

CHAPTER ONE

Boundaries and Buildings

For much of the seventeenth century, Paris was the largest city in Europe. Almost half a million people lived and worked in Paris, said their prayers in the city's churches and chapels, elbowed their way through its old crowded streets, or promenaded down its new esplanades. Some Parisians slept out of doors or died miserably in one of the city's great charity hospitals. Others spent their days in the salons of aristocratic *hôtels*, talking of the latest news from Fontainebleau or Versailles. Most Parisians lived and laboured in the high houses that lined the city's countless streets. All of them knew that they dwelt in one of the great urban centres of Europe.¹

Zell am Harmersbach was also a city. Prettily situated on a stream in the German Black Forest, Zell never had more than a thousand inhabitants. The community was poorer in early modern times than some of the surrounding agricultural villages; prosperous peasants ignored with impunity their obligation to pay taxes which the city was supposed to collect. Yet there was no doubt of the community's urban credentials, for Zell enjoyed the confirmed and recognized status of a Free and Imperial City of the Holy Roman Empire.²

Zell was an extreme case, of course – but so was Paris. Few cities in early modern Europe were quite as small as the urban hamlet on the Harmersbach, and few were as large as Paris. These two cities, however, suggest the full range of sizes within which European cities fell.

1. The estimated population of Paris rose from 220,000 in 1600 to 430,000 in 1650 and 510,000 in 1700: De Vries, *European Urbanization*, 275. For descriptions of seventeenth-century Paris, see Bernard, *Emerging City*, and Ranum, *Paris*.

2. Kähni, 'Reichsstädte der Ortenau', 59.

Demographic information of the kind we take for granted today is not available for the early modern era; the first national censuses of the modern type were undertaken only after the late eighteenth century. Through the painstaking collation of local records, however, historians have been able to arrive at reliable estimates of population for many towns and cities. According to one recent estimate, in the year 1500 there were over 150 cities in western and central Europe with populations of 10,000 or more; by 1750 there were over 250 cities of that size.³ But there were also thousands of smaller urban communities. It is always difficult to draw the exact dividing-line between cities and towns on the one hand and mere markets and villages on the other.⁴ Certainly population was not the only factor. To many people in early modern Europe, what really distinguished a city or town from other communities was not its size or function but its possession of specific political and economic privileges. Cities as small as Zell were rare, but Europe was dotted with urban places of only 2,000 to 3,000 inhabitants which were still true cities, with political privileges and economic activities that clearly distinguished them from the neighbouring villages.

The populations of cities rarely remained constant. A few cities declined during the early modern period. The great Spanish city of Toledo, for example, dropped from about 50,000 in 1600 to less than half as much a hundred years later. But the general trend was strongly in the other direction, for taken as a whole the early modern era was an epoch of considerable urban growth.⁵ A few cities of metropolitan rank emerged. The greatest city in Europe in 1500 was probably Naples, with a population of about 150,000. By the early seventeenth century Naples had been overtaken by Paris, but then Paris in turn was overtaken by London, whose population reached almost 700,000 in 1750.⁶ The great metropolitan centres had a huge social and cultural impact on other communities. According to one famous estimate, one out of every six adults in seventeenth-century England lived in London at some point in his or her life.⁷ Yet there were only a few cities of such magnitude. By one count in 1750 some

3. De Vries, *Urbanization*, 33. Higher estimates are provided by Bairoch *et al.*, *Population*, 270-1, but here as elsewhere I have followed de Vries's more conservative estimates.

4. cf. the discussion in Jones, *Towns and Cities*, 1-12, and Patten, *English Towns*, 21-8.

5. De Vries, *Urbanization*, *passim*; for Toledo, 278.

6. *ibid.*, appendix 1.

7. Wrigley, 'A Simple Model', 49.

3 million people in western or central Europe lived in 16 cities with more than 80,000 inhabitants – but almost 6 million lived in 245 cities whose population fell between 10,000 and 80,000.⁸ Millions more lived in thousands of smaller cities and towns. Even after three centuries of urban growth, cities of small to medium size still harboured the vast majority of European town-dwellers.

To be sure, the inhabitants of all cities still made up only a small portion – something like 15 per cent – of the total European population in early modern times. But the impact of cities was enormous. Tens of thousands of villagers migrated to cities every year; millions more had at least intermittent contact with urban life through markets, fairs and temporary employment. Few Europeans lived more than a day's walk from some city or other. Even those villagers – and they must have been few – who had never set foot in a city were affected by administrative and economic structures organized and controlled by people in the nearest urban centre. Cities were important to almost every European.

I

Most people, no matter where they live, know intuitively what a city is. Yet formally to define the term is notoriously difficult. Few theorists can claim to have improved on the observation made by Max Weber, awkward though it may sound in English: 'The many definitions of the city have only one element in common: namely that the city consists simply of a collection of one or more separate dwellings but is a relatively closed settlement'.⁹ This, after all, is how people first experience the city: long before they become conscious of its distinct economic or administrative functions, they perceive the city as a physical place, an assembly of buildings and other structures which differ in character, in size, and above all in the density of their concentration from what would be found in smaller communities. So before we can explore how men and women actually lived in European cities of the early modern era, we must know something of the physical environment in which they lived out their lives.

The most distinctly urban feature of the early modern city was the outer wall. Even villages could have churches, marketplaces, public buildings and houses – but by and large only a city would have a wall. To be sure, not every city had a wall, and not every walled community was a city. But the correlation was remarkably high. It

8. The calculation is based, with some rounding-off, on the data in de Vries, *Urbanization*, 34.

9. Weber, *The City*, 65.

is hard for people today to capture any sense of the size and ubiquity of city walls in early modern Europe. Only a few European cities – mostly small ones – still have their walls intact. Far more often, just a few metres of the old wall still visible behind modern houses or a gate tower hindering the traffic on a busy street will receive the visitor's fleeting notice on his or her way to the cathedral or museum. Yet in early modern times, the wall was almost a city's dominant architectonic feature.

Indeed, the term 'wall' is hardly sufficient to suggest the size and solidity of urban fortifications. The basic wall system for almost any city was a product of the middle ages, but throughout the early modern era urban fortifications were lavishly expanded and strengthened. Many cities, already girdled by one massive wall, received an additional perimeter of bastions linked by new walls in the sixteenth or seventeenth century.¹⁰ Access to the city was possible only through perpetually guarded gates, many of which were surmounted by high towers from which watchmen could survey the flow of traffic for miles in any direction.

