ottoman Turkish). In the fifteenth century, the Ottoman Empire granted ahdnames—literally ‘letters of imperial pledge’, but often translated, quite misleadingly, as ‘capitulations’—to the Genoese, Ragusans, and Venetians. In the sixteenth century trading privileges were also extended to the French, Polish, and English, and eventually to the Dutch in 1612. From the Ottoman perspective, these were not bilateral agreements in the modern sense, but an expression of the sultan’s largesse, the recipients being deemed to be the inferior party. However, while
these agreements specified the legal framework for foreign merchants’ and diplomats’ residence and commerce in Ottoman territories, they did not always specify or demand reciprocal measures for Ottoman merchants trading in European polities. As a consequence, while foreign Christians in Islamic territories had consular representation and could organize themselves into ‘nations’ subject to the laws of their home country, merchants coming from the Ottoman Empire could not count on the same levels of institutional protection or representation. The same was true for the merchants from the North African principalities of Tunis and Algiers that in the seventeenth century negotiated their own commercial agreements with European polities. As mentioned above, in some of the French and Italian port cities, Muslim slaves and merchants could follow prayers under the guidance of the local imams and even be buried in local Muslim cemeteries. In Venice, if a merchant died while in the city, according to the treaty with the Ottoman Empire his possessions would be passed on to his heirs. However, all such local arrangements depended on fluctuating relations between specific polities, and could suddenly be suspended or augmented.

To navigate the local institutional culture in European trade centres Muslim merchants had to rely on various official and unofficial intermediaries. For instance, in Venice they were obliged to engage commercial brokers (sensali) and interpreters (dragomani) for conducting business. Depending on the city, merchants could find lodging in local hotels and inns, like in Paris and Vienna where they tended to stay in particular neighbourhoods, or were obliged to stay in a structure designated for Muslim merchants, such as the Fondaco dei Turchi established in Venice in 1621. Although fondacos (from Arabic funduq) for hosting foreign merchants had been a ubiquitous Mediterranean phenomenon since the medieval period, and Venice was one of the earliest recipients of the Ottoman capitulations, in the post-Tridentine era the establishment of such a hostel for Muslim merchants in Venice had to be justified on the grounds that it would prevent mixing of Muslims and Christians in the city and facilitate surveillance of the foreigners, rather than as a token of help to Ottoman Muslim merchants. The fear of excessive familiarity between Christian inhabitants of various European cities and Muslim merchants was not unfounded—often, converts to Islam maintained connections with family members on the other side of the religious divide and engaged in running trans-imperial economic enterprises.

(p. 685) The establishment of the fondaco in Venice also highlights the instability of the category ‘Turchi’ as well as ‘Muslim merchants’. Although in theory the fondaco was intended for Muslims of all ethnic, political, and denominational stripes, in practice the rules for the fondaco recognized differences between the Ottoman merchants from Rumeli (‘Bosnians’ and ‘Albanians’) and Anatolia (asiatici). It also appears that Safavid merchants were able to live outside the fondaco until 1662 by arguing that it would be
dangerous for them to share the same space with Ottoman Muslims. Identifying Muslim merchants in the sources is sometimes made difficult by the usage of ambiguous and shifting categories such as ‘Orientals’ and especially ‘Levantines’, which could designate any merchant from the east, including Greeks, Jews, Armenians, Maronites, Persians, Turks, or Arabs.

Muslim Diplomats and Travellers

In recent years, greater sensitivity to the variety of early modern Muslim ethnic, regional, and political loyalties has also reoriented the study of Muslim–Christian diplomacy, as historians have begun to distinguish among different political, cultural, and linguistic aspects of the missions sent to Europe by the Ottomans, Safavids, Moroccans, or the so-called Barbary states (Tunis, Algiers, and Tripoli). Traditional scholarship interpreted Muslim rulers’ unwillingness to establish permanent embassies in Europe as an expression of Muslim isolationism. Such scholarship also tended to overemphasize the role of Islamic law—according to which Muslims are supposed to view peace treaties with non-Muslims as only a temporary necessity—in Muslim states’ approach to diplomacy. Recent research has paid greater attention to actual diplomatic practices rather than to normative sources and theories, thus challenging these views and shedding light on the ambiguous and heavily negotiated nature of diplomatic genres and practices in the context of Muslim–Christian diplomacy, as well as legal frameworks created through them.

In overemphasizing the absence of Muslim consulates or embassies in Europe, earlier scholars failed to account for the number and ubiquity of envoys from Islamicate polities to various European states. For instance, according to one count, around 180 envoys from the Ottoman Empire were received in Venice alone between 1384 and 1762. A conservative estimate suggests that there were between forty and fifty embassies from various Muslim rulers received at the French court between 1581 and 1825. Despite Ottoman–Habsburg enmity, Ottoman envoys were occasionally sent to the Habsburg court already in the sixteenth century, followed by more elaborate embassies in the seventeenth and especially eighteenth centuries. The most impressive Ottoman diplomatic mission arrived in Vienna in 1665 and numbered 395 people, including the famous Ottoman traveller Evliya Chelebi who left a fascinating account of that visit.

England, the Netherlands, Spain, and various Italian city states also received numerous embassies from the Ottoman Empire and the Barbary states. While the diplomatic activity with Islamicate polities became particularly intensive in the eighteenth century, the sight of Muslim envoys and their retinues (often ten to twenty people including scribes, translators, legal and religious advisers, cooks, and porters) sojourning in
European villages and towns on their way to the capital seems to have become more common beginning in the late sixteenth century.

Recent studies of embassies from Islamicate states to Europe have favoured a cultural approach that explores the heavily codified nature of these diplomatic encounters and the elaborate staging of difference on both sides. The presumed cultural and linguistic chasm between the Muslim envoys and their hosts necessitated the employment of a variety of intermediaries, such as court-appointed interpreters; however, recent research suggests that linguistic mediation was not always a sine qua non. Some of the Muslim envoys spoke European languages and could make themselves understood, although often outside the prescribed linguistic protocol. The envoys from North Africa often knew Spanish or Italian: the Moroccan envoy to France and Holland between 1609 and 1611, Ahmad b. Qasim al-Hajari who was of Morisco origin, spoke Spanish, while the Moroccan envoy to France and England in 1698, Abdallah bin Aisha, spoke Spanish and English very well. Until the late seventeenth century, many of the Ottoman envoys to European courts were official imperial interpreters (tercüman/dragomans) who were almost without exception converts to Islam and spoke various European languages. But linguistic and cultural mediation was not limited to dragomans; evidence from the sources suggests that it could also be performed ad hoc by individuals found locally, often merchants or (former) Muslim, Turkish- or Arabic-speaking subjects who could themselves be Christians, Jews, or Muslim converts.48

Although fewer than the narratives produced by early modern European diplomats and travellers journeying to Muslim polities, a number of Muslim accounts of diplomatic missions and travel to Europe survive. They do not constitute a thematically or ideologically homogeneous corpus but reflect the variety of their authors’ political backgrounds, levels of familiarity with European culture, and awareness of theological differences among Christians. For some diplomatic travellers, like the two Morisco ambassadors of the Moroccan ruler Muley Zaydan, Ahmet ibn Abdallah and Ahmad ibn Qasim al-Hajari, travel to Europe was a journey into the abode of intellectual disputation and polemical contestation. Other Muslim ambassadors’ accounts were less concerned with theology and more with visiting and describing local sites and institutions of interest as part of their task to learn the ways of their hosts and relate the marvels of the Land of the Christians. In eighteenth-century France, ambassadors are known to have toured the Louvre and Versailles, visited the royal library, watched theatre plays and opera.49 The Druze emir Fakhr al-Din al-Ma’ani’s journey from Mount Lebanon to Italy and Malta between 1613 and 1618 was primarily intended as seeking help against the Ottomans, but the official record of it included an elaborate and enthusiastic description of the sites, culture, people, institutions, and governing practices the emir witnessed.50
Both Muslim and Christian sources also suggest that Muslim envoys were met with considerable interest among the local social and intellectual elites, and that missions entailed a great degree of sociability, including with elite women. Ambassadors were dined and entertained both publicly and in the homes of nobility, where their manners, eating and drinking habits, and luxurious clothing were closely scrutinized and later narrated and imitated. Considerable literary, artistic, and material evidence survives from across Europe of this elite interest in and engagement with Ottoman culture, especially between 1650 and 1750. As a recent study argues, this phenomenon of turquerie ‘was not solely a European representation of a foreign people, but a set of responses to an increase in the movement of Ottoman [and Maghrebi] goods and ideas’. However, by the mid-eighteenth century, the balance of power and trade between the Ottoman Empire and its European interlocutors began to shift to the latter’s advantage, gradually increasing the cultural distance that for a couple of centuries prior seemed much more bridgeable.

Scholars

In addition to slaves, merchants, travellers, and diplomats, one can distinguish another group of Muslims in Europe, which intersects with these categories but operates in a different context. Between the sixteenth and eighteenth centuries, different Muslim men of learning sojourned in Europe, typically as captives or diplomats, and participated in the development of European oriental studies—a scholarly phenomenon closely tied both to humanist learning and to European polities’ military, mercantile, and religious involvement with the Muslim world. Until recently, however, the centrality of the Arabic, Turkish, and Persian speakers (Muslims, Jews, Maronites, converts, etc.)—both those residing in Europe and those interacting with Christian scholars, missionarues, and diplomats in the Middle East and North Africa—to the development of oriental studies in Europe has been largely overlooked.

Some Muslims’ involvement in this intellectual enterprise is better studied. Al-Hasan al-Wazzan, the Moroccan diplomat of Granadan background who was captured at sea in 1518 and presented to Pope Leo X, was baptized in Rome as Leo Africanus. He became a tutor of Arabic to various humanists gathered around Pope Leo X who were interested in oriental languages as a means of disseminating Latin Christianity to Muslims and bringing about the union of eastern Christians with Rome. The humanist (and Protestant) motto of returning to the sources also gave an impetus to the study of Arabic (and other Semitic languages), as it was seen as a linguistically more stable ‘archive’ that could help scholars discern the ‘original’ meaning of the Hebrew words in the Old Testament. Leo Africanus thus transcribed and translated various texts from Arabic, worked on an
Arabic–Hebrew–Latin dictionary, wrote a treatise on Arabic grammar and Arabic poetic metrics, along with several other works and his famous *The Description of Africa*.\(^\text{53}\)

In the later sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, oriental studies went hand in hand with confessional polemics, with the Protestants and Calvinists being particularly interested in Arabic as well as other sources in Semitic languages as a window onto the history of the early Christian Church and the process by which it was ‘corrupted’. Mercantile agreements with the Ottoman Empire in particular facilitated the movement of clerics, missionaries, and scholars eager to spread the Catholic, Lutheran, or Calvinist confession among the Muslims and eastern Christians, but also to collect manuscripts that could shed light on Christian history. Good teachers of Arabic were difficult to find in Europe, which is why native speakers and reliable copyists of texts in Arabic (as well as Persian and Turkish) provoked European scholars’ great interest.

For instance, the Swiss Arabist Hottinger purchased a copy of the Qur’an from a Moroccan captive named Ahmad ibn Ali who had been captured by the Spaniards in 1630 but then travelled through France and Belgium to Leiden, which was the seat of the most dynamic school of Arabic studies in Europe. Here Ahmad ibn Ali apparently copied a number of manuscripts, including a Qur’an, from memory. In Leiden he also crossed paths with a Persian (possibly an Armenian) named Haqq Virdi whom German scholar Adam Olearius had brought from Safavid Iran, and who taught Jacobus Golius, the great Dutch Arabist, Persian and copied Persian manuscripts. A few years earlier, Ahmad b. Qasim al-Hajari, in his capacity as the envoy of the Moroccan sultan Muley Zaydan, visited Leiden and conversed with professors of Arabic, Thomas Erpenius and Jacobus Golius, with whom he was also in scholarly correspondence later, upon his return to North Africa. Previously, during his stay in Paris, al-Hajari had assisted the French Arabist Etiene Hubert (d. 1614) in his study of Arabic and left marginal notes on a number of his manuscripts, now in the Bibliothèque Nationale. Another captive, an Ottoman Muslim known as Dervish Ibrahim, who was owned by the Styrian nobleman Baron Siegfried Preiner, worked in the 1610s as a copyist of the Ottoman manuscripts for Sebastian Tengnagel, the librarian of the Vienna Hofbibliothek.\(^\text{54}\) These are just a few individuals whose names have come to light in recent research but who are a part of a larger network of Muslim, Jewish, and Christian intermediaries from the Middle East who corresponded with European orientalists and significantly contributed to their work.\(^\text{55}\)

This makes the social history of early modern Orientalism a fascinating new field that promises to nuance Edward Said’s thesis.
Conclusion

As recent research reveals, contrary to traditional historiography, Muslims were a part of the European social landscape throughout the early modern era. In Ottoman southeast and central Europe they constituted the ruling class, while in the Polish–Lithuanian Commonwealth they were a substantial, enfranchised community with full religious and civil rights equalling those of Polish nobility. In western Europe their presence was not equally prominent everywhere, but they comprised small communities in key trade, slave, diplomatic, and scholarly centres. This survey of recent historiography has highlighted the diversity of the local legal and diplomatic arrangements in place to accommodate Muslim slaves’, traders’, travellers’, or diplomats’ religious practices, leading to what Jocelyne Dakhlia and Bernard Vincent dubbed ‘an invisible integration’. The evidence of early modern attempts to integrate Muslims could be productively approached in the context of local or state arrangements for accommodating members of different confessional groups in the age of confessional polarization, which have been discussed in historiography under the rubric of vocabularies and concepts of ‘tolerance’. The position of Muslims in European polities, just as the position of non-Muslims in the Ottoman Empire and Barbary states, was certainly dictated by the local moral economies of political integration, in addition to particular theological frameworks. However, as recent historiography suggests, trade and diplomatic interests between the Islamicate and Christian polities in the early modern era created conditions of parity that enabled religious minorities in these polities occasionally to invoke the principles of symmetry and reciprocity that prompted the articulation of new legal frameworks. In light of this, it may be advisable to speak, in particular historical contexts, of ‘Christianate’ early modern European societies in which religious practice and participation in the political culture was not limited to Christian denominations. While the parity between Islamicate and European polities was always tenuous, by the late eighteenth century the balance was definitively tipped in the Europeans’ favour, leading to the erasure of Muslims and Islam from the narrative about a culturally distinct European ‘civilization’.

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Further Reading

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Notes:


(2.) See vol. 2, chapter 23, for more on this.


(4.) On this process see E. Natalie Rothman, Brokering Empire—Trans-Imperial Subjects between Venice and Istanbul (Ithaca, 2012).

(5.) References to this literature will be provided throughout the chapter.

(6.) I am using the adjective ‘Islamicate’, adapting Marshall Hodgson’s definition of the term, to refer to polities ruled by Muslim rulers but in which religious practice and participation in political culture was not restricted to Islam and Muslims. For Hodgson’s definition see The Venture of Islam: Conscience and History in a World Civilization (Chicago, 1974), Vol. I, 59.


(8.) L. P. Harvey, Islamic Spain, 1250–1500 (Chicago, 1990), 7.

(9.) Cited in Constable, ‘Muslims’, 328.

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(27.) Minkov, Conversion to Islam, 41–47.


(32.) Molly Greene, Catholic Pirates and Greek Merchants (Princeton, 2010); János Varga, ‘Ransoming Ottoman Slaves from Munich (1688)’, in Géza Dávid and Pál Fodor, eds., Ransom Slavery along the Ottoman Borders (Leiden, Boston, 2007), 169–182.


(36.) Salzmann, ‘Migrants in Chains’.


(42.) Rothman, Brokering Empire, 198–201.

(43.) Rothman, Brokering Empire, 203–208.


(45.) Maria Pia Pedani, In Nome del Gran Signore (Venice, 2004), 203–209.


(47.) Do Paço, 70–71.


(49.) Matar, Europe, 98.


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Abstract and Keywords

The popular culture of early modern Europe is best conceptualized as ‘the cultures of peoples’ because of the continent’s diversity. Historians of popular culture have explored the interdisciplinary territory between history and anthropology, art history, literary theory, gender, and cognitive studies. Few fields have been more transformed by the methodological and theoretical shifts of the history profession. Such inquiries have overturned generalizations about the dependence of popular culture on elite culture, the monolithic nature of popular culture, and the supposed shortcomings of its religious practices. Attention to popular culture has revealed the impact of ordinary people on state development, the porous boundaries between learned and popular knowledge, and the selective appropriation of elite culture for popular purposes. This chapter assesses current dilemmas in the field, including contemporary confusion between microhistory and micronarratives and the potential pitfalls of seeking a contemporary audience for the study of popular cultures.

