

RURAL ECONOMY AND SOCIETY
IN NORTH-WESTERN EUROPE, 500–2000

Making a Living
**Family, Income
and Labour**



Edited by **Eric Vanhaute, Isabelle Devos and Thijs Lambrecht**
in association with Gérard Béaur, Georg Fertig, Carl-Johan Gadd, Erwin Karel,
Michael Limberger, Richard Paping *and* Philipp Schofield

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Series editorial board:

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(Ghent University)

Eric Vanhaute
(Ghent University)

Leen Van Molle
(University of Leuven)

Yves Segers
(University of Leuven)

Bas van Bavel
(Utrecht University)

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Top illustration: Jules Breton, *Le Rappel des Glaneuses*, 1859 (Musée d'Orsay, Paris).

Bottom illustration: *Labourers working with spades*. Illustration in the 'Veil rentier', an inventory of the estates of the lord of Pamele (Oudenaarde, Flanders, Belgium) written around 1275. Royal Library of Brussels, Ms 1175, fo. 156v.

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ISBN 978-2-503-53049-9
D/2011/0095/163

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SERIES INTRODUCTION

A new rural history of north-western Europe

This book is the second of a four-volume series dealing with the long-term evolution of rural society in north-western Europe from the early middle ages until the twentieth century. In this series an international team of researchers explains how the people of the countries surrounding the North Sea organised agricultural production and trade, and how the rural economy and society of these countries was repeatedly transformed through periods of shortfall and plenty, poverty and wealth, over the 1500 years between 500 and 2000. The comparative and long-term approach of the series reveals processes of convergence and divergence, stagnation and change.

The impact of rural societies on economic and social development cannot be underestimated. Until the nineteenth century, western European economies remained overwhelmingly agricultural. Wealth and political power were normally measured in land. Elite life in the countryside frequently provided the aspirational cultural norm. The development of the industrial world was in many ways closely related to changes in the countryside. It is therefore surprising that syntheses of the history of European agriculture and rural society are so few and far between. The past few decades have seen an enormous increase in our knowledge and understanding of European rural societies and economies, but most of what was written has been limited by the borders of a single modern state (such as the multi-volume rural histories of England, France and Sweden). An exception is the pioneering (but now dated) book by B. H. Slicher Van Bath, *The Agrarian History of Western Europe, A.D. 500–1850*, first published in Dutch in 1960. Van Bath covered more or less the same area that is dealt with in this series, and adopted a similar comparative and long-term approach, although limited to the period before 1850 and focussing mainly on agriculture from a technical and ‘traditional’ productivist point of view. He was less concerned with the social and structural aspects of rural society such as family structures, property and power relations and the relationships of markets and consumers. Van Bath’s synthesis was undoubtedly a brilliant and enduring piece of writing, but a single-authored synthesis seems an almost impossible task today. For this reason, our series is a pooled effort by more than 70 specialists in the field. Our aim is to bring a new and comprehensive narrative reflecting many new scholarly interpretations, showing the slow unfolding of European rural history and the deep historical roots of the rural economies and societies of the present day to a new readership – undergraduates, graduates, the general public and, importantly, policy makers in government and non-governmental organisations.

Features of the series

The approach of the four volumes is not a 'classical' chronological one. It is thematic and this enables us to focus on developments in rural areas from four crucial and interrelated perspectives: land use and productivity; production, distribution and consumption; family formation, income and labour; and property and power relations.

This thematic structure combines three main features. Firstly, it links important research results revealing the macro-economic trends with studies focussing on the regional and local levels. By doing so, the rural producers themselves come to the forefront and we see their constant struggle with environmental and structural limits that they responded to by adapting their production, family and market strategies. Even within geographical and political boundaries, differences between regions and interregional comparisons are taken into account whenever and wherever possible.

Secondly, each volume presents a long-term view. In order to gain an insight into the origins of the north-western European society of today, it is necessary to go as far back as the early middle ages. It was this period (and not the 'Pirennean' watershed of the year 1000) that marked the start of a new European society, with the fundamental break with the economic, social and political structures of the Roman period.

Thirdly, the main focus of each volume is on the evolution of the ways in which the inhabitants of the countryside managed to produce food for themselves, for local and distant markets, and for different tables and tastes. This is analysed from the four different angles we outlined earlier. Each volume can be read on its own, as a meaningful narrative from one particular point of view within an all-encompassing rural history.

Four volumes, four themes

The series is structured around the four themes of land use and productivity; production, distribution and consumption; family formation, income and labour; and property and power relations.

This volume on *Making a Living: Family, Income and Labour* deals with the interaction between production, reproduction and labour in rural societies. It investigates the ways that resources became available to the rural family and its members, and the strategies that were employed to generate these resources. Its goal is to interpret the regional and chronological diversity of household formation and the economic behaviour of its members in relation to labour organisation.

In *Struggling with the Environment: Land Use and Production* we consider how, when, to what degree and within which structural boundaries land was used for agriculture. The book focuses on the evolution of land use: why and how was land reclaimed and used? Which actors played a part in this process? What were the environmental and social limits of cultivation, and how did these alter with changes in climate, market demand and technical innovation? Production techniques and production systems are scrutinised especially in the light of alleged 'agricultural' and 'green' revolutions.

The *Agro-food Market: Production, Distribution and Consumption* aims at unravelling the changing character of the agro-food chain, from the field to the table. The path

from a self-supporting way of life to the present complex forms of market integration in the global world was far from uniform and linear. This volume explores how food production, market structures and market mechanisms changed over time and differed between regions and countries within the North Sea area.

The volume on *Social Relations: Property and Power* -published in 2010- deals with the importance of property structures over land and the question of who controlled and secured the income derived from land and the profits of farming. This is a complex question to pose because the land has been subjected to competing claims, varying from region to region: claims from the peasants themselves, claims from different landowning classes and from the central government. Likewise, landowners, the church and government all struggled to secure their share of the farmer's profits – except now, of course, the state subsidizes agriculture rather than the other way round. The volume also looks at the interaction between society and external changes, such as the rise and fall of the market, trends in population and European integration.

The extent of 'the North Sea area'

As mentioned, an international team collaborated on this book series in order to explain how people in the countryside surrounding the North Sea organised rural production. Taking the North Sea area as our research area is easy to defend.

Firstly, the area shows many similar features that run over the borders of nations. Like the Mediterranean, the North Sea can be considered a unity. The countries and regions surrounding it share several physical geographic characteristics. The whole area enjoys a moderate maritime climate and it mostly consists of lowlands with some low mountain ranges. In most of the area, agriculture is dominated by middling and large holdings.

Secondly, the area is an economic and cultural unity due to the strong commercial relations between the countries bordering on the North Sea, enabled by easy and inexpensive transportation. People, technology and ideas travelled smoothly over the North Sea. Over the past millennium and a half, the countries connected by it have progressed from being a periphery of the Mediterranean world to forming the core of the modern world economy. Parts of the North Sea area have played a key role in European economic history. Flanders and Brabant were among the most developed regions in Europe in the middle ages. The Dutch Republic was the leading economic power in Europe in the seventeenth century, Britain from the eighteenth century to the early twentieth century. The industrial revolution began in Britain and was followed by Belgium. From an early date, these areas not only had highly developed trade and industry as well as highly developed and commercialised agriculture. That is what enabled these countries to escape the Malthusian trap of population outrunning food supplies at an early date.

The North Sea area includes a variety of landscapes with different rural histories: from regions with a long tradition of extensive agriculture to areas where intensive husbandry was already established in the middle ages; from regions where low labour productivity lasted until the late nineteenth century to areas where it was replaced at

an early date by labour efficient production systems. However, due to intense contacts between regions along the North Sea littoral, prosperous regions gradually influenced the development of agriculture in more backward areas. Moreover, due to common characteristics in their agriculture and transport facilities, the countries around the North Sea were often competitors (e.g. Denmark and the Netherlands both tried to sell their butter to the British market in the nineteenth century). This makes the North Sea area a very rewarding one to study from a comparative perspective.

Some practical choices had to be made in order to determine the borders of the area under consideration. The following regions are included in our scheme: the Low Countries (Belgium and the Netherlands), England, Wales and Scotland (Ireland, farther away from the North Sea, is only taken into account in specific cases), Denmark and the southern coastal areas of Sweden and Norway, northwest Germany, defined as the states of Schleswig-Holstein, Lower Saxony, Saxony-Anhalt and North Rhine-Westphalia, all belonging to the 'Norddeutsche Tiefebene' and northern France, defined as the area north of the Loire river, stretching from Brittany in the west to the Vosges in the east, including Berry and a part of Burgundy in the south, the core of which is formed by Brittany, Picardy, Normandy and Ile-de-France.

Structure of each volume

Each volume is structured along a combination of chronological, regional, and comparative lines. Both the introduction and the concluding final chapter of each book, usually written by one or both of the volume editors, offer a comparative perspective. The early middle ages (500–1000), a period that is characterised by the scarcity of source material, is the object of a separate chapter, followed by chapters that deal with the different regions under consideration (northern France, Britain, the Low Countries, north-west Germany and Scandinavia) during a specific time span (1000–1750, 1750–2000). These regional chapters were all written according to the same template to make the narratives genuinely comparable.

Acknowledgments

The initiative for this series was taken by a group of specialists in rural history who have been collaborating for more than fifteen years in the research group CORN (Comparative Rural History of the North Sea Area), which is sponsored by FWO, Research Foundation - Flanders.

Scientific cooperation is never easy, certainly not between eight countries, each with their own historiographical traditions and historical preoccupations. Cooperation is particularly challenging intellectually and it opens up so many unexpected new horizons. It has been both exciting and a great pleasure to discover that so many scholars were willing to share the pleasures, and sometimes the difficulties, of this collective enterprise. Meetings were organised in all parts of the North Sea area, drafts were

circulated innumerable times, discussed, rewritten, discussed again. The general editorial board is most grateful to the editors of the each of the four volumes and to all the participating authors for their invaluable individual and collective input into the common project. We wish also to express our gratitude to the FWO Research Foundation - Flanders and to Brepols Publishers, in particular Chris Vandenborre, for their long support of the Comparative Rural History of the North Sea Area.

THE MEMBERS OF THE SERIES EDITORIAL BOARD:

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BAS VAN BAVEL

YVES SEGERS

ERIC VANHAUTE

LEEN VAN MOLLE

Gent, Leuven and Utrecht, June 2011

CONTRIBUTORS

G rard B aur is Director of Research at the CNRS, Professor at EHESS, Chair of the Centre de Recherches Historiques, France.

Jean-Pierre Devroey is Professor of Medieval History at the Universit  Libre de Bruxelles, Belgium.

Isabelle Devos is Professor of Social and Economic History at Ghent University, Belgium.

Laurent Feller is Professor of Medieval History at the University of Paris I, France.

Georg Fertig is Professor of Economic and Social History at Halle University, Germany.

Carl-Johan Gadd is Professor of Economic History at the University of Gothenburg, Sweden.

Hans Chr. Johansen is Professor Emeritus of Economic and Social History at the University of Southern Denmark, Odense, Denmark.

Erwin Karel is Lecturer in Economic and Social History at the University of Groningen and Research Fellow of the Netherlands Agricultural Historical Institute at the University of Groningen and University of Wageningen, The Netherlands.

Thijs Lambrecht is Researcher at the State Archives, Belgium.

Michael Limberger is Professor of Economic and Social History at Ghent University, Belgium.

Thomas Lindkvist is Professor of History at the University of Gothenburg, Sweden.

Anne Nissen-Jaubert is Lecturer in Medieval Archeology at the Fran ois Rabelais University of Tours, France.

Richard Paping is Senior Lecturer in Economic and Social History at the University of Groningen, The Netherlands.

Ulrich Pfister is Professor of Economic and Social History at Muenster University, Germany.

Phillipp Schofield is Professor of Medieval History at Aberystwyth University, Wales.

Eric Vanhaute is Professor of Economic History and World History at Ghent University, Belgium.

Nadine Vivier is Professor of Modern History at the University of Le Mans, France.

Jane Whittle is Associate Professor of Social and Economic History at the University of Exeter, England.

Samantha Williams is Lecturer in Local and Regional History at the University of Cambridge, England.

1 Introduction: family, labour and income in the North Sea area, 500–2000

Isabelle DEVOS, Thijs LAMBRECHT and Eric VANHAUTE

Between 500 and 2000, family farms were the key organisation that dominated agricultural and rural production in Europe. Families were the main unit of production and reproduction in society in general until the nineteenth century. Family formation was directly linked to access to farms and other means of subsistence. This strongly affected the organisation of rural society. Firstly, the long period we look at in this volume saw both the emergence and the dissolution of the West European Marriage Pattern of late and non-universal marriage. This had a high impact on household formation, life course, marriage and mobility. Secondly, since farms had a longer life span than any individual or marriage, their reallocation among farmers and the succession of older generations by younger ones had to be prepared. Successors had to be found and sometimes motivated to stay, and young couples had to find a way to form or take over a household. Thirdly, family forms and patterns of co-residence reveal a lot about the way labour was organised. Families provided a huge proportion of the labour inputs into their own farms, both in peasant societies and in modern agriculture. Rural labour markets have, nonetheless, been widespread since the middle ages. The early rural economy was essentially an integrated household economy, where the income of every member depended on the labour inputs of every other member. Fourthly, the rise and subsequent decline of wage labour in agriculture and the development and decrease of proto-industrialisation significantly increased variations in family organisation in north-western Europe. With the development of industrialisation and the welfare state, the allocation of income and labour changed fundamentally for many producers (family wages and breadwinner households), but not necessarily for farmers. Fifthly, household formation was strongly influenced both by manorial lords and by village communities who controlled local relationships. Social support systems, manorial control, and local credit relations contributed to patterns of marriage, inheritance, and intra- and inter-familial cooperation and dominance. Finally, families adapted their allocation of labour to changes in their social and economic environment (social agro-systems) when markets for products became more accessible, local communities became less risk-averse, financial markets pervaded the countryside, and rights on land became tradable by farmers.

The central theme in this volume is the connection and the interaction between production, reproduction and labour in rural societies. The main questions concern the way in which resources became available to the rural family and to its members, and the strategies that were employed to generate these resources. The goal is to understand household formation and the economic behaviour of its members within the context of the structural features of the regional agro-system. Two sets of research questions structure the discussion in the book. The first set evaluates the impact of

these processes on the family as a unit of reproduction and production and the relationships between its members (internal family relations). These issues are essentially dealt with from a socio-demographic perspective. The second set of questions aims to understand how families adapted their behaviour to changing social and economic circumstances. These topics are studied from a predominant socio-economic perspective. The geographic scope of the book covers the different nations and regions of the north-western European countryside. Since the book covers a long time span from the middle ages to the present, we study both peasant societies and modern agriculture. How were family formation strategies related to the economic survival of the family (short-term strategy) and the prospect of improving their income and position (long-term strategy)? Was there a shift in these strategies over time and what accounts for the differences? Changing economic and political structures were one element in family formation differences. Social groups followed diverging strategies. The interests of the landless workers, for instance, were very different from those of the elite who wanted to preserve their property and wealth, or even the small landowners who tried to balance work, resources and family size. In what way did families with market-oriented farms develop different income strategies than small peasants or tenant farmers operating close to the subsistence level? In other words, what happened to family forms in an increasingly commercial and commodified economy around the shores of the North Sea?

Some central concepts in this book should be clarified. In general, we define *peasants* as members of rural, agricultural households who control the land they work either as tenants or as smallholders. They are organised in family bonds and village communities that meet most of their subsistence needs (production, exchange, credit, protection) and they pool different forms of income (from land, labour and exchange). They are ruled by other social groups that extract a surplus via rents, taxation or market transfers. Key terms are (a degree of) household and local autonomy, flexible strategies of income-pooling, household-based village structures and surplus extraction outside local control. A *farmer* differs from a peasant in terms of scale of market-oriented production. A *household* is defined as the basic residential unit in which rural production, reproduction and consumption were organised and carried out. It is often used here as a synonym for *family*, in particular when it concerns the nuclear family, the most common household structure in the past. *Household strategies* are regarded as a set of activities more or less consciously undertaken by family members and directed toward ensuring the longer-term survival of the household unit. We can discern different sets of strategies, such as family formation, labour allocation, income pooling, mobility, consumption and education. Household strategies are bargained, interdependent decisions between household members, configuring the critical decisions affecting the family as a unit. Short-term strategies aim to cope with risk management and economic survival. Long-term strategies try to invest in future income, credit and protection.

The chapters in this volume are structured by a time/space frame explained in the Series Introduction. Each chapter follows the same canvas: the authors examine the central research questions at four different levels. The first section on *the family and demography* examines demographic patterns, household dynamics, household

composition and life course(s). What was the connection between family cycle and household composition? What were the patterns of marriage and migration? How prevalent was domestic service? All rural societies shared the fundamental value of linking marriage to the accumulation of resources necessary to establish a new household. However, they were subject to different constraints related to regional agro-systems. Secondly, we look at *the family and its members*, at inter-household relationships. How was family labour organised? What were the relations between old and young, male and female? These relations affect the allocation of resources to individual family members and the practices of inheritance (property transmission). The third section on *the family and income* aims to find out how families tried to guarantee an adequate income for the present, the immediate future and/or the long term. What are the external opportunities and constraints on the family concerning income systems, labour markets, exchange and credit relations? Finally, we question the relationship between *the family, the local community and the state*. This level relates the family to village society and institutions (such as commons and poor relief), the Church and the state (such as tax systems). In a concluding chapter, the editors of this volume present an integrated analysis of these four sets of research questions.

Each chapter (region/period) focuses more on the dynamic interaction between the research topics than on a detailed presentation of more or less isolated information. This approach allows us to develop a comparative and integrated view on the interplay between the family and the economy and to reconstruct a historical demography of the rural family in the north-western European countryside. Because of this comprehensive characteristic, bibliographical and statistical information has been limited. Interested readers should consult the quoted references and overviews published in the first volume of the regular CORN Series (*Rural History in the North Sea Area. An Overview of Recent Research (Middle Ages – Twentieth Century)*) edited by Erik Thoen and Leen Van Molle).

When preparing this volume, the editors met in Ghent on several occasions to discuss the outline and content of the book and its successive chapters. That makes this book a joint endeavour; a truly collaborative and comparative exercise. This resulted in joys and setbacks, both intellectual and practical. The joint concluding chapter is built on ongoing group discussions and marks the possibilities and limits of a jointly drawn and executed research programme. We express our thanks to Jean-Pierre Devroey and Anne Nissen-Jaubert for their extensive overview of rural demography during the early middle ages, Susie Speakman Sutch for the painstaking language revision, Wouter Ronsijn for the practical support, Bart De Wit for drawing the maps, and last but not least Erik Thoen for his continuous encouragement as director of this book series.



“Qui seminant in lacrimis, in exultatione metent”, Vulg., psalm. 125:5. Sowing and harvesting as depicted by the Stuttgart Psalter, Saint-Germain-des-Prés, c. 820/830 (Württembergischen Landesbibliothek, cod. Bibl. fol. 23, f° 146r°)

2 Family, income and labour around the North Sea, 500–1000

Jean-Pierre DEVROEY and Anne NISSEN JAUBERT¹

From antiquity onwards, north-western Europe was divided into two large bodies, both from an economic and social point of view. The first was constituted, to the south of the Rhine, by the former provinces of the Empire conquered by the Romans at the end of the first century BC and in the first century AD. In the third century Barbarian tribes on the borders of the Roman Empire (the *limes*) exerted growing pressure on this territory which was expressed in various forms: military raids, then systematic occupation of the territories after the withdrawal of Roman troops (Great Britain, Toxandria), or accommodation, by the infiltration of families or the settling of groups sanctioned by treaties between the Germanic tribes and Romans. Ancient Gaul was totally occupied from the sixth century on by the Franks, who progressively dominated the whole of the Great Northern European plain, towards the east as far as Saxony and to the north as far as the border of Denmark. The second body had as its single common point the fact of never having been conquered by the Romans and consisted of Germanic, Scandinavian and Celtic populations (Wickham, 2010). Within these two zones, peasant families were faced with very different agricultural systems and landownership structures before the Germanic conquest. In Great Britain, the withdrawal of Roman troops was followed in a few decades by the abandoning of earlier forms of ownership and settlement systems. On the continent, the processes were more complex in the sense that the changes which affected the settlement of the countryside could stretch over several centuries and that the new forms of ownership and land occupation resulting from these changes were spread by conquest, from the seventh century, from Frankish Gaul towards the north and the east (Frisia, Saxony), and to the west (the Anglo-Saxon kingdoms) by the influence exerted by Carolingian ideological models (Wickham, 2009). In this chapter, we examine three regions during the early middle ages: 1) north-western Europe under Frankish hegemony (northern France, Belgium, the Netherlands, and north-west Germany), 2) England, and 3) Scandinavia. These lands were in constant contact through ideological and religious influences, mainly from the Frankish regions, migration, trade flows and wars. The place occupied by the family unit in rural production at the beginning of the period studied is still poorly understood today in terms of the whole of the regions of northern Europe. The study of family morphology and the structures of rural production show that the narrow family group, composed of a couple and their children, became the principal unit of production, reproduction and organisation in the rural society of the West. It took on its fundamental features during the early middle ages at the moment when conjugality became the ideological model spread by Christianity and

¹ Our thanks to Chris Wickham and Alexis Wilkin who read the first drafts.