City walls obviously had a military function. A walled city was almost impossible to take by storm; an enemy army would normally have to negotiate its way into the city or initiate a siege, hoping to starve the inhabitants into submission. But the wall had other functions as well, for the system of fortifications had come into being largely to give city officials some control over the flow of goods and people in and out of their community. Access to the city was deliberately made difficult. Consider, for example, how travellers had to enter Frankfurt am Main in the seventeenth century. Arriving, say, from the southwest, they would first enter a fenced enclosure. Passing the pikeman posted there, they then took a wooden bridge across the city's outer moat and went through a stone gate into the bastion ring. Turning sharply left, the travellers continued along the bastion wall, past numerous soldiers, till they reached the next wooden bridge. After crossing the second moat, they went through yet another small stone gateway. Now at last they stood before one of the actual gate towers of Frankfurt, where of course a watchman stood to ask questions or check papers. Permitted to pass through the great arched entry of the gate tower, the travellers were finally inside the city itself and free to go about their business.¹¹

10. Stooß, 'Stadtbefestigung'.

11. This is based on the highly detailed plan of Frankfurt by Matthäus Merian, as revised c. 1682; the plan is reproduced in Bothe, *Geschichte der Stadt Frankfurt*, 446.

Of course the system of control was far from flawless. On busy days the throng of people, animals and vehicles coursing through the gates might be difficult to regulate, and many an unwelcome visitor was able to slip through. Schemes to control the traffic more tightly were liable to backfire. When an outbreak of bubonic plague was reported in the environs of Barcelona in 1650, the authorities' usual concerns about unwanted beggars and untaxed goods were compounded by their added fear of infected travellers. To maintain a closer watch on arrivals, the officials closed all but two of the city gates – but, as a contemporary diarist reported, 'as the Angel Gate is so narrow and so many carts and mules and people had to enter, there was little room for the guards, and it became so crowded that it was easier to break the rules'. Within a few days, the other gates were reopened.¹²

In actual fact, walls offered little protection from the seemingly endless stream of unwelcome vagrants who drifted from the countryside into the cities. But the importance of the walls was as much psychological as practical. In 1634 the magistrates of Nîmes in southern France became alarmed when it appeared that some small walls around the city might be torn down to provide building materials for an aqueduct. Painting a grim falling-dominoes scenario, the magistrates warned that this small act of plunder would lead, step by step, to the depopulation of the whole city,

inasmuch as the little walls serve as a reinforcement for the big walls, so that once they have been torn down indubitably the big walls will collapse and by those means the city . . . will be exposed to entry by every sort of person and the clergy, magistrates, merchants and other inhabitants will be unable to stay.¹³

Not every city had a wall, nor did every city that had one maintain it carefully. In England, which had not experienced a foreign invasion for centuries, city walls were often neglected – though their importance was quickly rediscovered during the civil wars of the mid-seventeenth century. A few cities, of course, had no need of walls at all. The most spectacular case of an unwalled city was Venice, which lay on a group of islands far out in the Venetian lagoon, defended from all attacks by one of the greatest navies in Europe. Other cities might have benefited from fortifications but had never been granted permission to construct any. Debrecen, whose population of about

12. Amelang, *Journal of the Plague Year*, 34.

13. Teisseyre-Sallmann, 'Urbanisme et société', 979.

10,000 made it the largest urban centre in early modern Hungary, was technically only a market rather than a city until 1693 – and it was surrounded by a fence, not a proper wall. The merchants of Debrecen were the richest town-dwellers in Hungary, but their unprotected community, located in a perpetually tense border region, was vulnerable to ceaseless financial demands from regional princes and marauding soldiers.¹⁴

Some cities lost their walls for political reasons. The English town of Gloucester, for example, was forced to tear down its wall in the 1660s as a result of having supported the wrong side in the recent civil war.¹⁵ Similarly, when Louis XIV seized control of the Alsatian town of Colmar in 1673, he ordered that the city's fortifications be destroyed. Bitter citizens complained that the city was now 'open to all to come and go, like a village', or had become nothing more than an 'urban village' itself. But the king's purpose was to assert the power of his regime, not to undermine the routine control of goods and travellers; within a few years a new, smaller wall was erected.¹⁶ Indeed, throughout the seventeenth century the conquest of a city was as likely to lead to a strengthening of its fortifications as it was to lead to the opposite. After conquering the Flemish town of Lille in 1667, for example, Louis XIV immediately ordered the construction of a massive citadel connected to the city's bastion ring – partly to protect the city from reconquest and partly, it seems, to intimidate the inhabitants themselves.¹⁷

The city wall normally enclosed the built-up areas of the community. But the city's legal boundary customarily extended for some distance beyond the actual walls. A few buildings – mills, chapels, convents, hospices – could always be found outside the walls. Some cities also had built-up suburbs or *faubourgs* outside the walls. In the middle ages it had been customary from time to time to build new walls to accommodate urban growth, and in many cities this continued to be done in the early modern era. In cities which experienced rapid urbanization, however, this was not possible. London, which underwent the most spectacular growth of any major city in early modern Europe, is the paradigmatic case. In 1500 London was still contained within its medieval walls; the administrative centre at Westminster a few miles upriver was a

14. Zimányi, 'Entwicklung der Städte Ungarns', 138.

15. Clark, 'Civic Leaders of Gloucester', 322.

16. Rathgeber, *Colmar und Ludwig XIV*, 38, 66, 69, 110.

17. Lottin, *Chavatte*, 167.

completely separate community. By the end of the sixteenth century, however, there were extensive settlements beyond the walls of London. Growth continued in all directions, and by 1750 London had become a vast urban agglomeration. The City of London was still a compact, clearly defined area at the centre of the metropolis, but the outer districts formed a dizzying tapestry of archaic boundaries and overlapping jurisdictions. It was centuries since anyone had worried about enclosing all of London within a single wall.

