

CHAPTER

2

Migration in Preindustrial Europe

Joseph Mayett left his parents' Buckingham cottage northwest of London in 1795 at age 12, when his father, a farm laborer, hired him out to be "in service." The young man ate, slept, and resided with his masters since service was paid in room, board, and a wage. Mayett departed the next September; local custom dictated that farm servants then present themselves at the Michaelmas fair to be hired out for the coming year's employment. Both Mayett and his parents tacitly expected him to be a farm servant, to be hired by the year, and to move annually. Neither party anticipated that he would again live at home, and he did not, except for one very short period when he was forced to take work as a farm laborer and find shelter with his parents. Mayett took 11 positions as a farmhand in eight years, sometimes returning to a former master, and never once living more than 23 kilometers from his parents' cottage. He followed a pattern established in Buckingham county since the sixteenth century. Mayett's departure from home, his annual moves, and his work as a farm servant all make him quite typical of men and women in early modern Europe—particularly typical among rural young people from families of modest means.¹

Leaving home as Joseph Mayett did was an integral part of European life in the seventeenth century. Studies of nearly every village, town, and city reveal that the face of Europe was bustling with movement long before the industrial revolution. Indeed, the image of a sedentary Europe may be most inaccurate for the preindustrial period. Jan de Vries's simulation of urban growth in early modern Europe suggests that there was more migration in the seventeenth century than there would be in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries; he postulates that the important "net flows of rural-urban migration . . . were part of a larger, probably much larger, stream of gross rural-urban migration. This in turn was embedded in a yet more general migration phenomenon continually redistributing population among villages and market towns."² Similarly, "the most striking and fundamental finding" from Peter Clark's wide-ranging study of migration in southern England, 1660–1730, was that mobility was the norm. Seven thousand biographies of court witnesses show a pattern of ubiquitous movement: about 65 percent of men and women departed their home parish.³ (See [Table 2:1](#).)

Pervasive mobility flies in the face of stereotypes about premodern life and, more seriously, historians' assertions that the most populous of European nations, France, was fundamentally sedentary between the sixteenth and nineteenth centuries, anchored by its people's visceral attachment to the soil.⁴ This chapter describes and analyzes the wide range of migration experiences in preindustrial Europe, elaborating the factors that made some people more mobile than others.

I define preindustrial Europe as the age before people labored in large-scale production for outside markets in the countryside *or* in the city, before patterns of work and residence were altered by the proliferation of rural industry *or* the development of machine production.⁵ Migration in the period before large-scale rural industry is difficult to pin down because there are very few acute sources or studies that address mobility. One must make careful inferences from local and regional studies for this age that lacks migration statistics, population registers, or census data. However, local studies have the advantage of providing vivid portraits of migration patterns in particular settings. It is essential to comprehend migration *before* the proliferation of rural industry in order to understand the changes wrought by its spread. Since rural industry and its crucial urban components were expanding rapidly in Britain and parts of the Continent by 1660, and elsewhere during the eighteenth century, this chapter will focus on the 1650–1750 period, emphasizing the seventeenth century for some regions and the early eighteenth century for others.

This chapter opens with a brief portrait of the age and a sketch of its migrations that were compelled by war, empire, and intolerance. It then shifts to the more subtle movements of ordinary men and women in the preindustrial countryside and city. I include a sketch of what may have been the largest system of labor migration of the seventeenth century: the annual movement of Westphalian men to work in the fields of Holland. (See [Map 2:1](#).)

THE CHARACTER OF THE AGE

This period followed an era of expansion marked by overseas trade and exploitation during which silver and gold from the New World had filled the coffers of Imperial Spain. The previous century had also been one of intolerance and religious conflict that had bred religious wars in France (1562–1593) and the Revolt of the Netherlands against Spain (1572–1581), which made possible the rise and commercial expansion of the United Netherlands and, finally, Spain's recognition of Dutch independence in 1648. The Thirty Years' War intermittently bled and starved German territories from 1615 to 1648. England, too, was divided by religious quarrels, the emigration of dissenters, and finally by civil war from 1642 to 1660.



Map 2:1 Western Europe in 1650

The 1650–1750 period was also one of economic stagnation.⁶ Regions differed very markedly from one another, and only very large capital cities and ports on the Atlantic were likely to grow; the cities of Mediterranean Europe and textile cities of northern Europe were devastated by murderous plagues, economic crises, and chronic unemployment. In this period, London, Paris, and Amsterdam came to dominate the continent while the great cities of Italy stagnated; Venice, Naples, and Milan lost population after 1600. Small and medium-sized cities actually declined.⁷ In terms of long-term economic cycles, Paul Hohenberg and Lynn Lees have indicated that the period between 1650 and 1750 was one during which cities suffered, while simultaneously production was beginning to take hold in the countryside. Thus, a gradual turnaround—a shift in the location of economic productivity—was embedded in this era of stagnation.⁸

The population of western Europe slumped as well, partly because the preindustrial demographic regime was a deadly one. In the countryside, high rates of marital fertility were offset by low marriage rates, late marriage, and high rates of infant and child mortality. Periodically, massive mortality crises brought on by illness and hunger would destroy the meager increases in rural populations. Demographic crises proliferated on the continent in the late seventeenth century when “the ‘times were out of joint’ as the saying went,” and repeatedly wet summers and bad harvests reduced crops in 1674–1679, 1681, and 1684. The winter of 1693–1694 brought a great famine that devastated much of northern Europe. The majority of people were short of food; at least one-tenth of the French died in a space of a few months, and less than half the usual number of children was born. The “great winter” of 1709–1710 froze crops and subsequently starved thousands of people.⁹ Urban and rural disasters were one and the same in this age when a bad harvest immediately translated to a rise in the price of grain and quick drop in urban employment; city records show that in times of high grain prices, new apprentices were not taken on and weavers had no orders.¹⁰

This was an essentially rural world. The vast majority of men and women lived in villages or very small towns.¹¹ Only one European in nine lived in a town of 5,000 or more, and towns of 20,000 to 30,000 were considered large. This was particularly true in the north, which had fewer urban areas than Italy or Iberia. Indeed, when the English town of Norwich reached 30,000 in 1700, it was counted as the largest city in England, London aside. There was only a handful of very large cities; in 1650, Paris, London, and Amsterdam figured at about 450,000, 400,000, and 175,000 respectively; Italy had five cities of over 100,000 (Venice, Milan, Rome, Naples, and Palermo); and both Madrid and Lisbon numbered about 130,000. Although southern cities declined and northern cities prospered, most people lived and worked in the countryside throughout this period.¹²

Migration in this age is of interest precisely because population growth was slow and urbanization a negligible factor. A prolonged population boom would not begin until about 1750; before this time, Europe was marked neither by the rural overpopulation that pushed people from the countryside nor by the plethora of growing cities that is said to have pulled them to urban areas later in history. In the year 1650, England, France, Germany, and the remainder of western Europe were much less populated than they would be at the end of the eighteenth century after fifty years of demographic expansion. In short, the preindustrial world lacked the massive pressures that would accompany migration in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.

This describes what is often called the traditional world. Rural areas were relatively self-sufficient; as yet, few countrysides had begun to produce for faraway markets, and goods imported from abroad rarely found their way to rural areas. Tools and clothing were produced in the same area in which they were used. Villages were not simply agricultural communities, but they included craft artisans and service people like innkeepers in addition to producers of grain and livestock; in concrete terms this meant that villages included a smithy who shod animals and forged tools, a shoemaker, and perhaps a weaver and a seamstress. We infer from the autarky of preindustrial Europe that country people lived out their lives in their natal village, “in earshot of the same parish bell.”¹³

Landholding patterns reinforced this impression, because the landholding peasantry, the least mobile sector of the population, was near its peak in many parts of Europe during the seventeenth century. By this time, rural dwellers in England, France, the low countries, and western Germany had gradually been released from the constraints of serfdom on mobility and property ownership. After the bubonic plague swept Europe in the fourteenth century, the resulting labor shortage enabled common people in many areas to replace feudal labor obligations with payments, to acquire land, and to obtain freedom of movement in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. By contrast, the social, legal, and political position of the rural people in central and eastern Europe deteriorated in the sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries; their feudal obligations expanded at the expense of their freedom to move as estate agriculture grew in Poland and the eastern German provinces.¹⁴

THE POLITICS OF MIGRATION: WAR, EMPIRE, AND INTOLERANCE

The kind of movement we often associate with this “traditional” world is the extraordinary displacements caused by the overseas expansion and religious turmoil that transformed the early sixteenth century. On one level, this impression is correct: the politics of war and intolerance motivated more migration in this period than they would at any time before the twentieth century. The best-known and most dramatic of movements were those of refugees from religious persecution and religious wars that reverberated through Europe during and after the Protestant and Catholic Reformations. The religious wars in France (1559–1598) and the Revolt of the Netherlands (1566–1587) ended the sixteenth century with the flight of Protestants. The wars that divided France destroyed rural areas and devastated cities like Lyon, where half the population was ousted by bouts of the plague and war. Silk production and commerce collapsed; hundreds of houses sat empty. Huguenots from the north of France found refuge outside their hostile homeland in Alsace, where John Calvin had founded the first reformed parish in Strasbourg in 1538.¹⁵ The Dutch revolt against Spanish rule of the Netherlands and the subsequent invasion of the southern Netherlands by the French drove Dutch Protestants north to the United Provinces of the Netherlands, east into cities such as Frankfurt, and across the channel to England.

Sixteenth- and seventeenth-century persecution sought to obliterate Judaism in western Europe.¹⁶ After a long period of coexistence with Christians on the Continent, Jews were forced to convert or be expelled from many areas between 1420 and 1520. The greatest shock to the Sephardic community was the expulsion of unbaptized Jews from Spain in 1492—a heterogeneous community that probably numbered at least 200,000; among the some 100,000 who departed, the largest group went to Portugal, from which unbaptized Jews were banned in 1497. Before 1512, Geneva, southern France, southern Italy, and numerous German and Austrian cities and provinces expelled Jews.¹⁷ In the conflicts of the sixteenth-century Reformation and Thirty Years' War, Jews were mistreated or driven out of Protestant provinces and more likely to be protected in archdioceses and bishoprics. The persecution and removal of Sephardic Jews from western Europe shifted European Jewry's center of gravity from west to the east of the Continent.¹⁸ The largest Jewish community in the world developed in Poland and Lithuania, where Ashkenazi refugees from Germany, Bohemia, and Hungary had played a major role in expanding the Jewish population from about 30,000 in 1500 to perhaps 150,000 in 1575.¹⁹

In both the conflict-ridden Netherlands and war-torn Germany, however, religious and ethnic upheaval also bred toleration—not always as a policy, but as an unintended result of neglect of religious affiliation. As a consequence, Jews began to return to the west as the sixteenth century drew to a close. The community in the Free City of Frankfurt grew from 150 in 1500 to 3,000 out of a total population of 20,000 in 1613. Culturally, the most significant development was the settlement of 200 to 300 Portuguese in Amsterdam by 1600—Jewish *conversos* or New Christians who moved in the maritime trade routes that brought Mediterranean and especially southern Iberian products like silk and olive oil to the ports of France, England, the Netherlands, and northern Germany. During the seventeenth century, a community developed in Amsterdam where the so-called New Christians could explore the faith of their ancestors. Ashkenazim came from Germany and Sephardim came from Iberia to expand the number of practicing Jews in the city to 4,000 by 1700; this “Dutch Jerusalem” became the largest Jewish community west of Poland or the Balkans.²⁰