MAP 2.1 The North Sea area, 500–1000



where small peasant farming was the normal framework of existence for the free and the non-free alike (Toubert, 1986).

2.1 The family and demography

What was the place of the nuclear family in the structures of production in the countryside before the year 500? Regarding the areas under Roman domination, historians and archaeologists alike have traditionally attributed a predominant place to the network of *villae* (the estate buildings designed for residential and farm use) and their estates, considered as the foremost expression of the ancient rural landscape and serving as a framework for an extensive and often specialised mode of agriculture. This paradigm rests in part on the archaeological visibility of the *villae*, and on the place they occupy in the sources and in historiography. More recently, numerous large-scale excavations of preventive (or rescue) archaeology in the framework of territorial alterations have yielded evidence of small farmsteads isolated or grouped in hamlets or villages.² For antiquity and the early middle ages, this latter distinction is scarcely operable, and it finds hardly any echo in the texts and in the Nordic languages. The settlements of the early middle ages most often comprised a half dozen farm holdings and only rarely exceeded a dozen. These small establishments are often considered as dependencies or satellites of the *villae*. Nevertheless, in many cases, they continued an Iron Age occupation, indicating their autonomous character (Ouzoulias, 2009). Their frequency varied according to regional contexts or the nature of the soil, but it leads us to qualify the place accorded to the *villa* in the Empire's northern provinces. If certain territories were strongly marked by the *villae* network and by a tendency towards the concentration of property in favour of large estates from the end of the second century, family agriculture dominated elsewhere. Furthermore, we do not know the proportion of slaves, barracked in the *villae*, and of tenant farmers, free or otherwise, at the end of antiquity (Van Ossel and Ouzoulias, 2000; Brulet, 2009: 253–255).

In contrast to the Roman agricultural system based on cereal growing and some specialised productions (wine, oil), the Germanic world was a peasant society structured in villages, with agro-pastoral activities. Tacitus' *Germania* (first century AD) projects a conjugal model onto Germanic society. It is not to be ruled out that it was highlighted by Tacitus less out of a concern for an 'ethnographic' description than with the intention of criticising the family organisation and morals of the Roman society of his day. Nevertheless the author of *Germania* emphasises the same features concerning the non-free in stating that the agricultural slaves, contrary to their Roman counterparts, were not allocated on the basis of their activities. The organisation of the rural settlements on the coasts of the North Sea confirm this observation. Up until the end of the second century farm holdings were made up of a longhouse, at the most

² Requiring the presence of a church or a castle to define a village comes down to using non-rural criteria to exclude large parts of northern Europe and to date the village to the eleventh-thirteenth centuries (Nissen Jaubert, 1998; Watteaux, 2003).

accompanied by a granary and a byre, implying that the members of the household were sheltered under the same roof. However, from the end of the second century in Scandinavia and, in the north of Germany a few decades later, as well as in regions close to the *limes* such as the Drenthe province in the Netherlands, the longhouse increased in size, due on the one hand to larger byres, and on the other to the addition of more rooms whose function often remains unknown. Certain large houses in the Vorbasse of the third-fifth centuries thus reached around 40 metres in length and, in the north of Germany, the Bremen-Rekum and Arschum sites offer examples of houses measuring over 60 meters long (Haarnagel, 1984: 179, fig. 55; Hvass, 1986: 67–71, Zimmermann, 1997: 428–431, fig. 14). For the eighth-tenth centuries, in the Sædding settlement, the house of the largest farm measured 50 meters in length (Stoumann, 1980: fig. 14).

At Arschum, floor and hearthstone conservation attests to the possible existence of several habitable rooms. The houses change at the same time as the settlements and their agricultural units which – surrounded by regular enclosures – number more annex buildings, which clearly distinguishes them from previous periods. More spacious, these farmsteads must have provided habitation for dependants as well as masters. As for the dead, the organisation of funerary spaces brings to light the grouping together in families or households. The notable differences in funerary furniture could reflect the varied social status of these farming units (Jørgensen, 1987).

Demographic patterns

The demographic question is closely linked to the manner in which historians problematise the processes which accompanied the end of antiquity. Since Pirenne this period of transition has been mainly studied by observing the transformations that affected the ‘encompassing society’ which dominated the countryside: towns, commercial exchanges, the situation of the elites, institutional structures, etc. (Delogu, 1998). The reader of Wickham’s *Framing the Early Middle Ages* discovers other fields of observation: 1) the crisis and then the end of a state based on taxation, supported by extensive cereal growing and the network of *villae*, and its replacement by peasant societies, based on the agro-sylvo-pastoral triangle, centred on family-owned farms and the village; 2) the framing of the countryside by seigniorial domination (Wickham, 2005 and 2010). These phenomena hinged on profound changes in the topography of the settlement of the countryside and on two large demographic cycles, one of progressive decline, in all likelihood set in motion in the west of the Roman Empire, at the end of the third century up until the middle of the seventh century, with a low point in the sixth century, followed by slow and discontinuous growth (c.650/700 – c.950).

Since Gibbon (1776), the beginning of the middle ages has been linked to the idea of demographic decline resulting from the disintegration of the Empire and its fall (Ward-Perkins, 2005). The decline of the population is sometimes presented as the result of endogenous factors, sometimes as the result of catastrophic exogenous factors which jeopardised the economy and shook Roman society in its entirety: epidemics (Antonin plague in 168, the plague of Justinian from 541), military disasters (the Barbarian invasions of the third, fourth and fifth centuries),

a temporary deterioration of the climate (Devroey, 2009). For Europe (excluding the ex-USSR), evaluations by demographers divide the European population by two with: a) a maximum in the year 200 (44 million); b) a minimum around 600/700 (22 million); and c) a restarting of growth from the eighth century (30 million in the year 1000) up to a peak in the fourteenth century (70 million) (Biraben, 1979: 16). If these general trends are reliable, the figures offered are founded on no direct data. It remains extremely difficult to measure the real extent of the shrinkage of the European population from the third century onwards and to model the causes of this decline of long duration. Nonetheless, thanks to a new generation of historians who ally their discipline with archaeology and thanks to a renewal of the data resulting from the contribution of archaeology and environmental studies, we today have available more solid bases from which to evaluate the possible consequences of ‘catastrophic’ events.

Population and epidemics

The arrival of the plague (*Yersinia pestis*) in Europe in 541 (Drancourt et al., 2007), with recurrences up to the middle of the seventh century, is frequently invoked to explain substantial decreases in the population and a demographic *nadir* in the sixth century. Nonetheless, according to the written sources and the paleodemographic data available today, the impact of the pandemic seems to have been much more pronounced in the East than in the West and these outbreaks do not seem to have prevented regions greatly affected by the plague, like Syria in the Middle East, from experiencing agricultural expansion in the olive and wine growing sectors oriented towards the market during the sixth-seventh centuries (Wickham, 2005: 443–459; *contra* Kennedy, 2007). In western Europe, the available documentation remains today almost entirely reduced to the written, which does not allow for a quantitative approach. It suggests greater devastations in Italy and in the south of Gaul: the plague, miraculously halted at Rheims, spared western and northern Gaul and the greater part of Germany. England (on two occasions in the seventh century) and Ireland (in 544 or 545) were also affected, but it seems more selectively (McCormick, 2001; Little, 2007). A more precise cartography is expected in the years to come thanks to the possibility of detecting the presence of *Yersinia pestis* in human remains. Whilst the Black Death of 1347–1352 was a global pandemic, affecting the towns and the countryside equally throughout the whole of Europe (with a yet more marked abnormally high urban death rate for epidemiological reasons), it seems that the geographical impact of the plague of Justinian in the West above all remained limited to commercial and exchange routes. Archaeozoological data show that the black rat, host to the insect that was the vector of the plague (the flea of the European rat), gained a foothold on the European continent in the first century AD. In temperate areas, the black rat was ‘the obligatory commensal of man’, who could not move on its own. It was human beings who were responsible for the spread of infected fleas, either through the agency of their clothing or the merchandise they transported, or through the presence of dead rats with their fleas in transported materials (ship grain-holds, bundles of clothing, etc.). According to the data of archaeological sites the black rat appears to have only saturated western

Europe in the eleventh- thirteenth centuries. Before that, its gradual expansion was at first linked to areas crossed by exchange currents between the East and the West. These hypotheses lead to two different epidemiological models: a limited geographical extension of the plague in the sixth century, resting on a substrate of rats restricted in space; a general expansion from 1347, resting on a complete colonisation of the continent by the rodent (Audoin-Rouzeau, 2003) and the globalisation of exchange on a European scale. The first model is predictive of a weak impact of the sickness in the countryside, with the exception of regions (or communities such as the monasteries) which could have been struck by pneumonic plague with intense interhuman contagion (England?) and rural locations which were in regular contact with the outside world through the intermediary of the circulation areas of the estates of large property owners. The plague of the early middle ages, despite dramatic consequences on a local level, seems to have been a marginal event in the West, without long lasting consequences. Gaul's gateway to the East, Marseille, struck several times by the plague, did not begin to decline until the end of the seventh century (Loseby, 2000; McCormick, 2003; Audouin-Rouzeau, 2003; Drancourt et al., 2007).

Population and climate

The dendrochronological series of the north-west of Europe and Chinese written sources bear witness to the impact of a major geological event (a volcanic eruption or the impact of a celestial object) in 536, leading to a sudden cooling of the temperatures (by a 'nuclear winter' phenomenon extending over several years), but it seems quite unconvincing to link such an episode to systemic changes such as the disappearance of an ancient Roman agricultural system or the widespread decline of the European population (Arjava, 2005; Devroey, 2009). Today, the increase in the amount of paleoclimatological data allows us to situate the social crisis and the complex structural changes that went hand in hand with the passage from antiquity to the middle ages within the framework of a long period of climate deterioration, wetter and colder from the end of the fourth to the seventh century, in the northern hemisphere (Cheyette, 2008: 158–163). However, the climate should not be invoked as a final cause, but as an element having played a role, amongst others, in the centuries' long crisis of European societies. The system of extensive cereal growing deployed by Rome in the Great European plain during the Roman era could have been incapable of reacting in the long term to this worsening of environmental conditions, leading to a fall in productivity, whilst the agro-sylvo-pastoral triangle spread the risks throughout the whole of the year and diversified its food sources, which explains the rapid disappearance of the *villae* after the retreat of the Roman troops in England or in the Netherlands towards the end of the fourth century-450 (Theeuws, 2008).

Population and settlement

Chris Wickham responds in the negative to the hypothesis of catastrophic exogenous factors. The demographic decline and the simultaneous retraction of extensive agriculture must be seen as the result of a set of economic and social phenomena due to the fall of the Roman Empire, and not as the result of disasters such as the

Bubonic plague. The decline of 50 per cent of the sites of the *villae* around 450 in northern Gaul and England is confirmed by solid data, not observed elsewhere. It coincided with the population size falling by half. This decline cannot be attributed to the plague (which burst out in 541 in the West), as it had already begun in the fifth century; the sixth century shows a stabilisation of land occupation, the basis of future demographic growth from the seventh century onwards. In England, two isolated outbreaks of the plague in 646–666 and 648–687, despite their possible seriousness, did not interrupt rural growth (Maddicott, 2007: 205–214). In the south of Gaul the general chronology of the evolution of the rural landscape is different: the peak of site abandonments is clearly situated in the sixth, even seventh, century (Favory, 2003), in a long trend towards a reduction in the points of settlement from the second and third centuries onwards. The profound reworking of rural landscapes was laid out in stages regionally between the end of the second century (Scandinavia, Netherlands, the north of Germany and present-day Belgium) and the sixth–seventh centuries (Aquitaine). Beyond the Romanised world, the organisation of settlements and land changed fundamentally. Farms and settlements became less numerous but their size increased, allowing for the grouping together of more inhabitants. This evolution went hand in hand with a significant regularisation of settlements structured around farm enclosures. The oldest examples come from Jutland and the north of Germany and date back to the end of the second century, whilst this evolution was observed several decades later in regions close to the *limes*. The similarity of the farm plots and the organised layout of many settlements recall the plans of many regular villages of the high middle ages. This evolution was nevertheless not linear and could vary within the same site: at Flögeln, in Lower Saxony, the enclosed farms of the second-third centuries form a highly organised arrangement which contrasts curiously with a looser spatial tissue without enclosures in the following phase of the fourth-fifth centuries (Zimmermann, 1997: 420–423, fig. 11–12). The transformation of settlements coincides with the abandonment of Celtic fields. In Sweden and Norway, extensive fossil lands with stone-wall fences demonstrate the setting up of a new system recalling the outfield and infield of traditional agriculture (Widgren, 1983; Nissen Jaubert, 1996). The reduction in the surface areas cultivated thus allowed breeding to be intensified. In this context, it is not possible to establish a direct link between the revival of forestry and a demographic crisis. On the other hand, it is certain that the extensive agriculture of the previous centuries had caused the formation of ‘podzols’ in numerous regions along the North Sea which made them uncultivable up until farming became mechanised (Groenman-van Waateringe, 1983).³ The evolution of agrarian landscapes coincided with changes in funerary and religious practices indicating a stronger social hierarchisation structured around elite warriors and the formation of chiefdoms or kingdoms (see below).

³ ‘Podzols’ are formed in light and leached soils. They are characterised by an ashy or a rusty colour, in which the leaching of ferrous elements can lead to layers which are hard and impenetrable for traditional farming tools.

The length of the demographic decline is also a matter of debate. For a generation of economic historians heavily influenced by the neo-Malthusianism of the 1960s, the obsolescence of agricultural techniques is said to have led to the stagnation of the population over a long cycle of depression lasting six centuries, between c.400 and c.950. Then, a complex of innovations liberated medieval society from the Malthusian ‘ceiling’: the breeding of horses for agriculture, more efficient harnessing techniques, the improvement of tools, the use of the heavy plough and the spread of triennial crop rotation (White, 1962; Duby, 1962). The resulting agrarian growth allowed for a population increase and the expansion of cultivated areas for over three centuries. Progress in the fields of archaeology and the history of technology refutes the hypothesis of technological breaks between antiquity and the middle ages, in insisting on the gradual and regionally diversified spread during the early middle ages of complex technology (regional metallurgy, ploughing, the growing of winter and spring cereals, livestock) linked to a farming system based on fallow land and heavy animal-drawn cultivation (Henning, 2008: 41, 43–44). The plough offers an eloquent example: its use is attested with certainty to the east of the Roman border in the coastal regions of the North Sea. The regions dominated by the Franks yield possible clues from the Merovingian period onwards, but we have to wait until the end of the first millennium to establish it with certainty (Zimmermann, 1995; Klapste and Nissen Jaubert, 2007; Nissen Jaubert, 2006: 169–172). It would be better to acknowledge that we know nothing about the population levels of the early middle ages. We have to take into account the biases inherent in the sources: funeral archaeology tells us about religious, social and cultural practices concerning the dead, while written evidence grasps the living in seigniorial censuses (a sample selected following economic and institutional criteria). Moreover, there is the qualitative importance of archaeology in terms of knowledge about the physical health and the modes of feeding the population (McCormick, 2001: 38–41). Despite the existence of very rich quantitative sources such as the estate surveys (polyptychs) of Saint-Germain-des-Prés and Saint-Remi of Rheims (800/850) (Devroey, 2003: 48–77), we have to reject the global evaluations constructed on the basis of extrapolating the densities taken from some seigniorial territories in the Carolingian era (Lot, 1921; Schwarz, 1985; Rouche, 1997) or the population growth rates constructed by archaeologists on the basis of Merovingian cemeteries (Hamerow, 2002: 107–109). At best, the available historical and archaeological data enable us to make out some trends. After a steep decline in the number of sites of settlement counted in the field surveys, signs of a resumption of land occupation can be perceived from the seventh and eighth centuries. This expansion of cultivated areas and of the population, in all likelihood rather slow and punctuated by severe episodes of famine, extended up until the tenth century when it accelerated and resulted in the first large cycle of demographic growth which reached its peak in 1300.

To analyse quantitatively the evolution of the European population, it is thus necessary to turn to how the land was occupied. The contraction of the population was very striking in the towns. In the Roman West, the reduction in the urban population can

be evaluated as a factor of ten on average, between antiquity and the early middle ages. In the countryside, the increase in available field surveys enables us to measure rural settlement in terms of the quantity of inhabited sites. Large-scale regional surveys are available for northern Italy (Etruria, Tuscany) and the south of Gaul (the Rhone valley), with converging results: maximum densities were reached in the first and second century AD. In relation to these figures, losses climbed to around between 50 per cent and 60 per cent in the fourth century and, to 80 per cent and over, in the sixth. This sharp reduction in sites is confirmed in the western Roman Empire, but also beyond its borders, in Denmark, in the north-east of Germany and in Poland (Hamerow, 2002: 109–114), which would privilege the impact of a general causal factor such as a climate anomaly (Cheyette, 2008) or a pandemic (McCormick, 1998). This attestation must nonetheless be tempered by the phenomenon of a grouping together of settlements observed in the north of Germany and Scandinavia. There it is a question of a farming better adapted to the linking of cultivation and the raising of cattle which in turn provided the manure necessary for soil enrichment (Groenman-van Waateringe, 1983; Nissen Jaubert, 1996). The techniques of the field surveys present significant biases when it comes to evaluating population density: on the one hand, the dating has large margins and covers many human lives, whilst on the other hand, for the whole of the area studied, it turns out that the ceramic objects of the early middle ages (or the recent iron age for non-Romanised territories) are rarer and more difficult to distinguish, because of their brown or grey colour; often their weak firing exposed them to rapid deterioration (Ward-Perkins, 2005: 184–187; Hamerow, 2002: 106). The passing from an architecture based on brick, tiles and stone for the *villa* of antiquity to constructions in cob and wood, with plant based coverings, made the settlement sites of the early middle ages not very visible for a long time. The important results provided by preventive archaeology have recently changed things greatly. The remnants of settlements now number in their hundreds, but overall summarising studies still remain rare or brief for the south of our study area, notably in France, where a number of research studies under way will add nuances to and revise our current knowledge in the years to come. Overall summarising studies are clearly more numerous for the regions along the North Sea on the other side of the Roman *limes*, which as a result dominate in the archaeological literature. Amongst them Scandinavian research studies have the merit of bringing together the evolution of settlements with other forms of archaeological remains and fitting them into a larger socio-economic and political context (Hedeager, 1992; Axboe, 1995).

The evolution of vegetation and regional archaeological investigations bear witness to several general phenomena capable of being interpreted in demographic terms. Material remains are a good clue to the level of complexity of artisanal production and exchanges: the end of antiquity marked a simplification of artefacts and a progressive localisation of the common circulation of consumer goods; the distribution zone of manufactured objects, including coins, strongly contracted. In most post-Roman regions, the number of settlements decreased, and the extensive and specialised crop cultivation centred on the rural *villa* regressed, giving way to

a more polyvalent agrarian economy based on crops, husbandry and woodlands. Settlement spread in the form of a scattering of hamlets grouping together three to five families. Their occupation might vary from a few decades to several centuries before they were abandoned or more likely moved to another place. As a matter of fact, throughout north-western Europe, this mobility was commonly an integral part of a long-lasting territorial continuity (Hamerow, 2003; Nissen Jaubert, 1999). Furthermore, very often the succession of buildings inside the same farm plots confirms that several generations lived on the same spot. The extensive cereal growing associated with the *villa* system was replaced by modes of cultivation which spread the risks over the whole of the year (wheat cultivation in the spring and the winter) and which developed food producing mixed farming in the gardens. The reduced body size of domestic animals (excepting the horse) indicates the changes in breeding, with the adoption of species more adapted to domestic animal husbandry and to the grazing of free spaces, such as pigs and sheep, at the expense of large cattle destined to be slaughtered for the urban market (Audouin-Rouzeau, 1993; Lewitt, 2009). From the beginning of the period till about the seventh and eighth centuries, the countryside of antiquity gradually faded out in favour of another organisation which points to the medieval and modern landscape. In the following centuries, the open agricultural landscape expanded; new groups of farms emerged on the margin of the rural territories. During the same period, the presence of a church or a cemetery favoured the concentration of populations and the stabilisation of large habitation sites. As a matter of fact quite a number of the existing villages may date from this period. In the central regions of the Frankish kingdom these phenomena were probably linked to the contemporaneous spread of the Carolingian estate system and a more pronounced social stratification in the countryside areas (Theeuwes, 2008: 220). They moreover became more widespread over the course of the tenth century and beyond the year 1000.