But London and the other great metropolitan centres were exceptions. Most cities retained their walls and gates until the end of the eighteenth century. In many places, however, there was increasing negligence in maintaining the fortifications. The outer ring of bastion walls built in the seventeenth century proved of little tactical value and their upkeep was often slipshod. Then even the integrity of the basic city walls began to be threatened. Little openings and doorways appeared in the walls and were quietly tolerated by the authorities. In the late eighteenth century, city walls suddenly came to be seen as impediments to urban growth, aesthetic form and the flow of traffic. Within two generations in city after city the walls were razed and parks and promenades were laid out in their place. But the idea that traffic should move in and out of a city without any impediment was still too much for the average European to swallow. Frankfurt am Main well illustrates the point. In 1804 the demolitions began and within a matter of years the once mighty walls of Frankfurt were totally gone. But on the major roads, where imposing city gateways had once served to channel movement in and out of the city, there now stood little guardhouses and metal gates. Not until 1846 did these last faint echoes of the walled city of Frankfurt finally disappear.¹⁸

II

Everyone has some mental image of the topography of the medieval or early modern city: a densely congested network of narrow, winding streets lined with high house fronts, a pattern relieved only occasionally by open squares and marketplaces. The image is not inaccurate, but it can be misleading. Most cities had considerable amounts of green space, even within the walls: there was no shortage of pleasure gardens, market gardens and orchards, not to mention other open areas like cemeteries and workyards. But the gardens were private spaces, behind houses or enclosed by walls, generally

18. Pehl. *Als die Frankfurter*, 77–91.

inaccessible to anyone but their owners or those who worked there. Public activity took place in the streets and marketplaces, or outside the city gates. The open spaces just beyond the walls were often available for recreational activity – but they, too, could be threatened by urban growth as fields and meadows were converted into sites of intense cultivation, organized leisure, or additional housing. John Stow, the topographer of late sixteenth-century London, complained bitterly about what had happened in his own lifetime to the district beyond London's northern wall, where the 'pleasant fields, very commodious for citizens therein to walk, shoot, and otherwise to recreate and refresh their dulled spirits in the sweet and wholesome air' had recently turned into 'a continual building throughout, of garden-houses and small cottages; and the fields on either side be turned into garden-plots, tenter yards, bowling alleys, and such like'.¹⁹

The basic street plan of almost every European city was a product of the middle ages, and once it was laid down the plan normally proved remarkably resistant to change. Only entirely new cities could ignore the constraints imposed by past construction. Early modern Europeans were quite alert to the potential attractiveness of straight streets and broad vistas: the 'ideal cities' of Renaissance theorists like Antonio Filarete or Francesco di Giorgio Martini almost always involved a rectangular grid or a pattern of identical straight avenues radiating from a central square.²⁰ A few cities were even constructed along such lines. The most flawlessly realized ideal city was probably the Venetian military outpost of Palma Nuova, which was founded in 1593 and still looks from above like a page torn from Filarete's textbook. The town of Freudenstadt, established by the duke of Württemberg in 1599, had rows of houses aligned evenly around the central market in a series of ever larger perfect squares.²¹ When a Polish magnate founded Zamość in the late sixteenth century he commissioned an Italian architect to design the entire city; the result, predictably enough, was an almost flawless grid with impressive sightlines.²² Similar concepts formed the basis for a handful of other cities as well.

Such designs, however, could hardly ever be imposed on existing built-up cities. Property owners, ranging from richly endowed

19. Stow, *Survey of London*, 116; this passage is discussed in Rappaport, *Worlds within Worlds*, 65.

20. For some examples, see Burke, *Towns in the Making*, 72–8.

21. Deiseroth, 'Fürstliche Stadtgründungen', 46; see also plates 6 and 25.

22. Kalinowski, *City Development*, 37–8.

institutions down to modest householders, were likely to resist any proposal to realign streets if it meant impinging on their land. Even the popes of the sixteenth century were thwarted in their attempts to run a system of straight avenues through the densely inhabited heart of Rome; great axial boulevards could be built only on the outskirts.²³ Nor did the sudden destruction of a city centre by fire routinely clear the way to significant changes in urban topography. It could happen, of course: when much of Stockholm burned down in 1625, the Swedish king insisted on redesigning the inner city to eliminate a cluster of small dark alleys and provide for a major new thoroughfare.²⁴ But this was hardly the norm. When the heart of London was destroyed by fire in 1666, numerous proposals were offered to reconstruct the city on elegant new lines. But any such plans would have required massive schemes for compensating landlords or redistributing property. In the end some realignments were made, a few streets were widened, and less flammable building materials were mandated – but major changes in the layout of the city proved impossible to realize.²⁵ When, to take another example, two-thirds of the German town of Schwäbisch Hall went up in flames in 1728, the authorities did succeed in straightening out one main street which ran from the market square down to the river – but everything else stayed the same.²⁶

None of this means, of course, that city centres remained completely unaltered. Property was constantly changing hands in early modern cities, and every now and then a new owner would tear down an existing dwelling to put a newer, more ostentatious building in its place. New public buildings were constructed and old ones were extended. Occasionally a whole group of dwellings would be razed and new structures erected. Or a vacant area within the city might be developed. In 1605, for example, King Henri IV of France decreed that a neglected royal tournament-ground in northeastern Paris – an area which was being used as a horse-market – should be transformed into an architecturally integrated residential square. Lots were granted to royal officeholders or other wealthy Parisians who promised to build elegant matching townhouses linked by a continuous arcade in conformity with a predetermined plan. One

23. Girouard, *Cities and People*, 121–3.

24. Roberts, *Gustavus Adolphus*, 1: 487–8; Råberg, 'Development of Stockholm', 14.

25. Rasmussen, *London*, 99–122; Reddaway, *Rebuilding of London*, 31–199 passim.

26. Krüger, *Schwäbisch Hall*, 79–80.

side of the square was initially used for silk-workshops, but these were soon relocated elsewhere so that all four sides could present a pleasingly coordinated appearance.²⁷ The resulting Place Royale, which was completed by 1612 and soon became a highly fashionable address, has long been praised by historians as a masterpiece of urban planning – and rightly so. But it came into being only because the ground concerned was a vacant tract held by a single owner, in this case the crown. Without this advantage, even the most energetic king would have had trouble putting such plans in place. For by and large, in Paris as elsewhere, once the city core was built up it became highly resistant to topographical change.