Christian refugees and religious dissidents also continued to relocate in the face of seventeenth-century strife and intolerance. The highest rate of net emigration in British history came in the wake of English conflict as Protestants took to the new world in the 1630s—and continued to do so after the civil war, fall of Cromwell, and restoration of the monarchy in 1660.²¹ French Huguenots joined a vast immigration into Alsace, which welcomed Protestants until it became part of Catholic France in 1681. Then, Louis XIV rescinded the remains of tolerance for Huguenots in 1685, setting off an exodus of 140,000 to 160,000 in the next five years. About a third of these French Protestants found a place in England, another third in the Netherlands, and the rest in Swiss and German centers like Geneva and Frankfurt. Because the Huguenots included many artisans and prosperous people, many of them were welcomed, if not recruited, to new locations. The intolerance that depleted the southern Netherlands and France of wealthy and skilled citizens transferred immeasurable assets of human talent and fed the success of England and the Dutch Republic.²²

War hammered at the people of northern Europe, particularly in the first half of the seventeenth century. The Thirty Years' War (1618–1648) proved to be the worst catastrophe since the Black Death; so devastated were German territories that an estimated average of 33 percent of the urban populations and 40 percent of the rural populations perished—either murdered or dead from hunger, typhus, dysentery, the plague, or syphilis. Although the destruction was uneven, devastating some cities and regions while allowing others merely to stagnate, the Holy Roman Empire lost 7 to 8 million people. The Fronde, the French revolt against the crown, brought destruction to the Ile-de-France around Paris and a more profound and widespread crisis throughout the kingdom of France in the 1640s and 1650s. After Louis XIV ascended to the French throne in 1661, his aggression plagued the Dutch Republic, Spanish Netherlands, and western German territories during the War of Devolution (1667–1668), invasion of the United Netherlands (1670–1679), war with the League of Augsburg (1689–1697), and War of the Spanish Succession (1702–1713). Although destruction never matched that of the Thirty Years' War, armed conflict continued to bring death, misery, and dislocation.²³

Overseas imperial ambitions of the seventeenth century also inspired migration by providing work for people far from their homes. For example, the Spanish invasion of the new world drained off ambitious young men in the army, clergy, and administration. This void of manpower was exacerbated by the toll taken on the commercial community and the manual labor force when Spanish religious zeal and nationalism, in the form of the *reconquista*, worked to expel both the Moors and the Jews in 1492. Rich in gold and silver, a wealthy Spain could support foreign laborers who earned three times what they could earn at home. Spain's need for manpower was filled by Frenchmen from the Pyrenees, the southwest plain, and the Auvergne beginning in the sixteenth century. A massive migration of workers in systems of temporary circular and even chain migration furnished the kingdom with its manual laborers and small traders. On his voyage into Spain in 1655, Antoine de Brunel saw French everywhere, working as water carriers, masons, carpenters, and manual laborers. Some came for a harvest season or for a few years, others married and remained, and most participants in this massive movement were poor like the water carriers of Madrid. Spain and France were at war during de Brunel's visit; nonetheless, he estimated that over 40,000 French then resided in Madrid alone, and 200,000 in all of Spain—many of whom hid their origins to protect themselves from political and economic reprisals.²⁴ This massive migration would change in character and function in the coming centuries, then eventually cease; but in the seventeenth century, French labor supported the Spanish Empire.

The Spanish center of trade was not in the Spanish port of Seville, but north in Antwerp, then under Spanish rule. This city's economy collapsed in 1580 during wars between Protestant and Catholic, Dutch and Spanish/French forces. Subsequently Amsterdam rose as the commercial and financial capital of the seventeenth century, the star city of the new

United Provinces, the Dutch Republic. Burghers from the south, international traders, and highly skilled artisans joined the city's elite. Many had fled the intolerance exhibited by the Spanish and French in the southern Netherlands. That is why 44 percent of Amsterdam's new burghers came from defeated Antwerp in the 1580s. Among the new arrivals came descendants of Jews who had fled Spain in the 1490s. The trickle of Huguenots became a flood after 1685 when Louis XIV revoked religious tolerance and 50,000 to 60,000 found refuge in the Netherlands.²⁵ These relatively skilled and educated people enriched the expanding city. The elite city council was open to newcomers of wealth; indeed council policy granted to the most valuable among immigrants free citizenship and tax exemptions to sweeten the pot.²⁶ The victorious and prosperous Republic altered the economic fortunes and the labor force of northern Europe.

The Dutch Republic required those without money or skills—sailors, laborers, maidservants, and journeymen—as well as burghers. During the expansion between 1600 and 1650 when Amsterdam grew from about 60,000 to 175,000, two-thirds of the city's brides and grooms were born elsewhere. These men and women came to Amsterdam primarily from the rural Netherlands, but a large proportion came from abroad. Nearly 60 percent of its sailors and seamen were foreigners, a fifth were city natives, and another fifth were from within the Republic of Holland. Among foreign sailors, the largest number were Germans, followed by Norwegians.²⁷ The German *Holländsganger* participated in a vast system of seasonal, circular migration that provided labor to build and maintain an empire that required seasonal work in brickmaking, peddling, hawking, canal construction, agriculture, and dock work. By 1700, an estimated 15,000 German workers crossed the Zuiderzee to Amsterdam every year for seasonal work in Holland.²⁸ I describe this migration system in detail below.

TABLE 2:1
Incidence of Migration in Southern and Midland England, 1660–1730

	Stationary (or intratown move)	Total migrants	Intra-county move	Extra-county move	Unspecified move
Males					
Rural	31.3%	69.0%	45.7%	15.2%	8.1%
Urban	42.7%	55.3%	31.5%	19.5%	4.3%
Overall	36.5%	63.2%	38.5%	17.4%	7.2%
Females					
Rural	23.7%	76.3%	55.3%	16.0%	5.0%
Urban	42.2%	57.9%	37.5%	17.8%	2.6%
Overall	32.9%	67.1%	46.4%	16.9%	2.6%

Note: Figures are from biographical data on 7,047 witnesses in diocesan courts. Percentages are weighted means of county percentages for Gloucestershire, Kent, Norfolk, Oxfordshire, Suffolk, West Midlands, Wiltshire, and Dorset.

SOURCE: Calculated from Peter Clark, "Migration in England during the Late Seventeenth and Early Eighteenth Centuries," *Past and Present* 83 (1979), 64–67.

Systems of long-distance migration like those of Germans working in the Netherlands and of French laboring in Spain were not marginal phenomena to the nations and economies of the seventeenth century. Upon visiting Spain in 1607, the Baron de Sancy asked how the Spanish could work the land without the French, if the French did not come to help and to marry and settle. Who would harvest if more troops of French did not come? And who would serve the Spanish in the fields and cities if these same French did not?²⁹ In their numbers, the need for their labor, the financial returns at home, and the impact of their absence on family and society at home, the movement of these men was central, not marginal, to preindustrial Europe. Long-distance migration systems supplied labor to the few prosperous regions in an age of widespread economic stagnation.

MIGRATION IN THE PREINDUSTRIAL COUNTRYSIDE

Family, Service, and Marriage

The migrations caused by war and religious intolerance have not dispelled the stereotype of a rooted, traditional society, a European countryside where the "immobile village" was the norm. The countryside was bustling with movement; this was frequently local movement, but it nonetheless took people away from their home parish. Evidence from across southern England indicates that between 1660 and 1730, a clear majority of rural men (69%) and rural women (76%) left their parish of birth, although relatively few men (15%) or women (16%) left their home county.³⁰ (See Table 2:1.)

The four kinds of migration systems described in the introduction all were present in preindustrial Europe. In addition to considerable local mobility, circular migration moved a growing number of harvest workers and temporary urban workers

from their home village, then back home again. Visible chain migration systems began to develop from the largest of circular systems, as some men and women remained at their destination, had families there, and provided a base for newcomer compatriots. Career migration—movement by the logic of the employing organization—was for church and government officials who were much smaller in number than they would be in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.

Moving about was an integral part of preindustrial rural routine, central to the rhythm of seasons, the life cycle, and family life and tied to patterns of family life, labor, and land ownership. Gender marked migration behavior, just as it framed almost all aspects of work and social life in early modern Europe. Men and women were much more likely to move at some life cycle stages than at others. As a social practice, migration was embedded in the dynamics of decisions, family formation, and inheritance. Larger forces affected migration decisions as well. Property ownership: members of landowning peasant families sometimes migrated for short-term work in order to earn cash or moved to new landholdings, but rural laborers who had little or no land were much more likely to decamp to a new village. Deployment of capital and labor demand: the distribution of capital created the demand for workers in specific regions of town and country. Demographics: most fundamentally, population trends produced a shortage of people in some places and overcrowding in others. This section focuses on two primary determinants of rural mobility in this age, the family and the land.

Local migration was an integral part of rural folkways, permeating systems of family and marriage. Men and women in northwestern Europe married at relatively late ages and had high rates of celibacy: generally speaking, men married in their late twenties and women in their midtwenties. Ten percent, and up to 20 percent in some areas, of men and women remained unmarried for life. By contrast, marriage was nearly universal in Asia and women married young.³¹ European late marriage and high mortality kept the number of children down. In Britain, northern France, the Netherlands, Belgium, Austria, and western Germany—much of Europe north of the Loire River—the nuclear family of parents and children was the norm. On the other hand, large extended families, stem families, and polynuclear families were more common in parts of central and eastern Europe, Italy, and southern France. Generally speaking, household composition in western Europe varied dramatically according to the family life cycle.³² And European households contained more than related people; indeed, there was no word for family in French or German before the seventeenth or eighteenth centuries to distinguish kin from the larger household of helpers. Rather, such words as *Haus*, *demesne*, *feu*, and *oustan* described the household in a less privatized age. In English, the word family did not distinguish related people from servants and apprentices.³³

European family systems had clear implications for geographical mobility.³⁴ The high proportion of single people produced a large contingent that could move easily from one household to another. The majority who eventually wed had a period of at least eight years when they could move for work and training. This was especially true for aspiring craftsmen whose families could afford an apprenticeship and for the children of cottagers and landless workers. This was a labor-intensive age. Feeding a household, running a farm, and, more specifically, transforming raw wool into cloth, milk into cheese, or grain into bread required many hours and the work of many people. The array of helpers and servants who were part of productive households performed the bulk of this work.³⁵

Despite this need for labor, many rural families could spare at least some of their adolescent members. Some men and women had to leave because they had to be trained, and those from poor families had to be fed as well. Consequently, a large proportion of rural single people destined for agricultural vocations moved out of their parental household. Departure constituted a routine part of rural lives—part and parcel of a system of training, employment, and economic support. Young people's high rates of mobility account for the lion's share of the "striking . . . degree of individual mobility" that characterized peasant societies in the seventeenth century.³⁶

Most mobile young people worked as rural servants like Joseph Mayett, whose story opened this chapter—what Americans call farmhands, the French *valets de ferme*, the Germans *Gesinde*, and the English servants in husbandry. Rural service was widespread in western Europe—Germany, Scandinavia, France, and England—where labor was free to move. Young workers lived away from home and customarily changed employers annually, moving from farm to farm and village to village. According to Ann Kussmaul, they supplied over a third of hired agricultural labor in early modern England. But servants are elusive; because the majority of them moved annually, the servant in one farm account book, census, or tax list rarely appeared in the next one. Because servants worked in this occupation prior to marriage, they were not listed as servants in marriage registers. Had they owned property, they would appear on tax rolls; had they been unhealthy, they might have left wills; had they been literate, they might have bequeathed letters or diaries.³⁷ But farm servants appear only in the occasional parish list or investigation of their status as unemployed poor in England, where the Settlement Law of 1662 regulated former rural servants' right to claim residence and, thus, charity in a parish.

