

Dear historians,

Well done for making it through year 1!

Your commitment in history has been exemplary and I look forward to reading your coursework.

I will go through all of this with you in lesson. Remember- keep an eye on your emails as I will email you when I have heard from the board regarding your questions for coursework.

Any questions you have, let me know.

Miss Salkeld

Lessons next year: Monday triple: Popular Culture and the Witchcraze; Wednesday double: Coursework.

### **Unit 3: Popular Culture and the Witchcraze**

#### **1. Europe in the 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> Centuries**

The blocks are as follows:

- The Russian Empire
- The Turkish or Ottoman Empire
- The Holy Roman Empire
- The Kingdom of France
- The Kingdom of England

You are going to do some independent study to research the ruling system (who's in charge and what is the structure of their ruling class), notable rulers in the period (maximum three, pick rulers who had a great impact on their people), religion (include any changes over time) and conflicts (internally and externally) for each block.

We will use the parameters of the ruling system, key rulers, religion and conflict to further understand the geographical nature of the Witchcraze.

<b>Ruling System</b>	<b>Notable Rulers</b>	<b>Religion</b>	<b>Conflict</b>

For each of the power blocks, create a table like the above, and note down your findings.

2. Read the first chapter of Henry Kamen's Early Modern European Society.

Using his description of European identity and your research into the political and religious climate of the five blocks, **write a paragraph showing an understanding of what Europe was like during the 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> centuries.**

Answer the following:

**How would you describe early modern Europe?**

#### **Unit 4: Coursework**

- Continue to work on reading around your topic area and keeping a log of what you are reading and any websites you go on.
- Aim to find as many primary sources and historical interpretations as you can.
- For 3 primary sources, and three historical interpretations, complete the following:
  - Summarise what the primary source is showing/what the argument in the historical interpretation is
  - Do you agree with the view in the primary source/historical interpretation?
  - What contextual knowledge do you have to support/challenge?

Write a paragraph for each primary source/historical interpretation.

# Early Modern European Society

Henry Kamen



**Also available as a printed book  
see title verso for ISBN details**

## IDENTITIES AND HORIZONS

‘My dear Raphael, do not attempt to be brief, but explain in order the fields, rivers, cities, people, customs, institutions, laws and everything you think we should know.’

‘There is nothing I would rather do,’ he said, ‘however it will require some time.’

‘Let us dine first and then afterwards we can arrange a time.’

(Thomas More, *Utopia*, Book I, 1516)

### Europe: an insecure identity

The fall of Constantinople to the Turks in 1453 focussed the attention of western states on the menace of Islam, creating for the first time a consciousness of their common interest against the enemy. The humanist Aeneas Sylvius Piccolomini, writing the year after its fall, appealed to the west to rally to the concept of ‘Europe’, which he identified with the Christian cause and whose leadership he assigned to the states of ‘Germania’. Subsequent writers tended to agree that the continent of Europe included all those countries that had been Catholic in faith and Latin in culture. Exceptionally, the French humanist Montaigne included ‘Muscovy’ in the continent, since the Russians also were a line of defence against Islam. But in the *Cosmographia* (1588) of Sebastian Münster, Muscovy and the Balkan states were portrayed as the mere skirt-trails of a queenly Europe whose heart was in central Europe and whose crowned head was in Spain.

‘Europe’ remained a nebulous idea, seldom encountered even in print. Though delineated carefully in the pioneering maps of Münster, it formed no part of the mental baggage of westerners. During the Renaissance, propagandists identified the idea either with the religious extension of papal Christendom or with the temporal power of the Holy Roman Emperor. Those, like the humanist Valla, who rejected both these identifications, preferred to believe in a Europe unified rather by the uplifting value of a common Latin culture. The attempt to define the continent became increasingly difficult at its edges. Most westerners were unhappy about admitting non-Catholic Slav culture. And what was one to make of multi-cultural Spain? Valla accepted that the Muslims of Spain might be termed Europeans, but a

Bohemian traveller to the peninsula in the 1460s, Leo von Rozmital, could not disguise his unease at the mixture of Jewish and Islamic culture he encountered.<sup>1</sup>

The discovery of the New World in 1492 initiated another phase in the process of the definition of Europe. America became a mirror to the Old World, the 'other' against which Europeans could contrast themselves. Because they were made aware of the clear differences of inhabitants of other continents, and in the process became more aware of their own attributes, capacities and culture, Europeans were slowly initiated into a consciousness of their special identity. 'Europe' as a cosmographic entity took on shape in maps and travel accounts, even while its inhabitants remained in general unaware that any such development was taking place. Contact with other civilisations, notably with the highly developed ones in Asia, gave further solidity to the perception of Europe viewed on a global scale.

### Dimensions of European space

By the early sixteenth century the traders, adventurers and explorers of the Atlantic seaboard had immeasurably extended the horizons of Europeans. The brief and fragmentary medieval contacts between Europe and Asia were replaced in the Renaissance epoch by direct and profitable exchanges between the traders of Europe and the Asian monarchies. 'What on earth have you come seeking so far away in India?', Vasco da Gama was asked in Malabar. 'Christians and spices', was his prompt reply. Spices, particularly pepper and ginger, became the chief source of wealth of the Portuguese crown, which in the first half of the sixteenth century pioneered the European discovery of the East Indian territories and China and Japan. The Portuguese Magellan, who had spent seven years in the Indies, eventually passed over into the service of Spain and helped to give the latter a definitive role in the struggle for overseas possessions. Between them these two small nations, some nine million in population, opened up the globe.

The riches harvested by Portugal—between 1500 and 1520 some 10,500 tonnes of spices from the east, some 410 kilograms of gold a year from west Africa—stimulated rivalry. The Portuguese exercised strict control over information about their trade, but the Spaniards were never so secretive and allowed the free exchange of ideas, for otherwise, as the historian Antonio de Herrera argued, 'the reputation of Spain would fall rapidly, for foreign and enemy nations would say that small credence could be placed in the word of her rulers since their subjects were not allowed to speak freely'. After mid-century the great collections of travel literature, notably the Venetian Ramusio's *Delle Navigazioni* (1550) and Hakluyt's *Principall Navigations* (1589), began to dispel old myths about the overseas territories and presented the literate public with realities far removed from the tales of bisexual monsters and dog-headed men with which their fathers had been regaled.

Trade and exploration were the first stage, largely limited to the early century, of Europe's discovery of the outside world. In that early period the sense of wonder was still paramount: many realised with a shock that Asia and America frequently outdid any marvels that Europe might offer. Antonio Pigafetta, who sailed with

Magellan in 1519 on the first European circumnavigation of the globe, claimed to have heard that the Emperor of China was 'the greatest in all the world'. Cortés, writing to his own emperor after entering Tenochtitlan in 1521, claimed of Moctezuma's palaces that 'there is not their like in all Spain'. The great temple, he said, was one 'whose size and magnificence no human tongue could describe', and the city itself he called 'the most beautiful thing in the world'. Recalling in his old age the splendours of Mexico, Bernal Díaz said that even the market-place was such that 'some of our soldiers who had been in many parts of the world, in Constantinople, in Rome, and all over Italy, said that they had never seen a market so well laid out, so large, so orderly, and so full of people'.

In the course of the century this awareness of Europe's modest part in world civilisation was superseded by a more aggressive attitude. Confident in his own superiority, the European moved forward into the colonial epoch. Gama's epic voyage of 1497–8 initiated the process.<sup>2</sup> The aggressiveness was in part fed by the conviction that Christianity must be taken to the heathen. The most remarkable achievements in this respect were of men like St Francis Xavier (d. 1552), whose global vision took him to Goa, Malabar, Malacca, Japan and the Chinese coast; and of Fray Toribio de Motolinía, who in 1524 landed in Mexico with eleven other Franciscans to begin the first large-scale conversion ever undertaken by Christians outside Europe. In part, however, the attitude sprang from an assumption of inherent racial superiority. 'How can we doubt', wrote the Spanish humanist Sepúlveda in 1547, 'that these people—so uncivilised, so barbaric, contaminated with so many impieties and obscenities—have been justly conquered by a nation so humane and excelling in every virtue?' This may be compared with the words of Jan Pieterz Coen, seventeenth-century creator of the Dutch East Indies. 'May not a man in Europe', he asked a critic of his policies, 'do what he likes with his cattle? Even so does the master here do with his men, for these with all that belongs to them are as much the property of the master as are brute beasts in the Netherlands.' European perception of the outside world was thus rooted in a supreme confidence. 'All has now been traversed and all is known', proclaimed the historian López de Gómara in 1552. And in tune with this confidence came the growing urge to dominate, as stated firmly in 1590 by the Jesuit José de Acosta when, applauding the possession by Spain of America, he affirmed that this was entirely 'in accord with the desire of Providence that certain kingdoms rule others'.

Not the least amazing feature of the expansion of Europe was the conquest of distance. A look at the distances covered by the ships trading to Asia round the Cape, the voyages made by the English settlers to north America, the territory traversed by Francis Xavier or Pizarro, might lead to the suspicion that technological progress had made it possible. Yet, for all the improvements in nautical science, time was barely attacked, and the endurance of man alone was a decisive factor in the conquest of distance. From the mid-sixteenth century European travellers undertook a determined advance to all points of the compass. Some seventy accounts survive of travels to Russia during the period 1550–99, where there were only a dozen for the first half of the century.

Water, horse or coach were the three means of transport, and their efficiency varied.<sup>3</sup> Over long distances the sea was beyond all doubt the quickest method of communication, but over smaller overland areas the horse was faster and more reliable, making it the obvious basis for the nascent postal services of Europe. Governments took a special interest in improving the quality of the postal service, which remained very expensive and therefore used less by private individuals than by the state and by merchants. In any case, there was no significant increase in speed during the early modern period. Uncertainty of conditions meant that in the sixteenth century the post from Antwerp to Amsterdam normally took from three to nine days, and to Gdansk from twenty-four to thirty-five days. An English regulation of 1637 specified that mail was to travel in summer at seven miles an hour and in winter at six. A generation later, in 1666, the average speed of letters was not more than four miles an hour. Compare this with the New World, where the Inca postal system attained speeds unequalled until the invention of the internal combustion engine. The distance from Lima to Cuzco by mail-runner took three days, whereas a post-horse in the seventeenth century doing the same distance took twelve. So efficient was the delivery that the Inca used to have fresh fish run up from the coast, a distance of some 350 miles, in two days.