The transformation of the western countryside areas thus took place in phases, first of all between c.350 and c.650–700 with the simplification of the ‘encompassing society’ that dominates it (urban decline, the erosion and then disappearance of the *villa* system, the end of the permanent army and the disappearance of property tax, a reduction in living standards and the size of aristocratic groups) and the empowerment of the peasantry; then, from the Carolingian period onwards, with an increase in the pressure exerted by the aristocratic elites on the countryside and a growing ‘caging’ of the rural population within the framework of the medieval ‘seigneurie’ (Wickham, 2009: 529–551). These oscillations can be read in terms of fluctuations in the overall population in the West: demographic decline and a contraction of the population from the third century, with localised revivals in the fourth and fifth century, the reversal of circumstances and the beginning of a slow endogenous growth of the population of north-west Europe, from the seventh–eighth centuries. The military dynamism of the Carolingian Frankish kingdom, from the seventh–eighth centuries (conquest of Saxony, Bavaria and Lombardy; defeat of the Avars) and its Germanic part in the ninth–tenth centuries (the beginning of expansion to the east) adds exogenous factors, by making available to the Frankish aristocrats

lands, material riches and a reservoir of human capital fuelling the transfer of slaves towards the interior of our region (as agricultural pioneers) or towards the Muslim Orient (as human merchandise) (McCormick, 2001: 741–777; Henning, 2008). In northern regions, the part played by the slaves in the rural economy has been much discussed. For some, they were large in number and important, whilst others have drawn attention to the lack of evidence. Certain privileged sepulchres certainly contain the remains of a ‘companion in death’, but these examples remain exceptional. A single runic stone at Horning in Jutland mentions a slave, a certain Toke, who had put it up in memory of his former master, who had granted him his freedom. On the other hand, foreign sources such as Rimbart, and then two centuries later Adam of Bremen, would have us believe that the slaves were large in number. Danish regional laws suggest the same. Their writing up certainly occurred later, but they contain archaic paragraphs several of which are concerned with slaves (Fenger, 1992). The increase in the size of farms and the number of buildings of which they were made up was a striking fact at the turn of 700. The working of these farms inevitably required a significant labour force, which to a large extent went beyond that of the family framework in the strict sense of the term. The six to seven agricultural units of the Vorbasse settlement of the eighth-tenth centuries covered a surface area of between 8,000 m² and one hectare, around four to six times more than that of the third-seventh centuries.

A qualitative approach

The rapid progress in paleo-anthropological investigation techniques, mainly for the period 500–700 for which burials in open country, accompanied by the depositing of objects, allow for very precise dating and social typologies, enables us to pursue a qualitative approach. These indications suggest a general poor state of health for the middle of the first millennium: pathologies caused by dietary deficiencies, poliomyelitis, tubercular diseases, isolated cases of leprosy and rachitis. It should be noted that we lack points of comparison to interpret these clues as a *deterioration* of the healthiness of the population. From the eighth century on dressed burial disappeared and funeral sites were progressively situated closer to the settlements, which prevent us from comparing health data. The studies carried out suffer from methodological weaknesses: the generalising of the data gathered and the difficulty in documenting correctly the historical context of the populations studied (Buchet et al., 2006). New progress requires the setting up of quantitative models of interpretation, through the simultaneous study of the points of land settlement and the cemeteries (Theeuws, 2008) which would allow us to characterise the evolution of how the ground was occupied on a regional scale, by increasing the studies with a local scope, avoiding any generalisation, and by developing health profiles allowing us to measure the dynamic of the populations as a whole (McCormick, 2001). The comparison of the population of two cemeteries, Buckland in England (end of the fifth-seventh centuries) and Munsterhof in Zurich (ninth-twelfth centuries) shows that adult women had a shorter life expectancy than men. Birth and death were very closely linked in these societies: half of the population died before reaching

adulthood, with very significant perinatal mortality; death in labour was the most probable for a woman of a fertile age. To ensure that generations were replaced, at least four births per couple were required. The cemeteries do not enable us to study the social practices linked to birth. Christian sources bear witness to practices to limit births, abortion and infanticide amongst the poorest levels of society (Smith, 2005: 66–70).

A regular and adequate food supply is a prerequisite for any sustainable demographic growth. Because of its limited spatial range, the European economies of the early middle ages were able to experience occasions of a local intensification of the agrarian economy, leading to demographic growth and a strengthening of town-countryside links, as in the Paris region in the eighth century (Bruand, 2002). The functioning mechanisms of the Carolingian seigneurie, notably the logic of the stem family which in theory regulated the succession of tenants at the head of a family farm, also led to considerable internal pressure, which could explain the high population density figures measured in the property inventories of Saint-Bertin (20 inhabitants per square kilometre) in southern Flanders and of Saint-Germain-des-Prés in the Paris region (50 inhabitants per square kilometre) (Schwartz, 2005; Lot, 1921) and the indicators of the extension of the settlement centres and of land clearing from old settlement zones that had been going on since c.650–700. But this potential local and regional growth was in all likelihood nothing in comparison with the extended growth of the European population which began c.950.

Population structure and demographic variables can be analysed locally on the basis of rural population censuses included in the estate surveys of the ninth century. These documents obviously do not have demographic aims but are linked to the lords' concerns about dominating the population (notably the transfer of legal status or of tenure). The data of the surveys reveal a peasant mobility of unsuspected scope from the large ecclesiastical estates and genuine behavioural differences between the genders. The shortage of women in the censuses resulted from the very pronounced virilocality of marriages between peasants on the manse. Women came in large numbers from the exterior to be married on a manse; the numbers who left the estate were even greater: at Saint-Remi of Rheims, there were 156 men per 100 women within the *villae*, whilst the emigrants numbered on average only 82 men per 100 women (Devroey, 2003: 56–60). A systematic analysis of the archaeological data from the cemeteries of the Metz region shows that girls were buried with the material attributes of femininity from puberty, whilst masculine attributes only appeared in the graves around the age of twenty (Halsall, 1995). It can be reasonably suggested that women got married between the ages of fifteen and twenty, and men around the age of thirty, perhaps after a period of fulfilling military obligations or at the moment when they became the head of the family farm. This society followed the rules of a patrilocal or neolocal mode of residence (through the creation of new farms to the benefit of surplus couples) linked to the fundamental organising structure which framed peasant populations from the seventh century on, the manse (a farmstead occupied by a family of tenant farmers).

Spatial mobility

Population mobility can be situated on many levels: 1) a local mobility which essentially derived from the organisation of the land with the displacements, grouping together and/or dispersal of settlements; and 2) settlement migrations which spread to more extended, regional or supra-regional areas.

Archaeology demonstrates the movements of settlements within territories, whilst population displacements are revealed more by written documentation. Settlement mobility is generally established by archaeological remains, whilst written sources pass over it in silence (if we make an exception for a passage in *The War of the Gauls*, but which indeed concerns a previous period). However, the distribution of land, its revenue and its obligations must have required significant land organisation in order to prevent internal conflicts. This silence can probably be explained by the level of decision making: the estate surveys made a census of the payments due; their appropriateness concerning users' rights must have been settled orally within the communities.

The texts are more explicit concerning migratory flows from *Germania*, notably in the form of legendary tales which situate the origins of numerous people in the north of Europe. On the other hand, the archaeological data are more ambiguous; characteristic weapons, such as the double bladed axe or the angon, or various female clothing accessories, do not necessarily establish the ethnic origin of the people, even if their possession doubtless stems from a desire for identity display (Hedeager, 2000). Let us note that these types of furnishing essentially derive from privileged graves, for the most part, whilst the relics of settlements rarely offer such 'ethnic' indications. The byre house, emblematic of the Germanic populations of the continental shores of the North Sea, never crossed the Channel, despite the massive arrival in *Britannia* of Angles, Jutes and Saxons. In Gaul, the byre house of Germanic tradition at Saint-Ouen-en-Breuil constitutes a remarkable exception, and one of short duration (Gonzalez et al., 2001). The decline of architecture built from durable materials in favour of modes of construction in earth and wood doubtless depends more on new social and economic frameworks than on a Germanic influence. Later, in the ninth-tenth centuries, the written sources and toponyms inform us as to the installation of Scandinavians in the West, whilst the settlements hardly leave any trace of it. Evidently their potential markers of identity were expressed through specific decors and funerary practices. Only the establishments of the North Atlantic mark a certain wish to construct in a Nordic style. England and Ireland have yielded significant quantities of furnishings of Scandinavian origin or influence; in Normandy the rarity of archaeological data underlines a rapid integration into the Frankish world.

In England, Scotland and the Hebrides, some open fields that are organised and divided following the sun recall the Scandinavian *solskifte*. The location and the size of the fields repeat those of the farm plots in the village: the farm in the south or the east of the village will have the southern or the eastern strips in the fields and so on. Our knowledge on the *solskifte* and its organisation rests on written sources related to the open field systems of the high middle ages or later. Nevertheless, archaeological, geographical and etymological evidence may hint at an older origin for some of

the basic principles. The numerous place-names with the suffix *-tot* in Normandy are of Scandinavian origin and derive from the *toft* denoting the farm plot which had an outstanding function in the organisation of land (see below). The geographical diffusion of subdivision and place-names ending with *toft* may indicate some way or another to organise the rural territories functioning without writing although this is extremely difficult to prove (Nissen Jaubert, 2003b).

Both at the beginning and at the end of the period under discussion, the ancient authors explain migration flows by referring to problems of overpopulation. Jordanes, the first to distinguish the Scandinavians from the other Germans, also mentions a migration from *Gothiscandza* organised by the Goths. Around 1080, Adam of Bremen explains the Viking raids from Norway by their poverty. In his *Ecclesiastical History* the Venerable Bede (731) relates that the Bretons had requested the assistance of two Jutish warlords in fighting the Picts, an unfortunate initiative as it ended in the massive arrival of Angles, Jutes and Saxons, who had left their lands of origin deserted. This passage has weighed heavily in explaining the chronological gaps of the sixth-seventh century and the reforestation of the fourth-seventh centuries in Denmark and northern Germany. Let us note that the reading of palynological diagrams varies according to the researcher. Danish paleobotanists have insisted on the advance of the beech at the expense of the oak: the new composition of the woodlands (the *silva*) is thus said to indicate that it was pastured on, as bovines prefer the shoots of oak to those of beech. Livestock breeding could have contributed to a demographic growth which went hand in hand with a new social organisation around 700. A better understanding of the evolution of modes of construction has effectively enabled us to identify a growing number of seventh century sites in Denmark, where the evolution cannot be ascribed to the arrival of new populations. In Lower Saxony, new sites such as Elisenhof or Dalem and the reoccupation of previous sites have been attributed to Frisian migrants filling the gap left by Saxon migrants (Schmidt, 1988). The different interpretations of forest regeneration clearly show that it is not possible to establish a direct link between demographic evolution and the frequency of arborescent pollen. Their presence could also have been integral to a new rural organisation which favoured the resources of the *silva* (in northern regions they constituted an indispensable supplement to fodder during the winter). The grouping together of settlements observed from the end of the second century, which was accompanied by a contraction of cultivated surface areas, thus allowed the *silva* to develop. Finally, a dense representation of trees in palynological diagrams is not necessarily synonymous with a wooded landscape; the hedges of hedged farmlands also emit great quantities of pollen. To come to a decision it will be necessary to be able to study the conditions of tree growth in archaeological woods.

After all these considerations which oblige us to strongly relativise our capacity to define quantitatively and qualitatively the dynamic of rural populations during the early middle ages and to fit our observations into a regional or even local framework, it is nonetheless obvious that the period was crossed by a first phase of a significant contraction of settlements, with in parallel a reduction in the population, marked by regional differences, between the end of the second century until

the end of the sixth century. These phenomena were then inversed in a kind of demographic ‘long, slow rise’ that at the end of the tenth century resulted in the sustained growth of settlements and of the population of the high middle ages (eleventh-thirteenth centuries).

Household dynamics and composition

The adoption of the manse, a family farmstead occupied by tenant farmers, as the principal framing structure of the dependent rural populations in the seigniorial landownership of the north-east of Europe underlines the importance of the peasant household in the countryside of the Great European plain. Vouched for since the end of the sixth century in central Francia, in the Paris region, this new Latin word spread throughout the Rhineland and in northern Gaul as far as the Loire, where it came into general use in the ninth century. From the eighth century on, the *mansus* and its equivalents in the vernacular languages (Germanic *hoba*, English *hide*, Scandinavian *bol*) designated a dependent farm, comprising a house, land and capital resources (animal teams, cultivation equipment) sufficient to ensure the livelihood of a ‘family’ of peasants and to deliver the charges and work services due to the lord. The manse was also used to evaluate land wealth and to fix the contribution to the army (*ost*), to public works (fortifications, the development of the palaces, upkeep of public highways) or to the payment of a tribute. Derived from the verb *manere* (to reside), it very strongly evokes the idea of the permanent (and hereditary) residence of the head of the household (*pater familias*) in his house. According to the Venerable Bede’s (673–735) expression the Anglo-Saxon *hide* is ‘the land of a family’. Nevertheless we should not give the word ‘*familia*’ its contemporary meaning (a nuclear family of two generations), but instead the meaning of a ‘household’. As for *mansus*, the etymology of the Scandinavian *bol* (translated as *mansus* in the texts), derives from living ‘*at bo*’. Discussions of its nature, its origins and fragmentation have the appearance of being hard to tell apart from debates about the manse. For want of Scandinavian texts of the first millennium, we can note that the *bol* belongs to the suffixes of the toponyms which appeared during the Viking era. In the Frankish countryside the seigniorial manse (*mansus dominica-tus*) could provide shelter for dozens of servants under the orders of a steward, whilst the simple manse of a peasant habitually housed two generations. By extension, the ‘*familia*’ designated all of a master’s dependants, regardless of their place of residence, such as the large seigniorial families placed under the aegis of a monastery’s patron saint (*familia sancti N*). *Mansus* and its Germanic equivalents replaced more ancient expressions based on social origin, such as the Roman *colonica*, a peasant holding run by a *colonus*, or systems of property taxation based on the division of the land, such as the former *iugera* or *sors* (lot) (Devroey, 2006: 410–425). The spread of the manse was contemporaneous with the changes in the structure of settlements and of land occupation observed in the north of France (Catteddu and Nissen Jaubert, 2004; Peytremann, 2003). A teleological view must be avoided: the geography of the manse corresponds to the extending of the model of seigniorial framing of rural populations to the north of the Loire; but the *mansus* incorporated pre-existing peasant realities

(the predominance of the small family farm in the agro-sylvo-pastoral triangle) more than it shaped rural society; it framed it without directly determining it.

The spreading of the institution of marriage to every strata of Roman society began from the second-third centuries. According to the information given by Tacitus, in *Germania*, slaves could live in their master's household or in their own dwellings in the manner of the Roman tenant farmers (*coloni*) (Tacitus, *De Germania*, 25). In the middle ages the ethical and spiritual values accorded by the Catholic Church to marriage extended its range to all Christians, without any distinction in terms of personal conditions. For the non-free, marriage had become an objective reality of life already in the ancient world and came into general use in the whole of the West from the eighth century. These progressions went hand in hand with the erosion of the social group of slaves working in the fields still deprived of family stability. For the master, the state of marriage, the creation of a stable family unit and the installation of a couple at the head of a small farm which would be handed on to the next generation appeared to be fundamental elements of the reproduction of the system of framing the dependent populations and the cultivation of the land embodied by the manse (Toubert, 1998). The function of the household as the basic unit of social life in the *seigneurie* is confirmed in the practical sources. The indications we have (because of the rarity of the available sources) seem to suggest that there were still quite a large number of servants without family status who lived with their masters in the average-sized farms of the minor aristocracy and the autonomous peasantry at the end of the tenth century. As for the free, the Edict of Rotari (643) shows that all the forms of family community were taken into account by Lombard law. The married state certainly had a Christian ideological justification but its popularity can above all be explained by its functional adaptation to the seigniorial framework for the non-free and the most widespread size of the peasant farm. We thus need to take into consideration the hypothesis of differences in the family morphology (kinship) in terms of economic and social variables.

The Carolingian polyptychs are the principal source of information on the morphology of peasant households. Let us note, however, that the lists of dependants indicate only the number of the household's members alive at the time of the census, which does not enable us to follow a household's life cycle. The simple nuclear family, composed of parents and children predominates in these 'snapshots', between 60 and 75 per cent, in Italy (Farfa) as well as in north-west Gaul (Saint-Germain-des-Prés, Rheims) (Devroey, 2003: 60–65). In these models, nuclear households composed of solitary people or conjugal families represent close to three quarters of the population. Settlement excavations are also pretty much in line with this image of the couple as the pillar of the small agricultural farm. In northern Gaul the average size of settlement buildings, on the order of 70 m², seems adapted to a household composed of a single nuclear family (Peytremann, 2003: vol. 1, 280–291). The Anglo-Saxon house also comes close to these dimensions, a fact which has moreover led to questions about the reasons for the absence of the longhouse with a byre-area, so characteristic of the lands of Saxon, Jute and Angle origin (Hamerow, 2002: 46–51; Nissen Jaubert, 2003). With the exception of the byre-house, the function of the buildings often remains subject to caution. At Lauchheim, analyses of phosphates have thus shown that in the

main buildings of the sixth-ninth centuries two naves had a byre. The probable surface area of living spaces fluctuated between seven to ten meters in length and a width of around seven meters in houses measuring around twenty metres long, in other words 49 to 70 m² out of a total surface area of around 140 m² (Stork, 1997: 301–305, fig. 325). The increased size of longhouses from the end of the second century can be explained above all by the size of the byre and by the addition of supplementary rooms. Certain rooms were certainly used for living in but more often it was a question of spaces intended for storage or for various artisanal activities (Hamerow, 2002: 22–26; Waterbolk, 1991: fig. 25). The section for living in rarely in reality exceeded 12 or so metres in length (or around 70 m² as in northern Gaul). Things evolved over the course of the seventh–eighth centuries. The byres became detached from the main house, first of all in the regions close to the Roman *limes*, then more to the north, where the section reserved for habitation increased in size. This does not necessarily imply, nevertheless, that its roof provided shelter for more people. It could be a question of social expression, all the more so since farms expanded in terms of increased surface area and numbered more separate buildings which sometimes comprised a central hearth indicating a dwelling function. These large farms must have required a large labour force which exceeded the labour supply of the nuclear family. In certain cases, the longhouses could have taken the form of joint residencies of free farm holders with slaves, rather than expanded family structures. Thus the essential difference between the northern regions and those of ancient *Francia* and Anglo-Saxon England seems to reside less in a nuclear family structure than in the composition of the agricultural units. In northern Europe these seem to result more from a household than a family farm holding in the strict sense of the term. In *Francia*, it seems, moreover, that where the manses were ‘overpopulated’, in other words occupied by several heads of family jointly responsible for the obligations of the land tenure, each of these family units had their own fire. The norm for a household (without possible servants) was thus probably a family of two generations, possibly enlarged over the course of the family life cycle by unmarried brothers and sisters, the husband’s mother and grand-children (Fichtenau, 1991: 82–85; Devroey, 2006: 389–390).

Very large families were the exception within the large monastic seigneuries. The vocabulary of kinship was scant and concentrated on the basic family (*maritus-uxor-infantes*). Words such as *mater*, *soror*, and *frater* are rare in the polyptych of Saint-Germain. The vocabulary of Farfa’s contemporary lists falls back on the restricted family (Devroey, 2006: 387–393; Feller, 1994). To mark their family identity, peasants, including those in Romance language regions, adopted the Germanic onomastic, whose possibilities of thematic variation they used by transferring family lexemes to their children (Goetz, 1987; Bourin, Chareille, 2002): for example the first tenant-farmer couple to be settled on a Gagny manse (in the Paris region), *Ansegarius* et *Ingalteis*, had two living children called *Ansegildis* et *Ingrisma*. From the tenth century on, the vocabulary of kinship became richer in the lists of dependants which progressively took the place of the polyptychs, such as the genealogies of serfs. This phenomenon illustrates a shift from land tenure to tenant in the practices of seigniorial management and an extension of the signs of dependants’ subjection to all the residents of the landed *seigneurie* from

the end of the ninth century. Several passages from the polyptych of Prüm (893) bear witness to the early appearance in Germany of charges which show seigniorial domination over an individual person, such as the 'formariage' tax (a tax paid to the lord to marry a man or woman alien to the '*familia*') and the 'mainmorte' tax (Kuchenbuch, 1978: 170–173).

