INTRODUCTION

Urbanization in Perspective

In a single millennium Europe has become urban. A thousand years ago the few towns north and west of Muslim and Byzantine areas were either vestiges of the Roman past or embryos of urbanization to come. Their few inhabitants had a limited place in the social order of the time. Today, by contrast, perhaps half the European population lives in substantial towns or large agglomerations, while another two or three out of ten lead lives that can only be called urbanized in fact. In many regions of Europe the proportion is higher still; there urbanization is quite general, regardless of how administrative distinctions label this or that group of people. And forecasts call for ever larger conurbations, gargantuan megalopolises that will stretch for hundreds of miles.

This profusion of cities and of city dwellers began centuries ago in many regions. Indeed, most of the major towns in Europe today were founded before 1300. Therefore, to study the development of urban Europe requires a lengthy look backward in time. The answers to many questions about the nature of contemporary European cities lie in the medieval period, not in the modern industrial era.

During the past millennium individual cities have had long and splendid histories. Sited at an important crossing point on the Danube, Vienna had become a fortified town and market by the early twelfth century. An important trading center for merchants from southern as well as eastern Europe, the city grew in political importance with its selection as a residence by the Babenberg and Habsburg families. Crusaders met in Vienna before moving against the Muslims, and nobles from the many Habsburg lands built urban
however, yield much more concrete data because documents marking the foundation of cities are often available. It is not necessary to speculate about warrior kings or the attracting power of shrines when it is clear that a particular ruler founded a town, then granted it a charter and market rights at a given date. Early maps and drawings sometimes supplement the archaeological record, permitting a detailed reconstruction of urban spaces.

A second major interest guiding the study of urbanization is in the activities taking place in cities, particularly those economic and demographic processes that characterize urban populations. Cities are seen as the sites of specific large-scale actions, as links in the movement of people and goods. For us as well as for many other scholars, these topics help to demarcate some of the most distinctive and widely encountered qualities of European cities in the past, and we accordingly give them much emphasis.

A third theme of urban scholarship arises from an awareness of the social consequences of urban life. The recognition that cities differ from rural communities has produced a vast literature tracing the psychological and cultural effects of urban living. Do cities foster crime, alienation, and deviance? Do they encourage independence, diversity, and initiative? Many would answer yes to one or indeed both questions. Whether they picture cities in positive, negative, or mixed terms, analysts generally agree on the fundamental importance of cities in shaping the life-styles and mental life of their inhabitants.

Yet none of these three larger concerns captures precisely the approach of this book, which is the history of the way Europe urbanized. In presenting this story, we shall take note of the splendid traditions and terrible crises of individual cities and towns. But we shall play off these captivating specific cases against an analysis of the larger processes at work and of the relationships that evolved between town and country, between city and city, and between cities and the larger political entities around them.

Process and Systems

On the most straightforward level, urbanization describes a shift in the composition of the population. The fraction living in towns grows in relation to the fraction that remains rural. In practice, though not as a matter of logical necessity, the shift involves a flow...
of people from rural to urban habitats. Even ignoring all the other influences and interactions, it is clear that urbanization is an ongoing activity that affects the country as well as the city. A key step in studying it is to identify important forces that drive the process. We shall focus on three—technology, demography, and markets—thereby linking the modes and factors of production and reproduction to the economic roles of cities. In feudal times cities were the sites of necessary exchanges of goods. Even primarily agricultural economies did not manage autarky. Later, growing long-distance trade and manufacturing gave urban elites added duties as organizers of production and suppliers of capital. In the heyday of merchant capitalism, cities pushed the boundaries of the world economy into new areas. Then, as Europe industrialized, mass production concentrated in the towns, which expanded the ability of cities to supply both goods and sites for exchange. As the European economy evolved, so did the urban role within it. We have tried to make explicit in later pages the connections we see between large economic and social processes and the microcosm of the cities.

Urbanization is more than the result of certain global forces acting on many individual towns and rural areas, however, even with due regard to variations in time and space. As urban places grow, they interact with their rural surroundings, with one another, and with larger sociopolitical units. Indeed, if there is a single defining characteristic of urban life, even in the most fiercely independent and secure city, it is dependence. Not only are the inhabitants interdependent, but the truly isolated city is both unviable and pointless. Unable to sustain itself, it would have no outlets for the fruits of specialization and complex organization. In the words of B. J. L. Berry, “Cities are systems within systems of cities” (1964:147).