Outside Europe the vastness of distance required measurement in terms of endurance rather than time. The heroes were those like Columbus, who informed Queen Isabella in 1503 that 'the world is small: I mean that it is not as large as people say it is'. Few would have agreed. The expedition of Magellan and Sebastian del Cano, which set out from Seville with five ships in 1519 and returned in 1522 with only one vessel containing eighteen men, after having sailed round the world, was proof of the high cost of any attempt to make the globe smaller. When Francis Drake made the same voyage fifty-five years later the difficulties were still prohibitive: he had five ships when he set sail from Plymouth in 1577 and only one when he returned in 1580. The long absence is deceptive, for in most voyages far longer periods were spent in harbour than at sea. The ships of the American passage, the *carrera de Indias*, took on average seventy-five days to cross from Seville to Vera Cruz and 130 days to cross back. The entire journey, including long waits in Vera Cruz and Havana, might mean that a ship leaving Seville in July one year did not normally return before October of the subsequent year. The fortitude of the explorers was acclaimed by the historian Cieza de León, who asked what other race but the Spaniards could have penetrated 'through such rugged lands, such dense forests, such great mountains and deserts, and over such broad rivers?'. We can reply that the Russians in Siberia, the Puritans in New England, the Dutch and Portuguese in Africa and Asia, and the French in Canada, were each in their own way, and often with methods that few would approve, bringing the outside world closer to Europe and thereby conquering the great gulf imposed by time and space.

The government of a world empire was made peculiarly difficult for Philip II by the inability to communicate speedily with his administrators. 'I have not heard anything from the king about the affairs of the Netherlands since 20 November last', complained the governor of that region, Requeséns, from Antwerp on 24

February 1575. Businessmen no less than politicians had an investment in overcoming distance and time. In any case it was less the delay in letters than the unpredictability of their arrival that came to be the biggest problem.<sup>4</sup> Of thirty-two letters received by Philip from his ambassador in Paris in 1578, the fastest took only seven days and the slowest forty-nine. Any delay in the payment of bills of exchange, the arrival of the galleons, the shipment of perishable cargo, might spell ruin. Yet when all the evidence for the urgent demands of these men of the world is considered, there can be little doubt that they were only a minority group. Time was not yet a universal pacemaker, and the age appears to move at a casual pace regulated only by the movements of the sun, the cycle of the seasons, and an occasional clock.

### Identities and frontiers

The notion of 'Europe' remained little more than a perceived ideal. Erasmus in the 1520s centred upon Christendom (he seldom used the word 'Europe') his yearnings for a united, peaceful and cultured civilisation without frontiers. Though proud to be Dutch, he asserted that 'I want to be a citizen of the world, not just of one town'. Yearning for a universal polity was also the dream over a century later of Tommaso Campanella. As men of culture, these and others looked beyond the conflict of governments and faiths, to a system where there were no frontiers.

In the real world, however, there were frontiers, to which map-makers tended to give a visible reality but which were difficult to define. In administrative terms, a frontier was not territorial but described rather the limits of a jurisdiction (noble, ecclesiastical, urban). Even then, the overlapping of different types of jurisdiction made it impossible to arrive at geographic precision in peace treaties, and frontiers did not necessarily mean that there were any firm differences of politics and culture between independent political units. The simplest frontiers (and always the most desired, for commercial reasons) were represented by water. The division of land was frequently determined by the division of waters: nations tried to define their frontiers according to the seas and rivers that fed them. Communities fought for the right to include streams (precious for both food and irrigation) within their domains. States fighting to establish their identity made every effort to obtain a sea-coast or at least a seaport: seventeenth-century Muscovy successfully ceased to be a landlocked country and obtained an extensive coastline, whereas a poorer region like Aragon failed to break through to the sea, remaining as the only landlocked kingdom in Spain.

### The nation, the 'state'

For historians the most fascinating aspect of European evolution has been the emergence of the 'state', at one time identified principally with the concept of a 'nation state' but more concretely studied over recent decades in terms of 'power', that is, in terms of territorial size, population, wealth, military potential and

administrative systems. A central feature of western civilisation, the state operated from above and imposed its authority.<sup>5</sup> It did not represent a primary identity for most Europeans, who identified themselves rather with the town or community into which they were born. Thereafter any sense of 'belonging' came into existence through a series of linkages that operated upwards, through allegiance to lords and to institutions. Until the eighteenth century the European landscape was divided up among these various allegiances, which reflected the feudal pattern of authority. Those who ruled, whether lords or kings, were in control of jurisdictions that frequently overlapped, did not coincide with political divisions, and often changed according to the mischance of war or of marriage alliances. The growth of the state has been explained in multiple ways, depending on the perspective adopted.<sup>6</sup> The explanations tend to coincide in pointing to the primary role of war and coercion in bringing about the organised state,<sup>7</sup> a view that confirms traditional thinking (including that of Hobbes) and has the virtue of coinciding with much of the historical evidence. The view also makes it clear that the state was an entity quite alien to the interests and identities of its subjects, and became acceptable only when it took on the guise of being a 'nation'.

If 'nation' signifies an autonomous political entity, then around 1500 there were possibly over 500 nations in Europe, each with its own history, traditional rulers and institutions. By around 1750, however, 'nation' had come to mean something different. The general rule was for large entities to swallow up small ones, reserving the description of nation only for the large unit. The absorption of the principality of Béarn (which claimed to be a 'sovereign entity, separate from any other sovereignty and realm') into the kingdom of France in 1620 illustrated the trend.<sup>8</sup> The king of both territories happened to be the same person, Louis XIII of France, who favoured the merger for administrative convenience. Most modern nations have achieved their condition simply by conquest or the fusion of smaller units. Muscovy absorbed the Ukraine in the seventeenth century in order to further the growth of the Russian state; Castile absorbed the crown of Aragon in the early eighteenth century in order to further the unity of Spain; and England and Scotland, after sharing a common ruler since 1603, fused together in 1706 to form a state with its seat in London.

Though the formation of modern nations appears, at first sight, to have been a process imposed from above, the reality was more complex. Absorption and conquest added to the territories of a 'state', but did not help to create a 'nation'. Throughout Europe, absorbed regions continued to operate for a century or more as autonomous nations, conserving their own administration, laws and language. With time, however, the regional elites began to identify themselves with the interests of the central government and might even participate in it. When that happened, integration into a 'nation' began to take place. Centralisation, in short, repeatedly took place from below rather than from above.<sup>9</sup> When provinces began to identify their interests with that of the central state, and when members of the provincial elite took power at the centre, a broad community of interest came into existence.<sup>10</sup> In the same way, it might happen that the population in frontier areas,

where identity was always fuzzy, began to accept a relationship with the centre, thereby allowing some feeling of nationality to take place. On France's southern frontier of Roussillon, acquired definitively from Spain in 1659, the people began by the eighteenth century to identify themselves with France as a reaction against their previous identity as subjects of the Spanish crown.<sup>11</sup>

Nations, in short, created themselves by accepting a series of shared linkages. It is possible that some of the linkages were 'imagined', for they defined perceptions or objectives rather than concrete links. It is certain that the end product, the nation state, was also 'imagined',<sup>12</sup> for much effort would be spent over subsequent generations in trying to endow its existence with some reality. Historically, only the smaller peoples in Europe—such as Bohemia or Catalonia or Wales—had a coherent identity in early modern times. There was no national problem, because strictly speaking there were no nation states and the political reality was one of semi-autonomous regional entities. At the same time, however, there were extensive shared experiences that brought the entities together and gave them the outlines of a 'nation';<sup>13</sup> neither unity of administration nor unity of language were prerequisites for national identity. As the sociologist Van Gennep has observed, a nation can be a complex of collective units that are constantly changing and constantly varying their relationship to each other.<sup>14</sup>

### Language

Central to a certain concept of national territory is the idea that its members should share common aspirations, expressed in a common language. The problem was that few political states in early modern Europe had their own language. Since most states were composite entities, they possessed many languages rather than one alone.<sup>15</sup> In Spain in 1600 one quarter of the population did not use Spanish as its daily tongue. In an area with several distinctive dialects, such as Germany, the *linguae francae* used by the elite in practice were Latin for scholars and (often) French for the princely court. In Hungary, a state of many cultures and languages, the standard speech used in the Diet was Latin, which remained the official administrative tongue until 1844.<sup>16</sup> This made communication easier but prejudiced the growth of a native literary culture. Language furnished an identity only within smaller nations, and even then might suffer serious disabilities. There was some doubt in the sixteenth century about what constituted standard spoken English. Thomas Wilson in his *Art of Rhetorique* (1553) distinguished between 'learned Englishe and rude Englishe...courte talke and countrey speache'.<sup>17</sup> If the local spoken language were not also privileged by the support of the local elite and the mechanisms of state, it might end up by being categorised as a mere 'dialect'; worse, books would not be published in it and it would end up as a medium of speech but not of literature.

For reasons of administration and communication, the evolving state began to favour use of a 'common tongue'. When England and Wales were united by law in 1536, only the English tongue was sanctioned for official use. The French crown in 1539 made a similar rule, that only northern French (known as *langue d'oeil*) be

used in its law courts. The Spanish Inquisition from around 1560 conducted all its proceedings in Castilian, even in areas (such as Catalonia) where few spoke the language. Absorption of smaller territories supplied a strong motive for using the language of the bigger unit. 'It hath ever been the use of the conqueror', the poet Edmund Spenser commented in the sixteenth century, with reference to the English occupation of Ireland, 'to despise the language of the conquered and to force him by all means to learn his'.

The diversity of tongues ensured the persistence of two major trends in Europe down to the nineteenth century. On the one hand, multiplicity of tongues preserved multiple cultural identities, without in any way impeding the growth of broader perspectives. Within the same frontiers people might continue to speak different languages without thereby losing their sense of belonging to a shared society. The best example of this is the Netherlands, which encompassed several tongues and dialects, but managed all the same to cultivate a sense of national feeling, thanks in good measure to the struggle for independence from Spain. In the same way the inhabitants of the Grey Leagues in Switzerland were conscious of a common political destiny, despite the use of three quite distinct tongues in the area.