Nonetheless, farm servants clearly figure large in preindustrial England and the Continent. From the Scottish border to London and south, the English put their children out to work. In the 63 available English parish listings, dating from 1574 to 1821, servants accounted for about 60 percent of the male and female population aged 15 to 24. Lists from the parishes on the Danish island of Moen drawn up in 1645 show that the majority of rural households had a servant. Although probably less ubiquitous in early modern France than in England, servants lived in prosperous French peasant households, such as those in the Limousin where seven or eight people worked landholdings of 25 to 50 acres.³⁸ In northern French Artois, young servants were more likely to enter and exit the village than any other group; 70 percent of single men aged 20 to 24 moved in any given year. Like most rural servants, these were hired on one-year contracts.³⁹

Children entered service when their physical strength and families permitted them to do so. Although some children in

western Europe entered service by the age of 10, most servants began their career in their midteens. For example, all children aged 14 and younger in the village of Ealing, Middlesex, lived at home with parents in 1599; however, 80 percent of the boys and nearly 30 percent of the girls aged 15 to 19 lived and worked with other families—those of yeomen, husbandmen, farmers, and laborers. A century later, northern English children left home in the Westmorland parish of Kirkby, Lonsdale, in their early to mid-teens. And on the Danish island of Moen, few children went out to service before their mid-teens in 1645.⁴⁰

Gender determined the duties of young farm servants. Women milked cows, cared for the small barnyard animals, and prepared food; men handled the draught animals and sheep and performed the heavy labor of plowing and carting. In most regions, everyone worked the harvest. Parish lists reveal that nearly as many women as men worked as farm servants. The proportion was very close for Danish villages, and in extant English parish lists, 1574–1821, the ratio of male to female farm servants was 121:100.⁴¹

Many rural people, then, spent their youth in work, training, and movement. Yearly migrations made sense to both masters and servants. From the master's viewpoint, whether foul-mouthed, incompetent, drunken, ill, or pregnant, servants could be undesirable. In England, the Settlement Laws of 1662 may have made masters particularly willing to release their servants, since those who left the parish became ineligible for poor relief.⁴² Servants, for their part, would wish to leave a farm that was too isolated or ruled by a master and mistress who were stingy with food, vicious, or overly familiar. Whatever the current place, the next one could promise better wages and a better position. As a consequence, some two-thirds of servants moved annually. Eventually, most would marry. Farm servants departed to take another job, marry, or to quit service. In any case, some two-thirds of servants moved annually; like Joseph Mayett, they were likely to be gone from the parish in a year.⁴³

In terms of mobility, what was the significance of farm service? By today's standards, servants did not go far; consequently, this local or regional migration is sometimes dismissed as micro-mobility or a sort of percolation that is distinct from meaningful migration.⁴⁴ It is true that the movement of young people like Joseph Mayett did not change the overall geographical distribution of population significantly, nor were their lives part of a sea change marking a transformation of the rural labor force. Yet although servants did not go far, their departure from home was an important life course transition, signaling the end of their childhood and dependence on parents. Moreover, rural service was important to the agricultural labor force because it trained people like Mayett in agricultural tasks while giving them the chance to develop their skills and reputation. At the same time, service introduced young men and women to the larger pool of potential mates and taught them the limitations of their abilities and personality (which in Mayett's case included a fiery temper). They experienced the attitudes, personalities, and peculiarities of others. Mayett, for example, never moved far, but his service exposed him to a remarkable variety of people and lifeways. Between ages 12 and 19, this Methodist boy lived in a Catholic household with a drunk who beat him, in a house of "scholars" who taught him to read, and in another where he learned to rob pear trees. Along the way, he began to keep company with women. Leaving home proved a broadening experience in this small world where one angry employer threatened to "blast his character so that he could not get another place within five miles."⁴⁵ Consequently, although the distance covered by rural servants may not have been great, the institution of rural service nonetheless had enormous import. It showed young men and women the world in which they would spend their lives, trained them to work in it, and introduced them to its characters and potential marriage partners.

Servants were primarily poor young men and women, from landless and nearly landless families like the Mayetts—simply because their parents had no land for them to work. Indeed, turn-of-the-century Danish scholar E. P. Mackeprang calculated that while 38 percent of landed farmers' children were servants (at ages 15 to 19) on the island of Moen in 1645, 91 percent of the landless laborers' children were so employed. Usually, they served the wealthier and landed members of society in a system by which the poor literally leased their children's labor to families that were better off.⁴⁶ Yet service was an integral part of training young people at every level of agricultural society. While children of land-poor and proletarian families learned the farming skills that would make them able agricultural laborers, some of the sons and daughters of farmers and of wealthier peasants went into service as well. They trained in farm operations, saving money to stock farms and to marry.

Their parents' reasons for sending them out are not entirely understood, but clearly economic need was not the only motive. It was probably seen as best that children be trained by outsiders and that servants be hired in their stead. For the farmer, this took some of the training of his children off his hands and freed him to hire whomever he wished. Of the midlands of England, one observer remarked that large landowning farmers sent their sons into farm service "as PUPILS, with superior farmers, at some distance from their father's residence."⁴⁷

Marriage migration, like farm service, was built into the western European family. Throughout the Continent, an incest taboo prevented men and women from marrying members of their own family and only in extraordinary cases were first cousins, for example, allowed to wed.⁴⁸ This fundamental principle of European family life meant that men and women often had to find a partner outside their hamlet or village. In addition, village social norms dictated that men and women marry someone of similar standing; landless laborers married each other, or married into a smallholding family, and middling peasants married one another; but a wealthy peasant could no more marry a day-laborer than could a member of the gentry. For this reason as well, partners had to be found for many men and women outside their hamlet. All other kinds of movement aside, then, men and women often moved to marry and set up a new household. Typically, husband and wife

moved into a new household in the husband's parish. Where the stem family prevailed, such as in southwestern France and Tuscany, wives moved into their husband's household. In peasant households lacking a son, the new groom would enter as son-in-law and eventual master of the holding. Much marriage migration was quite local; most village brides married someone from a nearby hamlet in the same village or a nearby parish. In the densely settled Beauvaisis in northern France studied by Pierre Goubert, almost 90 percent of brides and grooms came from the same parish, although many were from different hamlets.⁴⁹ In many of the seventeenth-century parishes whose marriage records have been studied, brides and grooms found their partners in their home parish—or within about a 10-kilometer radius.⁵⁰

The local nature of marriage migration has gone far to promote the stereotype that preindustrial society was fundamentally sedentary. Although rural marriage markets did not usually stretch far beyond neighboring parishes, the records of rural marriage provide a very incomplete view of mobility. This is because marriage registers, like the parish registers of birth or burial, reveal nothing about people who depart from their home village temporarily or permanently. Parish registers cannot ascertain several kinds of migrations that were important in the 1650–1750 period: those of families who procured land in a nearby parish and moved with their children; those of single people who left—whether they relocated in a nearby village, town, or city; those temporary departures of seasonal migrants who returned to their home parish. A most dramatic example of the way in which marriage records distort migration experience is the records from a village in the Marche in central France. Village records show that 68 percent of brides were born in the parish, another 26 percent less than 10 kilometers away. Yet, although 94 percent of the brides were from nearby, the experience of village men in this period was much less narrow than it may appear, because the village sent masons to Paris to work in summer construction.⁵¹ In such a case, the geographically limited marriage market does not reflect a narrow field of experience; rather, the arena in which men found work was much larger than the region in which they found wives. Men traveled in long-distance circular migration systems, women in localized marriage markets. So although marriage records tell us a good bit about marriage markets, they omit a great deal about rural people's migration experience.

Inheritance and Landholding

A rich variety of inheritance practices also influenced property holding and thereby shaped patterns of leaving home. Impartible inheritance, which kept family property intact, typified southern France and Britain. The heir was the eldest son in rigid systems of primogeniture, but in many regions parents designated which child would inherit. Elsewhere, rural property was divided among the heirs, or one heir would head the household in the next generation and his siblings would be paid off—brothers in cash and sisters with a dowry.⁵²

Inheritance systems and family forms gave some children a privileged position from the first years of their lives and condemned others to celibacy or departure.⁵³ This was particularly true in systems of primogeniture, where all children, except the eldest son, knew that they did not have a secure position in their family of origin. While the fortunes of the inheriting son could advance him in the world, those of younger siblings might have been quite reduced.⁵⁴ Whether the heir was designated by parents or established at birth, those who did not inherit the family land could either go away to seek their fortune or stay and take on the status of a helper. In regions where nuclear households and small farms were the norm (northern France, Britain, the low countries, or much of western Germany), sons and daughters would have to leave their parents' home in order to marry and have a family. Inheritance systems varied, but most of them paid off the children who did not receive the land, then dispersed them in order to keep the holding intact. Only systems of extended and multiple families like the French *frères* and Italian sharecropper families could retain all family members in the household, working together.⁵⁵

Landowning families sought to preserve the patrimony. It cannot be overemphasized that the passing on of land was driven by “the fear of extinction, *which is more the fear for the household than for individuals.*”⁵⁶ Preserving the landholding intact meant avoiding a division of land among children, even where inheritance was legally partible. This is why non-inheritors were bought off, encouraged to leave, or allowed to stay if they did not marry. Paradoxically, the strategies undertaken by families to preserve landholdings of a workable size promoted individualized destinies for the offspring. Some children would, “over a period of years, partially or completely disappear from the family structure.”⁵⁷

Landowning peasant families were doubtless more rooted than their more cottager or laborer counterparts, because a family's attachment to the patrimony was elemental. “Adequate land was shelter from want. As for the holding, it was the standard of the village hierarchy.”⁵⁸ Young people from peasant families were less likely than proletarians to move from the time they were young, because they could more likely work the land of their family, rather than become a farm servant. French scholars use a “sedentary model” to describe their population before 1750 partly because a greater proportion of French were peasant proprietors at this time than were the English (more of whom were dispossessed by enclosure and whose economy included more nonagricultural workers).⁵⁹