We propose two models of such urban systems, and much of our analysis relies on them. The first model is based on the role of the city as a central place, supplying its surroundings with special services—economic, administrative, or cultural—that call for concentration at a point in space. A hierarchy of such centers, the higher-level ones serving as central places for central places, forms a region around the principal center. The region, key to the relationships of town and country and to the hierarchical links among nearby towns, will receive much attention as we discuss Central Place Systems in Europe.

Yet cities are more than the points around which the threads of regional unity are wound. They also link the region with the world beyond, permitting it to reconcile the advantages of specialized activity with the enriching experience of diversity. In economic terms, cities enable the region to pursue its comparative advantage. In this perspective cities also belong to networks of trade, information, and influence that reach far beyond the borders of a country. As an example of the workings of a Network System, consider Bordeaux. To understand its activities, the reasons for its growth or stagnation, one cannot look at the city alone or merely at its role as the capital of a region of southwestern France, its influence bounded by that of Toulouse to the east and Nantes and Limoges to the north. Bordeaux has long been an important link in international trading networks along which flowed wine, of course, but also grain, fish, timber, sugar, and oil. To follow the city’s fortunes we would need to look to London, to the Antilles or Africa, even to the Levant and the Baltic. Just as in analyzing regions we distinguish hierarchies of centers, so urban networks have their nodes and junctions, their gateways and outposts, their cores and peripheries.

To these largely economic discussions of the Central Place and the Network Systems, we need to add a political dimension. Nation-states and empires came to operate and to mediate between the regional and worldwide linkages of town to town. The relationship of cities to the development of centralized political power has been an ambivalent one, and we shall probe it. Urban elites have been both the allies and the enemies, the agents and the rivals, of monarchs. Urban offices have been a springboard to national power as well as centers of resistance to it. These relationships, to be sure, shift over time and vary among regions. Specifically, cities play a key role in an ongoing struggle that pits centralized nation-states—dynastic or republican, pluralistic or homogeneous, continental or colonial—against an alternative structure that gives greater weight to regional as well as transnational levels of power and loyalty. Until a generation ago the struggle in Europe seemed a very unequal one, but recent developments once again challenge the administrative hierarchy of centers and offer opportunities to regional capitals and world-oriented cities.

Wealth and power are not the only impulses that travel along the conduits linking city with city. Cultural messages pass as well, and cities have always served as centers of cultural transformation.
and transmission. The two types of urban system correspond fairly closely in this regard to the types postulated by Redfield and Singer (1954). In their scheme, cities are ortogenetic or heterogenetic according to whether they elaborate and diffuse the prevailing culture or one alien to their surroundings. As is true in the economic and political spheres, cultural leadership of either kind can be viewed as service or exploitation, opportunity or coercion. In the Central Place System, the cities codify local and regional variants of a common language and make possible a high tradition of education, literature, and organized thought expressed as French civilization or Germanic culture. But the diverse folk traditions and values of the regions can easily dissolve in the dominant national culture or come to be viewed as subversive of unity and progress. By contrast, the Network System accommodates continuing pluralism but within a clearly defined structure of dominance and dependence. The good burghers of seventeenth-century Amsterdam could rub elbows daily with Jewish and Genoese merchants, Huguenot and Puritan dissidents, Frisian and Flemish artisans, and slaves from the Indies, West and East. Among the babel of tongues and the kaleidoscope of faces and costumes, it remained, unquestionably, their city.

Thus, the two sorts of urban systems model contrasting modes of development, from the rural base upward in one case and from the urban core outward in the other. In one, the nation-state represents the culminating union of a group of regions whose people share a territory and an ethnic heritage. Centralization in network system development, on the other hand, results in the formation of an empire with more diverse components. The experience of most European countries shows both sorts of processes at work, implying that many cities, notably large ones, have a place in both sorts of systems. London is a case in point, as shown by the many entities of which it has been the acknowledged capital: England, Great Britain, the United Kingdom, the British Empire, the—sometimes British—Commonwealth. Think for a minute of the many visitors to London in the eighteenth century. For how many was it an inland voyage as opposed to one abroad? Samuel Johnson of Litchfield certainly felt at home; what of his Edinburgh friend Boswell, or Ben Franklin of Philadelphia? Would an Irishman feel less alien in London than a mulatto Jamaican, or more uprooted for that matter than a Cornishman or a Geordie? To postulate two models of urban systems is to affirm, not deny, the complexity and variety of the urban experience. If our exposition sometimes appears to reify these constructs, it is only a by-product of the search for economy and force of expression.