On the other hand, the trend towards an imposition of a 'common tongue' was irreversible, and had significant consequences. France under Louis XIV and Spain under Philip V began a policy of administrative change in the provinces that involved obligatory use of the official language in public affairs. The changes, pursued by all states with a concern to improve government, took over a century to mature. For the most part, they were poorly applied. State intervention, undertaken with the aim of facilitating the paperwork of the state (and of the Church), implied an emphasis on the written word. One consequence was the marginalisation of oral culture. A parish priest in Bohemia or Catalonia in the 1720s might preach to his flock in Czech or Catalan, but then have to carry out his correspondence with the authorities in German or in Spanish respectively. In Russia the government of Peter the Great took steps to reform the Russian language, but made little practical use of it other than to print government decrees, which made up 90 per cent of printed matter (the other printed language was unreformed Church Slavonic).<sup>18</sup> In such cases Czech or Catalan or Russian failed to develop adequately, with negative consequences for creative literature. Though the first Russian grammar appeared in 1696 (published in Oxford by a Dutchman), it was not until the nineteenth century that a sophisticated creative literature developed. In Scotland the union with England from 1603 onwards led to the dominance of the English language in both administration and public worship, with serious effects on the country's literary culture. By the end of the seventeenth century, Scots tended to publish their books in English, and in London.<sup>19</sup>

A common language, then, was the preserve of small nations but took a very long time to get established in large nations. In France a report made in 1794, shortly after the Revolution, affirmed that the majority of people in France did not speak French, which was the main spoken language in only fifteen of the country's eighty-nine departments.<sup>20</sup> The situation a century earlier is reflected in Racine's despairing

complaint from the Mediterranean coast that 'I can't understand their French in this country and they can't understand mine'.<sup>21</sup> In eighteenth-century Languedoc, the people spoke French only when they were drunk, or swearing, or speaking to outsiders.<sup>22</sup> The lack of a single national language was a common phenomenon in all territories aspiring to be nation states. In 1861 not more than 3 per cent of the Italian population understood Italian.<sup>23</sup> Throughout the early modern period, Europeans accepted an environment where language tended to divide rather than unite. This was unacceptable to both intellectuals and statesmen, and by the early eighteenth century there were serious moves to make language conform to the realities of political unity. J.C.Gottsched's *Deutsche Sprachkunst* (1748) proposed a solution that became common: to make one dialect, in this case German as spoken in Upper Saxony, serve as the norm for both a written and a spoken tongue.

### Basic identities: the rural community

Early modern Europe was a predominantly rural society. In western and central Europe in about 1600, less than 5 per cent of the people lived in some hundred 'cities' of over 20,000 inhabitants each. A further fifth of the population lived in small country towns; all the rest lived in rural communities. The great developments of early modern society—the elements of economic, social and domestic change—occurred less in the great metropolises and seats of government than away in oft-forgotten corners of the European countryside. It was in the local communities that the social life and solidarities of a European were concentrated: 'state' and 'nation' were abstracts with which they seldom came into contact.

The units of organisation in provincial society varied according to region. At the most elementary level, in most of Christian Europe the village community coincided with the parish unit, so that the Church played a leading role in defining the character of the community. In more feudalised areas, the authority of a seigneur might be more decisive, particularly if he controlled most of the land. The community proper, however, was definable not in terms of outside influences such as Church and lord, but solely by the bonds between its members. Some villages, as in England where the peasantry were free and land distribution equitable, gave the appearance of being happy, self-sufficient units, with a full spectrum of social classes. By contrast, over much of eastern and Mediterranean Europe the villages could be depressed one-class communities, unable to survive out of their own resources. Few villages existed as viable independent units: all had to have close links with other nearby settlements for such basic needs as marriage partners and commercial exchange. In a very real sense, then, the village was not a complete community, which could be identified more exactly in the broader cultural area that included the village: within this area people grew the same crops, experienced the same environment of soil and weather, did the same types of labour, dressed similarly and spoke the same language. In England one might think of a village and its district for ten miles around as a community, but in the Pyrenees or in Norway one could

apply the term to several villages encompassed within the broad sweep of a mountain valley.

Though the basic unit within each village was the household or family, the importance of kinship as a social bond was not always paramount. In smaller communities, and in areas from which people seldom moved, endogamy might be high and the links of parentage strong. But in those many villages of northern Europe from which there was constant movement, family bonds were weaker and people were held together more by relationships of neighbourliness. Whatever the nature of the bond, the sense of 'belonging', the feeling of 'solidarity', was always intense and profound. Community feeling, of a sort seldom experienced today in our more individualistic world, was indeed perhaps the most powerful social force in early modern Europe.<sup>24</sup> All human activity was judged by norms created by the community: disapproved marriages were mocked by the 'charivari', 'witches' were driven out by hostile neighbours, unfair taxes were resisted with revolt.

The focus of loyalties in the community in turn created intense conflicts. Very small quarrels might lead to the growth of factions, some based on kinship, some on status. It was possible for such low-level conflict to last from generation to generation, particularly in the Mediterranean where the notion of 'honour' (or one's 'reputation' in the community) was always deeply cherished. Others might spill out beyond the local level, as in the Sussex village of Cuckfield in the 1570s, when a quarrel between the vicar and the squire split first the community then the county, and was carried to national level, ending when Sir Francis Walsingham intervened in 1582 to secure the vicar's deprivation.<sup>25</sup> Communities were naturally jealous of each other. In France and Spain the youths of one village would show their resentment at any of their girls being married to a man from another village, by creating a riot, extorting money or even resorting to violence. In times of distress, however, the village could unite remarkably well; and popular revolt, particularly against the local seigneur, often reinforced local loyalties.

Communities always had an historical origin; if they had not been able to prove their original privileges they would have been ill equipped to defend themselves against outside authorities. Small settlements of medieval origin might retain a document or deed. The Grey Leagues in Switzerland, a fascinating case, evolved among the Alpine valleys during the late fifteenth century through local agreements made in the face of threats from outside.<sup>26</sup> In the German lands the communities became weaker during the sixteenth century and tended to get submerged into princely states. Over much of Europe, however, even where clerical and lay lords dominated, ancient forms of communal government still survived in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. A village might be governed by its 'assembly of inhabitants' (France) or its 'general council' (Spain), consisting in theory of all adult inhabitants but in practice of the propertied male heads of households; even these did not all attend, and decisions fell more and more into the hands of an elite. Assemblies could coexist with seigneurial authority: in eastern Europe the lord sanctioned assembly meetings, and in England a jury of villagers might help to dispense seigneurial justice. Meetings were called only for exceptional business,

sometimes as infrequently as once a year. In Spain bells were rung and the council met after mass on a Sunday, in a traditional or symbolic location (the Basque national assembly met under the famous tree at Gernika). In Swedish and Savoyard villages the vote at meetings had to be unanimous.

The community and the village assembly played a crucial role in all aspects of economic and social life.<sup>27</sup> The economy was the basic reality on which the community was based. The assembly set times for ploughing, decided what crops should be planted and what cattle should be kept. Exploitation of the soil would sometimes be on a communalist basis: ploughland and pasture were periodically redistributed among households, since they belonged in some areas to the community as a whole and not to each family. A village with communal holdings—such as arable land, pasture, woods, a mill—might be economically strong; though a dominant feature of early modern Europe was the steady alienation of these assets to pay taxes and debts. In France the process of alienation became so great a threat to economic viability that Colbert forbade sales, and ordered intendants to try and recover property alienated since 1620. Law and order was often communally enforced, even when the court was technically within the jurisdiction of a seigneur.<sup>28</sup> In Valencia the community Tribunal of the Waters, composed of village elders, still meets weekly outside the cathedral to deal verbally with disputes between peasants of the region. The community also watched over honour and morality, and by extension intruded into family life: in Russia village elders had a say in the arrangement of marriages.<sup>29</sup> Well into the eighteenth century, in the Black Forest countryside of Württemberg, the community supervised marriages, work, crop-rotation, market arrangements, land transactions and poor relief; and local family and marital conflicts were settled by a Church court presided over by the pastor and community officials.<sup>30</sup>

By the end of the seventeenth century the autonomous village community was decaying through much of Europe. The single most important cause was the polarisation of wealth within the village, creating on one hand a propertied and often tax-exempt elite, and on the other a growing number of landless families. In a group of communities in seventeenth-century Languedoc, over three quarters of the soil was owned by 15 per cent of the residents, among them the local nobles, who effectively held the power in the countryside.<sup>31</sup> Control of the assembly fell into the hands of the minority. At the same time capitalisation of the soil by outside interests (the lord, the city) and the growing demands of the state (for taxes and military service) helped to undermine the fragile economic supports of the community. There may have been, all the same, significant exceptions to this trend. It has been suggested that in Burgundy, for instance, the state gave its support to communal structures because they offered a useful basis for taxation purposes. Communal lands produced good taxable income, so that from about 1683 the government of Louis XIV blocked alienation of communal property in the province.<sup>32</sup> Even in parts of eastern Europe, where changes in the manorial economy threatened peasant autonomy, it appears that the state authorities adapted the structures of the

community (as in Prussia)<sup>33</sup> rather than suppressing them. Rural peasant units survived, but with considerable changes.

The intense localism of community feeling survived long after the disappearance of political autonomy, and penetrated upwards into all levels of the state. The loyalty of a man to his hearth was basic: solidarities were with family, kin, lord and village, and throughout the early modern period there was little sign that they had been shaken. Local loyalties preceded those to the distant 'state'. A telling example is the series of traditional peace-agreements (*patzeries*) made in the early sixteenth century by villages on the French and Spanish sides of the Pyrenees, agreeing to keep the peace between themselves and not participate in the wars between their respective countries.<sup>34</sup> From one political level to the next, regional loyalties threatened the emerging centralised state. Throughout the early sixteenth century the self-governing city states of northern Italy remained the political ideal of Europeans, being proposed by many during the *Comunidades* in Spain in 1520 as the model for government. Even within themselves, the cities broke down into constituent communities, as with the 'communes' in Paris in the revolutionary years 1588 and 1648, and in Bordeaux during the *Ormée* in 1650. Persistent particularism everywhere—in Spain, in the Netherlands—delayed the formation of national identities. For most people, the village community of one's birth was one's 'country' (*pays, pats*), not the nation state of which it formed a tiny part. So fluid were loyalties that Marseille in 1591 and again in 1660 proclaimed itself independent of the nation: when Henry IV recaptured the city in 1596 he exclaimed, 'Only now am I king of France!' In the French Pyrenees as late as 1688 the valley of Aspe claimed that it was an independent republic not subject to the laws of France.<sup>35</sup>

The sense of identity of local communities did not of course exclude external realities: most were integrated at some point into the wider world. The link was often provided by the nobility and gentry, who were equally at home in their local countryside and in the capital city, and indeed frequently acted as agents for central government in the provinces, helping to collect taxes and recruit troops. A great many other activities also helped to create linkages, among them the need for inter-regional trade, and also the effects of the constant movement of population. Moreover, for reasons of defence or political common sense, many communities felt it necessary to collaborate with each other. When communes managed to combine their interests, as among the several communes of the Grey Leagues in seventeenth-century Switzerland, they were capable of acting virtually as sovereign states.