Nonetheless, not all peasant families remained in one location. We will never know why the family of infant Martin Guerre walked out of the French Basque country, where they owned a farm and fields, to the village of Artigat at the foot of the Pyrenees in the 1520s, but we can speculate that the opportunity to establish a farm in a friendlier climate could move an

entire household (which included, in this case, the Guerre brothers and the wife and child of the elder brother).⁶⁰ Alan Macfarlane's investigation of rural parishes in northern England contradicts the image of the sedentary peasant. Land was significant, but it appears that particular landholdings were not. After searching through wills and legal cases, Macfarlane concluded that precious little sentiment bound family to farm; "it is symbolic," he remarked, "that the farms were hardly ever called after families, but after natural features: [such as] Foulstone, Greenside. . . ." He found, for example, that in the two generations after 1642, fewer than half the original 28 families of Lupton township remained.⁶¹ Clearly, some landowning peasants did move as they bought and sold fields. It is likely that land ownership goes a long way toward accounting for the sedentary model of society to which the French subscribe, in contrast to the mobile model for southern England. Yet sources play an important mediating role in this particular contrast, because the sedentary model is grounded in early modern rural marriage records, which cast a very fine net over village property owners but underrepresent more mobile sectors of the population. By contrast, legal records of northern England and church court records of southern England capture a more varied population as well as a less land-bound economy.⁶²

Studies that focus specifically on the link between landholding and family migration show that cottager, laborer, and sharecropper families were more likely to move than peasants—and to move as a unit. In early modern Sweden, the households of tenant farmers in the manor-dominated parishes near Stockholm were much more likely to relocate than those in peasant or mixed-economy communities. In fact, different mobility rates were the primary demographic trait that distinguished those households (rather than fertility or family composition, for example). People born in the seventeenth century who worked as tenant farmers were likely to move around; two-thirds to three-quarters of them died outside their village and parish of birth. By contrast, two-thirds to three-fourths of people in villages where land ownership was common died in their parish of birth. David Gaunt concludes that "real stability" in the sense of remaining in one's village of birth was not a general feature of early modern Swedish society; rather, this was characteristic only of males in areas where peasant ownership was common. Permanent settlement was a luxury reserved primarily for landowners.

Because they were so mobile, agricultural workers were not known by fellow workers even after they were married and had children; obituaries were short and included such comments as "no one here a relative, so no one could tell of her past," and "about her life before coming here no one knows."⁶³ In such societies, the obituary of laborers like Brita Ersdotter had to be pieced together: As a young woman, Brita Ersdotter was likely to have moved frequently because most moves in any manor parish were those of single servants. Upon marriage in the early years of the eighteenth century, Ersdotter lived seven years with her husband at his parents' home; subsequently, the couple worked in four parishes. After her husband's death, she remained two years where he had died, then as an aging widow found a place in three other parishes in the Stockholm region before her death in 1757.⁶⁴

Sharecropping moved family units too, as dissatisfaction with work and strained relations between estate managers and laborers put families in search of a new position. Emmanuel Todd's comparison of agricultural laborers on large farms in northern France with sharecroppers in Tuscany shows a remarkable contrast in patterns of movement. Sharecroppers (*mezzadri*), who lived in complex families and owed half their crops to the landowners, moved frequently and moved together as a group; males relocated along with their families at all ages, and women moved with marriage and for service work. Young male sharecroppers did not leave home to work as farmhands in other families; rather, they remained with their fathers and moved along with the large family group. By contrast, the conjugal families of French agricultural laborers who owned their own house, garden, and sometimes a bit of arable land had a very different pattern of mobility: migration as an adolescent rural servant was common, but household mobility was not. Sharecropping produced family solidarity, household moves, and complex households, whereas the system of agricultural labor and small plot ownership "permitted, or imposed, an early rupture between family and individual."⁶⁵

Between service and marriage, women may have been especially likely to leave their home village. Indeed, of the over 7,000 English biographies surveyed for the period between 1660 and 1730, rural women were most likely to leave home. Over three-quarters of them, as opposed to less than 70 percent of the rural men, moved during their lifetime.⁶⁶ Of the 23 girls baptized between 1660 and 1669 in the Westmorland parish of Kirkby, Lonsdale, none remained in this parish of 2,500 in the year 1695.⁶⁷ In systems of local migration in peasant societies, then, women may have been on the whole more likely to leave home than men—at least before widespread rural textile production made girls who spun or made lace more valuable to their families and kept them at home.

In the uncrowded countryside of the seventeenth century, migration was due less to large-scale changes such as rural overpopulation or the widespread shift of capital and employment to urban areas than it was to be in future years. Movement was due more to structures of village and individual life such as property-holding, gender, service, and marriage. If one desired, or was forced, to leave home, local traditions provided the itineraries and the destination. In many areas, this meant a village in the same market system, a market town, or the regional capital city. In the case of Germans in Westphalia, local information signaled the Netherlands; in the south of France, it pointed to Spain. Witness the story of Martin Guerre, a sixteenth-century peasant whose story has been told in film and in print.⁶⁸

Martin Guerre was an unhappy young man. As the first-born son in a prosperous peasant family, he would eventually be head of a comfortable household, were it not for a combination of circumstances that spoiled this promising situation and prompted his departure. Martin's parents and his Uncle Pierre had come to his village of Artigat beneath the foothills of the French Pyrenees when he was two years old; in Artigat, no other boy was named Martin because it was the name for an ass

in the local patois. The teasing he received as a boy followed him into his marriage, because when no children came for years after his wedding it was clear to the entire village that Martin suffered from impotence. He was thought to have been bewitched. The eventual birth of his son, after the spell preventing conception was broken, did little to give Martin a man's place in the village. He was still young, having married at 14 and fathered a child at 17. Moreover, after the marriage he remained under the roof of his father, as did all young husbands in the region, and under the thumb of his volatile Uncle Pierre as well. There was no way to change his life in the village of Artigat, so Martin chose to disappear. Like thousands of young French men since the beginning of the sixteenth century, he went to Spain. There, also like many others, he initially found work as a servant.⁶⁹

PORTRAIT OF A MIGRATION SYSTEM

The most visible of migrations in the 1650–1750 period were those in which people moved and worked together. In this agricultural age, collective movements of harvest workers were most notable and most crucial to annual rhythms of agricultural production. These circular migrations were particularly massive to the “bread baskets” of wheatlands near the great cities such as London and Paris. Between 1660 and 1700, harvest teams organized from the north of England, descending on East Anglia for the harvest that fed London. Grain harvesters from La Perche west of Paris labored on the large farms of the Ile-de-France. Smaller groups from the villages like Pradelles in the southern highlands of France, described at the opening of [chapter 1](#), harvested wheat and gathered grapes on the Mediterranean plain. Both massive and small-scale systems of seasonal, circular migration animated western Europe; they gave labor to needy cities and harvests while simultaneously feeding and maintaining hungry rustics.⁷⁰

Here I focus on one migration system that dramatically demonstrates the traits of a circular migration system for temporary work. Such systems are characterized by a significant difference between money-earning possibilities in the home area and destination, cash-hungry migrants, and a need for short-term labor at destination. The migrants themselves experienced a collective journey, a specific labor routine, and considerable deprivation away from home. Likewise, home routine adjusted to migrants' absences. Finally, short-term labor migrants were usually ill-perceived by their hosts. All of these traits ring true in the system that joined the Westphalian *Hollandsgänger* to the Dutch province of Holland in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries.

This system was part of a broad movement of workers who came to work in the Netherlands, originating in an arc that reached from French Calais in the south up to the German states on the North Sea. Germans especially provided the Dutch with servants, sailors, flax workers, strong arms for land reclamation, peat digging, harvests, brickmaking, construction, and the digging of roots from the dye plant madder. Migration began in the seventeenth century when “*Hollandsgänger*” from Westphalia in the northwestern German territories began to travel to the Netherlands for seasonal rural work cutting hay, cutting peat, digging madder, and harvesting grain.⁷¹ On one hand, the Netherlands had a sophisticated, specialized, and capital-intensive economy with a sizable need for short-term workers. On the other hand, there were men in nearby Westphalia who were unable to live from their small landholdings alone, who could perform the tasks the Dutch required, who were willing to leave home, and whose lives were structured so that their absence could be tolerated. The self-perpetuating exchange of labor and capital between the regions found its roots in the complementarity of these two areas.

In 1650, the specialized Dutch economy produced cheese for the international marketplace, which in turn fueled capital-intensive dairy farming.⁷² Farmers raised dairy cattle exclusively for the production of cheese and butter in the meadowlands of Holland and Friesland. The enterprise of gathering milk and producing cheese and butter kept an army of farm workers occupied year-round. The cattle grazed in the summer but were fed hay in the winter, and this crucial feed had to be cut and gathered within a period of about six weeks in June and July. Local people were unable to carry out the crucial task of making hay, so migrants were brought in. Migrants also performed other tasks, but the first and most timely task of the temporary worker was cutting hay.⁷³

Relative to wages in Westphalia, those in Holland were high—and “relative” was the important consideration for the worker trekking abroad. Early nineteenth-century data suggest that the Westphalian smallholder could earn a third of family annual income during three months of work in the hayfields and peat bogs of Holland. Moreover, the Westphalian could be absent from home from about May 25 to July 25 and still sow his own fields before departure and reap the harvest upon return; the hay crop was small enough to be cut and gathered by women and children. Westphalians had small landholdings because their population increased much more than other areas in the seventeenth century. The region suffered less severe losses in the Thirty Years' War than had German territories to the south and east; and once the war ended, population grew rapidly—by 40 percent in the last half of the century in Lippe, for example. This increased population lived on smaller landholdings. In Osnabrück, for example, plots worked by tenant farmers and cottagers increased by 56 percent, while the number of full-sized farms decreased between 1670 and 1718. An increasing number of Westphalians subsisted on holdings far too small to support a family. (Most migrants probably lived on a mere two to five acres when about 12 acres were

required to live off the land.⁷⁴) By the 1670s, rural linen production had begun to expand in Westphalia. This industry became important for many weaver families, but for spinners and part-time weavers it could not furnish more than a small by-income. These nearly landless families required subsidies from seasonal migration.⁷⁵

The earliest record of the migration system that developed between these complementary areas is a 1608 Osnabrück document attesting to workers migrating to “Friesland and to other places outside this bishopric.” Other early seventeenth-century records from parts of Westphalia, including Lippe and Münster, testify to an increasing number of *Hollandsgänger*, who doubtless numbered 1,000 from Osnabrück alone by 1660. The spring peat cutters and summer hay mowers contributed to a migration system that Jan Lucassen ascertains to have grown quickly in the 1630s and again in the 1680s. By 1730, at least 15,000, if not 25,000, migrant workers traveled annually in a broad “North Sea system” to the province of Holland.⁷⁶ The entire North Sea system probably peaked with about 30,000 workers before the wars of the French Revolutionary era began in 1792. After the Napoleonic wars, Westphalians would find brighter fortunes elsewhere, first in the United States, then in the prosperous German Rhine-Ruhr industrial zone.⁷⁷

For the Westphalian migrant, the trip began by meeting up with others. In a satirical Dutch farce of 1685, Westphalian Hans replies to the question “How did you get here . . . ?” with

There were ten of us,
Farm lads all, at an inn, and we
really got loaded . . .
We set off for Holland.⁷⁸