**Major Phases of Urban Growth**

The creation of an urban network in Europe has not been a steady, slow progression. Rather, long spurts of growth have alternated with times of stagnation and decline. These rhythms are widely observable, but not everywhere identical. Some regions were dotted with towns by the later eleventh century, while others urbanized only in the nineteenth or twentieth. Partly dependent upon the density of human settlement, city growth began early in the crowded river valleys of the Rhineland and northern Italy but late in the empty forests of Norway and in the Scottish highlands. In general, however, when population increased rapidly in more densely settled areas, so too did the number and size of cities. The long waves of population growth provided the human material for city building. A basic interdependence bound together people, production, and trade; urban activities and urbanites multiplied together.

While figures are few and unreliable for medieval times, demographers estimate that the European population rose from around 1000 to 1350, again less sharply from 1450 to 1650, and then increased explosively after 1750. The centuries from roughly 1350 to 1450 and 1650 to 1750 were times of overall decline or stagnation (Braudel 1979). The demographic engine therefore produced three periods when increasing numbers of people had to be accommodated by social and economic systems. The particular links among city growth, economic change, and population will be explored at length in later chapters, but for now it will be enough to show how urbanization mirrored the large rhythms of population size.

Not enough information is available on the entire range of medieval cities to construct an urbanization rate for Europe as a whole during the years from 1000 to 1500, but hearth tax returns, army recruitment figures, data on mortality, and the changing area inside city walls give clues to the sizes of individual towns. While the margin of error is no doubt high, the pace and magnitude of urban growth can be observed in the estimated sizes of some European provincial capitals. Lyon, Cologne, and Milan grew substantially from the eleventh century until sometime in the late Middle Ages.
(see Figure 1.1). A common pattern of population declines, small increases, and periods of stability, albeit in fluctuating rhythms, marked the period between 1400 and 1800, when long-term growth resumed. Finally, as industrialization accelerated movement into the cities, their populations exploded.

The experience of countless other cities throughout Europe paralleled that of these three major towns. The eleventh, twelfth, and thirteenth centuries were generally times of accelerated city building and of increasing urbanization throughout western and central Europe. This trend reversed, however, with the deprivations and plagues of the fourteenth century and then resumed only weakly and in-

Figure 1.1. The growth of provincial capitals, 1000–1950. (Data from Chandler and Fox 1974.)

termittently during the next three centuries. Paul Bairoch (1977) and Charles Tilly (1979) suggest that by 1500, in Europe outside of Russia, the proportion urban had reached 16 percent. After rising more, it then decreased somewhat to reach 13 percent in 1700 before rising slightly during the next century. The years between 1300 and 1800 saw in a variable mixture limited growth and decline. This pattern is echoed in so many sources that it seems a reasonable proxy for the general progress of urbanization in Europe since the later Middle Ages. We therefore picture European urbanization as a three-stage process of growth, trendless fluctuation, and renewed growth, each phase dependent upon the interactions of demography, technology, and markets. Their interwoven patterns of change link human settlements with modes of production and exchange.

Of course, the pattern varied somewhat among regions and types of cities. The epidemics of the fourteenth century affected northern and western Europe more severely than eastern areas. Population growth continued in Poland through the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, only to retreat around 1550. Although in the northern Netherlands growth and urbanization continued strongly through the seventeenth century, in France population decreases set in after 1630 or 1640 (Pounds 1979). On the other hand, in England many county towns and smaller settlements underwent periods of demographic decline in the early and mid-sixteenth century and then again after 1600. London and other major ports were virtually untouched by economic difficulties at these times and continued to grow, except in times of plague (Clark and Slack 1976).

The forces shaping urbanization prior to the nineteenth century not only changed in intensity over time but were partially reversible in nature. Specific cities grew and then shrank because of wars, plagues, and economic troubles. Regensburg, the largest city in central Europe in the eleventh century and the meeting place for the Diet of the Holy Roman Empire, nonetheless declined by 1700 into a sleepy market town and residence for ambassadors from the various German states. Now a living museum of medieval urban architecture, Bruges was Europe's second or third largest city around 1400 because of its leading role in textile production and commerce. Rome, once the center of urban life in Europe, shrank to a fraction of its maximum size when its empire collapsed. The rhythm of urban population growth and decline mirrors the changing importance of specific cities in the European urban network. Although
few towns of any size disappeared after the urban revival of the
eleventh century, the relative importance of cities has shifted greatly
with the patterns of political and economic development.