#### Basic identities: the urban community

Town communities were the fundamental political unit of civilised Europe. In the most densely populated areas—northern Italy and the Netherlands—they were the only political presence, superseding the existence of either nation or state. Problems of size may give rise to confusion over what a 'town' was. In many regions the proliferation of very small settlements makes it difficult to distinguish them from 'villages'. In practice, small towns were five times more numerous than all other

types of urban community in Europe.<sup>36</sup> Very many of them were strictly part of the rural landscape: they were centres of the agrarian economy, and providers of services to the countryside. Though the majority of the population lived in the rural areas, therefore, their economic activity was closely bound up with local urban centres.

Our perspective here is centred on those towns, both small and large, that had a special identity based on political and civic privileges (in England, for example, the privileges were sometimes created by royal charter). They were often distinguished by possession of walls and roads, special fiscal rights, and an autonomous constitution. The ideal type perhaps was the German free imperial city, but in reality such towns—which developed in the thirteenth century and continued unchanged to the eighteenth—could be found everywhere in the great 'urban belt' that stretched from the Netherlands through western Germany and Switzerland to the cities of northern Italy.<sup>37</sup> Each town or city consisted of communal units that together composed the political community. Historians agree that the urban communities possessed distinctive identities that made their citizens feel both a sense of belonging and a sense of pride. One view is that in the German lands the small entities—with an upper population limit of around 10,000 people—can be seen as 'home towns', where there was strong social cohesion between the governing oligarchy, the guilds and the citizen body.<sup>38</sup> Enjoying continuous internal stability, such towns represented the backbone of the nation and helped to influence the direction of national politics without necessarily participating in the government of the state.

Even in the large and complex urban structure of a 'city', the sense of belonging and of community was fundamental. In Paris, the primary loyalty of the people was to their neighbourhood, their parish and the local community.<sup>39</sup> Neighbourhood values predominated, and local concerns took precedence over more distant ones. The scale of values extended to religion, with each parish fiercely jealous of its own church, saints and traditional customs. Though immigration into large towns was always very substantial, it seems not to have altered the primacy of neighbourhood values among the population. There was, it appears, sufficient continuity of residents in an area to maintain a continuity also of social values. In the London borough of Southwark in the early seventeenth century, nearly half the householders were still in residence over a ten year period,<sup>40</sup> a proportion paralleled in other towns. The population turnover would clearly diminish some aspects of community feeling, but would also guarantee the survival of enough residents to maintain a certain continuity in the neighbourhood. Despite the complexity of a city such as London, residents participated in local concerns of the parish, the guild and the administration, with sufficient dedication to help maintain social stability.<sup>41</sup>

Within towns the fundamental value was 'peace', understood in the sense of the 'common good' that citizens shared with each other, and their common purpose to accept norms that regulated their institutions and kept order.<sup>42</sup> In many towns, citizens had to take an oath to observe the conventions that maintained the peace. On this basis, a town might build up a tradition of loyalty that made its government stable and ensured both survival and the creation of self-interest and identity among

citizens. The way these rules functioned can be seen most clearly in the constitution of Italian and German city states. Florence was an outstanding example of a city that evolved an elaborate civic ritual, combining both secular and religious emblems, to affirm the common interest that all citizens had in their *patria*, while the Germans enjoyed a more modest pride in the dignity of their 'home town' or *Vaterland*.

The primacy of the 'home town' or the neighbourhood did not exclude perception of larger identities. Economic links between local markets made the growth of some sort of consumer society inevitable, and improved communications (stagecoach and postal services) brought the provinces into contact with large towns. There was, moreover, a shared culture<sup>43</sup> among all communities, based in some measure on local schools and what was taught in them, on the spread of news, and on the theatre. This allowed territories with a notorious complexity of autonomous towns, such as Germany, the Netherlands and northern Italy, still to feel capable of sharing a broader outlook in times of crisis.

#### A core identity: the family

In its most traditional sense a family was a kinship group based on lineage. This concept was particularly important among the upper classes, who traced their descent, and assured the survival of their property, from father to son; it was less common among classes that had little property to transmit. A family was also a household, a group of people living together on the basis of marriage. Until recently it was held that the traditional west European household was a multiple or stem family, comprising more than one generation and including servants as well. An influential book by Ariès<sup>44</sup> argued that this multiple household gradually gave way by about the sixteenth century to the emergent nuclear family, consisting only of parents and children. The evolution from multiple to nuclear family was accompanied, it was argued, by a major change in emotional attitudes. Unlike the large household, in which relationships were very impersonal and children received little affection, the nuclear family brought with it what has been called 'sentiment', 'affective individualism', or more simply 'love': the parents esteemed and respected each other and also their children. This conclusion has been successfully refuted by English demographic historians, whose research shows that in pre-industrial England the normal structure of households was the conjugal family: husband, wife and children; with extended or multiple families numerically quite insignificant.

It is currently agreed, then, that 'in the European peasant family day-today life was centred round the conjugal pair', and that kinship was nowhere in western Europe the dominant basis for social organisation.<sup>45</sup> The conclusion can be illustrated from northern France: in Brueil-en-Vexin in 1625, 85 per cent of households were nuclear and only 7 per cent extended. In northwest Europe at least there was no measurable transition from one type of family to another; even in medieval times the conjugal family may have been predominant, and the changes in affective sentiment within the family have been frequently exaggerated. The

function of the conjugal pair, however, must be placed within context. In practice, husband and wife existed as realities not solely because of a sentiment that bound them together, but because other obligations connected them: family, children, household, work. By contrast, in Europe east of the Elbe, for which our knowledge in this period is extremely fragmentary, the large multiple family (known as the *zadruga* in Serb areas) was more common.

Though core loyalties centred on the household family, kinship continued in some ways to be of crucial importance throughout early modern times.<sup>46</sup> The nature and extent of kinship links varied from society to society, and have provoked firm differences of opinion among historians.<sup>47</sup> But there is agreement on some aspects. The rules of consanguinity, laid down by canon law, prohibited marriage with any relatives within four or more degrees of relationship. In small societies, normal in the Europe of that time, this could make the choice of a partner difficult. Not everyone knew how to calculate the degrees. The problem was made more acute by the general practice of counting even spiritual relationships, such as being godfather at a baptism, as kinship. Kinship was also important because it affected the laws of inheritance of property; in an age when titles to land were often complex and imprecise, it was useful to be able to identify prospective heirs. In addition to these two practical considerations, kinship also continued to be a sort of bond that created cohesion among elite families and linked families together in their provinces. The links were usually fragile, but they contributed to a feeling that the nuclear family was not alone.

Our detailed knowledge of household structure is based on the technique of 'family reconstitution', which involves the arduous collation from parish records of data on baptisms, marriages and burials, to give a full profile of life and death in the community. The demographic data, however, do not by themselves explain the size and evolution of the family. In practice, household size was dependent closely on economic and social conditions. In northern France and in England, where the size of landholdings was small, it was logical that small family units would be required. But in southern France, over a large arc stretching from Béarn and Gascony to Provence, and in other parts of the Mediterranean, farms were larger and family life often tended to concentrate around the large house: here multiple units were more common. In Montplaisant in Périgord in 1644 simple families were 50.8 per cent, multiple or extended families 36.5 per cent of the population. In Altopascio in rural Tuscany in 1684, 58 per cent were simple, 36 per cent were multiple. In Provence, and in Franche Comté, multiple families were between one-and two fifths of the population. Thus the larger estates of southern Europe helped the survival of communal forms of exploitation, and encouraged branches of the same family to live together.<sup>48</sup> But as property division proceeded and as laws of inheritance changed, the multiple tended to be replaced by the nuclear family. It is likely, moreover, that in many parts of Europe (judging by research on eighteenth-century Austria)<sup>49</sup> the very same household could vary between multiple and nuclear characteristics, depending on which members of the family were in residence and which had died. Austria supplies a further example of possible confusions over the

size of the household. Records for Innsbruck in 1603 indicate that each household had around four members but each house had around twelve inhabitants, so that in such a case a house was evidently not the same thing as a household.<sup>50</sup>

Marriage was a major step, nowhere more than among the upper classes where it tied up property. Gentry who married beneath their station, contracting *mésalliances* and so putting the family fortune in danger as well as causing interfamily conflicts, prompted the state to take an early interest in the question. In France the king by edict in 1556 banned marriages that did not have the consent of parents, and in 1639 Louis XIII formulated the view that marriage was the cement of the state. These attempts to protect the social order, however, were counterbalanced in two respects. The Church (even after Trent, when the rules were tightened up considerably with the decree *Tametsi* of 1563, forbidding ‘clandestine’ marriages) recognised all marriages validly agreed between the two contracting parties; and social custom for most people outside the aristocracy allowed a surprising degree of freedom in courtship. In traditional society, courtship and sexual practice were often freer than has been thought (see Chapter 8). The allegedly cold English were not so in 1499 when Erasmus commented delightedly that ‘wherever you move, there is nothing but kisses’; while a native said in 1620 that ‘for us to salute strangers with a kiss is counted but civility, but with foreign nations immodesty’.

A powerful argument against the theory that love, and the corresponding freedom to choose one’s mate, was a late phenomenon identifiable with the evolution of the nuclear family, is that most young people in western Europe did have some freedom of choice. Parental consent would continue to be a fundamental feature of marriage, but even when in the upper classes property considerations were uppermost, ‘there was a widespread belief among would-be marriage partners that freedom of choice was their right’.<sup>51</sup> In Spain the consent of parents for those marrying under the age of twenty-five was not made obligatory until 1776. In the seventeenth century in Spain, a young man with legitimate claims on a girl could ask the vicar-general of the diocese to send an official to remove a girl from parental custody in order to wed her. In any case, in Spain, England, France and elsewhere the fact that young men of the lower classes were usually independently employed, had probably left the family home and had possibly lost at least one parent through early mortality, freed them in practice from dependence on parents in the choice of a partner. Many, moreover, had to go out of their own villages in search of a husband or wife, thanks to the high level of consanguinity in some country parishes. These elements of freedom must, of course, be balanced against strong traditional controls exercised by the head of the family, by the local community, and even by the feudal seigneur. At every level, both in the village and in the town, marriage was normally less a private affair based on personal affection, than a considered contract involving other elements in kinship and in the neighbourhood. Love, however, was never wholly absent. ‘If you can be contented to marry for love’, an understanding sixteenth-century English father told his daughter, ‘I am contented and do grant you my good will’.<sup>52</sup>

Once a choice of partner was made, the young couple could proceed to ‘betrothal’, which in traditional Europe was the same as marriage. Catholic practice, as seen in Renaissance Italy,<sup>53</sup> pre-Reformation Hohenlohe, and post-Reformation Catalonia, was that all the essentials of marriage were completed outside church.<sup>54</sup> The exchange of promises (*verba de futuro*) was viewed as a firm contract, sealed later by the exchange of vows (*verba de presenti*); agreement on the financial conditions confirmed the contract, and copulation completed the marriage. The completely secular aspect of this procedure disturbed religious leaders. The Lutherans made it a firm rule that marriages required a church ceremony, and the Catholics subsequently refused to recognise contracts that did not include a blessing in church before a priest.