Extended family groups (from 6 to 12 per cent of households) generally occupied larger holdings. The average surface area of the manses also slowly grew with the number of living children who lived with their parents. In the countryside, the holdings which were the best provided with land and animals were also those which provided housing to the largest number of people. At Saint-Germain-des-Prés, the ratio between the generation of the children and that of the adults was higher on the free manses (1.14) than on the servile manses (1.02) which were on average much less extensive (the free manse occupied by *coloni* contained on average 9.4 hectares, the servile manse occupied by serfs, six hectares of arable land) (Devroey, 2003: 64, 320). These clues permit us to imagine that the broad family and situations of co-habitation between the free and their slaves were more common in the well-off strata of the peasantry. Complex households were also more common in Germany, England and Scandinavia through the co-habitation of the free and the slaves within peasant holdings (see below).

The average peasant household was composed of a couple and two or three living children. At Saint-Germain-des-Prés the size of the household varied from 4.5 to 5.5. It was close to 5 at Saint-Remi. It falls within a range of 5 to 6 in five inventories from the Rhineland dating to the ninth century (Kuchenbuch, 1978: 76–94; Devroey, 2003: 63–65). Comparable figures appear in the south of Gaul and in central Italy which shows that the phenomena which determined the morphology and the size of peasant households were of a range affecting the whole of the West. Measuring fertility amongst the peasantry is largely beyond our reach. A study of the mortality and births amongst the Merovingian and Carolingian queens gives us figures of around four children per mother for the two periods, with a distinct improvement in the interval between two viable children from 3.5 to 2.5 years. These figures tally with a small sample drawn from aristocratic genealogies from the Frankish world: the number of children having reached adulthood per family rises from 3.4 in the seventh century to 3.5 in the eighth, then to 4 in the ninth and to 4.3 in the tenth century (Devroey, 2003: 64–65). For the peasant populations the numbers of children reaching adulthood varied from between 2.6 and 4 per couple in the ninth century. But a considerable unknown remains for the proportion of the singles and of couples without children who represent up to 30 per cent of the households of dependent farm holders in certain seigneuries. Another measure of the dynamic of the households is given by the ratio between two successive female generations. This ratio, generally positive, shows that the families settled on the manses experienced a slight surplus between succeeding generations which enables us to understand the mobility towards the exterior of the estates and, within them, co-residency on the manses, the appearance of divided up manses or of simple cottar's holdings, limited to one house and a basic plot of land of small dimensions.

The situation of co-residency on the land tenures (with two or three households on the same manse) can in all likelihood be explained by economic constraints and

by differences in wealth between the families, because it does not seem as though (at Saint-Germain-des-Prés) the manses with several households were significantly larger than the others. As the manse was the principal basis for the seigniorial levying of cash, products and work, the manses with multiple households or land tenures split into half or quarter manses obtained a proportional reduction in the real tax per contributory household. These divisions (which probably led to a pro-rata reduction in the rights on common land) were perhaps also agreed to by seigniorial agents to the benefit of tenants incapable of meeting the charges of land tenure.

Surplus population is also observed in the cases where we have complete censuses of the local population, which indicates that the large ecclesiastic *seigneuries* experienced potential growth of their population, with an interval, in terms of a doubling of their numbers, in the absence of crises of excess mortality, of between 60 and 150 years (Devroey, 2003: 70–77).

Life course and intergenerational relationships

For the master of a classic large estate, the most desirable form of household on an hereditary holding must have been the stem family (an authoritarian family model), which guaranteed the integrity of the land tenure and its transfer from a parental couple to one of the sons, in sidelining the other children. This holding devolution rule was applied at Saint-Remi of Rheims in the middle of the ninth century. According to the most plausible mortality parameters, at least a fifth of the peasant households must have remained without descendents (and an equivalent number must have had just a living girl). This explains the decision of the master to settle on his servile holdings young men who would be called upon to relieve the aged tenants (Farfa, Saint-Victor of Marseille) or the frequency of situations in which a young slave, seeking a spouse of higher socioeconomic status, made a hypergamic marriage in marrying the daughter of a free tenant (Saint-Remi of Rheims) (Ring, 1979; Feller, 1998: 526–529; Devroey, 2006: 386–387). Nonetheless, the sometimes large proportion of vacant land tenures (*mansi absi*) bears witness to the difficulties encountered in perpetuating family lineages on the tenures. We do not have comparable data for the autonomous peasantry in the regions studied, but it is likely that the strength of family networks, supported by the entanglement of lands, enabled the free to adapt the morphology of their landownership to the life cycle of the family groups and households. The small peasant landowners in Perche who appear in the Corbon book of traditions included in the polyptych of Saint-Germain-des-Prés, at the beginning of the ninth century, are presented as groups of siblings who maintained the means of developing strategies of matrimonial alliances (masculine hypergamy) and control of access to the land (gifts claimed in perpetual tenures, purchases and sales) (Devroey, 2006: 393–396). In Romagna, the presence of the parents of the lessees, within the confines of lands granted for rent, calls to mind family associations settled on land entities composed only in a formal way of holdings of diverse status and origins: undivided assets, land parcels owned under allodial title or granted in *livello* (on long-term lease), land tenures, etc. (Montanari, 1984: 70).

Research is necessary (but the deeds which would allow us to identify neighbours are rare) in order to establish whether analogous situations existed in our regions. Based on the evidence of the Edict of Pîtres (864), simple tenants did not hesitate to sell their property rights to sections of the manses to their peers or minor local notables, destroying the theoretical link between the head-manse (the residence of the tenant) and the rest of the holding (arable land, fields, vineyards, etc.). The dividing up of the land into manses, thus, did not prevent land mobility. In the present-day south of Belgium and the east of France, the breaking up of the manses into quarters (theoretically the quarter of an entire manse) from the tenth century on went hand in hand with a separation of the habitation (house and garden/peasant's garden plot), taxed separately from the 'quartered lands', whose charges were assumed by groups of co-holders. This evolution, which continued through the eleventh and twelfth centuries, went hand in hand with the appearance of land parcels taxed in isolation (rentable plots, land dedicated to cereal which would be due to the lord) (Genicot, 1943: 226–255), which could obviously modify land accumulation and transfer strategies, previously centred on hereditary land tenure.

2.2 The family and its members

In the manse system, the basis of rent charges was in principle fixed on the level of the holding which had to supply quantities of money, products or work, without taking into account the number of occupants. This model already appears in the Merovingian edicts transferred by the laws of the Alemanni and the Bavarians (first half of the eighth century, with a common background going back to royal edicts of the seventh century). Fixed theoretically by the legal status of the head of the family, the nature of the charges was rapidly determined by the legal denomination of the tenure: a free peasant at the head of a servile manse was obliged to comply with the typical custom of this category of peasant holding, characterised by arbitrary service or service fixed at up to three days per week. In the large landed *seigneuries*, the demographic weight of the non-free settled on the manses varied regionally and locally. Locally, seigniorial colonisation ventures led over the eighth and ninth centuries to the systematic settlement of slaves, associated with free tenant farmers in order to diversify the profile of rural holdings according to the theoretical division: free/ploughman, non-free/labourer. In these cases, the former slaves settled on the manses could make up significant minorities – up to 50 per cent of the population of a *seigneurie*. In a general way, between the Seine and the Rhine, the proportion of the non-free and the enfranchised nonetheless did not exceed 10 per cent to 20 per cent of the total population of tenants. This proportion was probably higher in Germany and, in general, in regions which were not principally enmeshed in the estate system, as in Bourgogne (Verhulst, 1991; Bois, 1989).

The tenants did not form the lowest strata of peasant society. They could themselves own slaves or hire occasional day labourers. The Carolingian *Sens Formulary* (a collection of charters and administrative texts) (820–840) contains several judgement notices. In the two cases where a *servus* contested his status before the comital court, he had been bought by a tenant farmer, one was a tenant of the abbey (Sigoillot, 2008: 268).

Such auxiliary workers were not rare on the lands of the Prüm abbey (893), as the polyptych makes provision for their contribution to work services in the case of 440 manes out of 1700. Amongst the tenants best provided for of Saint-Germain-des-Prés, at the head of holdings largely exceeding 20 hectares of arable land, it is unimaginable that the head of the family was not aided by others, even though the census criteria exclude mention of these workers, be they permanent or otherwise (Kuchenbuch, 1978: 76–80; Sigoillot, 2008: 268). Situations in which a family group, who owned the farm holding, and domestic workers lived together were also more common amongst the higher levels of the village elites, free peasants, seigniorial officers, priests, the minor aristocracy, and in the large aristocratic households.

Family economy

The peasant societies which set themselves up in the whole region during the third-fifth centuries were characterised by the activities of multiple cropping, livestock breeding and domestic artisanal production. Technological simplification and the local circulation of products (i.e. commodities) are particularly pronounced for everything concerning the home and the life of rural populations. Materials, furnishings and everyday utensils made from wood and textile materials for clothing were made by and within the family unit, as is corroborated by the evolution of construction techniques and the dissemination of objects linked to weaving in the settlement sites of the early middle ages. During the 400–700 period, the presence amongst funerary deposits of quality metallic artisanal products and ornaments and the circulation of objects crafted from bone and glass as well as ceramic objects produced within the urban centres bear witness to the latter's penetration into the privileged strata of rural society, but these objects are incommensurable with the degree of commercialisation measured before the Barbarian invasions.

After 700 the pressure exerted by the lords on the peasants became stronger. It encompassed a part of the farms' food and artisanal production, particularly concerning cereals and certain rare and sought after products such as wine and wood, either in a rough state or designed for the construction and upkeep of buildings. Archaeology also demonstrates the presence of specialised artisans such as blacksmiths and millers on a village scale. At Dalem an excavated hut housed a weaving loom over 4 metres wide. Its unusual dimensions indicate an artisanal specialisation which it is very tempting to link to a trade in Frisian woollen cloth (Zimmermann, 1982). In Denmark the coastal site of Selsø of the eighth-twelfth centuries has yielded the relics of several artisanal activities (metallurgy, luxury goods and textiles). Textile activities there occupied a predominant place, which seems to suggest the fabrication of sails for the boats whose presence is attested to by numerous rivets (Ulriksen, 1997: 44–79, fig. 4). At the same time imported goods became more numerous and widely diffused, including domestic utensils such as hand mills made from Rhineland tuff, steatite receptacles or whetstones originating from Norway, etc. (Sindbæk, 2007: 310–311). Against the background of the subsistence family economy, land domination thus included the dependent peasants in an extended circulation which profited the power elites. Nonetheless, a proportion of peasant charges consisted of perishable or difficult to transport goods which had to be

consumed on site by redistribution mechanisms or wages paid in kind. Another part remained in the hands of seigniorial agents, which encouraged local stratification. The same is true for the obligatory tithe which appeared in the second half of the eighth century and earmarked a proportion of its yield to assisting the poor, to the local church and to the upkeep of the local priest. At the same time peasants had access to markets where they could realise part of their surplus. In regions in which a certain specialisation of family based production was developed, such as textile production in the regions of the north-west which bordered the North Sea, or viticulture in the Paris region, it is clear that peasant families were directly involved in the circulation of part of their produce, notably in the hinterlands of large urban centres such as Paris or Cologne and the English, Frisian and Danish *wics* (see Corn, vol. 2).

Relations of gender and patriarchy

Amongst dependent peasants, the hereditary nature of the manse was established for the free tenants by the ninth century at the latest, but according to the principle of a single successor. It was tolerated, if not encouraged, amongst slaves provided with a holding. The inheritance of the manse was part of a primogeniture system that gave priority to direct male filial status and to the eldest. Thus, the ‘family policy’ of large landowners encouraged the vertical handing over of the holding which enabled the assurance of their permanence and the reproduction of the qualified labour force, the ploughman and his cultivation equipment linked by duty to the farming of the reserve. Depending on regional cultures, access to landownership for women was a little greater in the regions where Roman juridical traditions were perpetuated (more than 10 per cent). In Gaul, north of the Loire, in Germany and in England the share for women was even more restricted, below 10 per cent or even 5 per cent (Smith, 2005: 138–139). Typically, it was higher amongst the free and we more often encounter women as protagonists in land transactions which involved a property being abandoned: at the beginning of the ninth century, in Perche, 25 per cent of gifts with the short-term recovery of property involved women (Devroey, 2006: 403). For land tenures possession could pass from man to man by means of surviving women (through marriage or succession). In Romanic regions, the presence of women as the head of the house or as co-tenant represents only a few dozen of the cases found in the estate surveys. We come across none in the Rhineland estates of Prüm (893), which demonstrates the existence of striking regional differences (Devroey, 2006: 402–403). At Prüm, there was a large number of ‘surplus women’, the widows, daughters or sisters of tenants, who had to leave hereditary manses. We often come across women who are single or accompanied by children amongst the holders of miniscule land tenures, houses with or without a garden, possessions reduced to a little field (Devroey, 2003: 306). The division of tasks within a family holding also closely matches gender differences. A particularly powerful taboo reserved ploughing work for men (Kuchenbuch, 1991: 141–142). Religious prescriptions in theory reserved the *opera ruralia* for men and the *opera textilia* for women, in the seigniorial workshop and within the domestic framework. Male territory extended to the fields and to the woods, to cartage and artisanship in wood. At the height of the agricultural year haymaking, harvesting and

grape gathering were carried out by the two sexes. A woman appeared as a *Hausfrau*, someone who both brought up the children and was mistress of the house. The domestic sphere belonged to her, from the house to the garden: making mustard and preparing tinctorial materials, breeding barnyard animals, fruit picking, clearing the kitchen garden and textile production (linen sowing, growing and preparation, sheep shearing, spinning and weaving). Certain roles are sometimes associated with men, sometimes with women: oddly bread making and grain malting, two activities which could have taken place in the family *hearth* (the 'foyer' in both senses of the French word), in female territory, or in collective facilities such as the ovens situated outside the house, in male territory. Non-free women (*ancillae*) owed products or textile works on an individual basis, regardless of the legal status of the holding where they lived with their family. In regions where custom fixed the transmission of personal status from the mother to the child (*per ventrem*), young slave women found it difficult to get married within the world of the tenants (Coleman, 1971). At Saint-Germain-des-Prés (823–828), couples composed of partners with a different personal status accounted for 16 per cent of marriages. At every strata of the peasantry, from the completely free to the slaves, boys found it easier to marry within the framework of the manse than girls of identical status: the cases of masculine hypergamy (see above) account for over 74 per cent of the marriages involving social mixing. Women formed the majority of migrants in the large estates (see above). A non-free woman was doubly disadvantaged, as a slave in the same way as her male counterpart, and as a woman, in the countryside and in the dependent peasantries marked by the primacy of agricultural labour over the *opera muliebria* (Devroey, 2000).

Domestic service seems to have been a world of unmarried people, provisional or definitive. The youngest children of poor peasant families were often relegated to manual tasks, as was the case for the workers who served onboard the Prüm estates' boats (as porters and haulers) or the women gathered together in the seigniorial workshop, the gynaeceum, to sew and carry out the textile jobs. The seigniorial vocabulary has preserved a trace of these solitary people, be they free or otherwise. The custom of giving the name *puer* or *puella* to slaves, no matter their biological age, dates back to antiquity. These names were perpetuated in the vernacular languages (Obermeier, 1996: 68–69).

2.3 The family and income

In an agro-pastoral system structured by the family smallholding the subsistence economy necessarily claims a predominant share. No family, no farm or property owner, no matter how wealthy, was a self-sufficient, 'insular' entity in the early middle ages.

Income systems and property

As far as what affects land appropriation is concerned, the early middle ages were characterised by the alternation of periods of regular and heavy transfer of land assets to the churches and of intermediate periods of secularisation. Transfers of assets reached a maximum at the beginning of the ninth century: on estimate one third of cultivated

land was then in the hands of the Church. Seizures of lands to the detriment of the Church reached their maximum during the years 720–780 (transfer of lands by the Carolingians to the benefit of vassals) and 840–950, when the political and military instability in western *Francia* led to the disruption of public and religious institutions and favoured local loss of wealth and power to the benefit of the secular aristocracy. The increase in private donations from the eighth century onwards can be explained by the practices of funerary commemoration and the strategies of aristocratic families who were looking to avoid the property divisions and disputes that went hand in hand with the transfer of land amongst blood relatives. The burden of public service, such as participating in the frequent military expeditions, for free peasants from the eighth century on, and the search for protection against the abuses of the powerful, are without doubt important factors in the erosion of the social group of free peasants who abandoned their properties to enter as dependants and tenants under the protection of the lords. This phenomenon is often addressed in the Carolingian capitularies, which were apprehensive about the ‘poverty’ of the freemen, in other words the free peasants toppling over into dependency. These factors favoured the enrichment of large secular and ecclesiastical landowners, but it is clear that they also widely benefited the base of the aristocratic pyramid and local mediators, as the cases of minor officials or local priests show (Bougard, 1996; Feller, 2005; Devroey, 2006: 335–344). The dynamism of these intermediate social classes is poorly documented by the texts, but well attested to elsewhere, in other regions such as Alemania (the Saint-Gall charter), central and northern Italy and Catalonia. There certainly existed a market for land which threatened the cohesion and the very structure of the manors in the large seigniorial properties, as is shown by the practices denounced by the Edict of Pîtres (864). Beyond the Christianised world, the transfer of land is particularly difficult to perceive. Some rare runic inscriptions underline the importance of owning land. As far as the transfer of land is concerned, regional laws (composed of several chronological layers) clearly show that it was a thorny problem. The gifts and sales of land came into conflict with and disrupted a previous system in which the possession of land and the charges it bore formed a whole with the farm lot – the *toft*. Land transactions – notably to religious foundations – shattered this coherence. Contradictory paragraphs, certain of which envisage a retrospective annulment of a transfer, give an idea of the size of the problem (Porsmose, 1982: 451–455).

Exchange and credits

The very weak level of the monetisation of the economies of the early middle ages explains why exchanges and credit operations were carried out in kind, which leaves few documentary traces. On the continent, the circulation of money in the Merovingian era, based on standard gold coins which became progressively weaker (mainly a third of a *solidus*), was in all likelihood linked to the circulation of artisanal products and to the gift/exchange relationships of the power elites. The Carolingian reform, introducing the silver denier, mainly concerned *Francia* (in terms of coin minting sites and coined money). A variable proportion of the charges imposed on the peasants

was to be paid in cash, with the obligation of converting a proportion of the products (lower animals) or the services (army duties) into legal deniers, which must have forced the existence of rural markets to facilitate crop/money exchanges and ensured the centralisation of cash in the hands of the large property owners. The silver denier was also the privileged basis for the raising of exceptional tributes, collected notably to appease the Scandinavian invaders in the second half of the ninth century. But, according to the finds of isolated coins by archaeology and metal detection, entire regions of the Frankish kingdom (Germany to the east of the Rhine, Italy) functioned almost totally without real money circulation, after the introduction of the denier, up until the middle of the tenth century (Rovelli, 2009). Money was used above all as a measure of the value of work and things. For other agricultural products (cereals, wine) redistribution outside the family small holding was assured by levying in kind and transporting crops long distances as part of the consumption of the elites (the populations in the monasteries and aristocratic retinues), the upkeep of minor vassals settled locally and the services due to the State (provisions to the Court and public officers, military logistics). The politico-religious denunciation of the practice of usury in the Carolingian period concerned above all the manipulating of weights and measures within the framework of advances on crop harvests, which probably bears witness to the importance of these forms of credit in the countryside (Devroey, 2006: 338). It seems difficult to say more about this.

Labour markets

The labour market was also marked by weak monetisation. The proportion of slaves in the entire population varied regionally. Their existence did not exclude the presence of free workers on the estates and family farm holdings. The use of forced work by groups of chattel slaves seems to have disappeared from the Roman western provinces, on the basis of a mapping of the discoveries of slave collars (numerous and well dispersed on rural sites before 450). This contrast suggests that the change of agrarian system between antiquity and the middle ages went hand in hand with the extinction of chattel slavery in the countryside. These maps however provide the image of a brusque transformation, whilst the small rural peasant holding, run by free tenant farmers (*coloni*) or slaves living as a couple on plots of their own, progressively replaced the slave-mode estates in the large and average farm holdings in the Roman Empire from the fourth-fifth centuries. Agricultural workers remained anchored to the soil, but this link came about through less brutal practices, such as the regular distribution of food in the form of food for work (*praebenda*) and above all the opportunity given to the slaves to live under their own roof, with the obligation to partially maintain their own needs themselves through small-scale animal raising and the intensive cultivation of very small plots of land, rounded out by food distributed by the master in exchange for work. For more demanding work (ploughing and animal-drawn transport), the food handed over by the master also served as compensation for the tenants' services. These practices are less well documented in our regions than in Italy, but probably formed part of the lord-peasant relationship, passed over in silence in medieval sources, which

strengthened the relationships of reciprocity. The distribution of food for work also impacted on the more fragile strata of the rural population, those receiving assistance from the parish, occupants of short-term tenures and defaulting tenants. Around the parish church the priest frequently shared the development of the manse constituting its legitimate endowment (c.15 hectares and four workers) with the occupants who received food in exchange for their work. This situation was common on the lands of Saint-Germain-des-Prés and finds an echo in the ecclesiastical capitularies of the second half of the ninth century, which denounced the abuses of parish priests who exploited the poor by feeding them with the revenues of the parish poor list in exchange for work. Making use of wage systems, of prebendaries and work for food amongst the indigents and inhabitants of *burgs* close to the monasteries was widespread (Verhulst and Semmler, 1962: 117–118).