Since the year 1000 the location and identities of dominant cities
have changed regularly. While not an ideal proxy for political and
economic influence, relative population size helps to measure a city's
attractiveness to outsiders and the size of its economic base. A list
of Europe's largest cities during the past thousand years, along with
what we know about general patterns of political and economic
development, reveals regular shifts in the hierarchy of major cities
both within and among political units (see Table 1.1). In A.D. 1000
most cities in western and central Europe were tiny, with the
exception of the capitals of the Byzantine Empire and the Umayyad
Caliphate in Spain. Virtually all the sizable cities bordered the
Mediterranean. The real centers of the European urban world lay
to the south and east in the territories of the Muslim and Byzantine
rulers. Only Italy had an urban network that included several big
towns. By 1400 this pattern had changed decisively. Muslim control
of Spain and Byzantine influence in the eastern Mediterranean were
virtually ended, leaving the decline of both Constantinople and
Cordoba. The major Italian cities had increased in size, Genoa and
Milan quickly reaching the top ranks of an urban hierarchy. The
growing importance of the Low Countries and their cloth produc-
tion is reflected in the enormous growth of Bruges and Ghent.
Meanwhile, the growing strength of the kingdom of France and
the importance of Paris as a university town, national capital, and
trading center catapulted that city to the leading position in the
urban network of northwestern Europe. No longer was European
urbanization wholly centered on the Mediterranean. By 1700 sev-
eral different places, most of them political capitals, had become
major European cities. The growing power of the Ottoman Empire,
Portugal's colonial successes, and the commercial triumphs of Eng-
lish and Dutch merchants are reflected in the rapid development
of Constantinople, Moscow, Lisbon, London, and Amsterdam. The
fast-growing cities in Europe were increasingly located now in the
north and west. This dominance of northern areas became even
more marked by 1900, when industrial development helped to create
conurbations and metropolises whose citizens numbered in the
millions. Industrial towns like Manchester, Birmingham, and Glas-
gow, tiny in 1700, became larger than Rome had been at the height
of its empire. Throughout Europe, however, political capitals, especially those that managed to combine industrial development with their political functions, joined the list of urban giants.

**A Functional View**

The complexity of the European regional pattern of urban population growth and city dominance over time highlights the difficulties of using a purely demographic criterion for urbanization. When all population statistics are of dubious accuracy and when both urban and rural areas undergo mixed and moderate phases of expansion and decline, it becomes particularly difficult to decide whether a region is becoming more urban or less so. It is possible, moreover, for substantial amounts of urban population growth to be occurring in a specific part of an urban network, or indeed in all its cities, while the rural population still increases faster than the urban. Does it make sense in those cases to say that a society or a region is becoming less urban?

In both the mid-sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries in England, urban growth was largely confined to London and a few other cities. Most of the county towns and provincial capitals stagnated in size, even though the sixteenth century was a time of relatively high fertility and population growth (Clark and Slack 1976). In demographic terms cities probably decreased in importance during these two periods, but at the same time the influence of London was clearly increasing. The political dominance of the capital under the Tudor monarchs, the economic influence of the port along with its trading companies and merchants, and regularly high levels of migration to and from London meant that more and more people were experiencing life in the capital city (Wrigley 1969). A series of large-scale activities centered in London and mediated by the network of towns in fact affected the whole country in relatively systematic and intensive ways. At least for the early seventeenth century the scale of these activities was such that it warrants a judgment, based on functional criteria, of increasing urbanization in England, even if by demographic standards only a mixed pattern of urban growth can be discerned. Adding alternative approaches to demographic analyses can help to solve this problem.

Many people, particularly planners and geographers, view cities as parts of a network organized for the exchange of people, goods, and information. The spatial approach to urbanization has also yielded rich results when applied to single cities, for example, in the hands of Kevin Lynch (1960), who has analyzed the changing physical forms of cities and their arrangement in space with an eye toward discovering optimal designs for the cities of the future. Geographers such as Harold Carter (1966) and Alan Pred (1980) have shed new light on urban systems through their maps of the functional hierarchies that link towns in regional networks. Another major focus of the locational approach to cities has been through the historical study of urban economies. Eric Lampard (1954) traces the many connections between economic efficiency and urbanization, which he sees as a way of ordering a population to promote specialization and efficiency. Economic processes become central, therefore, in defining urban functions. Although he gives primary emphasis to the city building of the past two hundred years, Lampard's perspective also applies to medieval and early modern cities. His vision of towns as centers for specialization and differentiation captures a universal property of the city. For centuries European towns have grouped functionally integrated and specialized types of people whose occupations and social roles differed from those of rural dwellers. Following Lampard's lead, we will emphasize the special activities that take place in cities. Tracing the links among activities produced by those activities turns the study of urbanization away from mere population toward the study of process, a richer and more complicated inquiry. The study of cities requires shifts of perspective. Answers to those perennial questions—where, why, when, how, and so what?—will force the seeker to alter his or her point of view to accommodate the varying insights of several disciplines and the multitude of urban experiences that we will seek to order and to illuminate.