At the same time Protestants emphasised (as the Catholic state in France also began to do after 1556) that the consent of parents was essential for marriage. In rural Hohenlohe in Germany, the Lutheran authorities over the period 1550–1680 terminated all marriage agreements that did not have the express permission of the parents involved.<sup>55</sup> The Catholic Church after the Council of Trent (1563), however, reaffirmed the complete liberty of young people to marry if need be without consent, though at the same time emphasising the authority of parents and the obligations of children. In practice, the rules laid down by Church and state varied widely in their application. In England, not until the early eighteenth century was some order put into the rules validating marriage, with Lord Hardwicke’s Act of 1753.<sup>56</sup>

In many parts of France, Switzerland and Spain it was accepted that a betrothed couple could, with parental consent, sleep together under the family roof until they were financially ready to marry and set up their own home: the custom helps to explain high prenuptial pregnancy in some villages. The Counter-Reformation Church denounced the practice strenuously, but failed to alter it. In England, where the custom was almost unknown, it was nonetheless often deemed acceptable for a contracted couple to progress to full intercourse.<sup>57</sup> In Spain young couples might live in this condition for years, bringing up their children but still not proceeding to formal marriage. The Calvinist authorities in north Holland were informed in 1598 that ‘many persons remain for some months or even years in unlawful households, with their children, and afterwards leave each other in a scandalous manner’.<sup>58</sup>

The informal approach to marriage and sex in many European peasant households arose largely from economic causes: the lack of enough space to afford privacy. Communal beds, in which both family and servants slept, were traditional. A French noble, Noël du Fail, commented in the late sixteenth century:

Do you not remember those big beds in which everyone slept together without difficulty? All the people, married or unmarried, slept together in a big bed made for the purpose, three fathoms long and nine feet wide, without fear or danger or any unseemly thought or serious consequence; for in those days men did not become aroused at the sight of naked women. However,

ever since the world has become badly behaved, each has his own separate bed, and with good reason.<sup>59</sup>

### Birth, youth, marriage

Early modern European society was overshadowed by death. Life expectancy at birth was, by our standards, alarmingly low. In the English peerage in 1575–1674 the average male expectation at birth was 32 years, the female 34.8 (in the early twentieth century, by contrast, a male peer could expect to live to 60, a female to 70).<sup>60</sup> In thirteen English parishes in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries the male life expectancy at birth was 36 years. The lot of the poorer people was inevitably worse. A study covering 3,700 children of all classes born in Paris at the end of the seventeenth century arrives at an overall life expectancy of 23 years. A baby born into the elite of Geneva in the seventeenth century might expect to live 36 years, but the child of a skilled worker there had an expectancy of only 18.3 years.

These figures are statistical abstracts, but are reflected in the real data for infant mortality. In the demographic system of early modern Europe it was a rule that one out of every four or five children born failed to survive the first year of life: in England the average was a fifth of all children, in France a quarter. Survival beyond infancy continued to be extremely hazardous. In the Castilian villages of Simancas, Cabezón and Cigales in the sixteenth century, up to 50 per cent of children died before their seventh year; in the nearby city of Palencia the figure was 68 per cent.<sup>61</sup> In England less than two thirds of all children born survived the age of ten, in northern France barely a half. Almost one child in two in early modern Europe failed to live to the age of ten, and two live births were required to produce one human adult. The example of the Capdebosc family in the Condomois (France) is instructive. Jean Dudrot de Capdebosc married Margaride de Mouille in 1560. They had ten children, of whom five died before their tenth year. Odet, the eldest son, married Marie de la Crompt in 1595: of their eight children five did not reach their tenth year. Jean, the eldest, married twice. Jeanne, his first wife, had two children, one of whom died at nine years, the other at five weeks. Marie, the second wife, had thirteen children in twenty-one years: six of them died in infancy, one was killed in war, two became nuns. Of the thirty-three children born to this prolific family during the century, only six founded a family. The principal reason: infant mortality.<sup>62</sup>

The process of birth did not spare the mother either. The risk of death when giving birth was high; in England it accounted for a maximum of one fifth of all deaths among women aged between twenty-five and thirty-four. Since the risk was seen as normal, it did not provoke comment.

Because life was short, the Europe of around 1600 was predominantly youthful. Children and young people must have been everywhere more in evidence than the aged. Sebastian Franck claimed (1538) that ‘the whole of Germany is teeming with children’. In four parishes of Cologne in 1574, 35 per cent of the population were aged under fifteen; in six districts of Jena in 1640 the proportion was about 38 per

Table 1.1 Population age groups expressed as percentages; seventeenth-century Europe and twentieth-century England

Age group	Venice 1610–20	England and Wales 1695 (King)	Elbogen circle (Bohemia) late 17th C	England and Wales 1958
0–9	18.5	27.6	26	14.8
10–19	18.2	20.2	20	14.2
20–29	15.4	15.5	18	13.8
30–39	15.7	11.7	14	14.1
40–49	11.0	8.4	9	13.9
50–59	8.3	5.8	} 13	13.2
60+	12.9	10.7		16.9

cent. Leiden in 1622 had around 47 per cent in the same age group. Gregory King in 1695 estimated that over 45 per cent of the people of England and Wales were children. In Table 1.1 below, seventeenth-century data are set beside those of twentieth-century England.

In public life the young played a role that is rare today. Charles V was twenty when he faced the challenge of Luther at the Diet of Worms, Don Juan of Austria was twenty-three when appointed to lead the Mediterranean fleets of Spain. The predominance of youth in the population had important cultural effects that extended into the smallest rural communities (see Chapter 2).

Despite the large numbers of young people they did not, as was once thought, marry young. Scholars are generally agreed on the existence of a ‘northwest European’ marriage pattern distinguished by a late age of marriage with a small age difference between partners, a high rate of celibacy, and a relatively low birth rate.<sup>63</sup> The pattern is normally viewed as a contrast to that of eastern Europe, where conditions were markedly different, and of the Mediterranean, where there were variations. Evidence for Spain tends to suggest that in the sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries girls married at the age of twenty, men at about twenty-five. In Altopascio (Tuscany) in the seventeenth century girls married when just over twenty-one, though after 1700 the age was over twenty-four.<sup>64</sup> By contrast, over most of western Europe women’s first marriage occurred between the ages of 24.5 and 26.5; the men were usually two to three years older. In all cases, there were firm economic reasons that played a part in deciding when marriages occurred. Among the elite, the age at marriage tended to be lower, since an early and profitable wedding helped to secure property: in the sixteenth century daughters of the Genevan bourgeoisie wed at about twenty-two years, English noblewomen at just over twenty. The lower orders, on the other hand, probably delayed marriage until they could afford to set up their own family unit; though some couples, as we have seen, were allowed to live together after betrothal.

The relatively long wait for marriage raises interesting questions about how young persons who remained unmarried until the age of twenty-nine spent their sexual energy. Sexual dalliance short of intercourse appears to have been tolerated quite freely (Chapter 2) among the common people of western Europe. None the less, illegitimacy rates were modest: in England in twenty-four parishes studied, the rate was 2.6 per cent of live births; in Spain the level at Talavera de la Reina was 3 per cent; in Germany in Mainz in the century and a half to 1780 it did not rise above 3 per cent.<sup>65</sup> Communal prejudice against mothers of illegitimate children was strong enough to restrict levels. Nearly all births occurred within marriage.

On the other hand, the rate of premarital conception was everywhere quite high, and more in the cities than in the countryside. In the seventeenth century the rate in Amiens was nearly 6 per cent of first births, in Lyon up to 10 per cent; in one village in Galicia (Spain) 7.5 per cent of children were born within seven months of marriage. German towns appear to have had a high level, up to 21 per cent for Oldenburg in 1606–1700. England provides the most startling evidence: one fifth of all first births in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries were conceived before marriage, and in some villages as many as one third. The figures leave no doubt that courtship customs in pre-industrial Europe often did not conform to the official Christian ideal of chastity before marriage.

Marriage was seldom for life. Thanks to the high mortality rate, the average couple could look forward to a shorter married life than is usual today. In the Barcelona area in early modern times, the average length of marriage before the death of a partner was not much over thirteen years, though in the interior of Catalonia it rose to around twenty years.<sup>66</sup> At Basel in the 1660s the mean length of marriage was just over twenty years. In Colyton (Devon) between 1550 and 1699 it was around twenty years. A nuclear family would thus be thrown adrift by the untimely death not only of half the children but also of one parent. Early death (rather than, as now, divorce) contributed to the early breakup of marriages. It consequently became the rule rather than the exception to remarry, within the limits of available wealth and ease of access to new marriage partners. In the rich Genevan elite in 1550–99, 26 per cent of marriages by men were remarriages.<sup>67</sup> In Crulai (Normandy) a fifth of all male and a tenth of all female marriages were remarriages; one widower out of two, and one widow out of six, married again. In one French peasant parish in the seventeenth century, we are told by a contemporary,

when a husband loses his wife or a wife her husband, the surviving spouse at once invites everyone to a meal: this sometimes takes place in the house where the corpse is lying, and the guests laugh, drink, sing and make arrangements for remarrying their host or hostess. The widower or widow receives proposals, and gives reasons for acceptance or rejection: it is only rarely that the party comes to an end before the arrangement has been concluded.<sup>68</sup>

The relative brevity of married life, and the very high infant mortality, meant that the balance of birth over death was very precariously maintained. Enormous importance must therefore be attached to the fertility rate at this period. In almost every town deaths normally exceeded births, and population levels could only be maintained by continuous immigration. In Norwich there were 10,000 more deaths than births between 1582 and 1646, yet the town's population rose by at least 5,000, because of constant repletion by newcomers. It may have been that the newer immigrants in fact brought with them lower rates of survival; and that towns left to themselves would have had a healthy demographic balance with a need for only modest help from newcomers.<sup>69</sup> But the observation is largely an academic one, since in practice all large towns of early modern Europe experienced very considerable immigration. Though the birth rate among immigrants may have been lower, they often contributed solidly in numbers to urban expansion.