It was in the undeveloped districts outside the city wall that more dramatic changes could take place. Fields and gardens outside the walls were occasionally transformed into formal parks and promenades where well-dressed members of the public were permitted to stroll. Entire new neighbourhoods were established as well. Where no previous pattern of houses existed, it was easier to lay out a rectangular grid of wide streets which approximated the Renaissance ideals of city planning. Many a European city thus acquired elegant new districts adjacent to the old crowded centre. Up to the mid-seventeenth century, for example, Aix-en-Provence retained its conventional medieval appearance. But in 1646 the archbishop of Aix – whose brother, conveniently, was the chief minister of France – obtained the king's permission to create an entirely new district to the south of the old city. A major stretch of wall was razed and new walls were constructed further south to enclose a neighbourhood of wide, straight streets which soon came to be lined with spacious homes. Where the old southern wall of Aix had run, between the old city and the new neighbourhood, there was now a broad tree-lined avenue – the grandest public space in Aix.²⁸

What happened once in Aix-en-Provence happened over and over in a metropolis like London. Throughout the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, tracts of land outside the City – typically former monastery lands which had been acquired by secular owners – were developed into tracts or squares with elegant homes suitable for rental by prosperous tenants.²⁹ As in Aix, such developments normally required royal permission; traditionally the conversion of open land to housing had been discouraged in London – but in fact permission was rarely

denied. And once an elegant quarter like Covent Garden or what became Bloomsbury Square went up, it was soon surrounded by less carefully planned infill settlements.

Many new districts, in fact, developed in a much more haphazard way. In certain parts of London, for example, growth was almost completely uncontrolled – especially in areas east of the city and south of the Thames where the old ribbon development along major roads and down the riverfront increasingly gave way to a vast agglomeration of suburban tenements. Ramshackle dwellings were often thrown up by squatters who tried to avoid paying any rent to the landholders. But increasingly in the seventeenth century, landlords would forestall such intrusions by building orderly rows of houses to be rented out.³⁰

Some cities experienced no physical expansion at all. In many cases, the area enclosed by the city walls proved ample for a stable or even declining population. In other cases, the population grew but there was nobody with sufficient interest, incentive or influence to orchestrate the systematic development of a new district. In such places the density of population within the walls would steadily increase as existing dwellings were subdivided or new buildings were squeezed into alleys and courtyards. Suburban growth, if it occurred at all, was spotty and uncontrolled.

Walls and streets were the two main elements of urban topography imposed by human design on the physical environment. But a third element was provided by waterways and canals. Almost every city, of course, had grown up either alongside a river or near a body of water. Often river water had been diverted to supply a network of waterways around and through the city. Where the terrain permitted, a moat might encircle the walls to improve the city's defensive posture. And often marshy areas had been drained and streams regulated so as to form a series of canals. These waterways served a variety of purposes. Many urban industries, such as the manufacture of textiles, leather or paper, required ready access to water for their technical processes.³¹ And a canal often served as a source of drinking water or a convenient place to flush away wastes. In some cities – as in parts of the Netherlands, where settlements had emerged behind massive dikes on marshy land below sea level – there might be a vast and intricate network of canals, traversed in turn by bridges which linked an equally complex system of streets and roads.

27. Ballon, *Paris of Henry IV*, 57–113.

28. Kettering, *Judicial Politics*, 24–6.

29. Stone, 'Residential Development'.

30. Power, 'East London Housing', 238–42.

31. Guillerme, *Age of Water*, 95–8, 149–62.

Only in Venice, however, did the system of canals completely dominate the city's topography, reducing the streets to little more than pedestrian pavements. There was a reason for this, of course. Venice was the only major city in Europe which could be reached from the surrounding country exclusively by water. There was little point in ferrying horses and wheeled vehicles across the lagoon to Venice when goods and people could be moved around the city just as efficiently by boat. The priority given to canal traffic was signalled by the construction of increasingly high arched bridges with steps, easy for boats to pass under but impossible for anything but two-legged pedestrians to pass over. By the early modern period, as a result, horses and wheeled vehicles had virtually disappeared from Venice.³² In terms of topography, Venice was thus unique. Yet in many ways it was regarded by educated Europeans as the ultimate embodiment of what a city could or should be. Its constitution, its economic system, its cultural activity were all richly admired – and so was its capacity, throughout the early modern period, to defend itself from attack. For Europeans always respected a city with strong and successful defensive walls, even if the walls were made of water.

III

The modern urban geographer is apt to look at the spatial organization of cities in terms of functional zones, to determine where commercial, industrial, residential, recreational and other activities are primarily situated. The functional differentiation of modern urban space is powerfully reinforced by the zoning practices of most cities in the western world, under which certain activities are specifically restricted to particular districts or neighbourhoods.

The functional differentiation of urban space was by no means unknown to the early modern city. Some patterns evolved informally; others were specifically enforced. In many cities, for example, there were particular districts in which the wealthiest and most influential inhabitants preferred to live. Traditionally the favoured district had always been right in the centre of town, near the major marketplaces, though beginning in the seventeenth century the development of elegant new residential tracts occasionally modified this pattern. In many cities, certain productive activities were confined to specific neighbourhoods. Sometimes there were practical reasons for this related to the nature of the productive process itself: tanning, for example, required running water, so tanners were almost always

32. Morris, *Venice*, 68–9.

consigned to some neighbourhood near a river or stream. Some other activities might be restricted to specific districts or even removed to areas outside the city walls because of offensive odours or the danger of fire.

Generally, however, trades were dispersed throughout the entire city.³³ The functional differentiation of urban space was limited by the fact that residential, commercial and productive activities normally took place in very close proximity. Household production accounted for a vast amount of the economic activity in every European city. It would be misleading to think that all work was done in people's homes; in fact, one of the important insights of recent research in urban social history is the extent to which people in early modern cities, even married men and women, had to seek employment or income outside their own households. Yet the domestic workshop did remain, throughout the early modern period, the most important locus of productive activity. This meant that the spatial differentiation into residential and productive zones which generally characterizes modern cities would have been pointless in the early modern town.