Whilst a majority of agricultural workers probably lived in biological families of two generations and in their own home, we have to turn towards the large aristocratic households to come across large troops of domestic slaves: in 858 the cloistered nuns of Notre-Dame de Soissons had with them 110 maidservants (*famulae*) in the interior of the cloister, including 80 employed in the seigniorial workshops. The monastery in addition had at its disposal 130 men, working outside in the gardens and the workshops. In this aristocratic milieu the average proportion was one male or female domestic for per monk or nun (Hocquet, 1985: 662). We also come across workers living in same sex groups near to the Cysoing royal palace (northern France) (three houses for women built in a separate enclosure) and the seigniorial centre of the Annappes head-steward (also northern France) (three houses for men). Even these domestic slaves living under the lords' roof could have benefited from a division of time into two equal parts, to which an 817 charter of Saint-Gall bears witness, specifying that the slaves (*puellae*) who worked in the seigniorial court had three days to themselves (Goetz, 1989: 218). These workers were above all employed in the gardens and artisanal workshops set up on the periphery of the monasteries and the palaces. The agricultural workers who worked the lands of the Lobbes central estate lived domestic family lives on their own little land plots close to the monastery and at Thuin (Belgium) (Devroey, 2006: 279).

The slave trade and the brutal subjection of the defeated did not disappear in France and Germany, but the foreign slaves who were not destined for the slave trade towards the East (the discoveries of slave chains after 500 are concentrated on the eastern borders of the Frankish Empire and in the Balkans) lived without shackles in continental Christian society. The place of the slaves in the organisation of the labour market, characterised by the large scale passing from slavery to serfdom in the post-Roman provinces and Germany during the transition from antiquity to the middle ages, clearly contrasts with that of the British Isles and Scandinavia where slavery was still important after 1000. Domestic slaves, arising from raids and purchases, were there the principal source of non-free work alongside other forms of servitude: the slaves who could be sold by their master as merchandise were mixed with serfs who were sold along with their house and the land they cultivated. Servitude became commonplace when the French aristocrats exported continental seigniorial practices and habits after 1066 in England and at the end of the eleventh century in Wales (Smith, 2005: 156–157).

2.4 Family and external relations

Village societies and institutions

Before the seventh century the manner in which the aristocrats dominated local communities and extracted the countryside's surplus product remains very poorly understood. A significant part of these aristocratic resources rested on drawing tributes from sometimes very vast territories and from their inhabitants, in the name of political prerogatives resting on the ties between these aristocrats and royal power. Rosamond Faith uses the concept of 'extensive lordship' to designate these forms of domination of a rural economy 'relatively undeveloped by the local authorities in the form of rights to services and renders from the people of a given territory' (Faith, 1997: 4; parallels in Halsall, 2006). In regions strongly framed by large aristocratic landownership, the rural society can be characterised as a society of tenants (Wickham, 2001: 81), bound together by social characteristics which heralded the main aspects of the medieval village: depending on (and being protected by) the same lord, sharing collective obligations and enjoying the prerogatives reserved for tenants for the use of common wastelands and woods fixed by custom, sharing community elements such as the parish group, religious holidays, the local church (from the ninth century on) or the cemetery. From 650/700 the progressively tighter framing of the countryside encouraged the appearance of village institutions such as the groups of aldermen/*scabini* (in the *seigneuries* where legal immunity justified the existence of a local tribunal), or of parishioners who along with the local priest ensured the raising of the tithes and assistance for the poor. The sharing of the use of the commons and the charges associated with them must also have encouraged the crystallisation of village institutions, but which are without material traces in the sources. Forms of peasant association such as the rural guilds and brotherhoods appear only in a fugitive fashion in the sources such as the Rheims synodal statutes (852) which urge the priests to shy away from them. The sphere of activity of these voluntary groups (which seem to have constituted a commonplace structure in the Rheims countryside) touched on traditional forms of fellowship, such as participating in funerary banquets and self-help, but also self-defence. Condemned by Charlemagne as associations of conspirators, these guilds were regularly fought against by his successors: in 821 Louis the Pious banned the serf associations born in Flanders and other regions of the littoral (doubtless within the context of the first Scandinavian incursions). In 859 (see below), the peasants beseeched to fight the Danes were massacred by the powerful. In 884, Carloman, the king of Western France, forbade the people of the villages (*villani*) from forming armed groups 'which are in their language called guild (*gelda*) against those who have dispossessed them,' and ordered them to leave it to the their parish priest. He suppressed any form of association (Devroey, 2006: 150–153). For their part, archaeological relics offer clues as to a collective organisation of space, be it the upkeep of collective spaces such as country roads or common squares at Vorbasse (Denmark) in the fifth century or at Sædding (Denmark) in the eighth–eleventh centuries as well as in the contemporary site of Kootwijk (The Netherlands), in the Veluwe (Heidinga, 1987) or, in Frankish

space, common areas on which were concentrated domestic ovens or storage structures. Communal organisation could also encompass several settlements on the same territory. The small associations of farms which, as at Goudelancourt in Picardy, contrast with the size of the neighbouring Merovingian cemeteries could thus indicate burial sites common to several settlements. On several sites, farms which were grouped together or scattered such as at Montours in France or Bellingegård in Denmark were so close to each other that they must have undergone a certain common management of rural territory (Nissen Jaubert, 1998, Catteddu, 2009: 54–55).

Within dominated peasant societies, the legal dichotomy between the free and the non-free gradually lost its priority over other aspects of social stratification. Whilst tenants' obligations were still regulated within the agrarian laws of the eighth century by the legal status of the head of the family, in the estate surveys of the ninth century, it was still the legal designation of the manse (*mansi ingenuiles/mansi serviles*) which determined the tenants' charges, irrespective of their status. Secondly, from the middle of the ninth century on, the manses themselves lost their legal designation. These shifts contributed to smoothing out social differences and gradually made the peasants appear as an organic social group defined by its function in society. The progressive disappearance of the autonomous peasantry hastened this transformation and led to the system of the three orders which theoretically encompassed all workers (*agricultores, laboratores*) in a single social group defined by suffering (brought about by physical work) and servitude. The territorialisation of the *seigneurie* would contribute to including relationships of domination in space, by placing peasants, whatever their personal legal status or their degree of autonomy, under the domination of a single lord. This dynamic, which made all the inhabitants of a territory the men of a lord (with reciprocal obligations of obedience/protection), acted in parallel with the progressive inclusion of peasants in a functional 'order' in which the formal distinction between the free and the non-free seems to have been relegated to the background. This process of leveling, mixing free and non-free in the same group, does not mean that economic stratification and social differentiation diminished in the countryside, quite the contrary. If those who dominated them could consider peasant societies as a block, the size and the equipment of a farm holding or the possibility of holding a post amongst the estate's officers determined genuine social stratifications within rural communities. From the beginning of the tenth century the polyptych of Saint-Pierre-des-Fossés, in the Paris region, abandoned the dichotomy between free manse/servile manse to contrast the manses of ploughmen and the manses of labourers (*mansi carroperarii, mansi manoperarii*), a fundamental division of the western countryside which would remain valid for a long time after the year 1000.

The family, the local community and the state

Tax levying by the power elites certainly constituted the most important part of the revenue which escaped auto-consumption and was put into circulation. The level of the extraction of wealth varied significantly between 500 and 1000, with regional differences depending on the strength of royal power or of the aristocracy. Whilst

these transfers have been estimated to be around a third of gross agricultural product in the Roman tax system (Hopkins, 1980), a tax rate of between 10 per cent and 20 per cent can be considered for the 500–700 period, for the whole of the West (previously Roman or ‘barbarian’).

From the Carolingian period onwards, the peasant groups that were the most strongly framed by the *seigneurie*, in the central regions of the Frankish kingdom, experienced a very marked increase in the levels of wealth extraction (perhaps locally as much as 40 to 50 per cent?). Intervening as an arbitrator between tenant farmers (*coloni*) and their lords in 800, in the region of Le Mans (France), Charlemagne fixed the legitimate level of levying in work to half of the week for manual work, with some exemptions (one or two days a week) for the periods of animal-drawn work, depending on the manse’s equipment. This enormous levy on the available resources and work in the countryside included expenses committed to royal service, such as the military tax and participation in the public duties of transport and construction, which were carried out through the mediation of the aristocratic elites (Devroey, 2006: 567–583). This explains why the intensity of levying diminished drastically in the peripheral regions of the Frankish kingdom which were not framed by the manse system and where the effectiveness of central power was weak. In the south of Gaul, land taxes remained a lot lower, with a tribute of 10 to 15 per cent of agricultural production and symbolic work services for the peasants, and few public obligations for the local rural elites. From 765, the introduction of the obligatory tithe further increased the transfers of wealth. Imposed on the lands of Frankish conquest (Bavaria, northern Italy, Saxony), the tithe was put in place in the central regions of the kingdom at the end of the eighth century, but its diffusion was probably slower in the other regions. Its introduction gave birth to a decimal jurisdiction for each local church, a template for the future parish territories. But this spatialisation of the parish took place progressively up until the eleventh-twelfth centuries (Fournier, 1982: 509). Between the Seine and the Rhine the manse was retained as a taxation unit beyond the ninth century, but peasant families, confronted by the crushing weight of land rent, withdrew to fractions of previously entire manses, quarters or even half-quarters which tended to become standard as basic land tenure from the end of the tenth century. Beyond the Christian world the absence of written documents rules out from the start being able to specify the nature and the extent of the pressure exerted by the powerful on rural populations but synchronisms in the evolution of settlements and other material relics indicate rigorous organisation. The regularisation of settlements in southern Scandinavia observed at the end of the second century was set in place at the same time that central sites such as Gudme and Dankirke, in Denmark, or Amrum and Uppåkra, in northern Germany, and southern Sweden emerged. Funeral archaeology indicates a greater social hierarchisation and the great weapons sacrifices in Denmark such as at Illerup Ådal, Nydam, and Vimose bear witness to wide-ranging territorial conflicts and spectacular religious practices. Settlements marked a new fundamental transformation around the year 700, when the founding of *emporium* at Ribe and Haithabu as well as the increase in trading places mark the development of market trading. At the same time, the construction of great defensive works such as *Dannevirke* and the *Kanhave* canal attests to the ruling elites’

capacities for mobilisation. These chronological coincidences indicate that the warrior elites occupied a central place, and also seem to suggest that the settlements developed in the framework of a system of levying to their own benefit. The regular enclosed farm plots recall the above-mentioned medieval *toft* which was crucial in the open field systems regulated following the *solskifte* and *bolskifte* and which served as a point of reference for the division of lands and taxes, notably to finance the royal fleet⁴ (in the same way that the Frankish manse and the Anglo-Saxon *hide* served as the basis for the collection of royal tributes). It is very possible that the regular enclosure of settlements had a comparable function. In addition the English villages distinguished between the simple croft and the *toft*, which had a particular legal status. For Normandy, Dudo of Saint Quentin recounts that Rollo divided up the lands among his men with the help of a rope; this strongly recalls the organisation of land in medieval and modern Scandinavia. Moreover the word *toft* (-tot) is a common suffix for the names of Norman sites. The *toft* system comes down to us in its belated form, but its principle – sharing out the lands without relying on written documentation – as well as its geographical distribution plead in favour for a much older origin (Nissen Jaubert, 2003). During the seventh-eighth centuries regular settlements can be observed throughout the whole of north-west Europe. At Montours in Brittany, as at Odoom or Gasselte, in the region of the Drenthe, and still many more sites, the layouts of the farm plots and the trackways have been partially transmitted in modern land registers (Catteddu-Marguerie, 2007b; Waterbolk, 1991). At Vorbasse, Porsmose has demonstrated that the width of the enclosures of the farmsteads from the tenth - eleventh centuries respect the same modules as those of the cadastral plan of the end of the eighteenth century, despite the relocations of the settlements. The perennial nature of the enclosures and modules seems to suggest that they served in one way or another in the allocation of lands and, by extension, in that of charges. The question of the dividing up of lands and levies in the landed estates which could not rely on a written administration remains unanswered. It remains to be noted that in *Francia* the *mansus* appears in the accounting documents of the seventh-eighth centuries at the same time that the settlements experienced greater regularisation.

The passing from an 'extensive lordship' to a seigniorial pressure, which was both greater and spatially closer to the peasant lands (to end up in the high middle ages with a seigneurie on the village scale), took place with a probable time-lag of one to two centuries in England where the first written documents testifying to this intensification date back to the tenth century (*Rectitudines singularum personarum*, the Tidenham inventory, see Faith, 1997: 76–79). In this 'Carolingian' England (according to Wickham's expression, 2009: 453) of Alfred the Great and his successors, confronted with the Danish military threat, the peasants were also subject to heavier obligations with the development of a landscape of seigniorial manors and great estates which appeared everywhere (including in the regions which had formerly been dominated by the Vikings) in the Domesday Book of 1086. This movement began from inland and from seigniorial reserves, with a greater demand on the part of the aristocrats to

⁴ Notice that the *toft* also designs the bench or the seat for the rowers in the ship.

exploit the peasant labour pool to the benefit of direct production and aristocratic consumption (Faith, 1997). The inauguration of a strong royal power (which maintained and strengthened itself even in the high middle ages, in contrast with the weakening of royal power in France, to the benefit of territorial princes), based on the grand aristocracy, resulted in the augmentation of taxation by the lords. Reduced to land-tenancy, the peasantry was excluded from the public sphere, as had happened in the central regions of the Frankish world (Wickham, 2009: 465–471).

In regions where small and medium peasant ownership was still common, as in the societies of tenants strongly framed by signiorial structures, the relationships between the State, the Church and the aristocracy operated through local notables and mediators, anchored in rural society at the level of the land. In zones strongly marked by the 'manorial order', communication between lords and peasants took place through local mediators carrying out the functions of estate officers to frame the tenants and ensure the cultivation of the reserve: mayor, dean, cellarer, forest keeper, etc. These mediators had access to other sources of revenue which did not depend directly on agricultural activity: a proportion of the charges in money and in kind delivered by the tenants remained in their hands, which enabled them to improve their position by engaging in credit activities and in buying land (Feller, 2009). At Boissy (France, Orne), the monks of Saint-Germain-des-Prés yielded to the local officers a portion in money of the *ost* tax (15 per cent), and of other dues paid by the tenants. A more considerable figure who supervised the abbey's woods in this region allocated to himself over half of the cereals paid by the woods' users (around 300 kg). In exchange the man had to send, in his turn, substantial gifts to the monks: metal cooking utensils, honey, wax, poultry and birds of prey. The range of products represents less the social position of a well-off peasant than that of a minor lord (Devroey, 2003: 299) who belongs to the out-group mediators active on a supra-local level.

At the village level two figures were well placed to rise above the mass of inhabitants: the priest and the mayor, representing the lord. Some priests were accused of abusing the revenues of the tithe to recruit dependants, monopolising lands and investing in lucrative equipment such as watermills. These pastoral offices circulated above all in family groups of comfortably well-off peasants, doubtless amongst the *boni homines* who retained access to the public sphere. The mayors (their title '*maior*' symbolically places them at the head of the local lord's *familia*) were chosen from amongst the 'average' (*mediocres*) that is to say from amongst the freemen, capable of taking an oath of loyalty to the king. Recruited in the ninth century from amongst the ranks of the free (according to the estate surveys of western *Francia*), they were recruited in Germany in the tenth century from among the group of servant officers (*ministri*) considered legally as non-free. From the Carolingian era onwards they no longer cultivated their lands themselves, contenting themselves with carrying out symbolic services such as cultivating the compulsory boon-work plots as a way of providing an example, and with offering honour gifts. These elements created multiple social distancing and esteem factors: economic (peasants, but not merely producers because they shared the signiorial levying), functional and social (peasant, but no longer principally farmers because they had their lands cultivated by others), personal and spatial (dependants, but with specific rituals and charges, the honour gifts they gave out to the powerful

on whom they depended, as they moved towards the seats of authority). But these elite local peasants remained marked by dependency: the mayors, as we have seen, no longer carried out themselves the majority of the work services, but remained symbolically bound to carrying out a duty that reminded them of the obedience owed. Their engaging in the *seigneurie* excluded them from the ranks of the *boni homines*, those peasant notables who were able to retain the markers of full liberty: on the economic level the possession of lands in their own right, power over their own dependants and often possession of money; on the political level, participation in the public sphere, through access to the army and the public tribunal. In the case of treachery, a disloyal mayor was punished by the stick in the same way as any other simple peasant (Devroey, 2006: 296–304).

In regions where the peasants were supervised from a much greater distance by the aristocratic elites, the rare rich documentary evidence, such as the Redon cartulary in Brittany (Davies, 1988), show a stratified rural society directly framed by notables acting on the scale of several villages in which they oversaw the positions of the mediators, notably in the organisation of parishes, in the local justice system and the settling of disputes and in the legal validation of transactions. These notables (who were the equivalents of the Frankish *boni homines*) probably had their own intermediaries but we do not know the internal functioning of the village groups that found themselves in their sphere of mediation.

From 850–900 on this social group of peasant notables who still belonged to the public sphere progressively disappeared. A portion of them probably became integrated into the ranks of the aristocracy whilst the others were sucked downwards into the ranks of dependent rural populations. Certain estate officers also looked to attain upward mobility. It is significant that they sought to escape their obligations by claiming nobility (and no longer liberty), as did the mayor, as well as his brother, of the important *villa* at Antony, in the Paris region, at the end of the tenth century. To return them to their status of Saint-Germain serfs (but were they not in reality descendants of previous free peasants?) and to sideline other attempts in the future, the abbot Walo 'had them hand over the head tax (*chevage*)' and had all their descendants listed thereby making all the adults also subject to the *chevage*.

Throughout this whole period it was the exclusion (voluntary or forced) from the group of armed people which determined the worsening of the condition of the free peasants and hastened them to the ranks of simple dependants. This theme of the diminution of the class of the free bound to public service (participation in the army and the tribunal) determined the discourse on 'poverty' in the Carolingian capitularies in the ninth century. It disappeared from the texts in the following century. At the beginning of the tenth century, thirteen free men and one free woman (the text terms them *liberi* and *ingenui*) gave their Neauphlette *villa* (France, Yvelines) to the Saint-Germain-des-Prés luminary in order to 'no longer have to participate in the royal militia'. They collectively owned these lands under allodial title, with two watermill areas and a church (Devroey, 2003: 253; Sigoillot, 2008). This is *a contrario* the most probable explanation for the persistence of a free and autonomous peasantry in border regions such as the Catalonia and the Saxony of the tenth century, where incessant hostilities with neighbouring peoples encouraged the survival of the local militia and

where peasants thus retained the right to bear arms. In Germany they were probably the precursors of Henry I's *agrarii milites* who at the end of the tenth century were charged with the construction and the defence of earthen refuge compounds to which the local population could withdraw in case of danger. It is in this political context of the Germanic kingdom that we can identify upward social mobility, between these groups of armed peasants and the knights (*milites*). In the genealogical tree of the son of a count imagined with clear satirical intent by Rathier of Verona, we encounter, on going up the lineage, a knight (*miles*) in the fourth generation. 'Who was the father of this *miles*? A man of low birth, pulled from the aristocratic household (a fortune teller, a baker, a masseur or a bird catcher), from the town (a fishmonger or a pot maker, a tailor or a chicken merchant) or from those who travel the roads (a mule driver, an animal-drawn cart operator), or, in the countryside, a worker with horses or a tiller, a serf or a freeman.' The figure of the armed peasant was already unthinkable to the west of the Rhine from the middle of the ninth century, as a passage in the Saint-Bertin Annals for the year 859 seems to indicate: 'the Danes devastated the places beyond Escaut. The common people (*vulgus*) between the Seine and the Rhine, forming between them an association of conspirators (*inter se coniurans*), fought bravely (*fortiter*) against the Danes on the Seine. But as their conspiracy had been established carelessly, they were easily killed by our powerful (men) (*potentiores nostros*)' (Wickham, 2009: 529–530).