Migrants met at particular locations that became regular meeting places like the “Frisian Oaks” (*Frieseneiche*) on the northern route to Friesland and a mammoth boulder (the *Breite Stein*) en route to the Zuiderzee by a central track. By the time those bound for Holland reached the shores of the Zuiderzee, they numbered in the hundreds, so ferry captains vied furiously for their business on the crossing to Amsterdam. In June of 1728, the 13 regularly scheduled voyages from the port town of Hesselt to Amsterdam were augmented by 23 extra voyages for migrant hay cutters (and 12 others for cattle, which reveals a bit about shipboard conditions!). The uncomfortable one-day crossing brought Westphalians nearer their goal. Grass mower Slenderhinke described the ferry trip in a 1712 farce:

And I went in a ship across wide water, the Zuiderzee, a vast, wide lake, mad white caps that could not be calmed; and my stomach began to growl. I spoke to the skipper and said, you thief, the gallows is too good for you. . . . [After being sick] I fell asleep until morning and saw then for the first time this great Haspeldam, this Amstelholland. That cheered me up. Then I thought, Hinke, you’re going to make a lot of money.⁷⁹

Upon arrival in the great city of Amsterdam, workers stayed in cheap lodgings that catered to them in a neighborhood called the German Exchange (*Moffenbeurs*) before departing to the south to dredge peat or to the north to cut hay. This trip remained unchanged for 200 years until trains and steam ferries hastened the journey.⁸⁰

Hay mowers worked vast grasslands where each herd of 50 cows required nearly 50 acres of meadowland. They cut in teams of two from before dawn until evening, “Westphalian heroes who wield the scythe as a spear, / Grass knights, intrepidly swinging their arms.”⁸¹ The mowers preceded hay makers, who turned the grass, then gathered it in. These were sometimes women, and sources suggest that some teams included both men and women who worked as hay mowers and hay makers, respectively. After haying, some migrants went south to Brabant or north to Friesland for a second harvest. They returned home by St. Jacob’s day, July 25.⁸²

This trip required purposeful deprivation and self-exploitation.⁸³ Migrants walked long distances, carried heavy tools and supplies, and endured a dangerous return trip when they carried cash. They brought their own food and slept in tents or by the road. All of these behaviors were designed to maximize their profits from this trip whose explicit purpose was to earn cash. Indeed, for this reason, some carried along a bolt of Westphalian linen in the eighteenth century to sell without yielding profit to a middleman.⁸⁴ Group travel and purposeful deprivation designed to maximize earnings forecast the routines of the short-term migrants who would proliferate throughout Europe in the second half of the eighteenth century. We will meet them in the next chapter.

MOVEMENT TO THE PREINDUSTRIAL CITY

Migrants were part of life in every urban area of preindustrial Europe; they came to large and small towns, to trading and manufacturing cities, and they joined every level of society. The citizenship lists of towns and cities from Danzig and Berlin, south to Marseille, and west to near Cornwall show that the “respectable” portion of society commanded at least a regional draw; there were intimate connections between urban and rural elites, and among the elite of various towns.⁸⁵ The

origins of urban citizens, or *Bürgers*, are the best recorded. German records from before 1800 show that about half of the urban citizens were migrants.

Together with their families, urban citizens accounted for about half the population of most towns—and the other, less prosperous half was more mobile. For example, in Frankfurt am Main, about half the citizens were migrants in 1700, but about two-thirds of the noncitizens were migrants; the figures for nearby Würzburg in 1675 were 57 percent and 74 percent respectively. Thirty-nine percent of the *bourgeois* of the Norman city of Caen were migrants in 1660, yet most migrants were less prosperous “*petites gens*.” Marriage records, which track a relatively sedentary sector of any population, show that from 1670 to 1749, 44 to 52 percent of the grooms who settled in town after marriage were migrants to the northern French city of Rouen. Those who do not appear in its marriage records—single household servants, apprentices, and journeymen—were more likely to be from out of town. Steve Hochstadt has estimated the mobility of German *Bürgers* at a minimum annual rate of .02 to .08, and of all urban dwellers an annual rate of .10 or more for many communities—that is, he calculates that 10 percent of urban populations moved in or out of the city annually.⁸⁶

The city, then, was a node of movement in the preindustrial world. It must serve as the final resting place for the stereotypical view of sessile preindustrial life. This section discusses the demographic and labor needs of urban areas and general migration patterns to cities. It then focuses on the fortunes and migrants of smaller, typical cities before turning to the great cities of London and Amsterdam.

Unfortunately, we can never know how many people actually moved into and out of the early modern city. Similarly, we cannot know what proportion of city people were migrants, where they came from, how long they were in town, or how likely they were to stay on, marry, or bear children. Indeed, for this era, less is known about people in the city than in the countryside. In the absence of the census or population registers, much must be inferred from case studies.⁸⁷ We can only be certain that net figures of city growth (even when balanced against urban population deficits) come nowhere near to measuring migration because they do not include the servant women who went back home or to another town, journeymen who moved on, apprentices who found work elsewhere, or day-laborers who returned to the countryside.

The constant presence of migrants in preindustrial cities resonates with the fundamental demographic finding that most preindustrial cities produced more deaths than births. Few towns could maintain their numbers without an influx of migrants.⁸⁸ For this reason, migration to the city in early modern Europe was more crucial to populating the city than it would be in the centuries to come. Generally speaking, smaller towns were less deadly than larger ones, yet infant mortality was universally high in urban areas, and towns were subject to intense bouts of mortality from the bubonic plague and other epidemics of communicable disease. These scourges struck with particular force in poor urban parishes. As a consequence of its size, social structure, and sanitation, seventeenth-century London accounted for about one death in eight of all of England, although only one in thirteen English resided there.⁸⁹ Urban natural decrease became most important in the seventeenth century in northern Europe, particularly due to the depredations and repercussions of the Thirty Years' War, the Fronde in France, and Louis XIV's wars in the low countries and western Germany. The plague reverberated through the cities of western Europe. Unfortunately, the difficulties of the Swabian city of Nördlingen were not unusual. About 100 kilometers northwest of Munich, this city was in demographic decline from the beginning of the Thirty Years' War; at least one-sixth of its population perished in the plague in the waning months of 1634. Despite a surge of marriages, remarriages, and births in the subsequent year, the population continued to fall. Between 1627 and 1640, the number of citizen households dropped by about half, from 1,600 to 800. At the end of the war, Nördlingen began to recover, but its people then suffered from the disastrous hunger years (1693–1694, 1709) and were hit by the opening campaigns of the War of Spanish Succession. In 1700, the population of Nördlingen was about 6,000 and there were about 1,200 citizen households.⁹⁰ The four horsemen of the apocalypse—war, strife, famine, and death—took their toll on the early modern city.

The demographic complement to urban mortality was the sparse rural population. Jan de Vries's systemic analysis of the populations of preindustrial Europe reveals that migration to cities and towns had a greater impact on rural populations than it would have on a more populous countryside in later years.⁹¹ This is because high infant and child mortality meant that many couples could only replace themselves, if even that. In the Beauvaisis in northwestern France, for example, only half the children survived to age 20.⁹² Of those who survived, the ones who left home for domestic service, moved to a nearby village, or decamped to an urban area were far from negligible. De Vries calculates that an average of about 3 percent of rural-born young people definitively relocated in the city and that about 6 to 10 percent “eventually got a taste of city life.” These permanent departures were, in the late seventeenth century, the bulk of rural young people who could be spared by family and village.⁹³

Aside from episodes of strife and war, not many cities could sustain their numbers; thus urban migrants were most important at this time in history. Because data on city people is so spotty, their role is far from clear. Allan Sharlin asserted that migrants were a sort of demographic underclass because as apprentices and servants they did not marry and because their poverty subjected them to high mortality conditions in cities like Frankfurt.⁹⁴ Migrants probably did marry later than native-born townspeople, on the average, and thus perhaps bore fewer children.⁹⁵ On the other hand, death struck infants and young children hardest of any urban group, so that mortality of the very young—probably not migrant mortality—was responsible for the natural decrease of urban populations.⁹⁶ Moreover, although apprentices and single servants often were

newcomers, migrants also were well represented among more elite members of urban society, who did marry and bear children in the city. Finally, scholars like A. M. van de Woude ascertain that migrants were a positive demographic force in urban populations because they tended to arrive at or near the age of marriage and childbearing.⁹⁷ On balance, migrants probably contributed more than they subtracted from city populations.

Urban natural deficit is a demographic fact, but migration is a social phenomenon. Migrants entered the gates of cities not to fill in for deceased children but to seek a livelihood or pursue a career. The early modern town was much more than a deathtrap to the migrant, who acted as “the linchpin of the urban economy.”⁹⁸ This was a labor-intensive age for urban tasks just as for rural tasks. The town needed vast numbers of people, some of whom by necessity would be newcomers.

For example, a London bakery in the seventeenth century absorbed the labor of some 13 people, including two maidservants, two apprentices, and two or three journeymen, as well as the master baker, his wife, and their children. A Parisian printer’s workshop in the late 1730s gave something of a livelihood to two starving apprentices and a host of insecurely employed journeymen, all enthusiastic participants in “the great cat massacre” because the enterprise sumptuously fed and clothed the master, his wife, their daughters, and, not the least, the mistress’s favorite cats.⁹⁹ These apprentices and journeymen very likely were newcomers to the city; so, too, were untold numbers of migrant women who served in urban institutions—waiting on households, performing menial tasks in workshops, and praying behind convent walls.

Indeed, women were the majority in most western European cities. For example, the French city of Lille in 1686 enumerated only 79 men for every 100 women in a census that counted valets and maidservants as adults. By the same criteria, there were 74 men per 100 women in Zurich in 1671 and 79 men for every 100 women in Venice in 1655. Sex ratios (the number of men per 100 women) increased to the east because Russian, Asian, and Indian cities were primarily male. West of the Elbe, a few cities, like the Prussian military center of early modern Berlin and the papal city of Rome, also housed more men than women.¹⁰⁰ Generally, cities have become more female as time has passed and this trend continues to the present day. The implications of this fact for migration are very important. Yet, unfortunately, if there is little systematic data on men in the city, there is even less on women. In the 1650–1750 period, they do not appear in citizens registers or apprenticeship records; in the absence of the census, even the ubiquitous serving girl is invisible. And marriage records, so valued as a source of information on migrants to French cities, systematically undercount migrant women, who by tradition married in their home parish, if they did not remain in the sizable ranks of single people.

Despite gaps in our knowledge about urban migrants, researchers have elucidated several geographic and social patterns of migration that apply to most towns. Urban areas were served primarily by what Jean-Pierre Poussou calls a “demographic basin,” or primary fund of nearby villages and towns. The volume of newcomers to urban areas from demographic basins suggests that we see city walls not as a barriers but rather as semipermeable membranes through which nearby populations flowed. In times of expansion, demographic basins became more extensive. From the immediate region came a wide range of newcomers, from humble servants and apprentices to the children of local elites who sought to rise in society.¹⁰¹ Peter Clark and Paul Slack include this flow of intra-regional migration in their category of “betterment migration” because the servants, apprentices, and hopeful young landholders all aspired to social and economic improvement. The masses of young women are poorly documented, but the apprentices moving into towns are better known; typical among them are the aspiring weavers from the Norfolk villages who came to the provincial textile capital of Norwich for training.¹⁰² Some of this fairly local migration was among towns and small provincial cities through which traveled skilled workers like weavers and printer’s journeymen in search of work, small-town lawyers in search of a better position, and servants in search of a more sophisticated domestic position. For example, most of the town-born migrants in Peter Clark’s study of southern English migration, 1660–1730, traveled within their own county (57% of male and 62% of female migrants).¹⁰³ Most migration, then, was regional.