Keywords: Popular culture, early modern Europe, microhistory, cultural history, history and anthropology

_fields have been more transformed by the methodological and theoretical shifts of the history profession than the study of popular culture. Historians of popular culture have explored the promising interdisciplinary territory between history and anthropology, art history, literary theory, gender, and cognitive studies to uncover the practices and beliefs that shaped the world of ordinary Europeans. The enthusiasm for the study of popular culture emerged from historical interest in the lives of the nameless majority—individuals who had received little attention in the political and intellectual histories of elites that dominated historical writing in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.¹ From the
subsequent methodological innovations of the Annales school and of quantitative history, to the interventions of Marxist and social historians of the 1950s and 1960s, an analysis of popular culture seemed the logical next frontier of scholarly investigation. Marxist historians E. P. Thompson and Eugene Genovese had presaged the turn to culture with their path-breaking (and controversial) studies of working classes and slaves. Subsequently, scholars enriched our understanding of popular culture in early modern Europe, adding to the knowledge of individuals whose work, families, and demography were brought into sharper view by new methodologies and new sources.

The Rediscovery of Popular Culture

Yet, what was new to twentieth-century historians was also already an old subject. Early modern Europeans had reflected frequently on the cultural disparities between elites and common people, or between the learned and the illiterate, typically to note the shortcomings of the latter and the virtues of the former. In a telling metaphor, Jesuit missionaries to southern Italy in the sixteenth century referred to the area as the ‘Indies down here’, an unsettling insight among many by which elites fathomed the culture of the common people as ‘pagan’ and ‘primitive’ as that of the inhabitants of alien new worlds, exploited by European global expansion. The gaze of reformers episodically scrutinized the culture of the lower classes throughout the early modern period. In the late eighteenth century, elites would turn with renewed enthusiasm to confront the culture of the people, but this time with an eye toward capturing its curiosities, vanishing oral culture, and dwindling repository of songs and stories. That elites regarded it either as foreign or as a prehistory of their own more sophisticated culture underscored what they perceived as the gulf between popular and elite culture. A culture once shared across society had become the marginalized and exclusive patrimony of the poorly educated and labouring classes by the end of the early modern period. Vanished was the experience of previous centuries, during which at least a few practices still held some shared meanings for a diversity of social groups across the hierarchies of early modern European society.

The attitudes of early modern elites toward popular culture are embedded in the sources for popular culture which—as one scholar of popular culture rightly reminds us—were almost exclusively gathered by learned people. Early modern notions of the popular can mislead as much as they inform modern scholars in their quest to understand popular culture. The powerful have long had an interest in disparaging the ideas of the lowly. The separation and superiority of elite culture was an ideological assertion of which later historians had to remain wary if they were to examine popular culture with insight.
Elite commentary in the early modern period obscured the diversity of popular culture, its metamorphoses, *sui generis* Christianity, and the complexity of its relations with elite culture. Modern scholars of popular culture have confronted comparable difficulties in defining popular culture and delineating its boundaries, projects to which early modern intellectuals had already devoted considerable effort, sometimes to the detriment of popular culture in their own and in later times.

**Deciphering Popular Culture: Modern Methods and Dilemmas**

The history of the field in its modern incarnation emerged in immediate controversy over vague terminology, problematic sources, and competing methodologies. The arrival of new methods has scarcely been linear—competing approaches in the field of popular culture have moved in a wavelike motion, heading to the historiographical shore at the same time, crisscrossing each other and influencing the impact any one method might have on the field had it reached its target unchallenged. I trace the impact of these interventions in roughly chronological order. As the study of popular culture has gained significance and sophistication, it has become somewhat less visible as a field unto itself, since its areas of interest have become incorporated into specializations as disparate as the history of religion, medicine, politics, law, and family life. The popular has entered the realm of almost every line of inquiry to which historians have dedicated themselves in the last decades. Historians’ interest in popular culture also contributed to the ‘popular turn’ in historical writing, specifically the interest in reaching broader audiences through the narration of intriguing stories and anecdotes about people in the past, especially ordinary people whose lives contained sensational material. Popular culture in the age of historical storytelling faces particular challenges to which I will turn at the end of the chapter.

While recent critics of the field of popular culture have faulted it for its lack of theorizing and clear definitions,11 the problem of defining popular culture was an issue of great concern among its early practitioners. Whose culture was it anyway? On the one hand, a general picture of early modern Europe could underscore similarities among its ordinary people that might support a notion of cultural unity: most Europeans worked the land or were connected in some way to agrarian life. Yet even among these people there were vast differences in living arrangements, legal status, and political participation.12 Historians investigating issues as varied as carnival, tax rebellions, witchcraft, and cross-dressing had to contend with the numerous divisions and subdivisions in European society—between cities and countryside, between the artisans and the peasant classes, between better off and worse off artisans in the same trades. Peter Burke, author of an
early synthesis that has remained a touchstone in the field, recognized the dilemma. He acknowledged the diversity of the people of Europe as well as the sheer variety of their beliefs and practices. In addition to the urban–rural dichotomy, Burke noted the presence of a large number of ‘sub-cultures’, hypothesizing that popular culture might be the sum of these sub-cultures, including peasants (in their various conditions throughout Europe); tradespeople (divided in their different guilds); thieves and vagabonds (who had their own vocabularies and practices so secret it is difficult to track them); and diverse ethnic and religious groups. It is more accurate to envision popular culture in the plural—‘popular cultures’, or the more comprehensive plurality of ‘cultures of peoples’ reflects even better the reality of the European scene. Some exceptional individuals seemed to straddle various divides, mediators whose origins were popular but whose mastery of learning gained them access to literate circles. Noblewomen occupied a liminal cultural ground as well—their haphazard education placed them anywhere from semi-literacy to literacy. Their daily activities, household responsibilities, and religious proclivities created ties between them and the labouring classes for work-related and charitable reasons. Such mediators crossed divides but could not mend them, and diversity remained a key characteristic of European culture across the early modern period.

Rather than this cacophony of popular cultures, critics of Burke tended to focus on Burke’s more general definitions of popular culture, derived from the anthropologist Robert Redfield who emphasized the binary between the little and the great tradition. Burke hypothesized that in the sixteenth century, most Europeans partook of the little (unlearned) traditions, but that the upper classes knew also the high cultural traditions forged through literacy, education, and access to the courts of power where high culture was practised at increasingly greater distance from the rest of society. In this nexus, the notion of the popular was that shared by the whole of society—with only the elites understanding both the great and the little traditions. Ritual practices, especially religious, civic, and carnival festivities seemed to bring episodic coherence to the European scene, strengthening (if only briefly) the bonds among people of various backgrounds and ranks. A common reservoir of stories, songs, and proverbs may have been shared across social classes, although until the proliferation of printing, these likely had strong regional inflections. Over the course of the early modern period, festivals and traditions became ‘play’ for the learned and the well-born. Elites participated only halfheartedly or with amusement, in contrast to the serious dedication required of high culture which only the upper classes consumed or created.

This broad map of change first outlined by Peter Burke remains in dispute. However, his early interest in the social cohesion offered by ritual underscored emerging trends in the scholarship on popular culture which interpreted such activities as clues to popular beliefs and attitudes. In exploring rituals, scholars of popular culture found themselves
entangled in a world bizarre and indecipherable. Charivari and shaming rituals, youth organizations and ritual murders, magical beliefs and shamanism—all inspired historians to turn to the insights of anthropology. Anthropologists had long faced similar challenges in interpreting phenomena that at first glance seemed inexplicable to outsiders but through careful study were rendered intelligible and invaluable for understanding a society’s culture. Past and present ‘primitives’ sometimes encountered each other in twentieth-century historiography. Early modern beliefs and practices led historians to compare similar tales employed for comparable purposes around the globe. Sixteenth-century inquisitorial testimony in northern Italy on the resurrection of oxen from their desiccated bones, for instance, might be deciphered by evidence from the Vedda of Sri Lanka or the Yamana of the Tierra del Fuego. The ritual pillaging of the palaces of former popes in Rome could be illuminated by Van Gennep’s treatment of rites of passage among the peoples of Madagascar. The potential for conflict to support rather than subvert the social order in African societies provided clues for the interpretation of similar occurrences in European history. While cultural anthropology was in the ascendant, its findings in particular served as an additional evidentiary base with which to compare the popular culture of early modern Europeans—and its methodological intervention of reading rituals, as one might read texts, sparked new interest in the study of popular culture.

Historians drew particular inspiration from the interpretive possibilities of ‘thick description’ as elaborated by the anthropologist Clifford Geertz. His highly influential essay, ‘Deep Play: Notes on the Balinese Cockfight’, illustrated the possibilities in a nuanced reading of ‘social actions’ through which participants and spectators constructed meanings. Geertz believed that the task of the anthropologist was ‘to converse with [the natives]’ about the meanings of rituals such as cockfighting. Rather than revealing a static map of cultural symbols, the cockfight enacted ‘status concerns’ and rivalries between powerful men and rival kin groups in Balinese society. Likening cockfighting to art forms, he argued for its significance as ‘a story that [the Balinese] tell themselves about themselves’. Like literature or theatre, it organized disparate observations and experiences into a more intelligible whole. Geertz’s attention to the cockfight was limited—he focused specifically on men engaged in prestige betting, thereby excluding the views of lower class men, adolescents, and women from his analysis. The cockfights so meticulously reconstructed by the anthropologist revealed how such rituals both re-enacted status divisions and reinforced solidarities. They provided simultaneously an outlet for violence otherwise strictly prohibited but constrained such animosities within a highly scripted ritual for their expression. Geertzian insights on culture influenced historians working across European contexts—from religious violence in French towns, to Dutch rebels turned burghers in the
seventeenth century, to carnivals gone bad in northern Italy. The method of thick description and the practice of collapsing distinctions between reading texts, rituals, and artefacts provided new approaches in history, including and especially the history of popular culture. It is the Janus-like nature of ritual that came to dominate its European interpretations: ritual both summoned and restrained divisions in early modern society.

Historians of popular culture intertwined anthropology in their work, drawing upon its methods, its materials based upon observations from around the globe, and its conceptualization of culture. Burke’s incorporation of an anthropologist’s definition of popular culture was emblematic of one kind of borrowing between the two fields. Geertz’s notion (inspired by Max Weber) of culture as ‘webs of significance’ was another type of cross-pollination between the two. At the same time, historians turned to more problematic sources such as the records of the inquisition. Carlo Ginzburg hypothesized that there were links between the anthropologist and the inquisitor, stressing the dialogic aspects of each exchange. Both inquisitors and anthropologists encountered strange ideas that they pursued with further questioning. Such moments of incomprehensibility could illuminate ‘a deep cultural layer which was totally foreign to the inquisitors’ but which could be particularly revealing of popular beliefs and practices. For some critics, the paradigm was undermined by the recognition of the mutual invention of reality in the exchange between the anthropologist and her informants, or between the inquisitor and the accused. Geertz and Ginzburg, while acknowledging such dilemmas, insisted that there were better and worse guesses at cultural meanings, and that the task of the scholar was to draw ‘explanatory conclusions from the better guesses’. Through careful analysis and rigorous attention to sources, the historian could overcome ‘the referential fallacy’—the claim that historians could only construct the world of texts but not the actual beliefs and practices of early modern people. The gap between scholarly understanding and early modern culture could be bridged through meticulous and comparative analysis of texts.

Alongside increasing enthusiasm for the reading of the rituals of early modern Europe, historians of popular culture continued to mine the vast array of printed materials that circulated widely in early modern Europe: chapbooks, broadsheets, and cheaply printed images of popular devotion seemed to offer tantalizing remnants of popular songs, sayings, and beliefs. Through scrutinizing such sources historians hoped that they might glimpse the worldview or the mentalité of the popular classes. In a comparative exploration of European folktales, for instance, Robert Darnton surmised the higher value that French peasants placed on cleverness, the tendency for Italians to resort instead to ‘buffa-Machiavellianism’, and the Germans’ predilection for the supernatural and the macabre. Investigations of chapbooks suggested the indebtedness of popular culture to elite culture—the absorption and simplification of the materials of high culture...
for popular audiences. Chapbooks and cheap print might indicate the monolithic nature of popular culture, since the same stories and themes seemed to recycle repetitively across time and reinforced resignation to the social order. With the proliferation of the printing press and the wider circulation of cheaper editions, the oral traditions of popular culture were perhaps weakened by their contact with the homogenizing influence of printed texts and images.

A more sophisticated understanding of print culture and greater attention to the problem of reception undermined many of these straightforward readings of popular culture. Although such cheap printed materials were evidently in wide circulation, they could not be equated with popular culture itself. Nor could it be assumed that such texts had a unidirectional impact upon popular culture. In more substantive studies of the origins of popular texts and their readership, many texts presumed to be popular were discovered to have been targeted to elites and middling sorts. The content of print culture when consumed by ordinary people was likely absorbed in unforeseen and unpredictable ways. As Natalie Zemon Davis observed, print did not necessarily undermine oral culture as much as enrich it. Reading aloud brought such materials to the illiterate and also encouraged interpretations that may have belied the original or elite meanings of the text. While the proliferation of printed texts certainly had some impact upon popular culture, historians remain divided as to how to assess the extent of its influence. In a brilliant reading of the popular imagery of the Reformation, Bob Scribner analysed the communicative potential of cheap print, especially if combined with pictures. Simple texts and evocative images effectively exploited a widespread anticlericalism to achieve an effective ‘propaganda’ for Lutheranism. Image trumped text in some cases in the successful relaying of message, considerably deflating the axiom that it was the reading of the Bible that was integral to the spread of the Reformation. Through a meticulous reconstruction of the iconography of early Protestant prints, Scribner showed the power of such images to draw upon popular sentiment against Rome. They effectively made the argument against the Catholic Church, even if the tenets of the new faith—such as salvation by grace—were harder to teach in pictures.

The sophisticated scrutiny of printed evidence underscored the significance of the relationship between popular and elite culture, but failed to resolve the dilemma of influence: was the dynamic best understood as a multi-directional appropriation, a unidirectional influence due to the vaunted superiority of elite culture, or an increasing incomprehensibility between elite and popular culture? The spread of manners and the circulation of texts such as Giovanni della Casa’s Galateo or Baldassare Castiglione’s Book of the Courtier furthered elite notions that the educated and cultured individual had to separate his behaviours from those of the lower classes. For popular culture had its unsavoury aspects, including bear-baiting, anti-Semitism, and misogyny (although many
of its worst traits were shared by elites). There is mixed evidence to support the notion
that the culture of the lower classes was necessarily more violent, though such
individuals were more likely to be brought to court for their criminal offences. In their
collective behaviour, ordinary people could be considerably less violent than
their superiors. In the largest rural uprising prior to the peasant wars of Germany in the
1520s, peasants in the Friuli rose against their noble lords during the carnival of 1511.
They showed considerable restraint in their uprising, targeting mostly written records,
valuables, and property in their attempt to overturn seigneurial dues and eliminate their
debts to usurious landlords. Meanwhile in the city of Udine, nobles and their retainers
butchered each other with ferocity, allowing dogs to feed on the bodies of those they
murdered.

Popular practices looked dangerous from the point of view of the European elites who
attempted to control and manage the towns and cities that sprang up in the late Middle
Ages and continued to grow to unwieldy sizes in the early modern period. The legislative
attempts of such urban settings offered the possibility of observing popular culture in
additional sources. City officials sought to reform activities that were seen as crude,
uncivilized, or rebellion-making. Increasingly under scrutiny was the problem of
festivities in a world in which there was a plethora of holidays and saints days, including
but not limited to the well-known exuberance of carnival, days of reverie before the
penitential solemnity of Lent. In Venice, the city with the most meticulous control of such
festivals, the ruling elites eliminated raucous neighbourhood celebrations in favour of a
centralized and coordinated set of rituals that underscored the power of the Venetian
state. Venetian elites attempted to minimize spontaneous brawling and competing
neighbourhood festivities. It was, however, impossible to control all popular
entertainments, no matter how potentially rebel-rousing. Even in the carefully
choreographed Venice, working class battles on bridges (though prohibited) continued to
be waged.