Female fertility was radically affected by late marriage, which meant that girls started reproducing some ten years after they were able to do so. Pierre Chaunu has referred to this as pre-industrial Europe's natural system of birth control. When we bear in mind that most women had borne their last child by about forty (the evidence for this across several countries is quite clear), it can be seen that the average reproductive period of women at the time was fifteen years, less than half the span of a woman's normal fertility. The inevitable result was few children. Age-specific fertility rates show that women marrying in the age group 25–29 years tended to produce about four children; in older age groups the rate declined. In Spain mothers conceived immediately after marriage; in England and France on the other hand they tended not to give birth until fourteen and sixteen months respectively after marriage. The interval between births grew longer with subsequent children: English averages suggest an interval of twenty-eight months between the births of the first and second child, where in France the interval was about twenty-three months.

This fairly low reproductive rate, in a society where a high proportion of women never married, created a distinctive family pattern. In twentieth-century Europe the economically privileged classes and nations tend to have small families, the poorer communities tend to have large ones. In pre-industrial Europe precisely the opposite held good: the poor had fewer children, the rich could afford to have more. In the sixteenth-century village of Villabáñez (Old Castile) families seldom had more than four children; in Córdoba in 1683, 58 per cent of families had no more than two children, 32 per cent had no more than four. In France the average number of children was just over four per family. In late sixteenth-century Norwich the poor had 2.3 children per family, the richer burgesses had 4.2. Europe was thus far from having the large families usually associated with pre-industrial communities. The gentry and nobles, however, often exceeded the norm. The Genevan bourgeoisie, where girls habitually married younger, were capable of producing eleven and even fifteen children per family. The English aristocracy modestly limited themselves to five per family, though the record was occasionally upset by the heroic few, such as

the first Earl Ferrers (d. 1717), who had thirty bastards and twenty-seven legitimate children to his credit.

The absolute dependence of fertility on the age of the mother is solid proof that artificial birth control was not widely practised. At the same time, however, there were mechanisms in existence that controlled fertility. It has been argued, as we have seen, that late marriage in itself was a conscious method of control; though against this thesis one might cite the evidence of Spain, where a lower marriage age did not result in a different pattern of fertility. Breast-feeding, which delays a mother's possibility of conceiving, remained normal practice; but the evidence at least from French towns shows that a fair proportion of mothers from the elite and artisan classes gave their infants out to be wet-nursed, and this increased their ability to conceive while reducing that of the wet-nurses. The most commonly practised method of controlling unwanted children was exposure after birth; illegitimate infants were the chief victims, but several babies were also left by parents too poor to care for them. The practice of leaving infants on the steps of churches and hospitals grew regularly throughout the early modern period and led to the establishment of foundling hospitals in the major European cities. By the end of the seventeenth century the number of foundlings had attained alarming proportions: the hospital in Madrid had 1,400 infants in its care in 1698, and in the same decade the hospital in Paris was taking in over 2,000 a year.

The best documented cases of birth control refer not to the rural but to the urban population and elites. Henri Estienne referred in 1566 to women who utilised 'preservatives that prevent them becoming pregnant'; and another French writer, Bourdeille, quoted the case of a servant-maid who, on being scolded by her master for becoming pregnant, claimed that it would not have happened 'if I had been as well instructed as most of my friends'.<sup>70</sup> By the next century, according to a confessor's manual published in Paris in 1671, priests were instructed to inquire in the confessional whether the faithful had 'employed means to prevent generation', and whether 'Women during their pregnancy had taken a drink or some other concoction to prevent conception'. At the same period contraceptive and abortive practices were known in Spain, to judge by confessors' manuals and the prosecutions undertaken by the Inquisition. A more scientific, though necessarily indirect, guide to contraceptive practices is the study of birth intervals: lengthy intervals, such as those of forty-nine months or more found in all social classes in early eighteenth-century Geneva, are clear testimony that controls were practised; but it is less certain that the practices involved anything more than careful abstention. Very gradually, the unspeakable came to be spoken, and birth control was recognised to exist. In England in 1695 a book called *Populaidias, or a Discourse concerning the having many children, in which the prejudices against having a numerous offspring are removed*, defended the older values and attacked those 'who look upon the fruitfulness of wives to be less eligible than their barrenness; and had rather their families should be none, than large'.

### Population trends

Although information about population can be found in tax and military censuses of the period, it is to parish records that we turn for reliable details. Fragmentary data on births, marriages and burials were kept in several countries prior to the Reformation. But even after such registrations became compulsory—in England after 1538 (not fully effective until 1653), in Catholic countries after the Council of Trent (1563)—it was rare for a parish priest to keep his records up to date.

From about 1450 Europe's population began to increase, but unevenly, given the considerable differences in demographic structure between various countries. The highest rate of increase was in the north, where the Scandinavian countries by 1600 registered an advance of two thirds on their 1500 levels, and Britain and the Netherlands over one half. Central Europe, Spain and Italy increased by up to one third, France by perhaps only one eighth. The most notable increase was in the great cities: Antwerp and Seville, under the impetus of trade, doubled in size in the first two thirds of the sixteenth century. Lyon quadrupled its population from 1450 to 1550, while Rouen tripled in size during the early sixteenth century. Where in 1500 there had been few towns of over 100,000 inhabitants (only Paris, Naples, Venice and Milan), by 1600 there were at least nine (Antwerp, Seville, Rome, Lisbon, Palermo, Messina, Milan, Venice, Amsterdam), and three of over 200,000 (Naples, Paris, London). By 1700 these last three had half a million each, and Madrid, Vienna and Moscow had joined the ranks of those with over 100,000.

Both on a small and a large scale, both in town and country, the growth in population levels was unmistakable. In the village of La Chapelle-des-Fougerets (Ile-et-Vilaine) the records show an increase of 50 per cent between 1520 and 1610; in the Valladolid region, the village of Tudela de Duero increased by 81.7 per cent between 1530 and 1593. In Provence the demographic level of 1540 was three times that of 1470, in Luxembourg population increased by 39 per cent between 1501 and 1554, in Leicestershire by 58 per cent between 1563 and 1603. The territory of Zürich (excluding the city) increased in population by 45 per cent between 1529 and 1585; Norway's population grew 46 per cent between 1520 and 1590.

The causes of the demographic increase are not clear, though it is possible to point —for the early sixteenth century at least—to a relative absence of destructive wars and a lull in the frequent attacks of epidemics. The consequences of the increase were momentous: a restless movement of migratory populations, settlement of overseas territories, growing pressure on land use, a rise in prices stimulated in part by higher demand, a crisis in the exploitation of labour and the level of wages. There was a disproportionate increase in the town population, which probably doubled in England during the sixteenth century. In the province of Holland the rural population between 1514 and 1622 grew by 58 per cent, the urban by 471 per cent. Urbanisation was thus a notable feature of the period.<sup>71</sup> Towns grew principally, as we have seen above, through immigration from the rural areas. As cities grew they generated demand and stimulated the economy. On the negative

side, however, urbanisation pushed up property and rent values, and worsened the material condition of the lower classes. In the rural areas population growth was an undeniable stimulus to higher output in agriculture.

The period of expansion that began in about 1450 came to an end after the 1580s. Throughout Mediterranean Europe the decades after this were marked by reverses, associated particularly with epidemics. In France and the Netherlands the major negative factor was war. By the early seventeenth century, much of Europe was entering a phase of demographic stagnation and, in some cases, decline. In southern Europe the population levels of the early sixteenth century were not recovered for 200 years.

### Mortality: epidemics

In both the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, there were powerful negative influences on demography. The one great reality of life was death, readily accepted because always unavoidable. It was reflected in the whole cultural environment: in the teaching and imagery of religion; in art, poetry and drama; in popular entertainment and public celebrations. Of the three scourges bewailed by the litany—*a peste, fame et bello, libera nos Domine*—the first two could be considered as natural, though already there were suggestions that public policy could remedy their worst effects. In practice, for most people the environment in which they lived was a permanent source of mortality,<sup>72</sup> but they were seldom conscious of it.

Fears were focussed rather on the sudden mortality brought on by epidemic disease. Though plague was the most virulent of all epidemics, the regular toll of other diseases such as influenza, typhus, typhoid and smallpox may have in reality been responsible for more deaths.<sup>73</sup> Influenza, for example, may have been responsible for the English report of 1558 that ‘in the beginning of this year died many of the wealthiest men all England through, of a strange fever’: it was a severe crisis (1557–9) during which possibly a tenth of the English population died. ‘Fevers’ were a regular phenomenon, whereas plague could be more easily identified by its savage impact.

The proportion of people who succumbed to plague, especially in the cities, could be staggering. Possibly a quarter of the population of London perished in the plague of 1563, when the death rate was seven times higher than in normal years. Although 1665 became known as the year of the Great Plague, in fact proportionately more people died in the outbreaks of 1603 and 1625; together the epidemics of these three years caused the death in London of up to 200,000 people. Measuring the impact of plague over a run of years offers a somewhat different perspective (just 15 per cent of deaths in London from 1580 to 1650) but hides the gravity of the periodic outbreak. The outbreaks in Amsterdam in 1624, 1636, 1655 and 1664 are estimated to have removed, respectively, one ninth, one seventh, one eighth and one sixth of the population. In Uelzen (Lower Saxony) the plague of 1597 carried off 33 per cent of the population, whereas a dysentery epidemic in 1599 killed only 14 per cent.<sup>74</sup> Santander in Spain was virtually wiped off the map in 1599, losing 83 per

cent of its 3,000 inhabitants. The great ‘Atlantic plague’ of 1596–1603, which gnawed at the coasts of western Europe, possibly cost one million lives, two thirds of them in Spain alone. In France between 1600 and 1670 plague carried off between 2.2 and 3.3 millions. Mantua in 1630 lost nearly 70 per cent of its population, Naples and Genoa in 1656 nearly half theirs. Barcelona lost 28.8 per cent of its population in the plague of 1589 and about 45 per cent in that of 1651. Marseille lost half its people in 1720.<sup>75</sup>

Epidemics were spread by contact, probably the most mortal of contacts being the passage of troops in wartime.<sup>76</sup> Isolation was the commonest remedy adopted: during the 1563 epidemic in England the court moved to Windsor and (reports the annalist Stow) ‘a gallows was set up in the market-place to hang all such as should come there from London’. The flea-infected rat was eventually recognised to be the principal carrier of the disease, though some recent studies suggest that human fleas were equally responsible, since the rapidity with which plague spread is more explicable by the mobility of humans than by the movements of the less mobile black rat. It was significant that plague followed trade routes, and was also spread by armies on the march. Isolation was fairly effective. In seventeenth-century Spain, for example, double military cordons were put around infected communities and commerce was cut; but it was always difficult to control inland epidemics. A ban on commerce by sea was, on the other hand, invariably successful: it saved the Netherlands from the English plague of 1563 (but not from its indirect impact through Germany in 1566, after being taken to the Baltic in English ships), and Spain from the Marseille plague of 1720. The latter was the last outbreak known in mainland Europe. The epidemic at Messina in 1743 ended the reign of plague in the west.