In any case, for many inhabitants of an early modern city, the most important form of spatial differentiation was not functional but was instead jurisdictional. Even within the walls, many cities had specific zones which did not fall under the control of the city government. Many of these enclaves' 'liberties' and 'immunities' belonged to a monastery, convent, hospital, cathedral or other ecclesiastical institution. Some, especially in Protestant cities after the Reformation, no longer belonged to the church, but the special privileges which had been granted centuries before continued to apply. Other enclaves were purely secular: many cities, for example, had a castle precinct which stood under the direct control of the ruler or some regional lord. Some of these special zones were clearly demarcated by walls and gates; others were easily accessible to all. But no matter how they had come into being and how they were distinguished from the rest of the city, these privileged areas were a constant irritant to municipal authorities, whose ability to control economic activity or even to enforce criminal laws in the enclaves was strictly limited.

The northern English city of York well illustrates the variety of such enclaves which could coexist in one relatively small community. There were two secular liberties in York. The castle and its grounds were controlled by the high sheriff of the county of York. There was also a small building in the middle of town called Davy Hall.

33. Cramer, 'Gewerbegasse'.

Formerly a jail for poachers in a nearby forest, by the sixteenth century this building had come to be owned by a wealthy family which permitted certain poor shoemakers, who were forbidden to work in York itself, to practise their trade under its roof. There were also numerous liberties of ecclesiastical origin: some were eliminated in the 1530s, during the Reformation, and two – a hospital and an abbey – were taken over by officials of the crown. But the most important enclave continued to be run by officials of the church until the nineteenth century. This was the cathedral close, where the dean and canons of York Minster ran their own judicial system and permitted craftsmen to operate in defiance of city rules. Just how far beyond the immediate cathedral precincts the liberty extended, however, was a sore point over which the dean and the city authorities continued to squabble for centuries.³⁴

Great cities like Paris and London had dozens of 'sanctuaries' and liberties of this general sort.³⁵ And similar enclaves could be found in cities of almost every size in many parts of Europe. City officials and guild masters were constantly struggling against these special districts, trying to draw the enclaves under a more unified control. But many of the enclaves succeeded in retaining their special privileges throughout the early modern era. Though only some of these districts were physically demarcated, everyone was aware of their exact location. It was convenient to know which yard you should enter or which street you should cross if you wanted to avoid arrest by the city beadle or planned to sell your wares in defiance of the guild. For the invisible lines that crisscrossed many an early modern town divided the community into zones that were, at times, very functional indeed.

IV

Nature provided the setting: some cities were situated on flat terrain, some developed on sloping ground above a river or shore, a few nestled beneath an imposing hill topped by a fortress. Walls, streets and canals were the key elements of the city's infrastructure. But above all, a city was a collection of buildings, public and private. To understand something of the way in which early modern town-dwellers used and reshaped their physical surroundings, we must first know something about the urban building stock at the end of the

34. Palliser, *Tudor York*, 88–90.

35. Bernard, *Emerging City*, 127–9; Archer, *Pursuit of Stability*, 234–5; Pearl, *London and the Outbreak*, 23–31.

middle ages.³⁶ Then we can see to what extent and in what ways things changed in the early modern era.

Among public buildings the most prominent ones were generally ecclesiastical in nature. With only rare exceptions, churches were the largest buildings in any city at the beginning of the early modern era. Their spires and steeples dominated the skyline. If the city was the seat of a bishop – and there were about 500 bishops in early modern Europe – the most important church in town would be a cathedral. But a church did not have to be a cathedral to dominate the cityscape. Most urban churches were parish churches, serving the religious needs of a particular neighbourhood. Some parishes were large – a few, in fact, encompassed whole cities – but most covered only a small part of the city. Yet the size of a parish church had little to do with the size of the parish itself. Part of the very purpose of a church, after all, was to inspire a sense of awe in worshippers and visitors, and this was done, wherever possible, by the effective use of high interior spaces.

Churches were not the only ecclesiastical buildings in the city. At the beginning of the early modern period, almost every European city was also dotted with building complexes occupied by members of religious orders. The vows taken by monks and nuns generally involved some degree of seclusion from the surrounding world, so the interior of a monastery or convent would remain forbidden to the inquisitive outsider. But most such institutions also operated a church which was open to all – indeed, some monastic churches served as the standard place of worship for inhabitants of the neighbourhood or members of some craft or trade. Religious inspiration or obligation had led to the construction of numerous other buildings as well, from small chapels to hospices and hostels.

Of course there was no shortage of major secular buildings as well. Some cities had a castle which had once been or continued to be the seat of some prince or ruler. Some castles, as in Nuremberg or Salzburg, were dramatically located on a high slope or hill overlooking the community; others, as in London or Ghent, were situated along a river or canal at the city's edge. Only cities of great strategic or administrative importance were likely to have castles. But every city by the end of the middle ages had a number of public buildings specifically designed to meet the political and economic needs of the city-dwellers themselves.

36. For a useful typology of medieval urban buildings, see Meckseper, *Kleine Kunstgeschichte*, 89–246.

The largest of these were often devoted to the administration of city government. These included such grandiose establishments as the doge's palace in Venice, the Palazzo Vecchio in Florence, or the great town halls of Brussels and Bruges with their soaring belfries. But many other cities had more modest town halls at the end of the fifteenth century. The town hall could in fact be overshadowed by other municipal buildings. The regulation of commerce had emerged in the middle ages as one of the chief functions of urban government, and this was reflected in the construction of huge facilities for the sale, transfer, inspection or storage of commercial goods. The massive cloth hall of Breslau, where dry goods, leatherware and other items were exchanged, was vastly bigger than the adjacent town hall. Sometimes one building combined commercial and administrative functions. In the great town hall of Torun in Poland, the ground floor housed the cloth hall and other commercial facilities while the next storey held the council chamber and civic offices.³⁷ Some English town halls were built on pillars, so that magistrates could meet on the first floor while market activities took place in the covered space below.³⁸

Another critical obligation of urban governments – the guarantee of a sufficient supply of food for the population – was manifested by the existence of municipal mills in most cities and granaries in many. And there were quasi-public buildings as well, reflecting the importance of the associational life that had emerged in all medieval cities by the end of the middle ages: these included the meeting-halls of individual guilds and, especially in Germany, dance halls and drinking clubs for members of the social elite.