Judicial Evidence and the Method of Microhistory

Although the legislation of popular culture did provide some insights into its practices, it
was inquisitorial and other judicial archives that drastically reconfigured how historians
thought about popular culture. Trial evidence seemed to offer a more direct means of
examining popular culture. Its first-person testimony recovered the voices of those who
otherwise could only be known obliquely through the observations and laws of elites or
through the cheap printed artefacts that passed through their hands, but were not of
their own making. It was in the archives of the judiciary that some of the most
substantive breakthroughs in popular culture emerged. Such research significantly
undermined our ability to generalize about ordinary people and their culture. It was on the most marginalized members of society that historians focused their attention: heretics, thieves, prostitutes, and the usual suspects were lassoed by the increasing reach of state and church institutions. Ordinary people also poured into the expanding state tribunals on their own initiative, seeking redress for problems in their families and their communities. Against the testimony of the accused the words of witnesses and victims also had to be weighed. Judicial archives moved marginal people into view, and they proved to be—more often than not—as unexpected to historians as they were unwelcome by their persecutors. Their testimony had the potential to reveal what the historian Carlo Ginzburg referred to as the ‘really dead’, the past without a contemporary iteration in our world but whose existence the judicial archives now helped to excavate.47

In his study of the beliefs of one such ordinary European, Carlo Ginzburg brought to life the cosmology and modes of reading of the heretical miller Domenico Scandella, called Menocchio of Monte Reale, a village of the Friuli region in the northeastern corner of the Italian peninsula.48 Menocchio was a discovery of Ginzburg’s early excursions into inquisitorial archives in the early 1960s, a point at which Ginzburg and his generation confronted the problem of the compromised nature of inquisitorial sources—the disparity of power between the inquisitor and the interrogated, the coaching by lawyers that masked the beliefs of the accused in the cloak of legal safety, the determination of the orthodox to destroy the beliefs of the ‘deviants’. Ginzburg argued that such shortcomings could be overcome if the dialogic nature of these sources was acknowledged. The premise of the methodology was that the inquisitorial moment brought into dialogue two groups whose miscomprehensions and misunderstandings revealed something about the culture of each side, but most fruitfully for the historian of popular culture, the perspective of the persecuted. Microhistory thus emphasized places in trial transcripts in which the two sides failed to comprehend each other, or the coaching of the lawyer broke down and the accused ventured into territory legally inadvisable but subsequently revealing to the historian of the mentalité of individuals inaccessible by other means.

At the point of such ‘ruptures’ in the sources ‘a conflicting cultural reality may leak out even from such heavily controlled texts as inquisitorial texts’, Ginzburg hypothesized.49 Ginzburg asserted that a historical reality and a set of analysable popular beliefs existed and could be grasped through a meticulous exegesis of a particular trial or through the comparative analysis of similar evidence in many sources. Microhistory, as elaborated by its early Italian practitioners, was passionately empirical about what its explication of the ‘normal exception’ could reveal about historical problems difficult to address in quantitative data.50 Microhistorians acknowledged that the historian, having eliminated the unlikely interpretive possibilities, had to accept the interpretation that remained as the best interpretive conjecture. This ‘conjectural paradigm’ (paradigma indiziario)
helped to solidify the practice of reading closely a limited number of cases to shed light on popular culture. Its links to scientific modes of reasoning were apparent, especially in its recognition that any understanding of popular culture was only the best reigning interpretation—to be overturned in light of subsequent evidence or better readings of the evidence.

The paradigm shift that emerged with the practice of microhistory in the 1980s and the 1990s was prefigured in Carlo Ginzburg’s *Cheese and the Worms* (published in Italian in 1976, in English in 1980). While his study did not employ the word microhistory, it became recognized as an exemplary text for illustrating the method. The arrival of Menocchio and a number of other idiosyncratic individuals from judicial archives compromised many generalizations about the European past, literacy, village life, and popular culture. The attention to the lives of the marginalized revealed in such sources undermined frameworks that had organized historical thinking about popular culture, irrevocably undermining the notion that popular culture passively absorbed the influences of elite culture. Menocchio’s beliefs suggested a complex interplay between popular and elite ideas. It revealed the relative autonomy of popular culture at the level of the village, where popular culture existed apart from elite culture. In Menocchio’s village, Ginzburg argued, peasant culture rested on the logic of materialism—the notion that the world had a material origin at its beginning and that its physical realities had to be considered even in the context of the claims of the miraculous. Menocchio could not imagine that anything, including theology or religion, could originate without matter. Thus the universe had to have begun with a corporeal substance (the cheese, out of which worms emerged who became the angels) rather than in the spiritual realm of the divine. Menocchio had difficulty with all things theological that violated this principle. He selectively read texts to support this worldview. As Ginzburg slyly noted, this peasant materialism may have been more sophisticated (at that moment) than the culture of the clerics who interrogated, catechized, and then killed Menocchio. But it was they, rather than Menocchio who had the upper hand in the sixteenth century.

Menocchio’s ideas evidently had enough resonance with the villagers that they listened to him for several decades, seemingly without scandal though noting later (at the questions of the inquisitors) that his views may have been unorthodox. Since the socially derived ethics of the villagers were based on the notion that wrong was what did harm to others, the villagers did not seem to have associated his rambling cosmology with wrongdoing, in contrast to the way they saw their village priest’s request to have sexual relations with their daughters. Menocchio extended his materialist view to the notion that theological truth was socially constructed—that the adherence to any creed (Judaism, Christianity, or Islam) was the outcome of one’s upbringing. His adherence to religious tolerance was one heretical aspect of his thought that he did not surrender even during his second trial for...
heresy, a point at which he did deny his other heretical beliefs. From Menocchio’s testimony and that of his fellow villagers emerged a hitherto little known village world in which there was access to the world of books shared among the literate and semi-literate. Such books were absorbed through re-interpretation, and sometimes without reference to the original meaning of the texts. Their message was read through the ‘lens’ of peasant materialism, as Ginzburg characterized it, and so the contents of such texts did not supersede as much as become refracted and then appropriated in pieces into oral culture. At least at the time of Menocchio’s first trial in 1584, village culture was relatively tolerant of theological debate. Menocchio’s idiosyncratic views did not hold him back from offices in the village government or the Church. Theological talk—even if heretical—did not marginalize Menocchio until the last years of his life.

The discovery of Menocchio and similarly iconic villagers from around Europe complicated what historians could conclude about the relationship between learned and popular culture. The early hypothesis in studies of popular culture of a simple trickle down effect of high culture to low had to be eliminated. Burke’s notion that popular culture ‘was a sieve’ through which not all elite ideas could pass might be closer to the mark. Ginzburg’s metaphor of popular culture was the ‘lens’—which produced alternative ways of viewing the same ideas, or distorting them, depending on what one thought of the original texts. The literary scholar Mikhail Bakhtin had theorized in the 1940s that the relationship between popular and elite culture prior to the Reformation was one of circular influences and appropriations. Although Bakhtin based his interpretation on literary sources, with the translation of his work in the 1960s and the emergence of new data from the archives, his insight seemed to make more sense of what happened at the village level, at least prior to the incursion of the European inquisitions. Judicial evidence complicated historians’ ability to see popular culture simply as an inflexible and inferior frame into which loftier ideas were poured, with mixed results. Although Menocchio’s reading was piecemeal and eclectic, it suggested a more sophisticated approach to texts and to the use of printed material and its meanings. Menocchio’s popular culture, like that of other individuals who emerged from judicial evidence, found ‘its originality in what it [did] with … fragments’. Microhistorians’ focus on the drama of the encounter insisted that something was in play in the dialogue—all the scripts were not necessarily set, and though the disparity of power meant that there would likely be damage to popular belief in such encounters, popular practices proved to be resilient. In Catholic Europe, especially Italy, recidivist heretics (like Menocchio) were killed but first-time heretics and those accused of witchcraft were seen as being in need of healing rather than incarceration or execution. Exorcism became a standard recourse. It continues to be debated how much changed in popular belief in the face of milder inquisitorial methods.
Religion and Popular Culture

The study of popular culture has not fully recovered from the exploration of judicial archives—generalizations have vanished without legitimate successors. The splintering of Europe between Catholicism and Protestant sects further complicates our understanding of popular culture in the wake of such changes. The continent witnessed a proliferation of interest on the part of all religious denominations in reforming popular culture and popular belief. Both sides of the religious divide noted that popular religious rituals had unsettling parallels to pre-Christian pagan cults of antiquity. Such festivities also elided the separation between the secular and the sacred, a boundary of increasing interest to religious elites of all sorts. In one extreme interpretation of Christianity in this period, Jean Delumeau argued that it was only with the advent of the Protestant Reformation and the Catholic response to it that vast numbers of the European population was Christianized at all. A variety of sources suggest that there was a paucity of knowledge about Christian theology among ordinary people. The claim by Jesuits, for instance, that the south represented the ‘Indies down here’ was but one of the uncomfortable parallels for clerical elites between non-Christian indigenous people elsewhere in the globe and rural Europeans.

It is difficult, however, to gauge the Christianity associated with the popular classes. With the proliferation of interest in heresy on the part of the Inquisition and other religious authorities, anyone interrogated for heresy or as a witness to it likely had a vested interest in proclaiming ignorance rather than risk being tripped into error regarding the thornier matters of theology. The notion that the popular classes were not Christian also rests on too narrow a definition of Christian belief to constitute a fair assessment of the Christianity of Europe’s majority. Theological fine points continued to be debated among theologians, but were scarcely necessary to understanding the essentials of Christianity, which for many ordinary Europeans was based on doing charitable works and performing ritual practices that seemed to be thriving as well as ever on the eve of the Reformation in many corners of the continent. It was religious reformers on all sides who would promote the notion of Christianity as conformity to orthodox beliefs, rather than as ritual practice. The reform (or elimination) of suspect Roman Catholic rituals and practices in favour of new forms of spirituality and interior conformity to new orthodoxies would take multiple generations to achieve among Protestants. It may still be a work-in-progress among Roman Catholics.

The power to impose new forms of spirituality and conformity to religious practices increasingly came to be seen as the twin goals of religious and state authorities—beginning in the sixteenth century, and continuing with greater success in the
seventeenth century. The outcome was secured partly by the overlapping interest in state and religious authorities to bring popular belief and popular behaviour into conformity with the norms that would create docile adherents to reformed religion and compliant subjects of early modern states. The collusion between state authority and the religious reform of Martin Luther had been integral to the success of the latter in surviving persecution by Catholic authorities. The collaboration of such authorities came to be a familiar part of the European landscape in both Protestant and Catholic regimes. In the sixteenth century, Habsburg monarchs such as Charles V pushed the Catholic agenda against heresy with more energy than did the popes. State–church efforts seemed to explain the process by which ordinary Europeans came to accept the demands of religious reformers and of centralizing monarchs. Such a view fit well with increasing fascination by historians with the work of the theorist Michel Foucault, especially in his view of the significance of the disciplining process of modern states. Both through punishments and the interiorization of the demands of the Church and state, ordinary Europeans (who had been among the most rebellious people on earth between the mid-sixteenth and the mid-seventeenth centuries) came to accept the claims that authorities made upon their earthly and their spiritual lives. A variant of this thesis had emerged with the historians’ earliest excursions into the inquisitorial archives, where it was assumed that prosecution had been a key factor in the erosion of popular beliefs in magic and witchcraft. The social disciplining thesis provided an appealing analogue to explain change among an even broader spectrum of society, including among the many who never faced tribunals, but who gradually abandoned popular practices, rituals, and behaviours in favour of what the religious and state powers determined were orthodoxy and good behaviour.

In the Catholic world, the offices and the reach of the inquisitions expanded their scope. By the late 1560s, parish priests who had formerly been allowed to forgive heresy through confession were compelled to use their role as confessor to turn over cases of heretical belief to church officials. There was greater emphasis on the parish as the institutional framework for documenting religious participation. Increasingly regulatory demands were made upon the parish priests, whose training was now more assiduously attended by the bishop. Throughout Catholic and Protestant Europe literacy was encouraged as a mode for catechizing and internalizing orthodoxy. Even the increasing number of marriage courts offered by church authorities served (in the view of some historians) to reinforce the Church’s authority in determining what was appropriate to marital and familial life. Such tribunals, however, provided exits to particularly bad unions. Similar institutional interventions in the Protestant world, led by church hierarchy, implemented by pastors, and subject to scrutiny by religious and civic authorities eventually undermined the lingering residue of discredited Catholic rituals. The social disciplining thesis underscored the fragility of popular beliefs in the face of
religious authorities who, in a compact with state officials, imposed the disciplining functions of religion to construct orthodox religious subjects, more responsive to the yoke of all authority, religious and secular. The conservative aspects of religious renewal were exemplified early by Martin Luther’s call in 1525 to defeat the German rebelling peasants. Inspired by Luther’s assertion that the Bible was the ultimate authority, German peasants rejected the payment of seigneurial dues since they had no foundation in scripture. Luther called upon the German princes to break them of such notions. Religious support for the existing worldly order continued beyond Luther and assumed subtler but no less insinuating forms in order to suppress dissent in the subsequent centuries. The confessional, the prayer book, and the admonishment of the pastor gradually and insidiously shored up the power of disciplining authorities and dispersed their agenda into popular belief. Popular culture seemed an increasingly fragile entity, undone by reinforcing institutions of power that emerged triumphant by the late seventeenth century.

Though this view seemed to explain the pacification of European populations and the relative domestic tranquility that emerged in much of western Europe beginning in the mid- to late seventeenth century, it has been more difficult to assess the extent to which it modified popular culture. Once again, historians who continued to work in the judicial archives had a decidedly more complex story to tell than those who worked in prescriptive sources. Trial evidence suggested less the triumph of the church–state view than a process of accommodation, by which religious authorities recognized the persistence of popular heterodoxy and in some cases, agreed to participate in its practices. As David Sabean’s struggling eighteenth-century pastor discovered, he could question but not stop certain popular (and cruel) practices among his parishioners when they faced the widespread death of their livestock. While Venetian state and religious authorities had successfully snuffed out the heretical leanings in the republic, interrogations of literate women in seventeenth-century cities revealed a world of eclectic readers who passed from novels to pornography, took in fashion trends and contemplated conversion to Islam. Even the prosecution of the benandanti (good deed doers or shamans) in the Friuli appears to have proceeded more cautiously than was initially believed—as inquisitors and benandanti (now assessed for their potential as exorcists) contrived a co-existence and collaboration to rid the region of its common enemy of demon possession. Historians have detected the threads of early modern popular beliefs into the twenty-first century. Further study of popular belief among Protestant areas of Europe confirmed the long enduring nature of Roman Catholic beliefs and rituals well into the seventeenth century, despite the best efforts of pastors and the powers of their states.
Unexpected Synergies: Popular Culture and State Expansion

Despite the proliferation of the social disciplining thesis, nagging doubts remained among historians who worked at the interstices between the claims of authorities and the lived realities of European life. The extent to which one gauged success depended a great deal on the source vantage point from which one viewed society. It was a well-worn concern in the history of popular culture—it had begun with the debates over the meaning of carnival: did its raucous celebration of the joys of the earth and the critique of its rulers offer the opportunity for questioning the social order? Or was it as some historians asserted, a ‘safety valve’ which allowed ordinary people to vent their frustration but then forced them to return to their assigned roles and their society to its Lenten configuration? Religious and civic elites clearly feared its unruly potential, hence their tendency in the social disciplining mode either to legislate it away, or to prohibit its boundary-breaking between the secular and the religious, or to appropriate its activities in the service of a carefully orchestrated set of rituals in service of state power. Despite the collusion of state and church in many parts of Europe, carnival never disappeared entirely, nor did numerous practices and beliefs which the orthodox decreed were inappropriate. Instead what occurred was a form of cultural bilingualism among the popular classes similar to that which Burke had hypothesized once existed for elites: orthodoxy became another register of meaning to which ordinary Europeans increasingly had access. This underscores their ability to partake of different cultural regimes without becoming wholly immersed in one or the other. Ordinary people became particularly adroit at manipulating the official scripts for their behaviour. As E. P. Thompson cast the exchange, the performance of deference and acquiescence became just one of the theatres in which ordinary people could offer a brilliant recitation of the lines which they hoped would get them results. When the performance failed, they (re)turned to other forms of resistance.