The social effects of plague have been imperfectly studied, but there can be no doubt that it discriminated among its victims. Thriving on filthy conditions, it struck first and foremost at the lower classes in the towns. In London, the Mortality Bills show epidemics having their origin in the poorest suburbs. When an epidemic struck Lyon in 1628, a contemporary comforted himself with the thought that ‘only seven or eight persons of quality died, and five or six hundred of lower condition’. We find a bourgeois of Toulouse observing in his journal in 1561: ‘The contagion only ever hits the poor people.... God by his grace will have it so. The rich protect themselves against it’ The surest protection was in flight. When the plague hit Bilbao in the early autumn of 1598 ‘only the totally impoverished remained’ in the city. The bourgeoisie moved to other towns, the nobility to their country estates. Those rich who remained were aware that the plague discriminated in their favour. The banker Fabio Nelli, writing from Valladolid in July 1599 in a week when nearly a thousand people had died, commented that ‘I don’t intend to move from here...almost nobody of consideration has died.’ Social tensions were aggravated. With the evidence plain before their eyes, the upper classes felt that the plague had been spread by the poor. The poor in their turn resented the fact that those who had never lacked material comforts should also be spared the vengeance of the scourge.

Poverty and poor nutrition were the two main features of epidemic victims. In Sepúlveda (Spain) in April 1599 'all those who have died in this town and its region were very poor and lacked all sustenance'. The connection between poverty and epidemics encouraged public authorities to improve conditions of hygiene in the towns, but it is doubtful if any of the measures taken by municipalities was really effective. The lack of defence against disease highlights what was certainly the biggest failure of early modern European civilisation: its inability to achieve advances in medicine.

#### Mortality: famine

'This year', a Spanish correspondent wrote home from Naples in 1606, 'God has seen fit to visit this realm and Sicily and other parts of Italy with a ruinous harvest, and the one here is said to be the worst for forty years'. The report was an exaggeration, for there had been an even more severe famine only ten years previously, but inevitably each crisis seemed to be worse than its predecessor, and bad years were regular enough to have an adverse cumulative effect. In early modern England one harvest in four was poor. Between 1549 and 1556 there was not a single good harvest, and the Privy Council banned corn exports every year between 1546 and 1550; in 1549 grain prices were 84 per cent higher than in the preceding year, and in 1556 they were 240 per cent higher than the year before.<sup>77</sup> The incidence of such crises must be put in perspective. Famines, in the sense of great natural disasters, were infrequent; far more significant was the threat from the common, daily inability to obtain enough food.

The availability of food was affected primarily by the weather, but it depended also on human factors such as adequate agricultural methods, the volume of demand from the population, good communication and transport, and the presence of war. In an era when in some countries customs barriers even separated one province from another, it was possible for one of two contiguous regions to starve while the other fed adequately. The significance of the 'subsistence crisis' for mortality has been much debated. Some scholars have argued that subsistence crises could have a devastating effect, and that people could die in big numbers in famine conditions. Others have maintained that few ever died from starvation or malnutrition in early modern Europe; and that though undernourishment may have weakened health the real killer in most cases was disease. The latter argument has been based principally on a study of price data: because in many cases high mortality has not coincided with high grain prices, it has been argued that lack of food could not have caused death.

The evidence for a link between dearth and death prior to the eighteenth century seems to be firm, judging by the crises of the 1590s, of 1661 and of the 1690s. The years 1594–7 over most of Europe were ones of excessive rain and bad harvests, resulting in a steep rise in grain prices.<sup>78</sup> In Spain, Italy and Germany in particular the disaster coincided with heavy mortality brought on by epidemics of plague. Discontent and unrest led to large-scale peasant revolts all over the continent (see

Chapter 6). In England there were unsuccessful attempts at armed uprisings. The English government drew up a new Poor Law in 1597 to deal with widespread poverty and distress. The authorities at Bristol undertook relief measures whereby, they claimed with satisfaction, 'the poor of our city were all relieved and kept from starving or rising'. Newcastle was not so fortunate. An entry in the town accounts reads: 'October 1597. Paid for the charge of buringe 16 poore folks who died for wante in the strettes 6s. 8d.' In Aix-en-Provence in 1597 when 'the clergy of the church of Saint-Esprit were giving bread to succour the poor, of whom there were over twelve hundred, six or seven of them died, including little girls and a woman'. At Senlis in 1595 an observer saw 'men and women, young and old, shivering in the streets, skin hanging and stomachs swollen, others stretched out breathing their last sighs, the grass sticking out of their mouths'.

The crisis of 1659–62 created conditions that in many countries eased the way to absolute monarchy. The harvest failure of 1661 in north and eastern France helped to present the young Louis XIV to his people as a beneficent ruler. Colbert reported that the king 'not only distributed grain to individuals and communities in Paris and around, but even ordered thirty and forty thousand pounds of bread to be given out daily'. As in most subsistence crises, children were the most vulnerable: in the parish of Athis, south of Paris, 62 per cent of those who died in 1660–2 were aged under ten. In the countryside, reported an eyewitness, 'the pasturage of wolves has become the food of Christians, for when they find horses, asses and other dead animals they feed off the rotting flesh'. 'In the thirty-two years that I have practised medicine in this province', reported a doctor in Blois, 'I have seen nothing to approach the desolation throughout the countryside. The famine is so great that the peasants go without bread and throw themselves on to carrion. As soon as a horse or other animal dies, they eat it'.

The years 1692–4 produced poor harvests in western Europe. In November 1693 the city of Alicante reported that 'there has been virtually no harvest because it has not rained for fourteen months'. In Galicia the city of Santiago reported that 'most of the people have died of hunger and most homes have been depopulated'. The exaggeration was not unfounded. In the district of Xallas in Galicia, most of the conceptions of 1693–4 disappeared in the infant mortality of 1694–5; in 1691 there had been thirty-eight marriages in the parishes, in 1695 there were only twelve. For France 1693 was possibly the worst year of the century: at Meulan, northeast of Paris, the price of grain tripled and burials were nearly two and a half times those of a normal year. With associated attacks of epidemic, the mortality in France in 1693–4 may have exceeded two millions. Three years later, in 1696, Finland suffered a disastrous harvest failure which swept away possibly one quarter of the country's population in the course of 1696–7.

Not all the people starved. 'Nothing new here', reported a Rome newsletter in February 1558, 'except that people are dying of hunger'. The same newsletter then went on to describe a great banquet given by the Pope at which the chief wonders were 'statues made of sugar carrying real torches'. The rich were sometimes touched by the plague, but almost never by hunger. In Dijon in the great famine of 1694 the

number of deaths in the wealthy parish of Nôtre Dame was ninety-nine, in the poor parish of St Philibert 266. Even in normal times the mortality rate was tipped heavily against the undernourished poor: in seventeenth-century Geneva, 38 per cent of children born to the upper bourgeoisie died before the age of ten, but 62.8 per cent of those born to working-class parents.

Among the lower classes, mortality was as a rule higher among the rural proletariat than in the towns, for while the townspeople could beg for relief the peasants had to find sustenance from their own inhospitable environment. When the soil had no grain to offer them they turned to carrion, roots, bark, straw and vermin. Of the famine in 1637 in Franche Comté, a contemporary recorded that 'posterity will not believe it: people lived off the plants in gardens and fields; they even sought out the carcasses of dead animals. The roads were strewn with people.... Finally it came to cannibalism.'

It remains possible to maintain that death from hunger was rare in normal conditions, but it is not easy to define what 'normal conditions' were in a society that suffered frequently from crises of one sort or another. The common people were under no illusion about their susceptibility to starvation, and the regularity of bread riots in towns illustrates their refusal to accept their fate with resignation. In 1628 one of the pastors in Geneva explained to his congregation that the current food crisis (which was to last until 1631) was brought upon them by their sins:

The people, who had been suffering for a very long time on a meagre diet were outraged by this and left the church in great dissatisfaction, saying that they were more in need of consolation than of accusations...that they were very well aware of the true state of things; and that the pastor had no idea of the misery of the great number who passed whole days and weeks in their homes without a few loaves of bread; and that they had to go without that which others fattened themselves upon.<sup>79</sup>

Undernourishment was common in Geneva in both normal and abnormal times. In January 1630, during the subsistence crisis, silk workers were earning only two *sols* a day, whereas the cost of bread was five *sols* a pound and two pounds was the minimum required for a reasonable daily diet. In these circumstances the city council had to order the payment of supplementary wages.

Whole provinces and nations in early modern Europe lived at a parlous level of subsistence, and even in normal harvest years relied on food imports. The wheat fields of Sicily and of eastern Europe became the great suppliers. Spain in the sixteenth century was notoriously unable to meet its own needs, and became a regular importer from the Baltic, Sicily and north Africa. In early modern times, two crops imported from America (maize, and the potato) helped to solve the food problem in certain areas. In northwest Spain (Galicia) maize, already in use by 1600, formed by 1700 two thirds of all cereals grown, and by 1750 nearly 90 per cent.<sup>80</sup> With a yield ratio of 40:1, maize saved the peasantry of Spain's northern coast. In the Netherlands there was not enough land available to feed the high density of

population, and import of grain was always necessary: it was logical that Amsterdam should become the great clearing house for Baltic wheat.

On a smaller scale, rural communities and individual peasants constantly lived close to subsistence level, since the land they possessed did not suffice for their needs. In some areas, fragmentation of peasant estates further destroyed self-sufficiency. The village of Lespignan in Languedoc is evidence of this process. In 1492 the great majority of peasant proprietors here were able to produce a surplus which they sold in order to buy goods, so putting themselves above the minimum level of independence. By 1607 the majority were having to buy grain in order to feed themselves, and had to support their families by finding work elsewhere. In Beauvaisis the fragmentation of peasant holdings led to a situation where as many as nine tenths of the peasant population were not economically independent and could not guarantee to feed their families adequately. The peasant who aspired to economic independence had to farm at least 12 hectares (30 acres) in years of plenty, 27 hectares (65 acres) in years of dearth; yet in the seventeenth century less than one tenth of the peasants here owned 27 or more hectares.