Certain kinds of people traveled farther afield: the very poor, the very wealthy, and refugees. Prominent among long-distance travelers were vagrants and beggars, the distressed people of Europe who were driven far from home by hunger. Typically, these “subsistence migrants,” to use Clark and Slack’s term, traveled farther than “betterment migrants.” Over half of the vagrants and beggars in the East Anglia city of Norwich, for example, came from beyond the Norfolk borders, from not only other counties within a 150-kilometer radius but also from farther afield: London, Middlesex, Scotland, and Ireland. Some cities put vagabonds out at the city gates, and the rare detailed record gives us a glimpse of their identities. Of the nine people who were expelled from the city of Amiens in northern France on February 28, 1644, one was a man of 82 who had been begging for four years, no longer able to earn his living as a slate worker; another was a boy of 12 who had been caught at stealing the iron circles from buckets at a communal well (which he doubtless planned to sell in order to buy bread). The children who were sent on their way were too weak to work, “parasites at the family table,” abandoned, or orphaned. The adults were those who had not managed to recoup between bad years, to buy back their pawned clothing, or to find steady work.¹⁰⁴

Although they were never systematically counted, vagrants figured large in the consciousness of authorities, country folk, and charities. Sent back out on the road, vagrants and beggars met suspicion in villages and farms. For the destitute, cities—particularly the great cities like London and Paris—held out much more hope of work or charity than the village. The unemployed crowded into poor urban neighborhoods and “squatted in suburban slums” that lay around every city.¹⁰⁵ The numbers of poor who traveled long distances in order to work for, beg, or steal their food seem to have subsided in

Britain after the 1660s; local conditions and charity improved, and the poor laws and settlement acts acted as an *ex post facto* system of control, sending home the unsuccessful. The fate of the poor would be quite different on the Continent, where they were subject to a curious mixture of incarceration and freedom in the years to come.¹⁰⁶

Refugees such as the Jews and Protestants discussed earlier in this chapter were also long-distance migrants to the early modern city, especially in England, Holland, western Germany, and Switzerland. Those in Norwich give us an example of the role foreign refugees played in an urban society in this period. In the sixteenth century, Norwich housed families of Protestant Walloons who fled the Spanish in the southern Netherlands. Then in the 1680s, Huguenot weavers were invited to Norwich by a descendant of those Protestants, wool manufacturer Onias Philipppo. The Huguenots were greeted by a municipal riot on the part of local weavers who feared the newcomers would undercut pay rates. Nonetheless, some 100 to 200 Huguenots settled in, just as had Onias Philipppo's Protestant Walloon family a century earlier.¹⁰⁷

Third among long-distance travelers were professionals, gentry, university students, and some members of the bourgeoisie. In southern England, those who traveled the farthest were urban-born professionals—lawyers, physicians, and clergy who moved an average of over 90 kilometers. Large cities such as Paris and London—and provincial capitals like Norwich and Rouen—had the greatest draw for highly educated people who worked in urban courts, government offices, and churches. Moreover, these migrants and their families delighted in the fine artisanal creations, the fabric and fashions, and music and entertainments that urbane surroundings supported. They also possessed the money to spend on housing, interior decoration, personal luxuries, and entertainment, which in turn supported a plethora of urban livelihoods.

In this period, both in England and on the Continent, city architecture and building materials were upgraded and wooden housing was proscribed in many locations to prevent fires like the blaze that decimated London in 1666. Princes and their governments ordered public squares and streets constructed in the baroque style. In Louis XIV's France, for example, construction projects transformed much of Paris, fortified border cities, and created Versailles.¹⁰⁸

When English physician Martin Lister visited Paris in 1698 after a long absence, he reported that

It may very well be, that Paris is in a manner a new City within this forty Years. 'Tis certain since this King came to the Crown, 'tis so much altered for the better, that 'tis quite another thing . . . the greatest part of the City has been lately rebuilt. In this Age certainly most of the great Hotels are built, or re-edified; in like manner the Convents, the Bridges and Churches, the Gates of the City; and the great alteration of the Streets, the Keyes upon the River, the Pavements; all these have had great Additions, or are quite new.¹⁰⁹

These improvements had a most dramatic and direct impact on migration, because they required great teams of seasonal construction workers in addition to the laborers and artisans of the city. In fact, the very notable annual migration of stone masons from the Haute-Marne in central France to Paris dates from the mid-seventeenth-century mandate that Paris be built from stone; by 1694, 6,000 masons from that small highland region worked in the capital city during the construction season.¹¹⁰ Not only did large cities such as London, Paris, and Amsterdam attract working newcomers from afar; but the new cities of early modern Europe—the spas, dockyards, and government creations such as Versailles—did so as well.¹¹¹

In all kinds of cities, the turnover among urban dwellers was high. Many migrant apprentices and rural-born servants came for a temporary stay, and in addition, people passed through smaller towns to larger ones. Although contemporary accounts refer to the arrivals and departures of citizens and servants, the precise volume of this turnover is impossible to measure, and it is not even picked up by the most sophisticated analyses of urban populations.¹¹²

Unusual documentation gives some idea of this turnover. A complete census of Würzburg in 1701 indicates that the city was turbulent with the coming and going of young, single people and of families. The clear majority of adults in Würzburg (74% of the men and 57% of the women) had been born elsewhere, and although migrants were 69 percent of the male household heads, they constituted 89 percent of male non-kin household members—apprentices, journeymen, and servants—who were the most likely to migrate again. Natives of the city also departed; an age breakdown of the native-born population indicates that over a third of young men born in Würzburg left the city between ages 15 and 24 and nearly as many women left in their twenties, perhaps to marry. Peter Clark's survey of migration in southern England reveals that city-born people were less mobile than village folk; nonetheless, the majority of them (55% of men and 58% of women) moved at least out of their home parish. More urban dwellers moved at least 60 kilometers from home and more left their home county (20% of men and 18% of women)—probably because they relocated in another urban area rather than a neighboring village.¹¹³ (See Table 2.1.)

Difficult times caused much of this turnover in the 1650–1750 period. For example, religious conflict, economic hardship, and high death rates all worked to reduce the population of Rouen in northern France by both mortality and emigration; nonetheless, in some of its worst times (1680–1700) over 7,000 migrants, net, moved to the city. The actual number of newcomers was doubtless several times that. In fact, close study of the families of Rouen led Jean-Pierre Bardet to conclude that the city was a passageway, a “sieve,” to use his metaphor, that only retained a small proportion of newcomers.¹¹⁴

Men and women who came to and left the early modern city moved in systems of circular, chain, and career migration. Most of the young women who worked as serving girls, for example, probably planned to return to their village or small town.¹¹⁵ The same was true of rural men who came to the city for the winter to do odd jobs and the construction workers

who moved with teams from home for summer work. In some cases, a few of these circulating migrants, such as Germans in Amsterdam or upland masons in Paris, stayed in the city and opened an inn or flophouse for their compatriots, initiating a system of chain migration. Men like the lawyer moving from small-town to urban practice or court and the cleric in the cathedral chapter came to the city by the logic of career migration, dictated by the structure of the legal profession or church. Many beggars and vagrants moved in groups and in seasonal patterns, returning home in good weather or favorable times.¹¹⁶

The common patterns of migration to early modern cities appear to be relatively high turnover, intense local migration, long-distance movements of the very poor and elites, and circular and career movement. But neither all cities nor all regions were alike; profoundly different economies and historical circumstances created a wide range of migration patterns. Cities that grew the most and had the greatest geographical draw combined the functions of a government capital in this age of state consolidation with those of world trade and empire. Two in particular, London and Amsterdam (with 400,000 and 175,000 people respectively in 1650), came to primary importance in a world system of commerce and exploitation. Some cities grew because they were new state or commercial creations, such as St. Petersburg and Versailles. Others, like the English center of Norwich, attracted newcomers by dint of their local industries and functions as provincial capitals. Most cities, however, were less fortunate. In this age of war, demographic stagnation, and decline of urban fortunes, it is instructive to contrast Norwich with the French provincial capital of Amiens and the smaller town of Beauvais.

Norwich was a center of wool production that grew to house 30,000 people by 1700, to be the second largest city in the realm, after London. Penelope Corfield has calculated that about 400 newcomers, net, moved to Norwich each year in the 1670s and 1680s. Although its primary contacts were with London and with its port of Yarmouth, about 30 kilometers to the east, vagrants came from near and far, apprentices came primarily from within Norfolk county, and a community of Huguenots settled in as well. The lively and diverse life of Norwich supported not only master weavers, journeymen, apprentices, spinsters and finishers of raw wool and fabric but also the commercial and social life of a regional trade center and a multitude of services “ranging from sin to repentance.”¹¹⁷ The city thrived in this time of peace and relative prosperity.

The French city of Amiens also had a population of about 30,000 in 1700. Amiens, however, was only one of the “*bonnes villes de la France*,” there were six cities of greater size, including Paris, by far the largest city on the Continent with 510,000 people.¹¹⁸ Amiens was the provincial capital of Picardy, cathedral city, and, like Norwich, a wool-producing town with markets throughout France and abroad. Located on the navigable Somme River about 60 kilometers from the English channel, it had access to international commerce. Essentially, Amiens drew people from the surrounding province of Picardy, “sons [and daughters] of peasants, artisans, and shopkeepers come to try their adventure,” joining compatriots as bakers, shoemakers, or domestics. Like Norwich, Amiens drew apprentices from the region; it too attracted skilled workers from other textile centers (like the 48 weavers who arrived from Lille in the 1660s). Merchants, masters, and journeymen who were registered as members of the bourgeoisie came from farther afield in northern France, “weaving of their thousand individual destinies,” in the words of Pierre Deyon, “the cultural and economic unity of the country north of the Loire.”¹¹⁹ In addition to all the functions of Norwich, Amiens supported ecclesiastics associated with its important gothic cathedral.

Amiens did not grow as rapidly as Norwich because the 1650–1750 period was neither so peaceful nor prosperous for the people of Picardy as it was for the English. The crises of 1693–1694 struck Amiens with full force: an agricultural catastrophe followed by hunger, starvation, and epidemics of typhoid and smallpox made for two long years of high prices and unemployment. So catastrophic was this disaster that mortality was twice as high as it would be in 1710—a year when the harvest was virtually nil in many locations and in which many people of the Continent once again perished from disease because they were so weakened by hunger. In addition, monies were siphoned off to the state at a great rate to pay for the last wars of Louis XIV.¹²⁰ Consequently, although Norwich and Amiens were about the same size, both were textile cities, and the patterns of migration to them seem similar, the political economies in which they were embedded meant that their fates were very different in the 1650–1750 period.