No shift demonstrates this larger range of strategies employed by ordinary people to express their differences with elites better than the utilization of the law courts by ordinary Europeans during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. If rebellions became fewer in those centuries and violent crime began to diminish, it was, in part, due to the proliferation of legal avenues for ordinary people to address their grievances through the courts. European states devoted greater attention to the prosecution of crimes. What in the German context is called the ‘juridification of conflict’ had a European inflection in most countries. The prosecution of witchcraft remains one of the darkest examples of the collusion between state power and the grievances of ordinary people. But courts also proved to be vehicles for mitigating social problems, for addressing the disparities of power between lords and villagers, for exiting bad marriages...
or reinforcing parental responsibilities. From the point of view of political aspirations, the expansion of law courts served on the continent as the means for limiting seigneurial demands and for diminishing the impact of such demands on village life. Law courts doubtless served to reinforce the bonds between ordinary people and the state. In so doing, they reinforced certain tendencies in popular culture toward legalism—the scrupulous attention to the demands imposed by documents and tradition, against which peasants episodically rebelled from the Middle Ages to the French Revolution. In the face of expanding legal venues for addressing such grievances, legalistic tendencies sharpened, skills of bureaucratic navigation increased, and more sophisticated forms of reading and writing proliferated at the most humble levels of society. ‘Adversarial literacy’ or the proliferation of more sophisticated means of protest through reading, writing, and mastering courts and bureaucracies shaped the response of villagers from the end of widespread rebellions in the mid-seventeenth century to the revolutionary changes of the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.78

Neuroscience, Gender, and Medicine

Alongside recent excursions in popular culture and politics, older interests among scholars of the field have been transformed by newer methodologies and approaches. The evolution of the study of magic and witchcraft encapsulates the transformations in the study of popular culture. As witchcraft became a topic of historical interest in the 1960s, scholars placed distance between themselves and earlier approaches, especially that of Margaret Murray, who had posited the existence of practising fertility and pre-Christian cults into the early modern period. Some scholars of witchcraft initially de-emphasized the beliefs in favour of the mechanisms of the witch hunt itself.79 They linked witchcraft persecutions to the expansion of European states, whose officials exploited the witch hunts to consolidate power.80 Interests in the local origins of such persecution located their causes outside witchcraft beliefs—in the disruption caused by the collapse of charitable practices in local communities; the appearance of large numbers of impoverished people, especially older women; disputes over property and power—in sum, issues that were only tangentially related to witchcraft beliefs.81 Witchcraft beliefs, when analysed, were viewed as irrational ramblings that had yet to be stamped out by the rationalizing forces of the state and reformed religion.82 Scholars intrigued by the origins of particular witchcraft beliefs, such as the witches’ Sabbath, increasingly located them at the intersection of elite ideas and popular beliefs brought together through the prosecutions.83

Recent research now focuses more closely on the beliefs and practices of magic and witchcraft, with a view toward understanding how they functioned in society and in
individuals. Edward Bever has linked discoveries from neuroscience to witchcraft testimony. New knowledge of human sleep states and altered brain activity during shamanistic rituals facilitates our understanding of early modern accounts of experiences of the magical and the diabolical. Such occurrences were ‘real’ in the sense that they occurred in response to states of stress and perceptions of social hostility that are now known to produce negative physiological changes in individuals. Shamanistic states could ‘fine-[tune] the nervous system’ in ways that allowed some individuals to have access to information and perceptions unavailable to others. They then used those insights to influence the behaviour of those around them, including for psychological and physiological healing. Just as the human dream state is now recognized not as suppressing but as reorganizing experiences to produce learning, shamans in their altered mental states gained access to alternative ways of perceiving the world. Bever’s provocative intervention demonstrates the relevance of current research in cognitive science for understanding popular belief, underscoring the extent to which humans both in the past and the present ‘cannot … choose between rationality and inspiration, for we are hard-wired for both’.

A more rigorous attention to gender in the last decades has mapped the difference between gender notions of the lower classes and those of the elites. While across society misogynist views towards women prevailed, ideas of masculinity and femininity varied considerably. In a thought-provoking study of English balladry, Dianne Dugaw uncovered such divisions in her examination of the wildly popular songs that celebrated warrior women between the mid-seventeenth and mid-nineteenth centuries. The warrior women’s laudable exploits were repeatedly published and occasionally repackaged to reflect changes in their audiences. From the mid-seventeenth century through much of the eighteenth century, cross-dressing women who wandered to battle in search of relatives and lovers populated songs that sold well. Such women were regarded as plausible heroes because there was a close connection between the deeds and physical strength of such ‘fictional’ women and the activities and proclivities of working women, whose lives were marked by raw physical labour roughly equivalent to that of their male peers. Labouring women frequently employed the practice of cross-dressing if it made travel or work easier in certain contexts. Cross-dressing in general was a familiar practice among women and men in the early modern period, underscoring the extent to which gender, or the social construction of sex, was determined by appearance, clothing, and behaviour rather than biological difference.

Even participation in military life was more common for women than previously thought. Teenage girls properly attired seemed to have pulled off the soldier’s life most easily. The popular songs drew no attention to it as a dilemma any greater than putting on a ‘coat of male’. Women could most easily impersonate adolescent males, and with
some success: ‘Looking like a man, acting like a man, being celebrated as a man, she is a
perfect woman.’ The lack of military uniforms and regularized military training, and the
routine proximity of women to battle in other roles besides soldiers made it relatively
ey easy for women to insert themselves into the fray of battle. As late as 1847, Queen
Victoria insisted that military service medals be awarded regardless of gender. Yet medal
committees had to decline to select women because ‘there were many women in the fleet
equally useful, and it [would] leave the Army exposed to innumerable applications.’ As
notions of female delicacy gradually claimed relevance as a marker of the feminine, the
‘warrior women’ became less plausible as heroes, and their capacity to pose as men
required more and more lines of the song in order to explain. The spread of the idea of
the weakness of women made the warrior woman of nineteenth-century song a freak of
nature, an eccentric remnant of bygone times, brought to extinction by the restrictions of
activities allowed to the female gender.

The warrior women of popular song also reveal the ambivalent attitudes towards women
and violence in popular culture. These warrior women were not the ‘world upside down’
of carnival, but rather located along the continuum of female behaviour in the early
modern era. Women were permitted to riot in the name of securing bread for the
children. Their interests were believed to be aligned with the survival of families, and
since they could protest in specific circumstances, they were also a destabilizing element
in society. While male subjects were supposed to be disciplined to accept the power of
the state, women still had the responsibility to rebel. Some male rebels dressed as
women in order to facilitate their rebellion against authorities. The practice continued as
late as the nineteenth century in the Ariège region of the Pyrenees. Attention to gender
in the study of popular culture has revealed that the categories of male/female, as they
later came to be defined in the nineteenth century and for the middle classes, fail to
capture the meaning of gender for the popular classes of the early modern period.

The opening of newer lines of inquiry into early modern Europe, specifically the history of
medicine, has further blurred the boundary between the popular and the learned. The
professionalization of practitioners, especially physicians, is a significant development in
its own right. The sources left by such individuals initially organized the modern
approach to the history of medicine. Yet for historians of popular culture, the
physicians’ interest in professionalizing may lead us astray, for they had an incentive in
critiquing popular knowledge of medical matters in favour of promoting their own
expertise in written medical sources. The physicians hoped to become the intellectual
experts on health and the body while remaining aloof from physical contact with the body
itself. They therefore disparaged the learning of those whose knowledge was practical,
hands on, and oral. In the words of one physician, the competition was pathetically
unqualified: ‘every measly surgeon [cirugichetto], every little barber [barberuzzo], every
old woman wants to play the doctor. A closer scrutiny of the practitioners at the boundary between popular and elite medical practice has undermined the grand claims of the physicians. Popular medical ideas had their ties to the same ancient authorities as did learned medicine. A wide range of individuals and of trades occupied themselves with the care of the body, further complicating the division between popular and elite medicine. Exotic and first-hand knowledge from non-professional and non-mainstream sources gained its own adherents on the European scene as the secrets to good health came to be seen as dependent in part on the eclectic mastery of information from both popular and learned sources.

**Current Trends and Future Directions**

Attention to popular culture has influenced our understanding of almost every aspect of European life between the Renaissance and the age of revolutions. Rigorous attention to issues of popular culture has shaped fields as diverse as the history of the state, legal and medical history, as well as the history of gender, women, and the family. If Peter Burke’s praiseworthy first attempt to synthesize the field has not been followed by a successful later incarnation, it is due in part to the considerable difficulty of tracking a specialization that has seeped into the study of just about everything in the early modern world.

Contemporary scholars must look to the synthesis of the popular in specific fields in order to grasp the impact and the transformation of popular culture. Recent surveys—such as Wayne Te Brake’s overview of the impact of popular politics in Europe during the early modern period—contribute to a more synthetic understanding of popular practices in the context of the history of the state. Much of the study of non-elites has emerged within the framework Burke offered of sub-cultures—urban artisans, religious and ethnic minorities, and itinerant storytellers (among others) have all found their interpreters. The recognition that the popular in all of its varied forms merits closer scrutiny is a sign of the success of the field. Because scholars interested in popular culture made a persuasive case for its relevance to historical inquiry, popular culture has enjoyed a multiplicity of approaches: from study of national identity to the history of the self, from consideration of the family to the history of gender, with continued interest in long-standing foci on popular culture—the history of heresy and religion, magic and witchcraft, rebellion and revolution. Historians are now more attuned to the differences among social actors and to the variety of beliefs and attitudes that a single individual might embody in his or her thinking. The early insistence on the part of the field’s best scholars that popular culture should be thought of as a process—rather than a reified artefact—has proven to be correct, borne out many times in the lines of inquiry outlined earlier.
The study of popular culture that began in the mid-twentieth century incorporated a level of excitement and intrinsic human interest that sustained the variety of inquiries described here. It also inspired a wider readership for some of its excursions into worlds (to quote the cliché) in which truth did appear to be stranger than fiction. The adventures of the peasant who impersonated another man, assumed his life, and took his wife captured the fascination of popular and academic audiences alike. Subsequent revelations from the archives showed such a tale to be a comparatively tame one, as evidence culled from the archives recounted the massacre of Parisian cats, paranoid pastors, and fruit possessed by devils. The tales from the judicial archives ranged from the impossible to imagine to the pathos of the condemned and the victimized. In a telling reflection on the difficulty of how such glimpses into human suffering could further historical understanding, the historian Arlette Farge admitted her personal disquiet over 'the fragments of lives from the vast repository of once-pronounced words that constitute the archives—words emerging from the darkness of three successive night-times: of time and oblivion; of the wretched and unfortunate; and last (and most impenetrable for our own stubborn minds), the night of guilt and its grip'. Something of the shock of such voices had been embedded in the first studies to venture into the territory of popular culture: E. P. Thompson had dropped into mid-twentieth century prose the language of individuals whose diction, orthography, and lexicon were like a shot fired over the bow of reader complacency. While such techniques probably limited rather than expanded Thompson’s popular audience, the attentive reader could not fail to miss the raw and unassimilated quality of such quotations. They begged for interpretation (which Thompson ably supplied) and they simultaneously resisted facile integration.

Farge’s concern about the problematic dynamic between historians and archives underscores the dangers of historians’ failure to interrogate their motives for pursuing such materials in the archives. When combined with the growing interest in cultivating a wider contemporary readership for an excursion into popular culture, the result may be more titillating than illuminating of our understanding of ordinary people in the past. While the influence of literary analysis, especially deconstruction, provides fruitful insights for acknowledging the instability of cultural meanings, the equation of archival materials with literary texts has posed some perils for the study of popular culture.

References to parallels in literature may embellish the historians’ telling but do not necessarily illuminate the events or their interpretation. An analysis that pursues the novella aspects of the evidence creates characters, not flesh and blood individuals, who are harder to grasp than most fictions, because they were not fiction. Sometimes it seems that all angles are covered in the scholarship except the possibility of truth-telling. Especially in consideration of judicial evidence, little credence seems to be given now to the idea that an individual, having sworn to tell the truth, might actually be doing so in
the course of the trial. The oath was the last remnant of the medieval trial by ordeal, and though it may have little meaning in our society, we cannot assume that same interpretation for everyone in the past.\textsuperscript{108}

In contemporary practice, microhistory has become unfortunately confused with micronarratives.\textsuperscript{109} Micronarratives have a place in the study of popular culture, but they are not microhistories. An individual’s biography can cross considerable cultural and geographic distance, offering the reader a scope that is global, even in the telling of a particular life.\textsuperscript{110} Microhistories, however, were not and are not narratives or biographies, but rather approaches to reading and reconstructing culture from the dissonance and discrepancies in and between sources, in order to work on specific historical problems. The latter aim may interest popular audiences less, but that cannot diminish our professional commitment to it.

The focus on the ‘play’ of meanings and the reading of such texts as though they were literary ones, resonates with recent interest in the history of desire, especially a history that liberates desire from what has been called the moralizing tendencies of women’s history and feminist scholarship.\textsuperscript{111} While the call for an understanding of people in the past that does not impose normative heterosexuality or a binary of gender identity (male/female) is certainly laudable, historians of popular culture must navigate an interpretive minefield of testimony that included child trafficking, rape, physical and sexual abuse, often, but not exclusively, on the part of elites against members of the lower classes. While historians of popular culture should certainly not mindlessly import their own views of rape into such sources, they also cannot study it without acknowledging the considerable problem it posed to women, to some men, and to children in early modern times.

While such stories have resonance in our culture, the use to which we put them has to be examined with care. In a recent study of child abuse in Venice, the sexual abuse of a child, Paolina, becomes the point-of-entry for Larry Wolff to illuminate other aspects of eighteenth-century urban culture—the world of de Sade and the Venetian coffee house, libertinage, and the eroticization of childhood.\textsuperscript{112} While all are intriguing themes, the utility and the relevance of sprinkling Paolina’s story amidst the better known proclivities of eighteenth-century men is far from clear. The popular element of the story—the abuse of an immigrant child—vanishes and re-emerges. It serves more as a frame upon which to hang other interests than as an object of inquiry in its own right. In Paolina’s young life, a web of individuals worked to extricate her from the control of the man in whose home her family had deposited her as a servant. Mostly lower class individuals, as well as a proactive noblewoman and a hesitant priest, emerge as countervailing forces. Their ethical landscape provides some clues to the sexual attitudes of the popular classes. They
seem to wield the same moral imperatives that had characterized popular culture since at least the sixteenth century: sin was what did harm to others. The child was injured, frightened, and confused—she had been harmed, in other words, and her assailant (judged in the local bar as a ‘pig’) should be stopped. Paolina’s experience had been the fate of many thousands of girls deposited in the households of social superiors for hundreds of years in Italy. The traffic in children was already old by the eighteenth century. The historical import of Paolina’s story was how and why segments of society began to operate against it—from the judges in the tribunal, to the barman, to the servant woman, and even eventually to a priest. What receives more attention in the study is the erotic attraction of child abuse, but what may be more significant were the forces arraigned against it that made the sexualization and exploitation of children unacceptable, a significant cultural change that cannot be understood without consideration of the shift in popular attitudes and agency that made it possible.

An early critic of studies of popular culture hypothesized that they might lead to the problem of ‘the pigmification [sic] of historical scale’. A superficial excursion into the field can produce many gems that might seem to concede the point: ‘Were Thor’s goats domestic or mountain goats?’ is among the lines of inquiry that could easily be misconstrued. But attention to details was pursued with purpose—a teasing out of elemental clues to recover a lost world for which we have few points of reference and against which we might fancy ourselves the cultural and intellectual superiors. Microhistory and substantive studies of popular culture have proven difficult to write well. The lure of the lurid story is strong in popular culture, but this has emerged partly from the quest for a popular audience. Now construed as a near academic necessity, appealing to a more popular contemporary audience has pushed authors toward practices that border on the voyeuristic and the sensational. Popular culture in particular has often provided ample material for such aims. Though no single story can make totalizing claims, it must address some historical problem in order to remain relevant. The study of popular culture has destabilized many broad generalizations and disembodied theorizing about popular culture in early modern times. Popular culture has to be studied for the purpose of understanding it, rather than entertaining us. Knowledge secured through the careful analysis of ordinary lives and beliefs in the past can amuse but it must first illuminate, enlighten, and challenge what the reader believes he or she knows about the past.