All these public or semi-public buildings were of immense importance to the life of a pre-modern city. Many of them have survived to the modern day and many others, destroyed by neglect or war, have been painstakingly reconstructed. The modern tourist, guidebook in hand, will rightfully savour them all, from the three-starred cathedral or town hall down to the one-starred mill or chapel. But Weber was right when he reduced his preliminary definition of the city to little more than a 'collection of dwellings'. For the great majority of buildings in a late medieval city were in fact not public buildings at all, but houses.

As in any modern city, houses varied tremendously in size and durability, reflecting the relative wealth of their original builders or

subsequent owners. Some urban domiciles went beyond mere houses: nobles who lived in the city or merchants who aspired to noble status might well occupy miniature urban palaces. But such buildings were rare. Most of the housing stock of an urban community consisted of a continuum of dwellings, all built in accordance with local conventions but vastly different in size. One must not assume that any one house was always occupied by a single household or family. Subdivision and multiple occupancy were common.

House design varied across Europe. Local custom powerfully influenced the appearance and layout of buildings. A few characteristics, however, were common to houses in most of Europe. Houses were generally built in rows, with little or no space between them and fronting directly on to the street. Houses were hardly ever more than four or five storeys high, but differences in width and depth were common. Large houses might have an interior courtyard or a yard or garden to the rear. The ground floor would most likely include a workshop and probably a kitchen. The higher floors would have rooms in which families lived and slept. Cellars and attics were used for storage or for accommodating servants or tenants. Glass windows were still a luxury; wooden shutters were the norm.

This, then, was the basic repertory of urban building forms inherited from the middle ages. Of course the building process is always dynamic, and throughout the early modern era new buildings went up and old ones were extended, remodelled or converted to new purposes. New architectural forms and, to a lesser extent, new methods of construction were developed. More and more major buildings were designed in accordance with foreign architectural styles: Italian models were increasingly copied north of the Alps. Some building complexes, such as shipyards, grew larger than they had ever been in medieval times. Significant innovations emerged in military architecture, as bastions and citadels came to ring the periphery of some major cities. Yet the basic categories of urban building types remained relatively constant during the early modern era. The traditionalism of economic and administrative systems and the absence of sweeping technological change diminished the likelihood of fundamental innovations within the cities. In fact it was not until the nineteenth century that radically new types of urban structures – factories, railways, department stores and the like – were introduced in European cities on a massive scale.

The stock of ecclesiastical structures in the European city certainly did undergo some important changes during the early modern era. The basic parish system remained in force all over Europe, but in

37. *ibid.*, 174–7; Gruber, *Gestalt der deutschen Stadt*, 104–7.

38. Tittler, *Architecture and Power*, 25–33.

cities where the Protestant Reformation was adopted during the sixteenth century monasteries and convents were suddenly closed down. Their inhabitants were usually thrust back into the mainstream of secular life, and the buildings were quickly put to other uses. In countries that remained Catholic, however, monasteries and convents flourished. Indeed, they became ever more prominent parts of the urban landscape as new religious orders were founded and new houses and churches were erected to serve their purposes.

In Protestant and Catholic countries alike, the construction or, more often, reconstruction of church buildings continued throughout the early modern period. Two of Europe's most important churches were rebuilt in a grandiose new form: the papal basilica of St Peter's in Rome and, following the fire of 1666, St Paul's cathedral in London. All over Europe new churches were founded and old ones embellished. But even so, the pace of ecclesiastical construction fell behind medieval precedents. Especially in high-growth cities like London or Paris, the construction of new churches never kept up with the rate of expansion; new districts invariably had fewer churches per capita than the old city centres.³⁹ Sometimes ecclesiastical construction came to a dead stop. Work on the great cathedral of Cologne was suspended in the sixteenth century, leaving the central nave unbuilt and a huge crane perched atop an unfinished steeple. For over 300 years the crane remained in place, becoming a virtual symbol of the city itself, until construction of the cathedral was resumed and completed in the nineteenth century.

There was more innovation in secular construction. The greatest urban secular buildings of the middle ages had been the castles that served as centres of royal or princely power. But the traditional urban castle, a defensible fortress which could also serve as a judicial and administrative centre, was increasingly irrelevant to the new concept of protecting the entire city with an outer ring of bastions. A few castles, like the Tower of London, retained their defensive integrity. Many others were permitted to decay or lose their military significance. Some, like the Louvre in Paris, were converted into palaces.

The urban palace was, in fact, far more characteristic of the early modern era. Like the erstwhile castles, true palaces were found chiefly in those cities which had a resident ruler or prince. Many palaces grew ever larger during the early modern era, usually in a series of uncoordinated accretions as successive rulers would add a wing

39. Kaplow, *Names of Kings*, 122; Rudé, *Hanoverian London*, 101–4.

here or a section there. Awkwardly crammed between city walls on one side and built-up areas on the other, the urban palace was often more impressive in its parts than as a whole. In the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, princes increasingly despaired of turning their urban palaces into the grandiose and unified buildings of which they and their advisors dreamed – so it became ever more common for rulers to command the construction of new, architecturally integral palaces in parklands far beyond the urban core.

In any case, only a handful of European cities ever had a princely palace in their midst or on their outskirts. The extension of old city halls or construction of elaborate new ones represented a much more common theme of European urban history throughout the early modern era.⁴⁰ Sometimes the old mixed-use halls of medieval times were replicated in a modern architectural guise: in Dublin, for example, the new baroque 'Thorsel' of the 1670s had an open arcade below and a courtroom, the municipal offices and premises for the merchants' guild and the royal exchange above.⁴¹ In some cities, the construction of a grand town hall assumed an importance for civic self-representation which echoed the effort and energy traditionally devoted to the erection of churches. In the mid-seventeenth century, for example, the city of Amsterdam constructed a new town hall so grandiose that it serves today as a royal palace. Pious members of the civic elite, who were hostile to the construction of so lavish a secular building, insisted that a neighbouring church which was then being rebuilt should at least be given a spire which would be higher than the city hall's cupola. But the spire was never completed and the city hall totally dominated Amsterdam's main square.⁴²

Some new types of public and quasi-public buildings emerged. Evolving economic practices occasionally required new facilities. Great halls for the storage or exchange of goods remained important, but new buildings were needed for the systematic transfer of more abstract instruments of wealth. This accounts for the erection of such buildings as the Royal Exchange in London in the late sixteenth century or the Bourse of Amsterdam in the early seventeenth. New patterns of leisure also had an impact. Commercial theatres emerged.