Beauvais, Amiens’s smaller neighbor to the south, was probably more typical of European towns and of urban fortunes in this period than either Norwich or Amiens. This city better illuminates regular relations between town and country. Somewhat smaller, its population remained at about 13,000 from 1680 to 1730. Beauvais was also more isolated. Unlike Amiens, it did not import grain from Danzig or cheese from Holland; the sea was two hard days away by road. Although primitive, the roads were nonetheless full of people from all social stations. The poor were quick to come and go in times of trouble; beggars, women with a pack en route to market, and men with bolts of cloth on their shoulders traveled on foot. Donkeys carried market packs, mules traveled with loads of pottery and fish. Those fortunate enough to travel on horseback were wealthy farmers and gentlemen.¹²¹

This textile town was close to rural life. A town list of 1696 shows that the over half the residents were employed by the manufacture and marketing of wool and linen. Another third of the population worked at urban trades like bread production and shoemaking; one family in five was supported by an officer or a member of the bourgeoisie. Beauvais supported the bishop and his staff, 17 churches, and 10 religious houses, all within the one square kilometer enclosed by its walls. However, a tenth of its residents had rural occupations: agricultural laborers, vineyard keepers, coopers, and smithies. This serves as a reminder that the preindustrial town was one in which agricultural and urban occupations lived cheek by jowl.¹²²

Country folk came to work in the city. To work as a wool comber for the widow Restaut, one peasant walked eight

kilometers a day; two weavers from the same village worked for Robert Gimart. Even in the depressed period before the eighteenth century, over 1,000 villagers were employed in the city, some 250 as combers, 640 as weavers, and 227 as cloth finishers who worked as teaselers and cloth shearers. Later, a quarter of the town's apprentice combers and one-seventh of its weavers would come from a broad ring of villages around Beauvais.¹²³

In the low-pressure demographic regime of Beauvais, the people were more sedentary at the end of the seventeenth century than they would be later, to judge from marriage records; only perhaps 10 percent of marriage partners were born outside the urban parishes surveyed. In 1700, nearly all marriage partners came from within a 20 kilometer radius.¹²⁴ These low mobility figures systematically underrepresent the movement of Beauvaisiens because they do not catch temporary migrants, church personnel, or families; they even miss the marriages of urban servant women who wed in their home parish. Nonetheless, these figures are low even for marriage records, suggesting a relatively sedentary population.

Low mobility probably reflects the fact that Beauvais suffered bad times between about 1660 and 1730. The city declined after 1650, depleted by the Fronde, the wars of the kingdom, and by the dearth of markets for its fine, thick wools in a depressed economy. In this sense, its troubles were emblematic of the late seventeenth century. Underpinning these weaknesses was the fragile and death-ridden demographic system intimately tied to food supply and industrial output; when grain prices rose in times of shortage, cloth orders were short, and looms stood still. The wool-combers of Beauvais complained of hunger, numbering their fellows who had left to work the fields or to beg their bread.¹²⁵

Developing rural industry offers another clue to the sedentary Beauvaisiens. In the late seventeenth and eighteenth centuries agriculturalists in Europe increasingly worked in rural manufacturing to earn a living without leaving the countryside. The Beauvaisiens had little reason to move into their troubled regional capital, but there are indications that they had cause to remain in their home village where industrial production may have been expanding. It is clear that rural women already were spinning for the wool manufacturers of the city in the seventeenth century, and late-century complaints about the low rates of village weavers suggest that there were enough rural weavers to aggravate the city. By 1708, 7,900 looms dotted the plain between Beauvais and Amiens, 60 kilometers to the north.¹²⁶ The stagnating urban economy, the demographic disasters of the time, and the possibility of work in the countryside all help to explain the low mobility of the Beauvaisiens. They foreshadow the more prosperous countryside that would develop during the eighteenth century.

At the other end of the urban spectrum from Beauvais were the most attractive cities of the age—the capital and port cities that were preeminent in urban growth between 1600 and 1750.¹²⁷ The capitals and ports of Atlantic trade thrived above all in the mercantilist and centralizing policies of the seventeenth- and early eighteenth-century states that expanded government and trade. In terms of their attraction for newcomers, the quintessential cities of the age were Amsterdam and London, both of which depended on a vast influx of migrants. Significantly, their draw for Europeans also reflects their global power.

As center of the dynamic Dutch Republic, Amsterdam combined the functions of both the central place and gateway in an international imperial network. It dominated a national hierarchy of towns and cities as economic, cultural, and political center, while simultaneously serving as a port for colonial trade.¹²⁸ The city provided the heart of the Republic that successfully challenged Spanish domination of the Netherlands and the ambitions of Louis XIV. With the collapse of Antwerp at the hands of the French and Spanish in the 1580s, highly skilled artisanal production shifted north to Amsterdam. Its merchants reached northeast into the Baltic Sea region to sustain a grain trade that yielded enormous profit, particularly in times of famine, when Europe would pay high prices for relief. The centerpiece of its wealth, however, was the East India Company. Chartered in 1602, the company had powers of trade from the Cape of Good Hope east to the Straits of Magellan; it was empowered to make treaties with local rulers, to administer, to defend, and to make war on Spain and Portugal. Its great success was extracting gold from the East Indies in the form of colonial trade.¹²⁹

Dutch success transformed Amsterdam. From a population of 30,000 in 1550, it expanded to 100,000 in 70 years and to 175,000 by 1650. By the turn of the eighteenth century, the city housed 200,000. Construction throughout the seventeenth century converted the 450-acre town into a graceful half-moon of canals, new dwellings, and commercial buildings that stretched over 1,800 acres.¹³⁰ Amsterdam was a far cry from a troubled provincial manufacturing town like Beauvais, which was contained in a single square kilometer. The fall of Antwerp sent an initial flood of migrants to Amsterdam, visible in the high proportion of burghers from Antwerp in the 1550s (44%) and from the Spanish Netherlands into the 1590s (39%).¹³¹ The subsequent growth of the city was fed by the Dutch hinterland of the United Provinces, and by thousands of foreigners. In fact, international migration played a unique role in the history of the Dutch Republic. Tens of thousands of people from Flanders to the south immigrated between 1580 and 1620; subsequently, the greatest numbers of men and women immigrated from German territories and Scandinavia (especially the south Norwegian coast). Although it is impossible to know how many people came to the Republic or to Amsterdam, gross immigration clearly numbered in the hundreds of thousands. One-third of Amsterdam's seventeenth-century marriage partners and one-fourth of its eighteenth-century marriage partners (183,000 in all) were foreign immigrants. In the 1650s, Germans were predominant among the seamen and sailors who married in the city—numbering nearly as many as the Amsterdammers (1,086 German and 1,192 Amsterdammer seamen married between 1651 and 1665). By the late 1680s, over a quarter of the burghers of Amsterdam were Germans. The vast size of migration systems with Germany was reflected by the fact that over 28,000

German men married in seventeenth- and eighteenth-century Amsterdam. Perhaps more telling, in terms of systems of chain migration between German areas and Amsterdam, over 19,000 German women married there, many of whom began their life in the city as domestic servants.¹³²

The overall number of people attracted to the city exceeds even the astounding figures of city growth. Those net figures of expansion from 100,000 to 200,000 between 1620 and 1700 mask an incalculable flow of servants, sailors, and other temporary workers who subsequently departed Amsterdam. This is true of any city, even ones like Beauvais that did not grow in this period. Yet for ports such as Amsterdam, the phenomenon of “seaborne mortality” or “maritime drain” was also at work: the number of migrants in Amsterdam was very much larger than figures of net growth because, among the young men who came to the city, thousands went to sea, never to return. An estimated 700,000 of the million people who left the Republic under the aegis of the Dutch East India Company died at sea or died abroad at a colonial post. In the early eighteenth century, when about 3,000 perished per year, a quarter of the fatalities were men from outside the Dutch Republic, such as the German sailors. Even more Dutch men were lost, creating a demographic deficit filled by thousands of immigrants who go uncounted in net migration figures.¹³³

The same is true for London, as the stepping-off point for thousands of sailors, colonials, and indentured servants in the seventeenth century. Over 1,000 indentured servants per year departed in the 1680s; it is reasonable to assume that a minimum of 3,000 people left London annually, never to return.¹³⁴ An estimated three-quarters of the servants were part of the massive migration that fueled London growth in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Like Amsterdam, London grew fivefold between 1550 and 1650 (from 80,000 to 400,000) and, also like the Dutch capital, it more than doubled in the seventeenth century. Between 1550 and 1750, 1 million people are estimated to have moved to London; a net gain of 8,000 per year in the second half of this period pushed the city to 575,000. This net growth masks those who left London for the colonies or died at sea and others who came to London but left again. If the gross movement of migrants into London were only 50 percent greater than the city’s net gain (an outlandishly conservative figure), mobility was still remarkably high; such a figure suggests that nearly one-sixth of the population of England had some experience of London life by the end of the seventeenth century. Biographies from a Shropshire village some 190 kilometers to the northeast confirm this estimate; here one family in six had a member who had lived in London.

Long traditions linked London to East Anglia and the north from whence aspiring Londoners had come since the fourteenth century. Of the some 20,000 apprentices in London in 1650, about 85 percent were migrants; they came not only from the home counties, but about 8,000 came from the midlands and the north of England as well. Steve Rappaport’s observation of the city in 1550, “London served as a vocational training centre for young men throughout England,” applies equally well to the city a century later.¹³⁵

The draw of this city profoundly affected the people of the surrounding regions. The immediate hinterland was a wellspring; for example, the 1599 parish lists from nearby Ealing in Middlesex show that the number of daughters living at home declined by 75 percent between the group aged 10 to 14 and those aged 15 to 19; most of the elder group were probably in service in London.¹³⁶ More fundamentally, the attraction of London for the women of southeastern England seems to have influenced the population composition of nearby counties in the long term. David Souden’s analysis of eighteenth-century parish register abstracts suggests that the emigration of women from the southeastern counties “bit deeply into the population” of London’s hinterland to the extent that the sex ratios of those counties were altered. They had an overabundance of men. The reverse was true in the western counties, where there were many opportunities for women in dairy work as well as traditions of seafaring and emigration for men.¹³⁷

Women were crucial among new Londoners. They outnumbered men, giving the city a sex ratio of 87 in 1695 (87 men per 100 women).¹³⁸ Urban areas in general, and London in particular, needed women in great numbers to produce yarn and thread, to launder clothing, to shop, to sell and prepare food, to bear and raise children, to sew clothing and serve beer—in short, to carry out particular service, productive, and reproductive tasks that maintain urban life. These functions shaped their urban fortunes. Most women came to London to work. Migrant women who lived with kin could earn their keep in London as a seamstress or knitter. For those who had no kin in the city, or whose kin could not take them in, domestic service offered the best work because it gave room, board, and the potential for quasi-familial relations, although it had the disadvantage of being a clearly subordinate position.¹³⁹ Some women came to bear a child in secret. In this era, Jane Crooke left Oxford for London, for example, sent to the great city by her lover until she could be discreetly delivered of their child.¹⁴⁰ For others, marriage was a goal.