Out of opportunely chosen or fictionalized excerpts, elites first wrote the history of the culture of Europe’s lower classes during the early modern period. Popular culture was defined to underscore the validity of upper class views and solidify the hegemony of the powerful. It also provided them with pleasurable curiosities and amusing stories. As the study of popular culture enters a new century, historians must be mindful again of the
allure of writing the history of popular culture in terms that appeal to us, for our purposes, and for our pleasure. The more fragmentary the evidence, the greater the temptation to tell a story we ourselves wish to hear. The search for stories, after all, surfaced at the beginning of the quest to understand ordinary Europeans. Our contemporary study of popular culture has to return to the testimony told by ordinary people for the purposes of their struggles and their dilemmas, not for the purposes we can turn such evidence for ourselves. Otherwise, the outcome of many decades of research into popular culture is a return to the place where popular culture first drew elite interest half a millennium ago.

Further Reading


**Notes:**


(7.) Peter Burke suggested that carnival, for instance, might be one such shared ritual. See *Popular Culture in Early Modern Europe* (New York, 1978), 25.

(8.) Revel, ‘Forms of Expertise’, 255.

(9.) Chartier, ‘Culture as Appropriation’, 230–231.

(10.) Revel, ‘Forms of Expertise’, 255-256.


(13.) Popular Culture in Early Modern Europe was first published in 1978 and is now in its third edition. See Burke’s reconsideration of his choices in framing popular culture in ‘Popular Culture Reconsidered’, in Mensch und Objekt im Mittelalter und in der fruehen Neuzeit: Leben, Alltag, Kultur (Vienna, 1990), 181-191.

(14.) Burke, Popular Culture, 29.

(15.) Burke, Popular Culture, 31-50.

(16.) Burke, Popular Culture, 63.


(18.) Burke, Popular Culture, 23-24.


(20.) Burke, Popular Culture, 28-29.


(23.) Max Gluckman, Custom and Conflict in Africa (New York, 1959), 28.

(24.) Natalie Zemon Davis, Society and Culture in Early Modern France (Stanford, CA, 1975), xvi-xvii.


(31.) Geertz, ‘Thick Description’, 5.


(34.) In *Writing Culture* (Berkeley, 1986) James Clifford and George E. Marcus (eds.) offer the reader a number of perspectives on the crisis in anthropology during the 1980s. For a critique of Geertz’s method, see Vincent Crapanzano, ‘Hermes’ Dilemma: The Masking of Subversion in Ethnographic Description’, 51–76.


(39.) Chartier, ‘Culture as Appropriation’, 233.
(40.) Chartier, ‘Culture as Appropriation’, 231.


(43.) Muir, Mad Blood Stirring, 98-104; the reprisals against the rebelling peasants were far more violent; see also 105.

(44.) Muir, Mad Blood Stirring, 89-98.


(48.) Carlo Ginzburg, The Cheese and the Worms (Baltimore, 1980).


(52.) Andrea Del Col, Domenico Scandella Known as Menocchio: His Trials before the Inquisition (1583–1599) (Binghamton, NY, 1996), xxv–xxvi.

(53.) Burke, Popular Culture in Early Modern Europe, 60.

(54.) Mikhail Bakhtin, Rabelais and His World (Cambridge, MA, 1968 [submitted as dissertation in 1940, Moscow]).


(61.) Gerald Strauss, Luther’s House of Learning: Indoctrination of the Young in the German Reformation (Baltimore, 1978).


(65.) John Jeffries Martin, Venice’s Hidden Enemies: Italian Heretics in a Renaissance City (Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1993), 186.

(66.) François Furet and Mona Ozouf, Reading and Writing: Literacy in France from Calvin to Jules Ferry (Cambridge, 1982).

(67.) Daniele Hacke, Women, Sex and Marriage in Early Modern Venice (Burlington, VT, 2004).

(68.) Joanne Ferraro, Marriage Wars in Late Renaissance Venice (New York, 2001).


(71.) Nardon, *Benandanti e Inquisitori nel Friuli*.


(74.) Peter Burke reviews prevailing interpretations of carnival and the ‘world upside down’ in *Popular Culture in Early Modern Europe*, esp. 185–202; the safety valve thesis is discussed at 201–202.

(75.) Muir, *Civic Ritual in Renaissance Venice*.


(87.) Dugaw, *Warrior Women*, 122, 130.


(91.) Dugaw, *Warrior Women*, 129.

(92.) Dugaw, *Warrior Women*, 67, 149.


(99.) William Eamon, *The Professor of Secrets: Mystery, Medicine, and Alchemy in Renaissance Italy* (Washington, DC, 2010).


(109.) An early intervention by Lawrence Stone may have contributed to the confusion between microhistory and narrative. See ‘The Revival of Narrative: Reflections on a New Old History’, *Past and Present*, 83 (May 1979), 3–24.


(114.) Simon Schama, quoted in Edward Muir, ‘Observing Trifles’.

(115.) Maurizio Bertolotti, ‘The Ox’s Bones and the Ox’s Hide’, 54.


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Belief and its Limits

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Abstract and Keywords

‘Belief and its Limits’ outlines five major themes: (1) the transformation started by the Protestant and Catholic reformations of the sixteenth century that refashioned the way most people understood Christianity; (2) the slow emergence of peaceful co-existence among rival confessional churches after the violence of the Reformation that accompanied the disintegration of the Roman Church into dozens of different Christian churches; (3) the growing and protracted efforts of both church and state to control and regulate popular beliefs, practices, and behaviours, albeit with only limited success, with a particular focus on confessionalization, witchcraft beliefs, and printing; (4) the emergence of new ideas and belief systems by 1800 that historians have traditionally referred to as Enlightenment, that ultimately challenged the beliefs of the past; and (5) the continuation and even strengthening of belief in gender hierarchy and patriarchy in European cultures.

Keywords: Reformation, toleration, confessionalization, witch-hunt, Enlightenment, patriarchy

The Nature of Belief

did Europeans believe in the early modern world c. 1400–1800? They believed in many things, but most of all they believed in mysteries. And according to late medieval Christian theology, mysteries were the things that only God knew and that man could not know, and instead must believe. As Michel de Montaigne put it, ‘Only faith can embrace, with a lively certainty, the high mysteries of our religion.’ And immortality was, among all the mysteries that Europeans cleaved to, the most important mystery of all, in which
virtually every European believed. Their understanding or belief about immortality was summarized in the *Credo*, the longest part of the Eucharistic Mass extolling the universal Christian Church and based on the Nicene Creed:

I believe in one God, the Father Almighty, Maker of heaven and earth, and of all things visible and invisible. And in one Lord Jesus Christ, the only-begotten Son of God, begotten of the Father before all worlds; God of God, Light of Light, very God of very God; begotten, not made, being of one substance with the Father, by whom all things were made. Who, for us men for our salvation, came down from heaven, and was incarnate by the Holy Spirit of the virgin Mary, and was made man; and was crucified also for us under Pontius Pilate; He suffered and was buried; and the third day He rose again, according to the Scriptures; and ascended into heaven, and sits on the right hand of the Father; and He shall come again, with glory, to judge the quick and the dead; whose kingdom shall have no end. And I believe in the Holy Ghost, the Lord and Giver of Life; who proceeds from the Father; who with the Father and the Son together is worshipped and glorified; who spoke by the prophets. And I believe in one holy catholic and apostolic Church. I acknowledge one baptism for the remission of sins; and I look for the resurrection of the dead, and the life of the world to come. Amen.

Apart from minuscule minorities of Jews, Muslims, and unbelievers, in theory at least every man, woman, and child in early modern Europe believed in the Nicene Creed, or its slightly later variant, the Apostles’ Creed, both of which emerged in the fourth century and would serve for centuries thereafter as the foundation of what every Christian believed in both the Greek East and Latin West. And in the West this was one of the few Latin texts—along with the *Pater Noster* and the *Ave Maria*—with which even non-literate Europeans would have been intimately familiar. They not only heard it every Sunday in their parish churches, but they were also encouraged to learn it phonetically by their parish priests so they could recite it each Sunday along with them. It was a text that appeared in every Book of Hours, whether in Latin or in the vernacular. Thus, it might seem that the *Credo* was the fixed and secure foundation stone upon which all Christians based their belief system, resulting in a relatively homogeneous and uncontested compendium of beliefs across Christian Europe. This was never more than partly true, as acceptance of a foundational text was hardly a guarantee that believers would understand or ‘believe’ it in precisely the same way. By 1800, however, though the *Credo* still remained important as a synopsis for Christian beliefs, its dominance was no longer guaranteed, and it was competing and mixing with various other belief systems that had emerged from within Christian Europe. Moreover, for many Christians, especially those who broke away from the Roman Church in the sixteenth century—Martin Luther, John Calvin, and others first contested the mystery of immortality in the
first half of the sixteenth century—the meanings of the Credo had also shifted by 1800. Thus, one of the touchstones of this chapter is that European belief systems were never fixed or static, despite clerical claims that Christian doctrine was universal and unchanging over time, and the transformations that occurred in the early modern period bear this out.

Moreover, how scholars have approached the question of what Europeans believed has also changed significantly in the last forty years or so. By the 1970s a series of important books had already begun to reorient the study of early modern beliefs and push it in a new direction for a generation of scholars and students, though in some ways they remained fundamentally tied to a modernizing or Whiggish model of history that viewed early modern Europe as a battleground between the official religion of the clerical elites and the popular superstitions of the masses. Thus popular beliefs and elite beliefs were perceived as two separate bodies of ideas in constant competition with each other. For example, Keith Thomas in his Religion and the Decline of Magic proclaimed confidently in 1971 that the ‘Reformation took a good deal of the magic out of religion’, and the end of the seventeenth century witnessed ‘the triumph of religion over magic’. And that same year Jean Delumeau produced an even more explicit argument for the religious reforms of the sixteenth century as a modernizing force, claiming that most of rural France only became Christianized in the sixteenth century when reformers replaced superstition and ignorance with true Christian belief. ‘In truth, until the impact of the Catholic Reformation was felt, religious ignorance seems to have been widespread throughout most of rural France.’

A few years later Carlo Ginzburg, in his fascinating story of a miller in Friuli named Menocchio Scandela, went even further, claiming that the second half of the sixteenth century was marked ‘by an increasingly rigid distinction between the culture of the dominant classes and artisan and peasant cultures, as well as by the indoctrination of the masses from above’. Above all, he argued that ‘Menocchio’s case should be seen against this background of repression and effacement of popular culture’. Echoing Ginzburg, Peter Burke produced a masterful synthesis of popular beliefs in 1978 in which he was less certain that popular culture had been completely effaced, but he did claim that the battle between Carnival—popular culture—and Lent—elite culture—had driven a wedge between the two. ‘The reforms [of the Protestant and Catholic reformations] affected the educated minority more quickly and more thoroughly than they affected other people and so cut the minority off more and more sharply from popular traditions’. Finally, all four of these scholars pointed to the printing press as one of the principal agents of change, transforming a belief system based on oral culture, to one based on literacy and print culture. Or in the words of Elizabeth Eisenstein, author of a massive monograph on the impact of the printing press, the shift in the late fifteenth century from
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manuscript writing to printing and the resulting transformation from an oral culture to a print culture was ‘an unacknowledged revolution ... This shift revolutionized all forms of learning’. All of these views have been challenged over the last forty years, however, and they have either been significantly qualified or no longer stand up to scrutiny.

So, what does the picture look like today? The focus of this chapter will be on the most significant changes that occurred in the period 1400–1800 as well as important continuities that remained unchallenged. To do this I shall concentrate on five major themes: (1) the transformation started by the Protestant and Catholic reformations of the sixteenth century that refashioned the way most people understood Christianity, transforming it from a body of people or a community to which one belonged into a body of beliefs and doctrines that one learned and lived by; (2) the slow emergence of peaceful co-existence among rival confessional churches after the violence of the Reformation that accompanied the disintegration of the Roman Church into dozens of different Christian churches; (3) the growing and protracted efforts of both church and state to control and regulate popular beliefs, practices, and behaviours, albeit with only limited success, with a particular focus on confessionalization, witchcraft beliefs, and printing; (4) the emergence of ideas and belief systems by 1800 that historians have traditionally referred to as enlightenment, or even Enlightenment (but no longer the Enlightenment), that ultimately challenged and, for a minority of Europeans, overturned the authority of church and state and rejected ideas of a divinely ordained political and social order; and finally, (5) despite attacks on the social hierarchy and new ideas of social equality that emerged by 1800, the continuation and even strengthening of belief in gender hierarchy and patriarchy in European cultures.

If there is a general unifying argument that ties all these themes together in this chapter, it is this: early modern Europeans experienced some momentous changes in their beliefs, convictions, and values between 1400 and 1800, but very few of these transformations were primarily forced on the people by either church or state from the top down, even when the two worked in tandem. In nearly every case, as the discussion that follows will illustrate, cultural change was instigated just as much from below as from above. In other words, these changes were not something that happened to most Europeans, but occurred with their active participation. The significant increase in the belief and persecution of witches in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries is just one obvious example of this. Moreover, none of these changes were inevitable, and all of them were significantly contested. Indeed, it has become harder and harder for scholars today to defend and propagate the modernizing myth that early modern Europe was a period of transition from a backward medieval civilization based on ignorance and superstition to a more modern and morally superior civilization based on reason and social justice. To be
sure, Europe had become a much better place for many in 1800, but the changes that made it so were neither inevitable nor linear.

Above all, we must try to understand these changes through the eyes of those who lived through them rather than with clear hindsight from the present. Our ancestors who lived from the fifteenth through the eighteenth centuries encountered a number of clergymen, visionaries, and princes who claimed to know what God knew, who thereby transformed mysteries into secrets that they also knew. Many of them used this power to attract popular support. Michel de Montaigne warned in the late sixteenth century at the height of the religious wars in France that those who claimed to know what God knew were in fact claiming to be God: ‘God permits no one to be more wise than He’. And when he asked the question, ‘Que sçay-je?’ or ‘What do I know?’, he was asking if he could know the mysteries of his religion with enough certainty to use force against those who did not share his beliefs. And though Montaigne was certain that he himself could not know such mysteries with certainty, many others avowed not only to believe, but to know with certainty the will of God. And it was this certainty that enabled a few to oppress those of other religions and even kill in God’s name, both at home and abroad as European empires spanned the globe in the early modern period. But our ancestors also encountered other figures—especially natural philosophers—who translated mysteries into knowledge that was not kept secret, such as how the heavens moved or how blood circulated through the body. Nevertheless, we need to remember that for those Europeans who could not read, and that was more than 90 per cent of them in the fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries, all written knowledge was still in a sense secret knowledge, something that even the advent of printing could not remedy for at least a couple of centuries. And while many mysteries still remained in 1800, it was the challenge to the mystery of immortality and salvation that emerged in the early sixteenth century that we need to address first.

Reformations and Salvation

As the Credo at the beginning of this chapter makes clear, Europeans in 1350 believed in the mystery of life in the next world after death, a salvation made possible by the sacrifice of God’s son Jesus, whose flesh made incarnate lived, died, and was resurrected on earth, then ascended into heaven. The process of how Europeans followed Jesus into heaven after their own deaths was certainly understood to be a communal and collective one. That is, each European’s salvation depended not only on his or her own efforts, but also on the efforts of many others both living and dead. Because the Church taught that all sins had to be satisfied or compensated for before anyone could enter the kingdom of heaven after death, sins not satisfied through the sacrament of confession
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and penance before death could be satisfied after death by one’s surviving relatives through indulgences, the endowment of chantries, and masses for the dead. Even the saints in heaven could be called on to intercede with God on one’s behalf. The clergy were necessary for everyone’s salvation, as they alone could administer the sacrament of baptism—which was the only means of satisfying the original sin committed by Adam and Eve—and they also heard the confession of sins both mortal and venial and assigned appropriate acts of penance. Above all, only ordained clergy could celebrate the Eucharist during Mass, thereby bestowing God’s grace directly on the communicant via the physical presence and ingestion of God’s own consecrated flesh. And because the spectre of heretics living among them also threatened the entire community’s salvation, local magistrates and princes also played a role in safeguarding everyone’s immortality in the next world. So, for Europeans on the eve of the sixteenth-century reformation, salvation was clearly a communal and collective process. Worshipping together, praying together, confessing one’s sins together, attending Mass together—and the word Communion underscores the communal aspects of this ritual—were all bound up in the belief that salvation could only be achieved via a collective endeavour.