40. For important German examples, see Hitchcock, *German Renaissance Architecture*, 62–4, 120–1, 182–98, 293–300, 321–6; for the full extent of town hall construction in early modern England, see Tittler, *Architecture and Power*, 160–8, and Borsay, *Urban Renaissance*, 325–8.

41. Craig, *Dublin*, 47–8.

42. Schama, *Embarrassment of Riches*, 116–19; see also Fremantle, *Baroque Town Hall*.

So did coffee houses. Changing forms of interaction among members of the social elite required new structures, such as the 'assembly rooms' which became popular in early eighteenth-century England.⁴³ Other new buildings reflected an expansion in the responsibilities of municipal governments. In the middle ages, most schools, almshouses and hospitals were run by members of the clergy in buildings operated by the church. During the early modern period, secular governments became increasingly involved in the administration of such institutions, and this often led to the construction of new municipal schools, hospitals, orphanages and workhouses.

There is little doubt that public buildings, broadly defined, increased in number during the early modern era. A study of twelve towns in northern England shows that the average number of public buildings per town rose from four in 1600 to over seven in 1700 and twenty in 1800.⁴⁴ This pattern may have been replicated in many other communities. Yet even so, in every city, private houses continued to be the dominant building form. Of course the distinction between public and domestic structures was not an absolute one. A transitional form was provided by inns, taverns and alehouses – 'public houses' in terms of function and accessibility, but private in that they were normally inhabited by families that owned or managed them. Inns were normally larger than ordinary dwellings. But they were never as big as the grandest private homes in major cities. As in medieval times, throughout the early modern era those who could afford it – or were able to convince builders and creditors that they could afford it – constructed lavish palatial homes. Forms and styles changed, as the heavy stonework of late fifteenth-century *hôtels* and *palazzi* gave way to the ornamented masonry of neoclassical or baroque façades. But the function of these domestic palaces – to awe and impress – remained little changed.

The same continuity of function applied all the more to the conventional houses which lined street after street in every European town. The basic purposes and spatial organization of urban housing underwent no dramatic transformation in the early modern period, as long as the domestic workshop remained the basis of most urban production. But the housing stock of early modern cities was constantly undergoing a process of change. Not only were new houses built, but also existing ones were remodelled or extended: an upper floor might be added, an annexe installed, rooms divided or

43. Borsay, *Urban Renaissance*, 150–62.

44. *ibid.*, 104, citing an unpublished thesis by K. Grady.

combined. The stately street façade of many an urban house often gave no hint of the jumbled warren of extensions, passageways, courtyards and sheds that lay to the rear. Even the formal residential squares that became increasingly popular from the seventeenth century onward imposed far more uniformity on the front of the houses than on the interior and the gardens that lay behind.⁴⁵

There was certainly a steady increment of amenities. Occasionally an upgrading of building materials or techniques would be mandated, typically after a fire. In addition, certain luxuries became increasingly commonplace. In early sixteenth-century York, for example, glass windows were still regarded as movable furnishings which could be transferred from one house to another by gift or sale. Eventually, however, houseowners insisted that panes of glass be installed as permanent fixtures.⁴⁶ Many houses were remodelled or refurbished to reflect changes in taste or convenience. But much urban housing remained spartan, dense and crowded.

Much is known about the physical layout of houses in early modern Europe. Countless early modern houses survived to the late nineteenth or early twentieth century, when scholars began to take an interest in the history of domestic architecture and made careful records and photographs. A few such houses are even extant today, though recapturing how they looked in early modern times is a matter more of urban archaeology than mere photography. Some house-plans have survived from early modern times; by the seventeenth century architects began to issue books of stock plans, and occasionally architectural sketches and drawings were made in connection with property inventories or building permits.⁴⁷ Yet none of this evidence tells us much about the actual use of domestic space. Except for the workshop and, usually, the kitchen, the disposition of rooms was not functionally rigid. The critical distinction, at least in northern countries, was between those rooms which had a hearth or stove and those that did not. In German houses one always distinguished between a heated *Stube* and an unheated *Kammer*; the warmer room would be used for as many activities as possible. Sleeping-space was rarely segregated. Beds could be found in almost any room of the house, including, at times, the workshop.⁴⁸

45. cf. Ballon, *Paris of Henry IV*, 103–10, 150–7, and figs 171–4.

46. Palliser, *Tudor York*, 35–6.

47. Ranum, *Paris*, 102–4; Brown, 'Continuity and Change'; Kastner, 'Bürgerliches Wohnen', 206–31.

48. Brown, 'Continuity and Change', 578–80.

Above all, one must never assume that a single house was occupied by a single household. Records from Innsbruck in 1603 show that, on average, every household had about four inhabitants but every house had about twelve – so an average house could have contained three households.⁴⁹ In early seventeenth-century Augsburg, 70 per cent of all families listed in the tax records lived in houses which contained four or more households.⁵⁰ Some houses were actually constructed as tenements, with multiple occupancy in mind. But more often, the use of domestic space simply underwent a constant process of reallocation as the house itself was remodelled or the families who occupied it changed in size or wealth. In many towns, even modest craftsmen owned their own houses – though the house could be encumbered with debts and some parts might have to be sublet to others. But much urban property was owned by landlords or by institutions and the rental of homes, even by the well-to-do, was entirely customary.

V

Although as a rule we know little about the overall use of space in early modern houses, occasionally it is possible for historians to reconstruct in remarkable detail the exact contents of each room in a particular household at a specific moment in time. This is due chiefly to the survival of a particular kind of source: an inventory of all the goods present in a person's house at the time of his or her marriage or death. Local practices varied; only some communities required inventories, and sometimes they were quite perfunctory. But from time to time one comes across inventories so detailed that they tell us more about the contents of a particular dwelling than we may know about our own homes.

Let us see, then, what one historian found when he used such an inventory to explore the home of Euphrosina Burkhart in the German town of Augsburg in the summer of the year 1600.⁵¹ Euphrosina's husband Matthes, a butcher, had just died, leaving behind substantial debts – which may be one reason why the city officials conducted such a very thorough listing of the household's goods.