Assessment of health at this period has sometimes been made on the basis of the calorific content of food.<sup>81</sup> This has led to a number of disparate calculations. In modern diets 3,000 calories a day is assumed to give a minimum level of adequate nourishment. A study of the food of building workers in Antwerp around the year 1600, with bread, vegetables, butter, cheese and meat in the diet, suggests a value of some 2,000 calories a day.<sup>82</sup> The average citizen of Valladolid in the same period apparently had a daily diet of some 1,580 calories. Both these food levels have been assumed to be adequate for the time. On the other hand, a study of peasant diets on the Polish royal estates in the late sixteenth century arrives at a daily average of 3,500 calories; Spanish seamen are supposed to have consumed up to 4,000 calories a day in the period; and the Collegio Borromeo in Pavia supplied its indigent inmates with about 6,000 calories a day. Since in all cases most (perhaps three quarters) of these calories came from cereals, the bare figures may be misleading; an analysis of food and vitamin content would give a truer picture of health values. On the grounds that among the peasants of the Beauvaisis meat was almost unknown, fruit rare, vegetables poor and the staple was normally bread, soup, gruel, peas and beans, it has been argued that undernourishment here was constant. The same might convincingly be said of many other peasantries, and it has been shown that armies of the time—notorious spreaders of epidemics—were also grossly underfed, meat and vegetables being largely absent from their diet. By the mid-eighteenth century, however, it appears that the link between dearth and death had all but disappeared. An improvement in diet would have been a prerequisite for the population recovery that took place from that period.

#### Mortality: war

In post-Renaissance Europe the increase in collective violence was seen by many commentators as a new and deplorable phenomenon. It showed itself not simply in

acts of 'war' but in all levels of group conflict. Men of culture who had previously categorised as barbarians only those who lived beyond the confines of western Christendom, now recognised that Europeans also were capable of barbarism. It was against this background that Montaigne employed his irony to argue that the 'savages' of the New World were perhaps less so than those of the Old. Frenchmen in the late sixteenth century, for whom 'barbarism' had previously been a virtually unknown concept, began during the violence of the civil wars to realise that the state of nature of American Indians was one of innocence rather than of savagery. 'Nous les surpassons en toute sorte de barbarie', Montaigne wrote.

At a time when armies were fairly small, deaths in battle were the lesser part of the impact of war. It has been estimated<sup>83</sup> that in the English Civil War deaths in battle totalled 85,000 but that war-related mortality was much higher, possibly 100,000 people or 3.7 per cent of the English population. When armies increased in size, the battlefield casualties rose alarmingly. At Blenheim (1704), perhaps the most notorious case, 30,000 men died. Yes, the Poet Laureate Southey commented with sharp irony, but 'it was a famous victory'. Other factors, such as a long siege, tended to raise the death rate, especially among the civilian population. There were also exceptional events, such as the disaster of the Armada in 1588, which cost the Spaniards 15,000 men. It can be argued that military campaigns did not cause extensive mortality. Even so, their impact cannot be minimised: the soldiery spread epidemics, aggravated famine, and sometimes committed horrifying atrocities. In general, it was the civilian population that suffered most. 'It has been impossible to collect any taxes', runs a report from Lorraine in the 1630s, 'because of the wars that have hit most of the villages, which are deserted through the flight of some of the inhabitants and the death of others from disease or from sickness arising out of starvation'. Summarising the consequences of the great Cromwellian repression of Ireland, Sir William Petty, who had full access to state papers, estimated that 'about 504,000 of the Irish perished, and were wasted by the sword, plague, famine, hardship and banishment, between the 23 of October 1641 and the same day 1652'.

The early sixteenth century was relatively free from wars within Christian Europe, only Italy suffering to any extent (the sack of Rome in 1527 was a notorious example). By the late century war had become universal on both land and sea, whether in civil and religious conflicts or against the Turk; and armies began to grow in size: Philip II's army in Flanders rose to 85,000 men, in 1630 Wallenstein in Germany commanded about 100,000. By 1659 the French state had 125,000 under arms, the number doubling and tripling under Louis XIV. The following paragraphs touch on five areas where the army, as in most wars of the time, ruined the cornfields, drove civilians from their homes, spread infection, and in the process aggravated mortality and retarded fertility.

The French civil wars (1562–98) were costly in terms of lives: the massacre of St Bartholomew's Eve, for example, exterminated over 3,000 Protestants in Paris and 20,000 throughout France. Many localities suffered an overall loss of population: Rouen lost one quarter of its inhabitants between 1562 and 1594. There was a

brighter side to the picture. A survey of parish registers reveals that the earlier period, up to the 1580s, coincided with the general expansion of population in Europe. In Burgundy births and marriages increased regularly during the wars, decreasing only in the 1590s, when famines rather than war were responsible for falling birth rates. There is little doubt that the civil wars were a principal reason why the total increase of population in France was smaller than in any other western European country, but the mortality was not so great as to reverse the period of positive growth up to the 1580s.

In the same years the Netherlands were going through a civil war. The Eighty Years War (1568–1648) split the country into a northern section (the United Provinces) and a southern (under Spanish rule). In the early years the north suffered substantially, but from the end of the sixteenth century it was the south that took the brunt of the war. Not until the 1630s, when the Dunkirk privateers successfully attacked northern shipping, did the United Provinces suffer serious reverses. A number of factors combined to produce disastrous effects on the south. The collapse of the country was to some extent a consequence of the collapse of Antwerp, which suffered from the blockade of the Scheldt after 1572 and from the rebellion of Spanish troops—the 'Spanish fury'—in 1576. From 1580 onwards a severe crisis developed in Belgian territory as the economy ground to a halt. In 1581 the linen industries of Courtrai and Oudenarde collapsed, and nothing could be sown in the fields round Brussels because of the war. In 1582 the Duke of Anjou's troops sacked several industrial towns. Mercenaries murdered farmers, farms were destroyed, fields were left untilled. In 1585 the Scheldt was firmly closed by the Dutch. Around Ghent for a while the area of cultivation fell by 92 per cent. In most villages of Brabant the population by 1586 had dropped to between 25 and 50 per cent of 1575 levels. 'Trade has almost totally ceased', reported the Duke of Saxony when he visited Antwerp in 1613. The outbreak of war in 1621, after the expiry of the Twelve Years Truce between Spain and the United Provinces, brought further problems. 'I have come to Amsterdam where I now am', reported a priest in 1627, 'and find all the towns as full of people as those held by Spain are empty'. Fortunately, in many areas the survival of good land and other resources helped the people to recover rapidly from the war. The earlier phase of the Dutch wars coincided with demographic expansion, so that there was only a moderate check to fertility. The wars of the seventeenth century, however, came at a time of demographic stagnation or decline, and had a more marked effect.

In France the most serious reverses were associated with the Fronde (1648–53), which took place mainly in the north, around Paris. Angélique Arnauld in 1649 lamented 'the frightful state of this poor countryside; all is pillaged, ploughing has ceased, there are no horses, everything is stolen, the peasants are driven to sleeping in the woods'.<sup>84</sup> A report of 1652 on the area speaks of

villages and hamlets deserted, streets infected by stinking carrion and dead bodies lying exposed, everything reduced to cesspools and stables, and above all

the sick and dying, with no bread, meat, medicine, heating, beds, linen or covering, and no priest, doctor or anyone to comfort them.

Harvests collapsed in the affected region. Though war was the cause of misery in these years, in fact the highest mortality was caused by epidemic disease spread by the soldiers. The population loss around Paris was about a fifth. In the summer of 1652, the year of highest mortality in the whole century in the south of Paris, the death rate was fifteen times higher than in the previous four crisis years.<sup>85</sup>

The Thirty Years War (1618–48) is the most famous of the scourges of this period. Though literary accounts, notably Grimmelshausen's famous anti-war tract *Simplicissimus* (1668), have helped to exaggerate some of the effects of the war, detailed research has supported the traditional picture. At the same time there can be little doubt that epidemic disease, particularly the extensive plague of 1634–6, was the single most lethal killer. Nördlingen, for example, lost one third of its population of 9,000 in the plague of 1634. The human misery caused by military occupation that same year nevertheless caused a diarist to write that 'it was considered a blessing in these times to die of the plague'. The Rhineland, fought for by the troops of every nation in Europe, was reduced to ruins. 'From Cologne hither' (to Frankfurt), reported an English ambassador in 1635, 'all the towns, villages and castles be battered, pillaged and burnt'. 'I am leading my men', claimed the Bavarian general von Werth when crossing the Rhineland in 1637, 'through a country where many thousands of men have died of hunger and not a living soul can be seen for many miles along the way'. In the county of Lippe, a region only moderately hit by the war, the population fell by 35 per cent between 1618 and 1648. In the district of Lautern in the Rhineland, a more severely devastated region, of a total of sixty-two towns thirty were still deserted in 1656, and a population of 4,200 (excluding the chief town Kaiserslautern) had sunk to about 500. Augsburg lost half its population and three quarters of its wealth during the war; its richest taxpayers fell in number from 142 to eighteen. Over the German lands as a whole the urban centres lost one third of their inhabitants, the rural areas about 40 per cent.<sup>86</sup> The losses varied from under 10 per cent in Lower Saxony in the northwest to over 50 per cent in Württemberg in the south and Pomerania in the north. These figures must be treated with caution; there was an enormous refugee population, of whom many returned eventually to their homes, so that 'loss' may not necessarily mean death so much as displacement. Not only the German lands, but other adjacent countries, suffered badly: Franche Comté, devastated between 1635 and 1644, lost between a half and three quarters of its population.

A long-forgotten war whose consequences persist down to today was that of 1640–68 between Spain and Portugal, which ended with Spain recognising the latter's independence. Years of skirmishes and raids across the frontier turned every major town into a garrison town, periodically ruined both livestock and agriculture, aggravated emigration and led to the collapse of both dwellings and population. The already poor province of Extremadura may have lost half its population in the quarter century that the war lasted; its capital, Badajoz, declined

by 43 per cent between 1640 and 1691, at a time when most major cities in Spain were increasing in size.<sup>87</sup>

Although some areas took as much as a generation to recover pre-crisis levels, many managed to do so with surprising speed. The virtual cessation of marriages and births in some communities was only temporary. As the crisis neared its end, households which had lost one parent would look around for a replacement, and the stock of unmarried women would become available for men seeking wives. Marriages and remarriages would increase steeply. In Nördlingen<sup>88</sup> during the four months of the plague and military crisis at the end of 1634, only three marriages took place. When the plague died away in December, a massive increase in weddings occurred: 121 were celebrated in the first four months of 1635. This wave of crisis marriages would then produce a big upsurge in births, as duly happened in Nördlingen. Helped additionally by an increase in immigration, the cities and eventually the countryside would recover steadily from the disastrous years of war.