An individual’s own efforts were equally important, of course, and they were dependent on Christian charity towards one’s neighbours. The most vivid visual depiction of this was the many paintings and church facades that were decorated with the theme of the Last Judgement. Although there was some variation in the details, at the centre of such images was invariably either Jesus or the figure of the archangel Michael, following the depiction of the Last Judgement in the book of the Apocalypse that concludes the New Testament. In some images, the angel is holding a sword, while in others he is holding a scale, weighing up an individual’s sins on one side of the scale balanced by one’s acts of charity on the other. Typical of the genre and also very effective in visually underscoring the link between salvation and charity towards one’s neighbours is the altarpiece completed by the Flemish artist Jan van der Weyden in 1451 and commissioned for the new charity hospital constructed at Beaune in Burgundy.

The central and largest panel of van der Weyden’s Last Judgement altarpiece depicted Christ sitting upon a rainbow above the archangel Michael, who was holding a scale to balance the sins and acts of charity of each soul in the Last Judgement. The painting depicted the elect entering Paradise on Christ’s right and the damned sinking into the flames of Hell on Christ’s left. Just beneath Christ’s right hand and the Easter lily painted in gold was the passage in Latin from Matthew 25:34: ‘Venite benedicti patris mei, possidete paratum vobis regnum a constitutione mundi [Come, you that are blessed by my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world]’. And just at Christ’s left hand beneath the sword painted in red was the following passage in Latin from Matthew 25:41: ‘Discedite a me, maledicti in ignem aeternum qui
paratus est diabolo et angelis eius [You that are accursed, depart from me into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels]’, a scene recounted by Jesus just before his crucifixion:

When the Son of Man comes in his glory and all the angels with him, then he will sit on the throne of his glory. All the nations will be gathered before him, and he will separate people one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats, and he will put the sheep at his right hand and the goats at the left. Then the king will say to those at his right hand, ‘Come, you that are blessed by my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world; for I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me; I was naked and you gave me clothing, I was sick and you took care of me, I was in prison and you visited me’. Then the righteous will answer him, ‘Lord, when was it that we saw you hungry and gave you food, or thirsty and gave you something to drink? And when was it that we saw you a stranger and welcomed you, or naked and gave you clothing? And when was it that we saw you sick or in prison and visited you?’ And the king will answer them, ‘Truly I tell you, just as you did it to one of the least of these who are members of my family, you did it to me’.

Then he will say to those at his left hand, ‘You that are accursed, depart from me into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels; for I was hungry and you gave me no food, I was thirsty and you gave me nothing to drink, I was a stranger and you did not welcome me, naked and you did not give me clothing, sick and in prison and you did not visit me’. Then they also will answer, ‘Lord, when was it that we saw you hungry or thirsty or a stranger or naked or sick or in prison, and did not take care of you?’ Then he will answer them, ‘Truly I tell you, just as you did not do it to one of the least of these, you did not do it to me’. And these will go away into eternal punishment, but the righteous into eternal life.  

Thus, inherently imbedded in any depiction of the Last Judgement was the clear notion that one’s salvation in the next world depended on Christian charity to others. At the same time, this also meant that for all European Christians any sense of community in this world was also dependent on Christian charity.

As has already been spelled out in detail in chapter 22 of this volume, Martin Luther, Ulrich Zwingli, Martin Bucer, and John Calvin among others were the first to challenge the link between salvation and acts of Christian charity. Their doctrines of justification by faith alone and predestination explicitly denied that immortality in the next world was in any way dependent on acts of charity in this world. Everyone’s salvation was entirely dependent on God, who based all such decisions, the reformers claimed, not on how you
live your life or how many acts of charity you have performed, but entirely on God’s
divine grace and sense of justice. Moreover, God already made these decisions at the
time of the creation, rendering the Last Judgement of the Catholic Church irrelevant and
transforming it into a First Judgement. To be sure, all these Protestant reformers strongly
maintained that works of Christian charity were still required of all Christians, even if
they did not affect their salvation in any way, because this was their Christian duty
toward all humanity. Moreover, they argued that God could still punish you in
this world for not living a devout life, even if the decision about your salvation was
already predestined. Nevertheless, by unbinding works of Christian charity from the
process of salvation the reformers unwittingly relegated charity for most Europeans from
a requirement for entrance into the kingdom of heaven after death to something one
should merely strive for in this life.

The new Protestant doctrines of justification by faith and predestination also brought
about two further changes to the European belief system. First, they transformed a
collective and communal process of salvation into one entirely between an individual and
God. Not only was no one else but God involved in anyone’s salvation, but salvation
became something that was no longer connected to social relations at all. As John Bossy
has described them, the sacraments of the Catholic Church were ‘the skeleton of the
social body’. By rejecting most of the Catholic sacraments and uprooting those that
remained from any role connected with entering the kingdom of heaven, Protestant
reformers not only transformed salvation from a communal and collective process to an
individual and private process, they also relegated the role played by the clergy in
salvation. What Luther called the priesthood of all believers meant that neither clergy nor
sacraments were necessary for any Christian’s salvation, which had already been
predestined by God at the time of the creation. Every Christian was his own priest and no
longer needed any clerical intercessor to pray or confess sins to God.

And the other major change brought about by the doctrines of justification by faith and
predestination was a definitional shift of the Christian religion altogether, from a body of
people to which one belonged and with whom one worshipped together, to a body of
doctrines and beliefs that one not only believed but could be memorized even by young
children in the form of a catechism. In other words, because of the various reformatons
of the sixteenth century—both Protestant and Catholic—the Christian religion began to
be perceived by its practitioners less as a social body dependent on social relations of
Christian charity among its members and more as a set of doctrines and beliefs that one
had to believe. To be sure, one of those beliefs was that every Christian still had a duty to
live a Christian life of charity toward others in this world, but that duty was suddenly no
longer required for salvation in the next world. Moreover, the doctrines of justification by
faith and predestination may have resolved one mystery to the reformers’ satisfaction,
but it raised another for their followers, an issue that neither Luther, Calvin, nor any other reformer ever successfully resolved: if God did not base his judgement of salvation on how one lived one’s life, on what basis did he make this judgement? The reformers continually claimed that this was a mystery only God could know, and that because all God’s decisions could only be just, it was a mystery that individual Christians should not attempt to resolve. Or as Calvin put it, God has a higher justice concealed from human sight and comprehension, which will always remain mysterious to us: ‘we should not investigate what the Lord has left hidden in secret’.

While that response sufficed for some, it was hardly sufficient for all Protestants, who believed this made God unjust; and it would prove divisive in the long run. Some Protestants, for example, followed the lead of Jacob Arminius and began to abandon the concept of predestination in the early seventeenth century. Others simply redefined predestination to mean merely God’s foreknowledge of human choices, leaving free will with a role to play in salvation, as the Catholic Church had taught since the time of St. Augustine. Thus, the defining doctrine of their faith for many—though certainly not all—who left the Catholic Church in the sixteenth century ultimately failed to solve the mystery of their immortality.

It was also true, however, that the Catholic Reformation in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries was also partly responsible for the shift away from a communal and collective process of salvation to a more private and individual process. The Italian cardinal Carlo Borromeo, archbishop of Milan from 1564 to 1584, introduced the idea of a confessional box during the Council of Trent to create a private space where the confession of sins would no longer be public. Moreover, this was accompanied by more private acts of penance after confession, thereby transforming the sacrament of penance from a public ritual of restoring harmony in the local parish community to an individual ritual emphasizing the theological satisfaction of sins necessary for an individual’s salvation. The Council of Trent also placed other limits on the sacrament of baptism, limiting the number of godparents to two and requiring the sacrament to be performed within three days of the child’s birth, both reforms designed to limit the participation of kin and family and putting the emphasis more squarely on the doctrine of washing away the stain of original sin. Finally, after Trent the community of saints’ role as intercessors for the dead declined markedly, as saints evolved into role models for individual behaviour rather than the intercessors on behalf of the dead they had been for centuries. Moreover, masses for the dead as well as indulgences declined by the late seventeenth century as well, both shifts indicating that salvation for Catholics had also become less a collective enterprise and much more of an individual affair.
Relations Among Rival Confessions

The splitting apart of the medieval Christian Church into dozens of rival confessions in the sixteenth century was neither inevitable nor unpreventable, though it has to be said that in the three hundred years before these sixteenth-century reformations the facade of unity was already showing signs of stress. The Great Schism (1378–1417) certainly proved that the authority of the Pope had waned considerably since the apogee of papal authority under Pope Innocent III, with the secular kings, emperors, and princes being the primary beneficiaries. Moreover, the various extended Inquisitions against various communities of heretics—whether real or imagined—also indicated that uniformity of both doctrine and practice was a goal the Church had constantly strived for but never managed to achieve. Nevertheless, until the first half of the sixteenth century Rome had more or less managed to hold everyone together under one roof. By the middle decades of the sixteenth century, however, significant numbers of Christians in the Holy Roman Empire, France, England, Scotland, the Netherlands, the Swiss cantons, Denmark, Sweden, and elsewhere had departed from the Roman Church, with most never to return. Although they agreed on one defining principle—they all rejected papal authority—the dozens of different communities who exited the Roman Church could agree on little else, and certainly not which specific doctrines, beliefs, liturgies, and practices were to replace those left behind. Thus, in an institutional sense, Christianity in the West became splintered as a result of the sixteenth-century reformations. Even though by 1600 a bare majority of Europeans probably still remained within the Catholic Church, there is no question that the mass exodus that began with Luther in 1520 had a significant impact on the Christian religion of most Europeans in western Europe.

Moreover, there were hardly common interests, never mind outright bonds of affinity, among those communities who exited the Roman Church. They left for a variety of reasons, and a variety of doctrinal, political, and cultural issues prevented any common Protestant Church from forming across Europe. Even those Catholics remaining in the Roman Church were not completely united, as groups such as the Jansenists began jumping on the bandwagon of predestination in the seventeenth century just as some Protestants were jumping off the other side. In the end, tensions among the various Protestant communities were nearly as great as those between Protestants and Catholics, with mainstream supporters of Luther and Calvin being especially hostile to those radical spiritualist communities—many referred to pejoratively as anabaptists—who rejected predestination, justification by faith, as well as the primacy of scripture, arguing instead that God’s revelation through the Holy Spirit was of equal weight to revelation through the Bible. On the whole, however, the tensions between Protestants and Catholics proved much more dangerous and even escalated into outright violence. By the end of the
sixteenth century many communities all across western Europe had witnessed Protestant violence against Catholic churches and clergy, removing what they considered to be pollution and false idols from their parishes, with Catholic reprisals in kind. Killing other human beings in the name of God was hardly new to Christianity or to Europe in the sixteenth century, but the extent of violence committed by civilians against each other—neighbours killing neighbours in the name of religion—was unprecedented. It was this civilian violence that prompted Michel de Montaigne to ask ‘What do I know?’ Alas, too many Europeans still believed they knew God’s mysteries with enough certainty to use force against those who did not share their beliefs.

It is no accident that Montaigne was referring specifically to his native France, for it was in that kingdom where the most extended civilian violence took place. No other state in western Europe experienced anything like the French Wars of Religion, an extended period of civil war after 1562 that lasted nearly four decades before peace was restored in the Edict of Nantes in 1598. Although court politics were always at the forefront of this crisis, popular religious tensions between Protestants and Catholics at the local level, where members of both confessions resided in the same towns and cities, prevented any quick settlement. Indeed the high point—or low point—of religious violence during these civil wars was surely the St. Bartholomew’s massacres in August and September 1572, in which about 2,000 French Protestants in the capital of Paris and maybe a further 4,000 to 6,000 in the French provinces were murdered by Catholics in just a few weeks. The French were neither more bloodthirsty nor more devout than elsewhere in Europe, and specific political circumstances in the French capital were largely responsible for this violence, especially the monarchy’s naïve ignorance of the rising popular tensions in the capital itself, exacerbated by several Catholic preachers. Nevertheless, one legacy of the Reformation was surely the escalating intolerance of rival religious confessions, while virtually every prince and magistrate in Europe believed firmly that uniting all the people of his state under one common religion was a necessity for social and Godly order.

This ideal was incorporated into law most noticeably in the Holy Roman Empire with the Peace of Augsburg in 1555, when Emperor Charles V was forced to sign a truce with the Lutheran princes of the Schmalkaldic League. The resulting peace settlement did recognize the legal existence of Lutheranism within the Holy Roman Empire, but it did so by incorporating the principle of cuius regio, eius religio (the religion of the ruler is the religion of his subjects), allowing the prince or government of each of the state entities in the Empire to select either Catholicism or Lutheranism as the official religion of that state, tolerating no other. It seemed a simple solution for resolving the religious dispute in the Empire by allowing Catholics in a Lutheran state and Lutherans in a Catholic state a period of time to move to another state of their own religion. Enforcement was never
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possible, however, for two main reasons. First, not every European could pick up and move to another state of his or her own religion. So, the neat logic of religious apartheid could never really work, requiring either conversion or at least outward conformity to the state religion in each unit of the Empire. Second, the Peace of Augsburg completely ignored the fact that there were many members of the Reformed Church as well as radical anabaptists already living within the Empire, and the settlement did not recognize their legal existence at all. Thus, rather than resolving confessional tensions, the Peace of Augsburg perpetuated them.

Nevertheless, the confessional violence of the sixteenth century slowly gave way to various forms of religious co-existence in the seventeenth century. In some, especially rural, areas of Europe, the mere fact of living peacefully side by side over an extended period of time allowed for eventual social integration, and occasionally even intermarriage between members of rival confessions. This was more difficult in urban areas, where numbers were greater and each side sought a more clear-cut victory over the other. But the religious violence of the sixteenth century did eventually subside and evolve into a more peaceful co-existence of rival confessions. In nearly every instance where this occurred, however, it was in communities in which a strong religious majority no longer felt threatened by a much smaller minority, and where the minority confession was clearly defined by a second-class legal status. As long as the minority had distinctly defined and designated spaces in which to live and work and their second-class legal status did not threaten the majority, relatively peaceful relations were at least possible. In France, for example, where the greatest religious violence of anywhere in Europe was experienced in the sixteenth century, the civilian violence tailed off sharply after the Edict of Nantes in 1598, which significantly redefined the legal status of the Huguenots. Whereas crown policy toward French Protestants vacillated wildly between the very generous terms of the Edicts of Beaulieu in 1576 and Poitiers in 1577 to the outright banning of Calvinism altogether in 1585, the Edict of Nantes established clear boundaries between the two confessions and made it very clear that Huguenots were second-class citizens within the kingdom of France. They were given freedom of conscience but could not practise their religion publicly except in certain designated cities, largely in the south of France. Moreover, the preamble of the Edict even suggested that the long-term goal was that someday all French men and women would be reunited together within the Roman Catholic faith. After 1598 the Huguenots no longer sought to ransack Catholic churches, and Catholic magistrates no longer sought to arrest French Protestants as long as they did not violate the conditions of the Edict. So, an explicit legal distinction of second-class citizenship for the minority Protestants in France led to a long period of co-confessional existence. This was hardly religious toleration in any modern sense, as no French Catholic ever suggested that the Huguenots ought to be able to practise their religion publicly anywhere in France. But the Edict of Nantes lay the
groundwork for an extended period of co-existence, which was always necessary before any expressed idea of modern religious pluralism could be constructed.\(^8\)

The situation was similar in England and the new Dutch Republic that emerged after the seven northern provinces declared their independence from Spain in the late sixteenth century. In both countries there was a Catholic minority living among a Protestant majority with state-sanctioned Protestant churches. In England the Elizabethan settlement allowed Catholics freedom of conscience but prohibited the practice of their religion in public, thereby restricting worship largely to private chapels on the estates of wealthy Catholics. Moreover, official recusant laws required Catholics to attend the Church of England, though these laws were difficult to enforce. And even though Elizabeth and later James I and Charles I made little effort to enforce the recusant laws, in legal terms English Catholics were clearly second-class citizens forced to practise their faith in private.\(^9\) And in the Dutch Republic a tenuous but peaceful co-existence between a Reformed majority and a Catholic minority was constructed in many towns and cities whereby the Catholic minority was allowed as a second-class cohort within the community, though legally they had to physically exit their towns in order to worship, worship privately either in Catholic homes or in so-called clandestine churches, or sometimes even worship in Calvinist churches. All of these arrangements gave the Catholic minority a ‘fiction of privacy’ within the Reformed state, as Benjamin Kaplan has defined it.\(^10\) But again, these were policies of accommodation and co-existence, not a full-blown theory of open religious pluralism.