A portrait of the migrant woman in London in the early seventeenth century emerges from marriage license applications. Young women typically entered the city in their late teens, at about the same age as apprentices. Many had lost their father just before they left for the city, which suggests that this death hastened or even precipitated their departure. Vivien Brodsky Elliot’s analysis of the records suggests that there were two distinct subgroups of migrant women in London: one consisted of women who lived with kin in the city, and the other of the 35 percent who worked as servants. The young women servants had dramatically fewer resources at their disposal. Their fathers were more likely to be deceased by the time they married (74%) than the fathers of other migrants (64%). Although many of the servants had a relative in London, it was usually a brother, whose youth and apprentice or journeyman status perhaps prevented him from housing his sister. Migrant women who worked as servants were from lower-status families than those who lived with kin; servants were the daughters of laborers, husbandmen, common craftsmen, and yeomen. By contrast, a third of the migrants who lived with kin were

from gentry families. Over one-fifth of the migrant women lived with a relative—a married sister, brother, aunt, or uncle (in that order).¹⁴¹

For migrant women, two marriage tracks operated in London. Those who lived with kin “almost invariably” married men of higher status than their fathers and they married relatively early (at 23.7 years, on average). Many of them had been sent to the city to marry; the records often stated explicitly that the migrant woman living with kin had been “sent up to London by her father for that purpose.” By contrast, migrant servants tended to marry down, into the ranks of sailors and craftsmen, and to marry about three years later than migrant women who resided with kin (at age 26.5). They also married men close to themselves in age. Both migrant groups are distinct from London-born women, who married at a younger age (20.5 years on average) and married higher-status men substantially older than themselves (four to eight years older); most of these marriages were doubtless negotiated by London families.¹⁴² These patterns testify to the effectiveness of family protection and sponsorship in the marriage market and to servant women’s lack of clout.

But Elliot perceives another side to this coin as well; migrant women’s courtships were freer from parental constraints, and their marriages were more egalitarian than those of native-born urban women. Marriage records suggest that the social lives of young newcomers centered at work, implying that a most common ground for meeting spouses in seventeenth-century London was the households in which young men and women cohabited as servants and apprentices. This would make Margaret Lawe typical: her courtship with William Fellowe began in the Greene household, where she worked as a servant and he as a scrivener’s apprentice; they married in the summer of 1604, when she was 28 and his apprenticeship was completed.¹⁴³

As people streamed into London after 1550, the emblematic tale of Dick Whittington appeared in English folklore.¹⁴⁴ A poor orphan from the country, Whittington found work in a merchant’s kitchen after nearly perishing from hunger and an injury suffered in the streets of the city. Once employed, he nearly quit London, so miserable was his life made by the cruel cook during the day and by the rats that would scamper over his face at night. On the point of leaving the city, he was dissuaded by the bells of Bow church that he heard to ring out “turn around, Dick Whittington, thrice Lord Mayor of London.” Dick took courage; he faced his daytime tormentor fortified by the kindness of the merchant’s daughter and defeated his nocturnal enemies with the aid of a cat he managed to acquire. Whittington’s fortune was made when his cat was sold by the merchant’s men for a princely sum when they were shipwrecked on the lands of a potentate overrun by rats. He achieved instant wealth, married the merchant’s daughter, was sheriff, and finally, as the bells foretold, served three terms as Lord Mayor of London. Significantly, foreign trade made Whittington’s fortune, just as it did that of many a Londoner. As successful outsider, he was in good company, because 90 percent of London’s greater merchants and three-quarters of its mayors came from outside London in the sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries.¹⁴⁵

Whittington’s success story was apocryphal, and the real Richard Whittington neither was from humble origins nor married his master’s daughter.¹⁴⁶ The possibilities for the poor orphan boy, and for even a young apprentice, were modest. Many, such as Francis Haires, aged 16, “his father and mother and all friends dead and he a miserable wandering boy,” though like the fabled Whittington, would move on from London; in the 1680s, 1,000 per year went off to the colonies as indentured servants.¹⁴⁷ A realistic definition of success in London was offered by one John Browne in 1631. Browne had worked some 110 kilometers north in Leicester, unable to make a living at dressing hemp. In London, however, he declared, “I am a freeman of the city and of the company of merchant tailors,” and self-employed.¹⁴⁸ Such success and security was about as much as one could hope for, particularly because there were so many migrants less successful than John Browne and cities less prosperous than London in this age of war and religious intolerance.

CONCLUSION

We amend our rather cozy vision of preindustrial life. “Everyone had his or her circle of affection,” wrote Peter Laslett of “the world we have lost.” Yet this was by no means true for all Europeans in the preindustrial age. For many, it was not true that “time was when the whole of life went forward in the family, in a circle of loved, familiar faces.”¹⁴⁹ It may be more accurate to write that everyone *sought* a circle of affection. Those with land and fortunes could more easily remain with family and could more easily find a place. For the landless, inhabitants of war-torn lands, young people, and orphans, and particularly the women in each of these groups, home was to be found or created.

Certain traits of the migration process that endure into the next centuries are visible in the preindustrial world sketched out in this chapter. Migration was a social process mediated by family interests and embedded in the world of kin and village contacts. Those who took to the road operated within a known world of opportunities and practices provided by the social body. Within this framework the individual traits of gender, life-cycle stage, and (among landowners) birth order helped to pinpoint who would move and where and why.

The economic and social composition of preindustrial Europe included a large proportion of peasants and artisans—people who may have moved as young farm or domestic servants and may have moved to marry, but who, if

married, tended to settle and remain with their landholding or workshop. If adult males left home, they were likely to depart for a temporary cash-earning trip. This overwhelmingly rural and largely peasant configuration meant that much mobility would be local movement of servants and marriage partners or circular, seasonal migration.

Some sectors of the preindustrial economy needed a massive impulse of labor and attracted many migrants. In the countryside, these were the capital-rich large farms like the wheat fields on the outskirts of Paris that fed the Continent's most populous city and the dairy farms of Holland that met an international demand for Dutch cheese; such areas encouraged the development of systems of circular, seasonal migration. The early modern city also had a great demand—not simply for servants, apprentices, and laborers who came to every sort of town for a temporary stay, but also for new people in its bourgeoisie, mercantile class and professional groups who would become long-term residents. The largest and most successful of cities drew newcomers from a widespread hinterland, some of whom entered the world economy as wholesale merchants and others of whom left European shores as lowly sailors or indentured servants.

Migrants in the preindustrial world moved in systems of local, circular, chain, and career migration. In the 1650–1750 period, local movement was a key element of the life cycle for rural people. In a few specific regions, such as in Westphalia or the French highlands, circular, seasonal migration took men away from home for seasonal work; near most towns, temporary migration for a few years to work as a domestic servant was part of young women's lives. In some cases, chain migration systems began to retain circular migrants at their destination as Germans settled in Amsterdam and French settled in Spain. Career migration was the pattern of a rather elite few, such as the highly placed men and women of the church, court officials, and government agents. The significance of the balance among these kinds of migration lies in the fact that most rural movement was probably local or circular. Although many Europeans moved, most stayed within their province and the distribution of population did not change dramatically.

The balance among the various kinds of migration, as well as the propensity to migrate, would shift in the later eighteenth century with changes in the forces underlying preindustrial migration patterns. Both circular and chain migration would become more important in some regions, and migration would slow altogether in others. This happened as demographic patterns altered and the population began to grow. Chances for cash-earning in rural areas increased with the impulse of merchant capital into the countryside and the expansion of rural industry. And population expansion and rural manufacture combined to reduce peasant holdings and reduce land ownership after about 1750.

CHAPTER

3

Migration in the Age of Early Industry

The tax collectors in the rugged highlands of central France could extract nothing from Antoine Salez in 1739. Salez had left to work in Spain, his wife explained, because he could pay neither his debts nor his taxes. The desperation of peasants like Salez and the frustration of state agents would only increase as the eighteenth century went on, because a growing population pressed on limited land and few other sources of revenue existed around Aurillac in the central highlands. As a consequence, some Aurillaçois went to Spain, to Paris, and to the port city of Bordeaux; still others left for the season to work as sawyers or to harvest crops on the Mediterranean littoral and to work as tinkers as far north as the Netherlands. What the mountains had to offer was the strong arms of their men. Women and children accompanied harvest teams to glean and to beg only in very bad years; they usually journeyed within their region, working as farm servants or domestics in the little towns of the uplands, if they left home at all.¹ Between 1750 and the 1789 Revolution, long-standing systems of temporary, circular migration expanded under pressure from population increase and the need for capital.

By contrast, families were quite sedentary some 500 kilometers to the north in the Pays de Caux near Rouen. There, merchants' porters delivered warps for weavers and raw cotton for spinners to villages like Auffay, about 35 kilometers from the city. Thus, when Marie and widower Jean Hebert married in 1762, the bride brought a spinning wheel as part of her dowry. She would make weekly trips with other women of the village to sell her thread at a market town 10 kilometers away. Father and son wove together and worked as laborers on the rich commercial farmlands around Auffay. This was not a peasant family but a proletarian family, almost entirely dependent on the cash they were all able to earn. Auffay grew as the century passed, partly because outsiders came and stayed. It also expanded because during most of the eighteenth century, the men and women of Auffay remained at home—all year round and all of their lives: women spun year-round, men wove in the winter, and everyone worked the harvest in the fall.² Those who did move in the Pays de Caux generally went in the direction of Rouen, toward the belt of villages on the outskirts of the city that became virtual industrial suburbs. City and countryside were a unit; and the entire area depended on the vagaries of the international textile market.³ In this region, the proliferation of manufacturing in the village setting enabled rural people to earn necessary cash without leaving home.

The proletarians of Auffay and the landowning peasants of the Aurillaçois represent two exemplary experiences of eighteenth-century Europeans. They offer contrasting mobility scenarios in the extremes of increased migration born of pressures on areas with a chronic lack of resources, on one hand, and a more sedentary regime underwritten by rural industry, on the other. The eighteenth century is a conundrum in terms of human mobility, precisely because two very different general patterns emerged. This chapter explores and explains migration paths that were marked with particular clarity after about 1750—a turning point in the economic, demographic, and social history of Europe.

This chapter must be considered against the backdrop constructed by the previous chapter, because most patterns of preindustrial migration persisted through the 1750–1820 period. Systems of seasonal migration thrived. Rural service continued to be the means by which young people became trained in agricultural work and earned their keep, and for the majority of young people this vocation demanded annual moves. At marriage, brides continued to relocate in their husband's parish. Some marriage markets expanded after 1750; more young people married outside the parish, and others found spouses farther afield. Some peasant families moved, but it was still more likely that proletarian families left their parish. Evidence from eighteenth-century cities indicates that about half the *burghers* continued to be newcomers, a third to half of urban marriage partners were migrants, and a substantial turnover in city population persisted. None of these patterns was new.

What was new in eighteenth-century Europe that altered migration patterns was a substantial increase both in population and in rural employment outside agriculture. Population and labor force change were the fundamental engines of change in human mobility. In the eighteenth century, these developments contained migration in rural industrial areas and increased