These violent acts, which destroyed the peasantry's capacity for resistance, probably coincided with a 'ruralisation' of the aristocratic elites from c.850–950. From the eighth century on, professional warriors were settled in a permanent manner on the estates of the Church, particularly in zones of strategic importance, but the presence of these military elites, or even that of disarmed estate officers, is difficult to detect through archaeology, as the 'privileged' settlements are not directly distinguished from others by their fixtures and fittings. At Ecuelles and at Ruelles de Serris, in the Paris region, these sites are only detectable by their greater surface area, the presence of larger buildings, partially built in stone, and silos, and their proximity with other polarisation elements in the village, such as the church and the cemetery. At Ruelles de Serris, the construction of a tower in the second half of the tenth century, which could have also been used as a granary, finally allows a command post to be clearly identified in the village (Feller, 2007: 78). The civil wars and instability provoked by the incursions by Viking and Hungarian bands, and the weakening of royal power, encouraged the militarisation of the rural landscape to the benefit of the aristocrats, as it was they who controlled the refuge compounds (as in Flanders or in Saxony) or built private fortifications by using the peasant workforce in the name of the right to command (*bannum*) which they exercised to their main benefit. The construction of a *motte* (a fortified mound) was complementary to the monopolising of the parish rights and the tithes in polarising the rural landscape around the church dominated by the local lord and possibly the castle or the fortified seigniorial court. The tithe and the customary manse charges constituted a target (a motive for localisation) for the activities of the lower strata of the aristocracy in the tenth century, by monopolising the powers of military protection or legal prerogatives and parish rights at the level of the village lands. These phenomena perhaps explain why, contrary to what happened during the Germanic invasions of the

fifth century, the crisis of central authority and the aristocratic elites in post-Carolingian Europe did not result in more autonomy and fewer taxes levied for the peasants.

2.5 Conclusions

The north-west of Europe entered into a phase of demographic growth which was very slow (because of frequent intervals of crisis) from the seventh century on. This trend, which would be accentuated at the end of the tenth century and would lead to sustained growth up until the thirteenth century, followed a long phase of demographic decline, set in motion from the end of antiquity, and that bottomed out in the sixth century. The significant drop in the population went hand in hand with a change of agricultural system in the previously Roman provinces in the West, which became 'barbarised' in the sense that they adapted systems of land occupation which existed in Germania and Scandinavia before 500. 'Cerealisation' and the system of extensive occupation of rural space which resulted from it, gave way to a selective occupation of the land, with a contraction of cereal lands and the selection of lands which were the most favourable to mixed farming. The growth of spaces occupied by the *saltus* and the *silva* at the beginning of the middle ages enabled the constitution of a significant quantity of land to be reconquered for agriculture, begun by clearing, from the seventh-eighth centuries, under the influence of the demographic growth and the rise in aristocratic demand, and then strongly eroded by the acceleration of demographic growth and the seigneurialisation of the high middle ages. These two processes acted in a dialectic manner, but without us being able to say which one was the prime mover, in the increase of the population and that of the demand for agricultural products by the non-producers.

The period 500–1000 saw the peasant family and its farm holding installed as the major actor of agricultural production in Europe, a position it would keep in the majority of regions until the nineteenth or even the middle of the twentieth century. Its emergence began a little earlier in the northern regions of the non-Romanised world, but essentially we find – in other forms – the same evolutionary stages. In parallel, it became the main work pool for direct agricultural production by the aristocracy, notably for the regions subjected to the process of manorialisation, from the seventh century in Francia and from the tenth century in England. Aristocratic demand thus played a catalyst role in the economic and spatial development of peasant populations (restructuring of lands and stabilisation of settlements). The advent of tenant societies in the early middle ages is a characteristic phenomenon in certain regions of the continent in which the powerful greatly increased their pressure on the peasantry (the heart of the Frankish world, later England), and where the peasants were strongly framed by the aristocracy, used as a major labour pool by the elites and deprived of their freedom of movement. It led to an increase in inequalities within the peasantry, with the emergence of rural elites linked to the process of manorialisation, the progressive erasure of legal borders between the free and the non-free peasants to constitute a class of *agricultores* or of villeins defined in opposition to the two other orders of society, the warriors and the priests.

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BRITAIN



Harrowing as depicted in the Luttrell Psalter, c.1325-1335 (British Library, Ms Add. 42130, f° 17v°)

3 Britain, 1000–1750

Phillipp SCHOFIELD and Jane WHITTLE

This chapter examines the nature of families, labour and income in rural Britain (including Scotland and Wales but not Ireland) from the high middle ages until the mid-eighteenth century. Due to the weight of existing historical research, it is inevitably biased towards lowland southern and eastern England. There is also a conscious attempt to offer particular focus on a broad North Sea region. Thus a good deal of the following exploration will include direct reference to the east of Britain and, most obviously, England, although comparisons are also drawn with other parts of Britain.

Medieval and early modern Britain can be divided into two broad economic regions, separated roughly by a line drawn from the mouth of the river Exe in the south-west, to the mouth of the river Tees in the north-east. To the south and east of this line lay lowland England, relatively wealthy and densely populated, with the significant presence of extensive and often reasonably powerful lordships in the medieval period, and an agriculture dominated by arable farming. To the north and west lay upland England, Wales and Scotland, a more sparsely populated zone with higher rainfall and poorer soils, where arable agriculture was often marginal and livestock farming of sheep and cattle the most profitable commercial activity. Of course there were many variations within these zones: for instance the contrast between the open fields of midland England and enclosed fields of parts of East Anglia and Kent, or between lowland parts of northern England and southern Scotland which contained some rich land used for arable agriculture, and the wild and wet western highlands of Scotland and Cumbria. England had been a unified political unit since before the Norman conquest of 1066. The whole of Wales was conquered and added to the kingdom by Edward I at the end of the thirteenth century, while Scotland was peacefully united under the same monarchy when James I, already James VI of Scotland, came to the English throne in 1603. Despite this, Wales has retained a strong and separate cultural identity from England including its own language, to the present day, while Scotland has always retained its own legal system in addition to a separate national culture. Economically, the barriers in travel and trade between Scotland and England remained in evidence throughout the period considered here.

3.1 The family and demography

Discussion of family in the medieval and early modern countryside needs to be set in the context of population change. Britain experienced two great cycles of demographic growth and decline between 1000 and 1750. In medieval and early modern Britain population grew until the fourteenth century when it declined sharply, stagnated in the fifteenth century, grew again in the sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries, stagnated in the middle to late seventeenth century before growing again by the mid-eighteenth

MAP 3.1 Britain, 1000–1750



century (see table 3.1). Demographic change was intertwined with the rural economy and society. Fertility was strongly influenced by age at marriage, which was dependent not only on social customs but economic conditions. The density of population and extent of rural poverty affected levels of mortality, while rural poverty was itself affected by household structure and household formation strategies. Periods of population growth were characterised by rising rents and falling wages, while demographic decline saw the opposite trends.

Even with such extraordinarily rich and wide-reaching sources as the late eleventh-century Domesday Book, the Hundred Rolls of the later thirteenth-century and the poll-tax returns of the later fourteenth century, population change in medieval England remains subject to speculation. The usual assumption is that the peak of population was reached c.1300. Estimates of that maximum population vary from c.4.5 million to 6 million or more. The years after c.1300 were followed by a period of decline in the early fourteenth century, partly as a result of the famine of 1315–1322 (Campbell, 2000: 386–410; Smith, 1991: 48–51; Stone, 2006: 19–21). The first outbreak of plague, the Black Death of 1348–1349, brought a further sharp reduction: estimates of mortality in the countryside suggest a fall of at least 33 per cent and probably closer to 45 per cent (Razi, 1980: 103). Recurrence of plague in the late fourteenth and fifteenth centuries was one cause of the subsequent stagnation of population. It seems likely that the total population of England remained static at a low level of around 2.5 million from the mid-fourteenth century until the 1520s. By the 1540s, when parish register evidence first becomes available, England's population had reached an estimated 3 million, and grew rapidly to 4.1 million in 1600. Despite slower growth in the seventeenth century, the population stood at twice the early sixteenth century level by 1670, remaining stagnant at around 5 million between 1670 and 1700, before slowly increasing to 5.8 million by 1750 (Clark, 2007: 120; Wrigley, 1987: 170). Although little is known about the medieval period, demographic change in early modern Scotland followed a similar pattern to England. Population estimates for Wales before the eighteenth century are extremely difficult to establish with any accuracy. By 1700 the total population of Scotland stood at around 1.1 million, while the population of Wales was c.400,000 (Whyte, 1995: 113; Howell, 2000: 14).

Both mortality and fertility have been invoked as causative factors in the long-term patterns of demographic change described above. The early period of growth, especially in the thirteenth century, is seen as spurred by commercial and market expansion, the success of the English economy serving as a boost to fertility rather than a restraint to mortality. The famines of the late thirteenth and, especially, the early fourteenth centuries have been characterised as Malthusian events, with population *in toto* outstripping resources. By contrast, the plague epidemics of the mid- and later fourteenth centuries have been seen as preventive checks on population which were largely or wholly independent of the availability of resources (see, for instance, Hatcher, 2003). The failure of population to recover in the late fourteenth century and for most of the fifteenth century (there is some indication of an upturn in population in the later fifteenth century, though this is largely extrapolation from sixteenth century population calculations) has attracted discrete historical explanations. Mortality undoubtedly remains a significant

Table 3.1: Population in England, 1100–1750

	England (thousands)	Rural (%)
1100	1100–2500	90
1300	4500–6000	80–85
1400	2500–3000	80–85
1500	2250–2750	80–85
1550	3011	80–85
1600	4110	80
1650	5228	75–80
1700	5058	65–70
1750	5772	65

Sources: Campbell: 2000, 402, and references there; Campbell, 2008: 908-909, 910, 927. Wrigley and Schofield, 1981: 208-209; Wrigley, 1987: 170; Whyte, 1995: 113; Howell, 2000: 14. On the extent of urbanisation in the middle ages as well as the problems inherent in defining towns and consequently an urban population, see for instance Dyer: 2005, 24. Comparative 'snapshots' for Wales and Scotland in the middle ages suggest an estimated combined population for the two countries of 700,000 to 1.3 million c.1300, with an urban population somewhat less than 10 per cent and possibly closer to 5 per cent; four centuries later, in 1700, the combined population was perhaps 1.4 million, with an averaged urban population of c.30 per cent, Campbell, 2008: 908-909, 910, 927; Langton, 2000: 462, 466.

part of that demographic story, not just in terms of repeated outbreaks of epidemics occasioning moments of crisis mortality but also in terms of background mortality including an assumption of significant levels of infant mortality (Hatcher, 1986). Famine affected early modern Scotland, with national famines in 1594–1598, 1623, 1649–1651 and the late 1690s (Whyte, 1995: 123; Wrightson, 2000: 198). In contrast England escaped the severe mortality crises which afflicted the medieval period, at least on a national scale (although see Appleby, 1978). As a result, despite some recent challenges to the orthodoxy (Hatcher, 2003), England's demographic fluctuations between 1540 and 1750 have been seen as predominantly determined by changes in fertility (Wrigley and Schofield, 1981; Wrigley et al., 1997). The arguments about the importance of changes in fertility, and the influence of economic fortunes on marriage patterns, have also been projected back into the late medieval period (Goldberg, 1992; Poos, 1991).

As both fertility within marriage and illegitimate births were relatively constant, changes in fertility were caused by variations in women's age at first marriage and the proportion of women ever-marrying. While there is general agreement that the decision to marry was effected by economic circumstances, the exact mechanisms by which this

operated are disputed. In the fifteenth century, when low and stagnant population levels were accompanied by expanded employment opportunities for women, it has been argued that women's economic independence allowed them to delay marriage (Goldberg, 1992). However, the rapid population growth of the sixteenth century, and its subsequent slowing down in the seventeenth, has been explained by exactly the opposite logic, the ease with which women could marry, with high real wages in the early sixteenth century encouraging early marriage and the establishment of new households. When real wages fell in the later sixteenth century, historians have argued that marriage was delayed or put off altogether and the numbers never marrying began to rise (Wrigley et al., 1997). There is strong evidence that local economic variations could affect age at marriage. For instance, in east Devon in south-west England in the late seventeenth century, an economy dominated by dairying and lace-making, two areas of women's employment, led to a skewed sex ratio and a late age of marriage for women (Sharpe, 2002).

Migration in and out of the Britain was insignificant before the seventeenth century. At that date falling real wages in England and real economic hardship in Scotland encouraged a moderate rate of out-migration, contributing significantly to population stagnation and in some parts of Britain, decline. Relative to its overall population, Scotland experienced the most significant movement, with around 200,000 people leaving the country, mostly for other parts of northern Europe, particularly Ireland, during the seventeenth century (Whyte, 1995: 120). In contrast an estimated 240,000 people migrated from England, mostly to the North American colonies, in the second half of the century (Wrightson, 2000: 221, 230).

The demographic landscape outlined above had implications for the complexity and size of rural households. A household can be simply defined as all those living and eating together in the same dwelling. Hajnal drew attention to the fact that the typical household in north-west Europe was comprised of a nuclear family (parents and children) sometimes with the addition of unrelated live-in servants. This stands in contrast to the extended family households containing three generations of a family which were common in southern Europe, and the multiple family households with more than one married couple found in eastern Europe in the same period (Hajnal, 1965, 1983). In medieval Britain most households were small and nuclear. Surviving 'census-type' data does not suggest that anything other than a small proportion of households were complex in their structures. In late-thirteenth century Spalding, for instance, little more than 1 per cent of identified households appear to have been three generational. Even where there was an established familial base with a well-developed kin network, most husbands and wives established separate households, as has been observed by Razi for Halesowen. A number of local studies for the high and later middle ages in England have resulted in estimates for average household size, hovering at between c.3.7 and c.4.8 people (Schofield, 2003: 82–87 for a summary of this material for the middle ages; Razi, 1993: 6). There is much less discussion of medieval family sizes outside of central and southern England, and historians have been able to make only the most general suggestions regarding size and structure (for the limits of information on the family in medieval Anglesey, for instance, and the problems of quantification see Carr, 1982: 195).

Size and complexity of household structure were features determined partly by wealth. In pre-plague villages, wealthier households tended to be larger and more complex: a combination of available resources in terms of produce, land and personnel, helping to sustain and encourage larger households both through enhanced resistance to morbidity and mortality, and opportunities for early marriage and family formation (Razi, 1980). It is in these relatively wealthy households we find more evidence for care of the elderly and the management of family resources in favour of a range of offspring, especially through pre-mortem reallocation of property (Smith, 1991). By contrast, poorer households might struggle to retain even their biological membership, the lack of disposable resources forcing offspring into the world in search of other opportunities. Changing economic conditions and polarisation of wealth and landholding almost certainly introduced some further variety and complexity into household structures in the later middle ages, something also reflected in the changing construction of domestic building. Servants and life-cycle service were not new features in this period, but may well have become more common.

A scattering of detailed English parish censuses which survive for the period 1599–1725 show average household sizes of 4.0–5.2 people, with around 30 per cent of households containing live-in servants (Laslett, 1977: 21, 32). Occupational listings for Ealing (Middlesex) and Clayworth (Nottinghamshire) show that household size increased with wealth. In Clayworth, in 1688, labourers' households contained an average of 3.8 people, husbandmen's 5.7, yeomen's 6.1 and gentlemen's 8.7 (Laslett, 1977: 92). Much of this difference is accounted for by servants, but wealthier households also contained slightly more children. The same household structure pertained in early modern Scotland and Wales: nuclear families dominated and live-in servants were common (Whyte, 1995: 153, 165; Howell, 2000: 26).

Individual households may only have existed for a single generation or less, but they served as the mechanism for the reproduction of society as a whole. The assumption, reasonably well-supported from evidence for pre-modern English society, is that rural household formation was neolocal: marriage and the establishment of a new household was dependent upon the acquisition of resources through capital accumulation, gift or inheritance (see, for instance, Poos, 1991: 141–148). Estimates for age at marriage vary for the middle ages. Razi has suggested that age at marriage, amongst wealthier peasant families in late fourteenth-century Halesowen was relatively early, 16–17 for males and 13–17 for females (Razi, 1980: 136–137). While such early marriage may have operated amongst village elites, just as they operated amongst landed elites in Britain more generally, it is likely that the majority of the population married considerably later in life. The changing employment opportunities for women are of particular relevance here. Evidence for sex-ratios in later medieval English towns reveals that women outnumbered men by a ratio of c.0.9/1; by contrast, the proportion of males to females in the medieval countryside in the same period was c.1.1/1, suggesting women moved from country to town in search of work (see, for example, Goldberg, 1990). The process of urbanisation, general estimates for which are outlined in Table 3.1, and which suggests limited, although not wholly insignificant, urbanisation before the early modern period and an increased rate of urbanisation thereafter, illustrates the increased potential for

rural-dwellers to seek opportunity beyond the countryside, with all of the attendant consequences for fertility and household formation. Women as well as men spent the early years of their adult lives engaged in life-cycle service, working as live-in servants during their late teens and early twenties. This caused them to delay marriage and thus operated to limit family size. Women's average age at first marriage was relatively late for much of the early modern period: age of 25–26 for England in 1600–1750, and 26–27 for rural lowland Scotland in 1660–1770 (Wrigley et al., 1997: 134; Whyte, 1995: 118).

Other factors, of course, served to limit family and replacement rates across the pre-modern period. Childhood mortality was undoubtedly crucial, but often a hidden feature of the demographic regime. Breastfeeding suppressed fertility and increased the spacing between children: high status and urban families were more likely to employ wet nurses, and had more frequent pregnancies as a result. Thus influences on the demographic regime varied regionally and according to wealth. It is possible that in areas of proto-industry, such as parts of eastern England from the high middle ages, the populations were dominated by in-migrant nuclear families and experienced reasonably discrete demographic regimes. Processes of morcellisation, of urbanisation and of proletarianisation, especially evident in parts of southern and eastern England helped establish a relatively high proportion of families and individuals occupying small units of land. In such circumstances, the futures of these families were founded less on a reallocation of familial landed and moveable resources. Instead, offspring were as or more likely to leave the natal household in search of new opportunity for employment and capital accumulation. Their experience of household formation equated more closely with a so-called 'proletarian' or 'real wages' household formation system, generally seen as a move away from more traditional, 'peasant' models of household formation.

3.2 The family and its members

Although the household is often treated as an undifferentiated unit, it was made up of individuals with different rights, interests and access to the household's wealth. The members of medieval and early modern farming households worked together in the household economy, but men and women typically had different roles. Men took the main responsibility for field work: ploughing, maintaining hedges and ditches, mowing hay, reaping corn and caring for cattle, sheep and horses. Women's main activities were centred on the house and farm-yard: milking dairy animals, making butter and cheese, brewing beer, raising poultry, caring for pigs, and growing herbs and vegetables. Women were also employed on occasion as agricultural labourers, weeding crops, making hay and harvesting corn. Both men and women marketed agricultural produce, generally with men taking responsibility for grain, sheep and cattle, and women making smaller more frequent sales of items such as poultry, eggs and dairy products. Women's contribution to the agrarian economy has often been underestimated by historians in the past. Studies of wage labour on large estates between the late fifteenth and the seventeenth century show that at harvest time and in tasks such as weeding, women could account for between one third and over 50 per cent of the labour employed. Dairy production, an important sector of the agrarian economy,

was dominated by women until the late eighteenth century, in part because of a belief men would turn milk sour if they came into contact with it directly. While poultry raising, also a female preserve, rarely generated a large income, the sale of birds and eggs was an important extra source of cash income for poorer households. The widespread employment of female servants in the households of wealthy and middling farmers, where domestic work was not sufficient to occupy them full-time, also indicates the value of women's work to the agrarian economy (Whittle, 2005: 62-4).