The dwelling occupied by the Burkharths consisted of four distinct spaces: a room with a hearth which served as the kitchen and main living area, an unheated room, an attic and a shed. There was no shop, since Matthes did his butchering at a city slaughterhouse and sold the

49. Mathis, *Bevölkerungsstruktur*, 22–7.

50. Roeck, *Stadt in Krieg und Frieden*, 1: 492.

51. *ibid.*, 1: 387–9.

meat at a stand on the marketplace. His work tools were not included in the inventory. But everything else he or his wife owned was.

The kitchen had a cooking hearth, a chopping-block, a small wall-cabinet and an old oak table; the table had a drawer in which the officials found a mirror, an old tablecloth, eight spoons and a few other items. There were only two chairs. Cooking was done on a tripod placed in the hearth; there were fourteen pans, six pots, six ladles and two big knives. For consuming ordinary meals the Burkharths had at their disposal ten wooden plates, one glass serving-plate, eight wooden spoons, four metal spoons and ten glasses – but no forks or small knives. The kitchen also had a handful of containers for storing food and a wooden tub for washing up.

The unheated room was used chiefly for sleeping and for storage of linen. There was an oak bedstead – with a canopy, a straw-filled mattress and a blanket – along with a crib and a stool. The room also had an oak cabinet, two cupboards, four cases and two chests, all crammed with clothing, linen and other textile goods. The couple's personal treasures amounted to a handful of silver buttons, some coins, a locket and the wreath and bouquet from their wedding.

The attic contained a spare bed without a canopy, a child's bed, some straw mattresses, a pitchfork, some other tools and one outdated calendar. But above all, the attic was used to store the couple's collection of copperware and tinware: twelve tankards, nineteen bowls, six meat plates, five basins, one salt box and a few other items, altogether weighing a total of 81 pounds. There were also some vessels made of brass and tinplated clay, and eleven 'old plates'. We can assume that most of these items were rarely, if ever, used in the kitchen; they were a form of investment, available to be pawned or sold if the need arose. The tiny shed was used to store a few additional, less valuable items: an old armchair (possibly too broken to use but too cherished to discard), some bowls, a shovel, an additional pitchfork and a cage for poultry.

This, then, was what Euphrosina and Matthes Burkhart owned at the time of Matthes's death. We cannot know how typical their household was in a formal sense, but the size and contents of their home were certainly representative of the material environment of working people in sixteenth- and seventeenth-century Europe. Evidence from early modern Bordeaux confirms this impression: a recent study of a hundred inventories from the households of servants, labourers and poorer artisans between 1515 and 1675 shows that almost every such household had at least one bed and one or more storage chests, most had a table, more than half had benches,

but fewer had chairs. There was some improvement in the course of the seventeenth century – the proportion of households in this social milieu that had chairs, for example, rose from less than one-third in the sixteenth century to over half by 1675. But there was no radical change.⁵²

We need not know the exact number of stools or chairs in an artisan household, however, to recognize from examples like these that the physical artifacts with which people were surrounded in early modern homes were sufficiently limited in number so as never to be taken for granted. All of the furniture, tools, utensils, tableware and linen used by these people had been made by hand. Not all the things they owned were needed for everyday living – many objects were clearly preserved as a form of investment or security for hard times – but none was considered superfluous. Broken furniture and tools were saved, just in case. Before the age of mass production, labour imparted value to each manufactured object in a way which Karl Marx still understood but we, except in theory, no longer can. Recycling was taken for granted.⁵³ The waste-disposal problem in early modern cities – and there certainly was one – had chiefly to do with the removal of body wastes and animal remains, not, as today, with the disposal of manufactured goods.

VI

Such, then, was the physical environment in which early modern town-dwellers lived. Great walls girdled their communities, making the act of entering or leaving town a deliberate experience. Narrow house-lined streets predominated, but the pattern was occasionally broken by open market squares or the broad boulevards of new districts. Great public buildings were found in every larger city, but most were accessible only to those who had business to transact. For most townspeople, churches and taverns were no doubt the most frequently visited public indoor spaces. Houses were variable in size and structure, their interior spaces flexible in use and function. Material goods were carefully assembled and preserved; how much people owned obviously had something to do with their wealth, but the distinction between luxuries and necessities was not always an obvious one. For Euphrosina Burkhart it was clearly more important to keep twelve tankards and nineteen bowls in her attic than to pick up some additional chairs for her kitchen. There was, as we shall see, much want in the early modern city – but there was little waste.

52. Dinges, *Stadtarmut in Bordeaux*, 165–239 passim, 533–4.

53. cf. *ibid.*, 223.

CHAPTER TWO

City and State

One day in June of the year 1613, the old German town of Worms on the Rhine received two most distinguished visitors. The 16-year-old Prince-Elector of the Palatinate, Frederick V, and his new bride, Princess Elizabeth of England, together with a great retinue of followers, were passing through Worms. Promptly at 12 noon the prince and his retinue arrived in the city. A delegation of local officials assembled to greet the prince, and the city's chief legal advisor, Johann Jacob Buntz, made a formal speech of welcome. Lavish presents were given: the prince received a goodly quantity of wine, vintage 1610, and twenty-five measures of oats in sacks embossed with the city's arms. The princess received a silver tankard and wash-basin. When the ceremony was over Frederick and his retinue left Worms to continue their way southward to the princely capital at Heidelberg.¹

Ceremonies like this took place time and again in early modern Europe. The annals of countless cities are replete with accounts of such visits: the assembling of craftsmen or schoolchildren in the market square, the speech of welcome by Mr Recorder or the city's Syndic, the bestowal or, perhaps, exchange of gifts, the gracious reply from princely lips – all these are stock themes of these accounts. Yet each such event had its own special dimensions.

Frederick V, for example, was more than just a neighbouring prince to whom routine courtesy had to be shown, for he had a distinct political relationship to Worms. Yet he was not the city's overlord, for Worms, like about eighty other cities in Germany, acknowledged only the Holy Roman Emperor himself as its true overlord. Worms also

1. Stadtarchiv Worms, 1B 8a: Zorn-Meixnersche Chronik, folio 254v.