But even policies that served to provide peaceful accommodation and co-existence in multi-confessional communities did not inevitably evolve into policies of legally enforced religious pluralism. History just does not support the idea that if two rival confessions lived side by side long enough, they would inevitably either evolve into one harmonious community or simply realize that what they shared in common outweighed their differences. In fact, one could argue that it was not the success of the various policies of accommodation that eventually evolved into legal policies of religious pluralism, but their failure. In France, for example, the accommodation of the Huguenots as second-class subjects after the Edict of Nantes in 1598 certainly did not evolve in some linear, Whiggish fashion into religious pluralism. Indeed, the edict was revoked by Louis XIV in 1685 and all French Protestants were required either to convert to Catholicism, go underground, or leave France altogether. It was nearly a century later in 1787 before Huguenots were legally tolerated everywhere in France and given both freedom of conscience as well as freedom of worship. In England the first formulations of religious pluralism were articulated by John Locke in the late seventeenth century at the very height of the fears of a popish plot, when relations between Protestants and Catholics, mainly stable in the reign of Elizabeth, had reached a new nadir due to civil war and the
Catholic King James II. Again, it would be nearly a hundred years later in 1778 when Parliament passed the first of several Catholic Relief Acts ending the restrictions against Catholic worship in public. The point here is that modern religious toleration, in which a multi-confessional society became a goal rather than an unwanted circumstance that had to be endured, was neither inevitable nor a natural outgrowth of the many policies of accommodation that were tried in early modern Europe. It took nearly three centuries after the Reformation before some Europeans began to realize that policies of suppression, including state-sanctioned violence, as well as policies of accommodation of religious minorities as second-class citizens, did not provide a long-term solution to solve the tensions in a multi-confessional society. Even after the first of these toleration acts were passed in England and France in the late eighteenth century, however, there was a strong and powerful backlash against the idea of religious pluralism by many Europeans, a resistance that has survived into the twenty-first century.

Controlling Beliefs: Confessionalization, Witchcraft, and the Printing Press

What was the relationship between the powerful elites and the popular classes in early modern Europe? Between the learned and the unlettered? Did the learned elites superimpose their own belief systems from above onto the masses below? Was the shift from an overwhelmingly oral culture in 1400 to a dominant print culture by 1800 a part of this process? And finally, can we even still use terms such as ‘elite culture’ and ‘popular culture’ as if they were distinct and separate entities? As the beginning of this chapter made clear, all these questions were much easier to answer forty years ago, when innovative and revisionist historians such as Keith Thomas, Peter Burke, Carlo Ginzburg, Elizabeth Eisenstein and others swept away older narratives that never even considered such questions. These pioneering historians clearly recognized that popular beliefs were not only worth considering, but that they also formed a vital part of the mainstream narrative of early modern European history. As spelled out above, however, they all tended to assume that elite beliefs eventually supplanted popular culture over the course of the early modern period. For Thomas, religion replaced magic; for Burke, Lent defeated Carnival; for Ginzburg, the Inquisition quashed the folk beliefs of those such as Menocchio; and for Eisenstein, print culture supplanted oral culture.\textsuperscript{11}

Over the last forty years social and cultural historians have complicated this picture considerably. At the very least we now know that popular beliefs survived long after they came under assault from above by the Reformation and the printing press. Moreover, we also now better understand how new ideas and beliefs were created. It is now very clear that popular beliefs from the masses often percolated up to the elites just as often as elite beliefs trickled down to the masses. Indeed, the creation of new beliefs was a symbiotic
process in early modern Europe, with changes in beliefs emanating from both directions. Two examples—confessionalization and belief in witchcraft—illustrate how this process worked. And finally, a short survey of the advent of printing will make clear why print culture took so long to supplant oral culture for most Europeans. Indeed, in the first century and a half after Gutenberg developed his printing press in Mainz in the 1450s, the new technology of print did more to reinforce oral culture rather than eradicate it.

Some historians of the Reformation in the German Empire have recently argued that both church and state worked hand in hand after the Peace of Augsburg in 1555 to strengthen the authority of both institutions as well as create distinct confessional identities—whether Protestant or Catholic—within each political entity of the Empire. Referring to this practice as confessionalization, these historians argue that with the peace created after 1555, both major confessions—Catholicism and Lutheranism—competed to establish their authority among the population of their respective states. Thus, confession building tended to result in stricter rules for daily living and a more intense social and moral discipline. It was up to the secular governments, whether a prince or council composed of elites, to enforce this new discipline, and in return, the states demanded obedience and the payment of regular taxes. For their part, they offered protection of the Church within their states and promised poor relief for the needy. In this way, confessionalization has been viewed as an explanation for the distinctive confessional identities of each state within the Empire as well as for the rise of more centralized, absolutist governments. In other words, it is argued that individuals within each entity that made up the German Empire ‘chose’ their religious beliefs because of pressure from both church and state to conform to a religious identity established by the state.

Yet critics of the confessionalization thesis have rightly pointed out that confessional uniformity and political centralization were always just policies that were pursued in earnest but impossible to achieve. Much like what David Parker said about absolutism, confessionalization ‘was always in the making but never made’. In fact, the reality of lived experiences shared by many Europeans in the German Empire was of rival confessions living side by side in the same community until the seventeenth century. Moreover, where these policies did succeed, it was because of popular support from below as much as political pressure from above. As Marc Forster has put it, in the southwestern German Empire where Catholicism won out over Lutheranism and Calvinism, ‘the daily experience of Catholicism shows clearly that peasants and townspeople did not passively accept an identity imposed by the elite. Instead, the population played a major role in the creation of Catholic confessionalism and consequently the churchliness of the common people often developed in directions unforeseen by the Church.’ There were some parts of Europe that experienced more or less confessional uniformity: the Spanish kingdoms and most of the Italian states were
almost entirely Catholic, while some of the Swiss cantons as well as Sweden and Denmark had become almost entirely Lutheran by the late sixteenth century. But in France, Scotland, England, the Netherlands, and many of the states of the German Empire, complete confessional conformity was impossible, with many of them having sizeable minorities of other confessions. All of these states had an official church and designated state religion, but despite heroic efforts to convert or extirpate their religious minorities, complete religious uniformity proved impossible.

Thus, there is no question that all across western Europe both political and ecclesiastical authorities attempted to impose order and control on all Europeans. During the various reformations of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, the ideal for both church and state was to construct a godly society based on uniformity of religious and political beliefs. But as the previous section made clear, such uniformity was difficult to achieve, and most European states managed some kind of accommodation with their confessional minorities. So, confessionalization managed to achieve some limited success in defining religious identity in some European states, but it was hardly the principal forger of religious identity that its early champions have claimed.

The belief in witches is an even better example, because prior to 1400 hardly anyone in Europe believed that witches were servants of Satan who flourished everywhere in Christendom just waiting for an opportunity to overthrow Christian society. Very few were arrested and prosecuted for the crime of witchcraft, never mind convicted and executed for such a crime. Yet by 1600 such beliefs were not only shared by nearly all Europeans—elites and intellectuals as well as the popular classes—but the tiny number of sceptics who dismissed such beliefs as superstitious bunk were hectored and excoriated as if they were as dangerous as the witches they refused to acknowledge. Reginald Scot, who wrote perhaps the most effective critique of beliefs in witchcraft in 1584, *The Discoverie of Witchcraft*, was still being maligned long after his death and for nearly a century after the publication of his treatise. Moreover, witches were being arrested, prosecuted, convicted, and executed for their supposed crimes in significant numbers: perhaps as many as 90,000 suspected witches were tried in court between 1450 and 1750 all over Europe, with maybe 45,000 of those executed for their suspected crimes. How did such beliefs emerge so quickly? How did the belief that witches were dangerous and needed to be extirpated from society by death become so popular? And why did the most educated and intellectual minds of early modern Europe buy into such beliefs?

To address the last question first, Stuart Clark has reminded us that European intellectuals believed in witchcraft so tenaciously because it tied in so neatly to all other areas of current intellectual debate. And the writers who wrote the various demonological tracts never failed to point this out.
In natural philosophy [what today we call science], they worked with a flexible amalgam of up-to-date Aristotelianism and natural magical theory; in history, they espoused an apocalyptic and prophetic understanding of the past and the events of their own times; their view of religious deviance derived from a providential interpretation of misfortune, a pastoral and evangelical conception of piety and conformity, and a preoccupation of sins against the first Commandment, notably idolatry; and their politics was built on a mystical and quasi-sacerdotal view of magistry and on the workings of charismatic rulership.16

As for the unlearned, in 1400 virtually every village, town, and community across Europe had at least one lay person who was believed to have supernatural powers who could help them when the local priest and prayers proved ineffective. Almost never referred to as witches, they tended to be referred to as local healers, cunning folk, wise women, soothsayers, etc., and they were believed to practise what we might call ‘white magic’, using their perceived powers to benefit rather than harm their neighbours. Although many of the clergy and educated elites tended to discount the powers of these people, urging the popular classes not to put any stock in their claims to help them, they remained very popular among all social groups, especially in rural communities where there were no physicians and insufficient resident parish priests. Indeed, for many Europeans these cunning folk and local healers were their principal source of aid in times of distress and need. For centuries both clerical and political authorities generally had ignored them or turned a blind eye, believing them to be essentially harmless as long as they did not seek to undermine the authority of church and state.

This was already beginning to change around 1400, however, as the Inquisition began to expand its purview from communities of heretics, both real and perceived, who strayed from Christian orthodoxy. Established two centuries earlier under Pope Innocent III with a formal ecclesiastical tribunal to try heretics in southern France—the Cathars—the Inquisition attempted to restore to orthodoxy groups such as the Cathars and Waldensians, who were perceived as threats to Christian society. In the fourteenth century the tribunal expanded its mission to examine the Knights Templar and the Beguines, an order of lay women. And by 1400 the Inquisition also began to concern itself with any individual Christian whose beliefs or practices strayed from Christian orthodoxy. For example, in 1398, the Theology Faculty of the University of Paris declared unequivocally that those claiming to have special powers not authorized by the Church and all ‘those who use such figments and sorceries to find hidden treasure or learn and know things secret and occult ... are to be held superstitious in the Christian religion, are to be deemed idolaters, are to be deemed invokers of demons and strongly suspect in the faith’. Even those who used ‘for a good end magic arts or other superstitions forbidden by God and the church’ were equally guilty.17 Thus, all such practitioners of popular magic, no matter how beneficial they were thought to be by their local constituents, were now
deemed to be idolaters and invokers of demons. By 1400 it was already becoming clear
that a new kind of sorcerer—in fact, a witch—had been constructed out of the fears of the
Inquisitors, now dominated by Dominicans, combined with the widespread belief in popular magic of various kinds. And this new kind of sorcerer was not only evil and capable of causing great harm, but was also indelibly linked to Satan.

The construction of this new kind of witch reached its fullest expression in 1487 with the *Malleus Maleficarum* (The Hammer of Witches), written by two Dominican Inquisitors in the German-speaking Holy Roman Empire: Heinrich Kramer and Jacob Sprenger. The main argument of the *Malleus* was that Satan was actively conducting an organized campaign to overthrow Christendom, aided and abetted by his thousands of servants on earth, these newly defined witches. To stir their readers to action, the authors went on at great length to show that most witches were women, who were ‘in the habit of eating and devouring the children of their own species’. Moreover, they explained ‘how in modern times witches perform the carnal act with Incubus devils, and how they are multiplied by this means … [and] how, as it were, they deprive Man of his virile member’. The last part of the *Malleus* was an instructional manual for other Inquisitional judges explaining how best to prosecute and convict witches most efficiently. Although the *Malleus* did not create this new definition of the witch, it was an effective catalyst for spreading and perpetuating the belief in witches’ power and danger. And even if its influence was muted in states where the Inquisition had made no real headway—in the British isles, for example—the *Malleus Maleficarum* quickly became the source most often cited during the next two centuries as the persecution of witches quickly turned into a panic by many who feared an international conspiracy orchestrated by Satan to overthrow Christianity.

The main point here is that this new definition of the witch so starkly expressed in the *Malleus Maleficarum* and responsible for the witch panic that followed, resulting in about 40,000 executions for the crime of witchcraft, was not just the result of Inquisitional pressures from above or exclusively from popular beliefs from below. Indeed, it required both the paranoia of the Inquisition as well as the widespread belief in the supernatural powers of ordinary villagers by the popular classes to produce this new construction and the resulting witch-hunt. To be sure, Inquisitors like Kramer and Sprenger were remarkably successful in getting the popular classes to accept that all local ‘magicians’ were potential servants of Satan, as previously the popular classes had never associated them with diabolism. Indeed, the Inquisitors not only managed to convince the people that their local healers were potential witches and servants of Satan, but they even managed to convince many of the healers themselves that they were witches. Carlo Ginzburg’s fascinating account of the Inquisition in Friuli in northeast Italy makes this clear. Through intensive oral questioning of a local group of peasants who believed they had special powers because they were born with an afterbirth caul around their necks,
the judges eventually convinced these *benandanti*, or night walkers, so-called because they went out at night to perform beneficial acts for the local community, to confess that they were themselves witches. Thus, it was the combination of the elites’ fears of diabolism initially emanating from the Inquisition combined with the wide variety of popular beliefs from below that ultimately created the witch-hunts of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Thus, it is very problematical even to speak of a separate elite culture distinct from popular culture. Belief in the power of dangerous witches was shared by all Europeans whatever their social or educational status. Above all, those in political and ecclesiastical power who controlled the criminal justice systems throughout Europe could not have mounted a sustained witch-hunt all on their own. They needed the popular fears and suspicions of the people who were so quick to suspect, turn upon, and bear witness against their neighbours.

Finally, let us turn to the printing press, as it has often been invoked as a means by which the technology of the European elites suppressed both popular beliefs as well as the oral culture of the masses. It is undoubtedly true that in the long run, say, by the beginning of the eighteenth century, print culture had more or less supplanted oral culture in nearly all the cities and major towns of Europe. Literacy rates by 1700 were well above 50 per cent in urban regions—though rates of literacy were still higher for men than for women—and news and newspapers, not to mention books, pamphlets, and other printed texts, circulated widely. In some rural areas, however, things were very different, as literacy and printed materials were much less common. Nevertheless, it is still fair to say that by 1800 most (though not all) Europeans had become transformed by the world of print, and that many ideas from European elites had indeed formed and shaped the belief systems of the popular classes in many striking ways. But this so-called ‘print revolution’ took nearly three centuries to have this kind of impact. Until the mid-seventeenth century, things were very different.

For one thing, as Natalie Davis and others have shown, for the first century and a half after Gutenberg, printed books reinforced oral culture as much as they challenged it. In the rural countryside, in fact, literacy was nearly non-existent for women and very low for men. In rural Languedoc in southern France in the second half of the sixteenth century, for example, barely 3 per cent of all agricultural workers could sign their name. Even among the better off land-owning peasants—yeomen in English, *laboureurs* in French—only one in ten could sign his name. In the countryside, as Natalie Davis remarked, in 1600 ‘oral culture was still so dominant that it transformed everything it touched’, even printed books. That was certainly true of the sixteenth-century Friulian miller, Domenico Scandella (known as Menocchio) mentioned at the beginning of this chapter, whose agrarian folkways coloured, shaped, and altered his reading and understanding of texts as divergent as the *Bible*, the compendium of saints’ lives called the *Golden Legend*,
and the *Travels of Sir John Mandeville*. Everything he understood from his reading was screened through the filter of his agrarian culture.\textsuperscript{22}

In the cities, literacy rates were certainly higher, though again, it took a very long time after Gutenberg before even a majority of the population was functionally literate. In Venice, the leading print centre in southern Europe and home to some of the most well-known printers in all of Europe, in 1587, more than a century after Gutenberg, only 23 per cent of the population could read: 33 per cent of men and 13 per cent of women.\textsuperscript{23} Literacy rates did increase much more quickly in the cities than in the countryside, however. Moreover, we now know that illiteracy did not prevent the unlettered from having any contact with printed books or being influenced by them, as reading aloud (p. 737) in groups was very common in the cities, with the lettered and unlettered mixing comfortably. Still, it is very clear that reading from printed books did not replace oral culture; indeed, reading aloud made print a part of oral culture. Literacy and the printed book did ultimately make a huge difference to European beliefs and influenced them in various ways. But the so-called ‘print revolution’ did not happen overnight, and the grand claims made by some for the printing press—especially claims that suggest that the Renaissance and the Reformation might never have happened without it—seem overblown. Along with the great fanfare that greeted Gutenberg’s printing press in the German city of Mainz in the 1450s, we must remember that hand-copied manuscript books had been flourishing for centuries and would continue to flourish well into the eighteenth century.