More specialist types of industrial and trading activity were an important element of many rural household economies in medieval and early modern Britain. Wrigley estimates that in 1520 76 per cent of the English population was dependent on agriculture for a living, falling to just 46 per cent by 1750. During the same period the urban population, closely defined, rose significantly from 5.5 per cent to 21 per cent, and the rural non-agricultural population, that is those dependent on industry, crafts and commerce, from 18.5 per cent to 33 per cent (Wrigley, 1987: 170). Long before the sixteenth century, however, rural England and Wales were already dotted with regions of specialist industrial production which was combined with agricultural activities to produce a diverse economy. Woollen broadcloth was produced in three main areas: the Essex-Suffolk border in eastern England, the weald of Kent, and a large part of the West Country stretching from eastern Devon to south Oxfordshire, including parts of Somerset, Gloucestershire and Wiltshire. Worsteds, another form of woollen cloth was produced in eastern Norfolk, and cheaper woollens in West Yorkshire. Linens were produced in the north west, including north Wales, Lancashire and Westmoreland. By 1700 rural cloth production in eastern England and Kent was in decline or already gone, but had strengthened in Yorkshire and Lancashire in northern England, as well as in Scotland and Wales. The production of stockings and lace spread across rural England dominating scattered localities in the midlands, west and north. There were also areas of metal working in south Yorkshire and the west Midlands, coal mining in Scotland, Wales, and north-east England around Newcastle, lead mining in the Pennines, and tin mining in Cornwall: all industries that were carried on in conjunction with farming (Clay, 1984: 14–64). Like farm work, industrial work was gendered. Spinning and lace-making provided work for women and children: 80 per cent of Scottish women were estimated as employed in spinning in 1750. Mining and weaving were typically male occupations, although weaving was undertaken by women both in the late medieval period and the eighteenth century, while Scottish women outnumbered men as bearers in coal-pits by two to one (Whyte, 1995: 154).

Such diversity created economic opportunity for rural households, and presented different labouring outlets for members of the household. Combining farming and rural industry offered security for households against harvest failure on the one hand, and trade fluctuations on the other. In the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries the rural cloth industry thrived in areas of southern and eastern England characterised by small mixed farms, such as Norfolk, Suffolk, Essex, Kent, Berkshire and Wiltshire. As agriculture became increasingly commercialised in these regions, the cloth industry became concentrated in north and west England, as well as parts of Wales and Scotland by the early eighteenth century. Here it was combined with small scale pastoral farming. The

spinners who needed to supply the cloth industry, were more numerous than weavers and spread over a wider area: at least three spinners were needed to supply one weaver in the sixteenth century Kent broadcloth industry; although as spinning was normally done as a part-time activity by women the actual number of spinners employed would have been greater than this. Spinning was badly paid, at 2–3 pence a day when an agricultural labourer or a weaver could earn 8–10 pence, but it offered a useful supplement to household incomes (Thirsk, 1967: 864; Wrightson, 2000: 195). Rural, non-agricultural employment was provided not only by industries such as cloth production, but also by a myriad of craft and specialist occupations. Occupational evidence from the records of county courts in mid-sixteenth century Norfolk show that 43 per cent of the accused were farmers, 31 per cent labourers, and 25 per cent followed crafts or other specialisms. Of these 45 per cent worked with cloth and leather, 24 per cent were smiths or building trades, 18 per cent were in service trades such as butchers, bakers and pedlars, 9 per cent were specialist workers with livestock, such as shepherds, and 4 per cent were mariners and fishermen (Whittle, 2000: 236). All these households were likely to have some interest in farming as well as specialisms. Probate inventory evidence demonstrates that the mixed agrarian economy persisted into the early eighteenth century in areas such as Kent, where prosperous large farming households were also likely to be involved in food processing for sale, and various aspects of trade (Overton et al., 2004: 78). London, which accounted for 5 per cent of England's population by c.1600 and 11.5 per cent by c.1700, fuelled a diverse and highly commercialised rural economy across a large stretch of southern and eastern England (Wrigley, 1987: 162), as it had done to a lesser degree for centuries (Campbell et al., 1993).

Small family households did not necessarily mean that important kinship links were not maintained beyond the household. For instance, although large numbers of sons and daughters left home to work as servants before marriage, they still expected to receive an inheritance from their parents, and parents expected to have some influence over who their children married. Likewise, although the elderly did not typically live with their adult children, such children were still expected to contribute to their elderly parents' support and this might be enforced through the poor laws. Intergenerational relationships thus often extended beyond the household while remaining within a particular family.

One reason parents could exert influence over children's marriage choices was the continued dependence of offspring on the inheritance of land, moveable goods and money. Children from labouring families relied almost entirely on their own earnings to set up home at marriage, but those from wealthier homes expected a parental contribution. The dominant custom of inheritance for land was primogeniture, favouring the eldest son, although partible inheritance between sons and ultimogeniture, inheritance by the youngest son, were not unknown for customary landholdings. Partible inheritance was particularly common in Wales, even for leasehold tenancies (Howell, 2000: 34). In all areas, daughters inherited jointly in the absence of sons. The inequalities of primogeniture were mitigated somewhat by giving peripheral pieces of land or apprenticeships in craft occupations to younger sons, and providing daughters with dowries of moveable goods. From the mid-fifteenth century onwards ordinary

fathers used wills to tailor divisions of the family wealth between widow and children to their own designs, although the underlying principal of primogeniture remained strong. Daughters rarely received land, although there were regional variations: 26 per cent of daughters with brothers received land from their fathers in seventeenth century Yorkshire compared to only 4 per cent of all daughters in Norfolk in the sixteenth century (Whittle, 1998b: 42). Daughters' dowries were increasingly paid in cash rather than goods from the mid-sixteenth century onwards. Provision for widows showed a great deal of diversity. The most common custom was for the widow to receive one third of her husband's land for the duration of her life, but customs varied and joint land tenancy and wills could be used to give the widow more or less than this. Provision varied from maintenance agreements and cash annuities to complete control of the marital property. Overall, women were much less likely to hold land than men: in the century before the Black Death around 15–20 per cent of customary tenants were women, almost exclusively widows, falling to around 10 per cent from the fifteenth century onwards (Whittle, 1998b: 35–38).

3.3 The family and income

No household in rural Britain was an economic island in this period: all entered into exchange relationships with others, and the great majority also participated in a variety of markets. There were exchanges between different wealth and status groups with tenants paying rents to landlords, and farmers paying wages to the landless. But there were also exchanges between equals, including sales of tenancies, subletting of land, purchase of labour, skills, and products, and the lending of money. Rural inhabitants were not only pushed into market participation by the need to raise cash for rents or exchange cash wages for food; country dwellers also actively engaged in the market as a means of increasing wealth and independence. The rise in rural industrial production across Britain in this period connected workers with an international economy and increased their independence from traditional power relations that bound lords and tenants.

The extraction of wealth from tenants by lords has attracted a good deal of attention from historians, particularly for the middle ages. The extent to which such transfers dominated domestic economies has been challenged by a revisionist historiography, with historians reducing their assessment of the significance of tenant payments as a feature of seigneurial economies (see, for instance, Campbell and Bartley, 2006: 265–268). Attempts at modelling of peasant budgets suggest that while rent was only a small proportion of outgoings, it had a major defining influence where subsistence margins were so narrow. The wealthier English villagers c.1300 could certainly cope with rent, even if it was a significant portion of their income. Dyer's estimates for an unfree tenant of 30 acres in c.1300 show 37 per cent of surplus being paid to the lord as rent, although still allowing the tenant a small profit. Almost two centuries later a comparably secure tenant would have enjoyed a larger surplus into which rent would have made less significant inroads, accounting for c.20–25 per cent (Dyer, 1989: 115, 149). Tenants such as these were required to pay relatively high levels of rent, including

regular labour services. Poorer tenants and cottagers paid lower rents, but at the beginning of the fourteenth century would have seen a greater proportion of their surplus eaten into by these payments (Dyer, 1989: 136); extraordinary exaction such as death-duty payments (*heriot*), entry fines to land (*gersuma*) and marriage fines (*merchet*) could exert a significant impact upon the budgets of both wealthy and relatively poor tenants.

The old model of the medieval economy typically argued that it was the obligation to meet money rents that forced tenants into markets, selling their cash crops in order to generate coin. The peasant family was viewed as largely separated from the market, only venturing into it as necessity dictated, and in other respects dependent upon its own immediate resources for its consumption needs. The consensus is now that peasant market involvement as less an indirect product of seigneurial coercion and more a consequence of market-seeking activity on the part of both wealthier and poorer peasants and country-dwellers. There is no doubt that the market expanded in this period, with an initial burst of commercial activity and market growth associated especially with a 'long' thirteenth century (Britnell, 1993). During this period, and especially in parts of eastern, southern and central England, there was a dramatic growth in the number of physical markets, and strong evidence for the expansion of the economy.

One feature of the medieval rural economy which suggests real dynamism in this period is the land market. Historical investigation of land transfer in medieval England, which once focussed primarily upon *post-mortem* transfer and the inheritance of land, has since the early 1980s paid close attention to the peasant land market and *inter-vivos* transfer (Harvey, 1984; Smith, 1984). The chronology of a market in land has been pushed back. Where once a market in land was associated with a post-plague reallocation of resources and economic power in the later fourteenth and fifteenth century, recent work stresses an earlier market in land, in part driven by crisis but also by economic opportunity (Smith, 1984; Schofield, 1997; Campbell, 2006). There is good evidence of a market in peasant land from the thirteenth century, especially in parts of eastern England, and there is some suggestion that a market in small plots of land existed from even earlier. By the second half of the thirteenth century, a local land market in unfree (customary) land is well documented. In parts of East Anglia and the east Midlands plots of land, often of much less than an acre (< 0.4 hectare) in extent, were bought and sold in something close to an open market. By the high and later middle ages there is evidence for a fairly fluid transfer of parcels of land elsewhere in Britain. In parts of Wales a market in land was in existence from at least the early fourteenth century, with plots exchanged through a device similar to a perpetual gage of land (*tir prid*), a system operated in order to by-pass customary restrictions on the alienation of family land (Carr, 1982: 177–185; Smith, 1976). The tenant land market accelerated in the later middle ages (Harvey, 1977; Whittle, 2000). This was especially the case on those estates where alienation of holding, as well as the accumulation and fragmentation of tenements, had been originally fiercely resisted by lords, and perhaps in some instances also by local communities and families.

The tenant land market also changed in nature over time. Before the Black Death it typically involved the transfer of very small pieces of land *inter vivos*, with larger (but still small) holdings being transferred at death. This market led to the increased

fragmentation of farms, declining in size over time. The fifteenth century marked a high point in the market with land transfers increasing in size, and a very high number of transactions. In the sixteenth century transfers were larger in size but less frequent, fuelling the engrossment of farms (Whittle, 1998a). By the late sixteenth century the tenant land market had stagnated, and the active transfer of land moved to the level of sub-tenures using short term leases (French and Hoyle, 2007). Mortgages of customary land recorded in fifteenth and sixteenth century court rolls demonstrate that sophisticated financial instruments were used by quite humble tenants at this date to borrow money, often to fund further purchases of land (Whittle, 2000: 116–118). All this land exchange activity was much more characteristic of eastern England than the west, where a form of customary land tenure known as copyhold for lives offered tenants only a lifetime interest in their land, and precluded the right for tenants to make permanent alienations (Whittle, 1998a). In Scotland forms of tenure seem to have precluded an active peasant land market throughout the period. Leasehold was the dominant form of tenure, and small land transfers between tenants were rare (Whyte, 1995: 151).

England's land market, with clear evidence of relatively early activity, contrasts with a view of the rural family and household as largely self-contained and self-sustaining. In a famous essay on the Peterborough Abbey *Carte Nativorum* ('Charters of the Villeins'), M.M. Postan had suggested that the *inter-vivos* exchange of land in the thirteenth and early fourteenth century equated less to a market and more to a mutually sustaining system of reciprocal transfers, these transfers reflecting changes in the size of individual families and households. Postan, apparently following Chayanov, identified this as a 'respiration' of the household unit, its membership increasing and decreasing in a manner that created 'natural' buyers and sellers (Postan, 1960). While there was readjustment of holding size in order to meet the changing needs of family economies, it is also evident that realignments of landholding was not solely dependent upon family size. A direct equation of family and household size with landholding applies best to larger units intended to sustain a single family, the so-called *terra unius familie* of around 30 acres (12 hectares). However, the size of holdings across medieval Britain did not equate with such units and a large proportion of the medieval population lived on parcels of land of significantly smaller dimensions. The estimated proportion of smallholders in medieval England varies considerably; Kosminsky's analysis of the Hundred Rolls shows that there was a greater proportion of smallholders in the counties of eastern England than in midlands counties to the west. In Oxfordshire, in the late thirteenth century c. 78 per cent of peasant households lived on holdings capable of sustaining them while in Cambridgeshire this was the case for only 44 per cent of peasant tenants (Kosminsky, 1956: 217–218; Campbell, 2006). In the fifteenth century, the size of holdings increased as population declined and the leasing out of land previously farmed directly by lords made land relatively plentiful for tenants. Despite some land lying vacant, smallholding persisted throughout this period in eastern England, perhaps because relatively high wages and the spread of rural industry encouraged some householders not to enlarge their farms (Poos, 1991). Despite renewed population growth in the sixteenth century, the average farm size continued to grow. By the early seventeenth century holdings of 100 acres (40 hectares) were quite common among the village elite, creating a class

of wealthy yeomen farmers, virtually unknown in the medieval period when 30 acres constituted a large landholding. Smallholdings continued to exist in certain locations up to the eighteenth century, particularly in localities with plentiful common grazing land (Spufford, 1974). But over much of southern and eastern England smallholders were replaced by completely landless labourers in the late sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. In the medieval period landholdings were smallest in eastern England and the counties around London; by the early eighteenth century these regions were characterised by large farms. The north and west of England, which had relatively large landholdings in the medieval period, saw less change, and small to medium sized farms remained common up to the nineteenth century (Shaw-Taylor, 2005).

Disparities in holding size and differences in wealth had consequences for market involvement. Even in the medieval period, while the more substantial tenants and farmers engaged with the market as investors and entrepreneurs, small-holders and the landless were also reliant upon the market for employment and to provide them with a major or even absolute foundation to their subsistence. Wealthier rural households, from those of peasant elites to the more substantial landholders, including gentry and nobility, employed the market as an outlet for produce and as a means of investment. The market provided labour for farms and households, it allowed landholders to sell the product of their estates and to purchase additional goods, including relative luxuries. In earlier centuries there is less evidence for a high-level engagement with the market; in the late eleventh century, food farms and a system of rents founded upon the consumption needs of landlords tended to predominate in the medieval countryside (Lennard, 1959: 271). Throughout the period, poorer rural dwellers must have engaged with the market, in search of labouring opportunities and in order to sell their own produce. Even before the thirteenth century small craftsmen and petty retailers were present in the countryside. Their numbers are likely to have increased with the population growth of the high middle ages and later centuries saw the proportion of this cohort grow further, an increase associated with a rising standard of living and a redistribution of landholding. Cloth-making in parts of eastern England and the south-west in the high and late middle ages illustrates the extent to which men and women in the countryside could be drawn into activity largely dependent upon the market, and the same was also true for other kinds of activity, including fishing, mining and pastoral husbandry (see, for example, Bailey, 2007: 153–160).

The strongest evidence for commercialised farming in the medieval period comes from the records of demesne farms managed directly by lords. Campbell finds that the majority of demesne farms were 'strongly commercialised' selling 40 per cent or more of their produce, and/or generating an income of £10 or more for each 100 acres sown in the period 1288–1315 (Campbell, 2000: 206–207). Peasants also certainly marketed a proportion of their crops and livestock. Indirect evidence from the increased regional specialisation of agricultural production in early modern England indicates that marketing networks continued to develop in that period. Whereas crops had been grown in all parts of the country in the medieval period, upland areas of the north and west increasingly concentrated on livestock farming, often combined with rural industry, from the mid-sixteenth century onwards (Thirsk, 1987).

The degree of market involvement experienced by rural households in early modern England is best illustrated from the perspective of some hypothetical households of different levels of wealth in c.1600. As already discussed, the smallholder was heavily involved in the market. The male head of household worked for wages as an agricultural labourer, or else in other similarly paid crafts such as thatching or plain tailoring. His wife added to their income by raising chickens and eggs for sale and spinning. Despite a plot of land to grow a small amount of grain, vegetables and fruit, and owning a cow and pig, lack of time and equipment made them dependent on the market for everyday foodstuffs. The number of bakers and taverns in rural England, and rarity of ovens, brewing vats and milk churns in poorer households suggest dietary basics such as bread, beer and hard cheese were purchased. The large farmer or yeoman was also dependent on the market, for the sale of produce and the purchasing of labour. Such households employed between two and eight live-in servants, as well as day labourers at times of peak demand such as sheep shearing and the hay and corn harvests. Servant labour, space and equipment allowed such households to add value by processing some agricultural products, such as milk which was made into hard cheese; and to save money by providing the family and workforce with bread and beer made on the farm. Purchases such as soap, starch, candles and pewter were products of England's industrial economy, while some foodstuffs, such as dried fruit, came from further afield. The rural gentry had some direct access to foodstuffs, receiving grain as tithes payments or in lieu of money rent, and often keeping their own livestock in a home farm. They were significant employers of servants, with five to twenty in each household, and employed a wide range of craftsmen and day labourers to maintain their house and estate. Their income from tenants' money rents was spent partly in the local economy: buying the food products and services that local farmers and craftsmen could offer, but also further afield in regional cities or most of all in London. From these centres came high quality textiles and tailoring, household furnishings, and imported foodstuffs such as wine, sugar and dried fruit. By the late seventeenth century imported goods such as exotic woods, tea, tobacco and china were increasingly common in houses of English yeomen, tradesmen and gentlemen, indicating the degree to which such households were now connected into an international economy (Overton et al., 2004). Welsh inventories show a less elaborate domestic environment and fewer foreign goods, although raising cattle for fattening in England tied small producers into the national economy (Howell, 2000: 39).

The buying and selling of land, labour, and goods was oiled by complex relations of debt and credit. Evidence from early modern probate inventories and accounts show that multiple debts owing to and from individuals were the norm rather than the exception (Spufford, 1990: 139–174). Young men and women lent out their inheritance and saved wages to earn interest in the years before marriage. Farmers and tradesmen borrowed and lent money to and from each other. Wealthy widows engaged in money-lending on a larger scale. Evidence of this active credit economy stretches back to the medieval period with manorial court rolls recording evidence of money lending in the village economy, including small-scale exchange but also significant credit agreements, involving labour, cash, and goods (for instance, Schofield and Mayhew, 2002).

Given the well developed markets in land, goods and credit in late medieval and early modern Britain, it is no surprise that there was also an extensive labour market. The poll tax returns of the late fourteenth century indicate a high proportion of adult men in southern and eastern England were wage earners, perhaps not much different from the early sixteenth century figures provided by the more detailed subsidy and muster returns, which reveal a proportion of around 30 per cent for eastern England. Both the number of wage earners, and extent to which they were wholly dependent on wages increased throughout the early modern period. In early modern Scotland the completely landless were less common, but there was a numerous class of cottars who worked for larger tenants (Whyte, 1995: 151). In all parts of Britain the labour force was made up of a mixture of unmarried live-in servants, and married labouring householders. The supply of labour was influenced by demographic change: low wages indicate an oversupply of labour when population levels were high, high wages indicate shortages of labour when population levels fell. Clark's recent estimates of changing real wages illustrate the impact of population change on rural standards of living. Using data on agricultural wages and the cost of living dating from 1209 and 1860 he estimated the real wages of agricultural workers across England. During the whole period, real wages hit their lowest point in 1316, during the last great famine to effect England, at just 29 per cent of their level in the 1860s. Real wages rose sharply after the Black Death, from 40 per cent in 1348 to 80 per cent in 1350, and reached their highest point in the mid-fifteenth century with a peak of 145 per cent in 1464. Population growth during the sixteenth century caused a gradual decline, hitting a low again in 1609 at 50 per cent. Real wages then remained low until the early nineteenth century, fluctuating at between around 50 per cent and 80 per cent of their 1860s level, only exceeding 80 per cent in six years during the whole period, and never reaching 90 per cent (Clark, 2007: 109, 130–134). However, access to land also had an important influence, as those with their own land were less inclined to work for others. Household structures were also significant: life-cycle servants provided wage labour and experienced a rather different type of labour market. Levels of migration affected the supply of labour on a local and seasonal basis. Finally, the presence of labour laws demonstrates the discomfort of the English government with the idea of a free market in labour, a point discussed further below. The laws sought to eliminate unemployment and regulate the mobility and wages of workers.

3.4 The family, the local community and the state

Rural society in late medieval and early modern Britain was neither homogenous nor particularly isolated or immune from exogenous impact. The rural population was composed of households of different levels of wealth and status, and there was a great deal of variation between different villages. Villagers engaged in active systems of local administration, performing roles as constables, reeves, jurors, church wardens, and overseers of the poor. As such they maintained law and order, regulated agriculture and administered poor relief. Within the sphere of the local community, wealthy householders had considerable power over the poor and landless. Wealthy

villagers feared the burden of poor relief created by the presence of numerous landless households, but they welcomed the availability of cheap wage labour. Given this, there is surprisingly little evidence of migrant labour. Scraps of evidence from the seventeenth century suggest large arable farmers may often have relied on seasonal harvest workers from elsewhere within the same county or region. Henry Best, a gentleman farmer in early seventeenth century east Yorkshire, employed 'moor-folk' from the North Yorkshire Moors at harvest time, while an observer in 1664 noted that corn farmers in Kent 'invite many stout workmen hither from the neighbouring country to get in their harvest' (Everitt, 1967: 434). By the late eighteenth century and possibly earlier, Welsh labourers travelled across England to find work in the summer months: women in particular worked in the market gardens around London (Howell, 2000: 85).