Why this was the case is now much clearer, thanks to recent scholarship on the history of the book. For example, we now know that it was extremely difficult to make a living as a printer, and Gutenberg himself died in bankruptcy. Huge capital outlays were required over and above the construction of the presses. It was expensive to cut multiple metal fonts for the typeface, as well as to maintain a sufficient supply of rag paper, a surprisingly large expense for all printers, never mind the more expensive vellum for special books. Gutenberg himself realized that he could hardly turn a consistent profit printing exclusively 180 large folio sized copies of the *Bible* of 1,282 pages each, so he also printed larger runs of school books and other popular texts. Nevertheless, it took him two years to print those 180 copies of his famous *Bible*, and they sold for 20 gulden for those printed on paper and 50 gulden for those printed on vellum. This was a fantastic sum for a book, even for a copy of the *Bible*. Even a paper copy would have cost the equivalent of a year’s salary for a master craftsman.\textsuperscript{24} It is hardly surprising that most of the 180 copies were purchased by monastic houses and churches in the immediate vicinity of Mainz. Most readers, even relatively well-off ones, were simply unable to pay that much for a book. Ultimately, Gutenberg discovered the hard way that it was impossible for a printer to stay in business printing only scholarly books. By 1490
printing presses had spread to more than 200 cities all across Europe, as eager printers turned out thousands of copies of books eager to take advantage of this new technology. But as Andrew Pettegree has amply demonstrated, ‘there were simply not enough readers to absorb this new torrent of books’. Partly this was a result of the limits of literacy discussed above, but also, the market for scholarly books was simply too small to accommodate the flood of titles that were coming off the presses. ‘Ultimately print would only survive by developing new types of book for new types of reader: texts of a type and variety unimaginable in Gutenberg’s day.’ These new types of books consisted of almanacs, calendars, prayer books, pamphlets, and even sensationalist news accounts—in other words, not just books for the unscholarly reader, but the very types of books that Natalie Davis suggested reinforced oral culture. Thus, the printing press survived not by printing the great classical texts and their commentaries during the Renaissance or the seminal religious texts of the Reformation. It was the books for this new and more popular market of readers that served as the foundation of the revolution in print.

Challenging the Past: Enlightenment and its Discontents

Religious reformers had challenged medieval beliefs about salvation in the sixteenth century, and natural philosophers had challenged medieval notions of how the natural world was ordered and operated in the seventeenth century. Yet when John Locke first published An Essay Concerning Human Understanding in 1689, he could hardly have realized that his essay would serve as the catalyst for the greatest attack on the past in early modern Europe. A committed Anglican, he had already advocated religious toleration—though not for Roman Catholics, non-Christians such as Jews and Muslims, and non-believers—in his Letter Concerning Toleration published that same year. And he was in the process of publishing his Two Treatises on Government, which came out in December 1689, in which he attacked the concept of divine right monarchy and propagated the idea that all governments needed the consent of the governed to be legitimate. These works already guaranteed Locke a secure place in the pantheon of the founders of classical liberalism and Enlightenment. Moreover, William and Mary had just recently replaced James II on the throne in England, with divine right monarchy having given way to constitutional monarchy, and sovereignty having been handed to Parliament by the new monarchs. But his Essay Concerning Human Understanding was even more radical and proved to be far more dangerous than Locke ever intended. This text would make Locke unwittingly a founding father of the idea of social equality as well as political equality, and perhaps most oddly of all for a devout Anglican, a founding father of deism and ultimately atheism. In a real sense, Locke’s Essay can be seen to have undermined
Belief and its Limits

the entire corpus of beliefs of early modern Europe. Ultimately, he was challenging the past.

Locke’s most radical idea was that man was born without any innate ideas or values; he was a tabula rasa, a blank slate upon which all ideas, values, and truths were imprinted solely from experience. This was hardly an original idea, as some version of it can be traced back at least as far as Aristotle. But Locke resurrected it and linked it firmly to his opposition to authoritarianism, believing that every human being was free to develop and understand truth through reason and empiricism, rather than blindly accepting the opinions of authorities such as church and state. For Locke, he believed he was merely emphasizing the natural law that God had built into the universe at the creation, and that searching for truth through reason would not only increase human happiness but would also fulfil God’s divine purpose for all humankind. Some of his readers, however, jumped to rather different conclusions.

In the political sphere, if there were no innate ideas, this would suggest not only that traditions of divine right monarchy had been lamely accepted from previous generations and could be easily jettisoned, but that perhaps God did not involve himself in politics at all. If the new science of Kepler, Galileo, and Newton had fashioned God into the giant clockmaker of the mechanical universe, it had also suggested that God was now permanently retired, never interfering directly in his divine creation. Thus, politics itself and all forms of government were simply human creations. It could be surmised—and indeed was by François-Marie Arouet de Voltaire, Jean-Jacques Rousseau, Denis Diderot, Thomas Paine, and others in the eighteenth century—that God did not favour one dynastic state over another for the simple reason that God had not created them. God created men, but men had created states and governments. Had Locke been alive when in the late eighteenth century both France and the newly independent United States of America created new governments whose power and authority derived from the consent of the governed rather than from God, Locke likely would have given his assent. Indeed, he doubtless saw the Glorious Revolution in England in 1688–89 during his own lifetime as a measured step in this direction.

The Glorious Revolution, however, left the English ruling classes intact. Indeed, it gave them even more power by derogating a share of sovereignty from the monarch to the Houses of Parliament: the aristocracy who comprised the Lords and the gentry who comprised the Commons. In the social sphere, the tabula rasa implied that this divinely ordered social structure with the landed elites at the top with their special privileges and perquisites—especially their exemptions from various forms of taxation as well as their monopoly on serving in Parliament—was also a human creation simply inherited from the past without any divine participation. If Locke might have approved in principle the
Declaration of the Rights of Man and Citizen in France and the newly constructed Constitution in the United States—both of which appeared in 1789—he would certainly have been very concerned had he known that those two documents would eventually lead to ideas of social equality, whereby property owners of the large landed estates could be treated the same before the law as landless mechanics. Indeed, the main point of Locke's Two Treatises of Government was that the principal function of any government was to protect property, both public and private. The English Civil War in the 1640s had produced radical groups such as Levellers, Diggers, and Quakers, all of which had advocated the social equality of all men. Oliver Cromwell had little time for these dissenters and made it very clear that his puritan revolution would not be built on social equality. And as already stated, both the Restoration and the Glorious Revolution were founded on the notion that the great property owners in England should have a greater say in how the kingdom was governed. And if nothing else, Parliament was the institution of the landed elites. Thus, Locke's tabula rasa was extremely problematic for those Europeans, and they were the overwhelming majority, who sought to preserve the social hierarchy.

But it was in the religious sphere where Locke’s tabula rasa had the most destructive impact on the past. If states and governments were all human constructions, then was it possible that all revealed religions and institutional churches were also human constructions? Many free-thinking voices in the eighteenth century thought so—Voltaire, Rousseau, and Thomas Jefferson, among others—yet perhaps none was as outspoken as the Englishman Thomas Paine (1737–1809). The ideas he and others came to propagate were referred to as deism, a set of beliefs that recognized a Creator, or power far greater than any human power, but no organized religion. Indeed, for deists all revealed religions were simply human efforts to understand the power of the Creator through faith, whereas reason was all that was required to see the Creator's handiwork everywhere in the natural world. Man did not need a Bible or any kind of divine revelation at all to reveal the Creator's divine power, as nature provided all the evidence that was needed. Deists rejected the Christian doctrine of the Trinity and believed in only one God. A few of them believed in, or at least hoped for, an afterlife. Like some of the radicals in revolutionary Paris—who denounced Christianity in general and the Roman Catholic Church in particular and converted Notre-Dame cathedral into a Temple of Reason in 1793—Paine condemned the Christian religion openly. Indeed, despite his inability to speak French, Paine was elected a deputy to the National Convention in late 1792 and was in Paris when the radical efforts at de-Christianization began. His anti-Christian views, however, made him extremely unpopular in both his native England and in the United States, where he died in 1809 a detested man despite the popularity of his much earlier work, Common Sense (1776).
Evidence of arguments against what their authors called atheism can be found throughout the Renaissance in the writings of Petrarch, Montaigne, Pascal, and many others. But it was the rise of deism in the late seventeenth century that opened a floodgate of attacks against so-called atheism. Starting with Locke’s own denunciation of atheists in 1689 through Edmund Burke’s excoriation of them in the late eighteenth century, their principal targets were really deists and other libertine thinkers—many of them anti-Christian to be sure—rather than atheists. Genuine atheists, those who rejected all deities and supernatural powers, were rather thin on the ground. Jean Meslier, a French Catholic priest is a case in point. When he died in 1729 after a conventional and wholly unremarkable life as a Christian cleric, three copies of a book-length treatise advocating atheism were discovered in his house. Meslier had never even mentioned this treatise or the ideas contained within it to anyone during his lifetime, and he promoted Roman Catholicism in all the traditional ways. Thus, although Voltaire later borrowed an extract from Meslier’s treatise once it became public, it is safe to say that if Meslier was a secret atheist—promoting and propagating atheism was not on his agenda.  

There were a few genuine atheists who emerged a bit later, such as Paul Heinrich Dietrich, Baron d’Holbach, who kept a salon in Paris in the years leading up to the French Revolution. Thus, early modern Europe experienced a wide variety of free-thinkers and libertines, but until the advent of deism in the late seventeenth century they were perceived primarily as individual thinkers rather than as a dangerous intellectual movement.

It is nevertheless true that despite the growth of deism during the eighteenth century, large numbers of Europeans opposed Enlightenment and all it stood for. The backlash against deist beliefs was both fierce and sustained. Most Europeans perceived deism and indeed all forms of free-thinking as atheism, seeing very little about the deists’ Creator that they could recognize as God. As Darrin M. McMahon has reminded us, there was a significant Counter-Enlightenment in the eighteenth century that pushed back against the ideals of reason, political reform, and deism. In France, where Enlightenment was strongest, ‘well before 1789 opponents of the philosophes had ... warn[ed] repeatedly that the triumph of philosophie [Enlightenment ideas] augured regicide, anarchy, and the annihilation of religion. Reiterating these admonitions through the 1780s, they greeted 1789 as the fulfillment of their worst fears’. Whereas Locke’s contributions to republicanism and the separation of church and state, still minority beliefs themselves, did eventually take root a century later in the French and American Revolutions, it is also true that the Counter-Enlightenment backlash against Locke’s tabula rasa and its resulting deism and critiques of Christianity not only took root but increased in strength over time. While it might be tempting to argue that Enlightenment brought about a new secular age and resulted in the decline of religious belief in general and the collapse of the idea that God has any ‘chosen people’ or ‘chosen nation’ in particular, one only needs to look at how many people still to this day sing fervently and take seriously the lyrics of
‘God Save the Queen’ and ‘God Bless America’ to realize the fallacy of such notions. The intellectual elites of Enlightenment were no more able to dictate what the popular classes should believe than the Church or the state. Thus, in the end Enlightenment was neither as heroic and progressive nor as totalitarian and oppressive as its many champions and critics have respectively claimed.

**The Preservation of Patriarchy**

If early modern Europe was a period of profound change in religious, political, and social beliefs, in several areas continuity was stronger than innovation. And this was never truer than in the belief and practice of patriarchy. Despite all the attacks on the social hierarchy by various writers during the eighteenth century, there were very few voices suggesting that the gender hierarchy ought to be overturned. To be sure, the French Revolution provided the right moment and context for such voices to emerge. One of the first was an aristocrat, Marie-Jean Antoine Nicolas de Caritat, the marquis of Condorcet, who argued in July 1790 that if political and social rights were universal, as the French revolutionaries had claimed, then they also ought to apply to all adults, including women. Even more significant was Olympe de Gouge’s ‘Declaration of the Rights of Women’, written the following year in 1791. This tract was a direct riposte to the more famous ‘Declaration of the Rights of Man and Citizen’ of 1789, which presumed the inferiority of women. ‘Woman, wake up’, she wrote, ‘the tocsin of reason is being heard throughout the whole universe; discover your rights. The powerful empire of nature is no longer surrounded by prejudice, fanaticism, superstition, and lies’.

But the revolutionaries were not only unmoved by such appeals, they found them to be dangerous. Condorcet was imprisoned where he died a mysterious death in 1794. De Gouge was arrested during the rule of the National Convention in 1793, and she was tried for treason, convicted, and executed by guillotine in November 1793. Not only did the appeal for women’s rights fall on deaf ears in revolutionary France, but France was the very last European nation to give women full political rights, including the right to vote, which did not occur until after World War II. In England Mary Wollstonecraft’s *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* was published to wider acclaim and a more receptive audience in 1792.

Nevertheless, despite all the reform bills as well as countless voices and demonstrations for women’s suffrage that occurred throughout the nineteenth century, women—at least those over thirty—did not gain the right to vote until 1918.

A very different form of patriarchy that remained intact throughout most of early modern Europe was the belief in slavery. It had existed in various forms in Europe ever since the classical period of slavery emerged in Greece and Rome. And in early modern Europe slavery continued as the Barbary states in the Mediterranean captured and enslaved...
peoples from all over Europe. It was not until the advent of the transatlantic slave trade out of Africa in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, however, that slavery as an institution emerged as a foundation of the early modern global economy. Slavery thus became racial, which earlier forms of slavery were not, and the paternal nature of the master–slave relation also became proprietal, as slaves were viewed primarily as property. France, Spain, Portugal, England, and the Dutch Republic all established colonies in the New World dependent on slave labour, largely to produce sugar, cotton, and tobacco, and transport these products back to Europe. Although there had been numerous calls for the ending of slavery by various European voices in the eighteenth century, the profits of slavery were too lucrative to abandon. It was the slave revolt on the island of Saint Domingue and the subsequent revolution in that Caribbean island that was the first significant catalyst for change. Led by François-Dominique Toussaint Louverture, this revolution not only transformed the French Revolution, making the revolutionaries see how hollow their claims of universal rights had been and forcing them reluctantly to extend those rights to slaves, it also shook the institution of slavery throughout the New World. Great Britain finally ended the transatlantic slave trade in 1807, though they did not abolish the institution of slavery throughout the British Empire until 1833.

In summary, how can we best summarize the evolution and transformation of the beliefs of Europeans in the early modern period? It is certainly true that many of the mysteries that had existed in 1400 were no longer so mysterious by 1800 for many Europeans. The knowledge of how the natural world actually worked, both in the heavens and on earth, is a case in point. Yet even there many mysteries remained to be resolved, and the writings of Charles Darwin would soon prove in the nineteenth century that the Christian churches had not yet given up on trying to control such mysteries. Even the apparent triumph of liberal republicanism over divine right monarchy in the French and American Revolutions did not immediately transform Europe into a more modern world. Indeed, it would take all of the nineteenth century and two World Wars in the twentieth century before most Europeans came to accept that the consent of the governed was a requirement for a modern state, with the leaders of Soviet Russia remaining an obvious exception. But even they, like the political and religious elites of early modern Europe, have been forced to learn that cultural change and the transformation of beliefs works best when supported by the people rather than forced upon them from above. While raw power and naked force can usually change behaviours relatively quickly, beliefs have proved to be much harder to control.
Further Reading


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**Notes:**


(5.) Matthew 25:31–46 (translation from the *New Revised Standard Version*).


(8.) For the situation in France, see the essays in Graeme Murdoch, Penny Roberts, and Andrew Spicer, eds., *Ritual and Violence: Natalie Zemon Davis and Early Modern France* (Oxford, 2012).


(10.) For the Dutch Republic, see Benjamin J. Kaplan, *Divided by Faith: Religious Conflict and the Practice of Toleration in Early Modern Europe* (Cambridge, MA, 2007), 144–197.
(11.) See n 3 above.


(18.) Kors and Peters, eds., Witchcraft in Europe, 190, 196, and 199.


(21.) Natalie Zemon Davis, Society and Culture in Early Modern France (Stanford, 1975), 208.

(22.) Ginzburg, The Cheese and the Worms, 33.

(23.) Paul F. Grendler, Schooling in Renaissance Italy: Literacy and Learning, 1300–1600 (Baltimore, 1989), 46.


(26.) Jean Meslier, Testament: Memoir of the Thoughts and Sentiments of Jean Meslier (New York, 2009).


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