In England by the late seventeenth century trends towards the engrossment of farms, and the pressure of the poor laws, had led to the emergence of 'open' and 'close' villages. 'Close' villages were dominated by a few large farmers. The poor law system which levied rates at parish level to support poor labouring households, encouraged rate-payers to restrict the number of cottage dwellers without land who worked for wages. As a result such villages lacked an adequate labour supply at peak times such as harvest. 'Close' villages were most common in arable farming areas but did occur in all regions. 'Open' villages were those where multiple smallholdings remained and no clique of large landholders dominated. Here there were few restrictions on creating new dwellings. Over time there was a gradual population movement from close to open villages, which were more common in the west and north of England. Open villages were more likely to be centres of rural industry, which soaked up some of the surplus labour available in these communities (Wrightson, 2000: 171–172). Poor law administration also had a more direct impact on population movement via the Settlement Laws, first introduced in 1662. These laws made residency for at least a year a condition of receiving poor relief from a particular parish. They not only discouraged established householders from allowing new labouring families to settle permanently in a parish, but also discouraged the employment of servants for longer than just under one year. By encouraging people to remain in their parish of birth, it may well have dampened population mobility over time (Hindle, 2004: 311). Nonetheless, throughout the period population mobility was high. Evidence from church courts demonstrate that in East Anglia between the fifteenth and early eighteenth centuries only 22–24 per cent of men were 'life-time stayers' resident in the parish in which they were born. There was only slightly more stability in southern and midland England in the seventeenth century, with 34 per cent of rural male deponents being lifetime stayers.

All rural communities and their households were connected to higher social and political powers: to landlords, the church and the state. These powers not only took wealth from rural communities in the form of rent, religious dues and taxation, but also sought to administer law over them. England had a complex legal system in which landlords, church and state all administered courts whose business touched the local community. While they were certainly subject to unequal power relations, and awarded little formal political power, rural dwellers were not as isolated from or ignorant of politics. A series of large-scale popular rebellions between 1381 and 1549 demonstrate

the political agency of ordinary rural people, not only in their ability to organise independently, but also their awareness of national political and religious issues. In terms of family and community it is useful to consider some of the more immediate ways in which ordinary people were subject to, but also capable of influencing, a range of institutions.

The most familiar is lordship. All rural dwellers were, to some degree or other, forced into contact with landlords. While for many this only meant paying a small cash rent to the lord, at the other extreme was a lord and tenant relationship founded upon the servility of the tenant. Serfdom remained a legal reality into the early modern period, with sixteenth-century landlords making direct reference to their bondsmen, but the heyday of servile tenures was the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries. The latest estimates suggest that around 25 per cent of the English population was servile in this period, although in some communities in certain parts of England and Wales the proportion was much higher. For these tenants and their families, the consequences of servility varied from slight to severe. As already discussed, lords could make considerable demands of a family's resources; they could also exert a degree of control over mobility, education and marriage. In this respect lordship was greatly aided by central authority and a developing common law of villeinage which established a legal and intellectual foundation for the obligations of villeinage and their consequences (Hyams, 1980). For many more rural dwellers, however, lordship was relatively benign; the free tenantry, including within their ranks small-holders, might enjoy a degree of autonomy and low fixed rents. Freehold rents were generally lower than customary rents, although some new freeholds created out of asserted waste in the late thirteenth and early fourteenth century owed very high rents. Leasehold rents were set at market determined rates: at times of low demand for land, such as the fifteenth century, these could be lower than customary rents. For example, in eastern Norfolk in 1494–1529 freehold rents were typically between 1 and 4 pence an acre, customary rents were 7–12 pence an acre, and leasehold 8–12 pence (Whittle, 2000: 69).

Throughout the period the church was capable of exerting its influence on family and community. Tithes payments were ubiquitous, although poorly documented in comparison to some other parts of Europe (for a detailed study of surviving tithe data for one English region in the middle ages, see Dodds, 2006). The parish was an important administrative unit, drawing parishioners into the social world of church, and from the late sixteenth century, providing the framework for administering the poor laws. The church influenced the family directly by shaping the marriage ceremony and policing sexual behaviour in the church courts. We might usefully and briefly concentrate on one aspect of the church's involvement in rural society, namely the extension of the sacrament of marriage and its regulation. The absorption of a canon law 'ideal' of marriage has significant implications for a demographic history of the family, given the importance of nuptiality and fertility to the demographic regime. The weight attached at canon law to choice, natural law and the rights of both partners, even if limited by other customary constraints (family, lordship etc.), had significant implications for property transfer and the organisation of structures intended to regulate such transfer. These last included both marriage fines which were possibly

aimed at curbing unrestrained redistribution of property and legal devices the purpose of which was to secure female rights in property (see the discussion in Smith, 1986; Smith, 2007; for discussion of canon law of marriage and its application in medieval England, see the essays in Sheehan, 1996). In this respect, a theorised discussion of marriage within the church had significant and long-lasting implications for family formation and the transmission of property within the family. Not least, a canon law regulation of marriage may, for example, have helped to contain fertility, a common respect for the sacrament potentially reducing the incidence of extra-marital sex and the frequency of illegitimate births.

The generalities of this relationship between church and people extended across medieval Europe; however, the burgeoning English state established a rather more particular relationship with rural dwellers during the middle ages. In the development of its legal systems and of its systems of taxation, medieval government engaged closely with all sections of its population. Taxation and military service based on landholding in the high middle ages, as exemplified by the Domesday Book in the eleventh century, increasingly gave way to a relationship based more directly upon moveable goods and people. The taxation reforms of the thirteenth century, especially those during the reign of Edward I (1272–1307), established moveable goods as the basis of assessing wealth and property in the lay subsidies; later medieval experiments with taxation included the introduction of *per capita* taxation in the poll-taxes of the later fourteenth century. These were much disliked, and the experiment was short-lived, after the third poll tax led to the outbreak of large-scale popular revolt in 1381. Popular resistance, or at least the threat of it, seems to have discouraged further innovations and kept government impositions down. The burden of taxation remained relatively light in comparison to other European countries until the Civil War of the mid-seventeenth century. After the mid-sixteenth century, poor and labouring households were largely exempt, the gentry and nobility were taxed but tended to be under-assessed, leaving those of middling wealth with a disproportionate burden. In the second half of the seventeenth century the medieval tax structures were abandoned, and new forms of indirect taxation, taxes of hearths and windows, poll taxes and the land tax, spread the burden of taxation more widely and raised larger overall revenues.

A direct consequence of these forms of taxation, especially the generally efficient medieval and early Tudor lay subsidies, was to set in place mechanisms capable of extracting an identified proportion of resources from family and household. This drew rural dwellers into the processes of government as administrators and local assessors. The structures of English law also involved the village elite in administration in the high and later middle ages (Schofield, 2003). Later centuries saw the development and extension of this administrative responsibility at a local level, supporting governmental mechanisms for the regulation of labour and the treatment of the poor (for example, McIntosh, 1998). The Ordinance of Labourers of 1349 and Statute of Labourers of 1351 set wages and prices at their level before the plague struck, ordered the unemployed to enter service, increased the penalties for breaking contracts, and in its only concession to the rights of manorial lords, gave lords the first call in employing their own tenants. There is plentiful evidence that these laws were enforced in the fourteenth century, at

least in eastern England where wage labour was most common, even though historians struggle to agree over the significance of their impact. There is little evidence for the fifteenth century, but by the mid-sixteenth century, the labour laws were once again being enforced in eastern England. The laws were renewed and updated in the 1563 Statute of Artificers, which was particularly concerned with servants and apprentices. It left in place the measures for regulating contracts, wages, which were now set annually by county courts, and to force the unemployed into compulsory service. It strengthened the regulation of mobility, requiring servants between contracts to carry testimonial letters authorised by a village constable and two other householders. Those without such letters were liable to punishment as vagrants. These laws remained in active use until at least the early eighteenth century (Whittle, 2000: 287–296). Village constables chosen from among the larger tenants, first appear in the late fourteenth century, and had responsibilities for enforcing the labour laws and other royal statutes, as well as some aspects of tax collection. Alongside the long term demographic cycles therefore, there was another trend, the gradual replacement of the authority of landlords and the church with that of the central government and its administration.

3.5 Conclusions

Alan Macfarlane has argued that from at least c.1250 England was occupied not by peasants but by ‘rampant individualists’ engaged in a commercial economy. While it is true that there is plenty of evidence of early involvement in markets by the ordinary population of England, and that devices for inheritance backed by the church gave the household head the right to disinherit his offspring, it is clearly wrong to see rural England as unchangingly commercial in the centuries up to 1750. Medieval England was characterised by small landholdings, a diffuse but varied manorial system, and personal serfdom for a significant proportion of the population. The late fourteenth and fifteenth centuries saw a significant restructuring of rural society, with an increase in the size of landholdings and wealth amongst the ordinary population and a weakening of the manorial system and old aristocracy. The sixteenth and seventeenth centuries were a period of increased commercialisation. Agricultural specialisation and the quantity of produce marketed were extended significantly. Farms became larger. The labouring population lost their access to land, and middling groups of rural society prospered. The English elite became increasingly capitalist in outlook. New imported goods such as dried fruit, sugar, tea became everyday necessities for the bulk of the population. An increasingly large section of the rural population was engaged in by-employments producing raw materials or goods for import. There is less evidence for Wales and Scotland, but we know that by 1750, they like England, had commercialized agrarian economies and rural industrial production, and were both increasingly drawn into the global economy.

And, of course, this is not to say, as this chapter has in part explored, that features of nascent commercialism and a market-driven economy were not evident much earlier. Recent research has emphasised for medieval England, but less so to date for Wales and Scotland, the commercialisation of its economy and the implications of

that for its society. Throughout the period studied here, family remained a crucial component in the economic and social history of Britain, significant as a foundation to social structure, as a primary mechanism for property transfer, and as a determinant of economic change. Though it is reasonable to propose a decline in the overall significance of family, the extent of that decline, the variety of degree of change across the period as well as across sub-regions of England, Scotland and Wales, challenges any comfortable generalisations.

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George Morland, *Evening or the Sportsman's Return*, c.1795 (British Museum, London)

4 Britain, 1750–2000

Samantha WILLIAMS

The last two hundred and fifty years have been a period of fundamental transformation for farming and agricultural families in Britain. The unprecedented changes wrought by industrialisation and urbanisation changed the landscape, farming institutions and family life. The period experienced ‘revolutions’ in agriculture, industry, industriousness, population, and consumerism. Agrarian capitalism was firmly established by the mid-nineteenth century, while the agricultural workforce became more masculine and contracted sharply. Manufacturing boomed and busted and has largely been replaced by the service economy. More people began to live in towns and cities than in the countryside and this trend has continued throughout the twentieth century. The ‘demographic transition’ of the later nineteenth and twentieth centuries has resulted in a much smaller family size, and this has had important implications for women’s work, while the population is also ageing and bringing with it challenges for the distribution of resources. All these factors have had a profound influence upon rural and agrarian families. The regions under study in this chapter are England, Wales, and Scotland, with some reference to Ireland.

4.1 The family and demography

It has been a long-held assumption that families and their households in the pre-industrial past were larger and extended, but analysis of one hundred English household listings (census-like documents surviving for the period 1574–1821) has revealed that household structure was, in fact, primarily nuclear (rather than extended or complex). Mean household size was small at 4.8, but of course there was considerable variety around this mean. Also false was the assumption that the simple nuclear family household was a product of industrialisation. In pre-industrial English communities households tended to be larger the more servants, apprentices, and sojourners were present, whereas the incidence of children or even of kin had little bearing on mean household size. 29 per cent of households contained servants; many were agricultural, rather than domestic, and as many were men as women down to the 1800s. A small proportion of households took in lodgers in pre-industrial communities and this increased during the nineteenth century: in 1851 10 per cent of households in rural Lancashire (northern England) took in lodgers and approximately one-fifth of households in industrial towns. There were mutual economic advantages of lodging arrangements for both lodgers and their hosts and female headed households in particular took in lodgers to make ends meet, especially in towns and cities (Humphries, 2004: 241–250). Household dynamics therefore rested upon not just the biological/kinship links within a family but also the wider co-residential household, including these servants and lodgers. Indeed, during the eighteenth century the term ‘family’ referred to all household members (Tadmor, 2001). During the nineteenth century,

MAP 4.1 Britain, 1750–2000



however, there was increasing social distance between the biological family and other members of the household. This gradual separation of ‘master and man and missus and maid’ increased as the century progressed and as one moved up the scale of farms (Howkins, 1991).

While the number of simple family households in a given community may have been the largest single category, more of the population actually lived in larger, complex households. Life-cycle is important here: small households became larger and more complex at certain stages before shrinking or perhaps dissolving. In nineteenth-century rural Kent (in the far south-east of England), for instance, the family economies of small farmers, dealers, traders and craftsmen were particularly adaptable to the needs of kin and responded by either expanding or contracting. Such households encouraged longer-term residence, due to their better resources and ties of inheritance, while extension was a short-term arrangement for impoverished labouring families. Indeed, in Kent between 45 and 56 per cent of the elderly lived with a child or other kin. Kinship links also extended far beyond the household to relatives living nearby or further a field. Family relationships were far wider than that of any domicile. In one Kentish community, for instance, 60–70 per cent of households were related in some way and Reay argues that ‘families had kin all about them’ and ‘kinship was part of neighbourhood’ (Reay, 2004: 167). Such evidence reminds us that we should not become fixated with the nuclear family and that the extended family was not unimportant. Analysis of eighteenth-century diaries, conduct treatises and popular novels has also revealed the pervasive, strong and durable ‘friendship’ relationships, which went beyond near and distant kin ‘friends’ to non-related employers, patrons, neighbours, and intimate personal companions and that such links were often the most significant relationships in an individual’s life (Tadmor, 2001).

One of the ‘revolutions’ of this period was the massive growth in population (table 4.1). In the later seventeenth century the population of Britain had been static, but by the early nineteenth century the population was growing more rapidly than at any earlier or later period. Due to innovative use of parish register evidence trends in population totals, fertility, mortality, and marriage frequency between the sixteenth and the early nineteenth centuries are much clearer than the estimates for the earlier period covered in the previous chapter. After 1700 the trend in population size in Britain was one of great increase: rising from 6.5 million in 1680, to 18.5 million in 1840 and by 1990 it had reached some 56 million (Wrigley, 2004: 57–58). How do we account for this rise in population? A convincing argument is that the motor of such growth was accounted for primarily by fertility (some 64 per cent of growth) and that it was changes in patterns of marriage – notably falling age at first marriage, plus a greater proportion of the population marrying – that increased the number of children born. Average marriage ages fell by 2.5 years for brides and their grooms: from 26.0 to 23.5 and from 27.6 to 25.1 respectively. The proportion of ‘young marriers’ (aged under 25) increased markedly. With rapidly rising fertility, the proportion of children under 15 in the population increased from a low point well under 30 per cent in the 1660s to 40 per cent in the 1820s. In addition, the proportion of all first births which were prenuptially conceived and those that were illegitimate both increased from about

Table 4.1: Population in England and Wales, Scotland and Ireland, 1751–1999 (millions)

	England and Wales	Scotland	Ireland
1751	6.5		
1761	6.7		
1771	7.2		
1781	7.5		
1791	8.3		
1801	8.9	1.6	5.2
1811	10.2	1.8	6.0
1821	12.0	2.1	6.8
1831	13.9	2.4	7.8
1841	15.9	2.6	8.2
1851	17.9	2.9	6.5
1861	20.1	3.1	5.8
1871	22.7	3.4	5.4
1881	26.0	3.7	5.2
1891	29.0	4.0	4.7
1901	32.5	4.5	4.5
1911	36.1	4.8	4.4
1921	37.9	4.9	4.3 (1926)
1931	40.0	4.8	4.3 (1936)
1951	43.8	5.1	4.3
1961	46.1	5.2	4.3
1971	48.7	5.2	4.5
1981	49.1	5.1	4.9
1991	51.1	5.1	5.1
1999	53.3	5.1	5.4

Note: Census returns are only available from 1801; the figures for 1751-1791 are estimates based on data contained in the Parish Register Abstracts for baptisms, burials and marriages for England and Wales only. There is no data available for 1941. Irish figures are based on census returns in 1926 and 1936. Figures for Ireland after 1911 represent the combined population totals for Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland.

Source: Cook and Stevenson, 2001: 151–152.

7 per cent in the later seventeenth century to about 25 per cent in the early nineteenth century. The stillbirth rate also fell in the same period, which accounts for a rise in marital fertility (Wrigley, 2004: 68–79). What was truly extraordinary of England in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries was the ability of rising population not to bring about a ‘Malthusian crash’, in which population outstrips resources. This is attributable to the long-term transformation of the English economy during industrialisation from an organic to a mineral-based economy. Thus, England had broken with Hajnal’s north-west European marriage pattern, characterised by low proportions marrying, high numbers of life-long spinsters, relatively late age at marriage and the relatively late age of mothers at child-bearing.

The decline in age at marriage and the substantial growth of population during the eighteenth century could be related, in part, to both proto-industrialisation and proletarianisation. Proto-industrialisation is presumed to have encouraged larger family size since children could be economically active from an early age in households producing for the market, although the costs of investing in or renting machinery were important to the timing of marriage and proto-industrial employment could actually keep young adults at home and delay their marriages. Proletarianisation was the achievement of regular and stable wages as agricultural (and industrial) labourers at a relatively early age and the literature is persuasive that such employment led to earlier family formation (King and Timmins, 2001; Goldstone, 1986: 20–30). Marriage at an early age and the birth of more children impoverished landless families relying upon daily or weekly agricultural wages.

It is clear that population also increased due to improvements in mortality during the eighteenth century. Life expectancy rose by nine years between the late seventeenth century and 1841, from 31 to 40 (Wrigley, 2004: 64). Levels of infant mortality in rural England were comparatively low by pre-industrial European standards and fell from the mid-eighteenth century. There were improvements for adults after 1700 and such improvements were sustained into the early nineteenth century. Child mortality, however, deteriorated. Improvements were not uniform by place and life expectancy actually fell in some large cities during the early nineteenth century (Voth, 2004). Life expectancy did not recover to its 1820s figure again until the 1870s.

Both Scottish and Welsh early modern demography are constrained by the inadequacy of records and the same level of detail cannot be reconstructed (Devine, 2004; Wrigley, 2004). In 1700 Scotland had an estimated population of little more than a million, or one-fifth of that of England. The topography of Scotland is very different to that of England and much of the country is dominated by mountain and moorland. This has affected the distribution of inhabitants, with the main concentrations of population in the more fertile lowland regions, although population was more widely dispersed in the eighteenth century than the nineteenth. Compared to England there were modest but sustained increases in population from 1.3 million in the 1750s, to nearly 2.9 million by 1851, and to 5 million by 1951. In the post-war period population has remained almost static (Devine, 2004: 413; Lee, 2004: 429).

The Victorian period was one of significant transition as both fertility and mortality declined (Table 4.2). In the third quarter of the nineteenth century the secular decline

Table 4.2: Birth and death rates per thousand in England and Wales, 1751–1990

	Births	Deaths
1751-55	33.0	24.6
1756-60	31.9	25.8
1761-65	33.5	28.3
1766-70	33.9	27.7
1771-75	34.9	25.5
1776-80	35.8	26.6
1781-85	34.9	27.8
1786-90	36.9	25.2
1791-95	37.2	26.1
1796-1800	35.5	24.8
1801-05	37.6	24.1
1806-10	37.9	23.7
1811-15	39.2	23.3
1816-20	39.5	23.5
1821-25	40.2	23.7
1826-30	37.3	22.4
1831-35	36.0	22.4
1836-40	35.3	22.5
1841-45	35.2	21.4
1846-50	34.8	23.3
1851-55	35.5	22.7
1856-60	35.5	21.8
1861-65	35.8	22.6
1866-70	35.7	22.4
1871-75	35.7	22.0
1876-80	35.4	20.8
1881-85	33.5	19.4
1886-90	31.4	18.9
1891-95	30.5	18.7
1895-1900	29.3	17.7
1901-05	28.2	16.1
1906-10	26.3	14.7

	Births	Deaths
1911-15	23.6	14.3
1916-20	20.1	14.4
1921-25	19.9	12.1
1926-30	16.7	12.1
1931-35	15.0	12.0
1936-40	14.7	12.2
1941-45	15.9	12.8
1946-50	18.0	11.8
1951-55	15.3	11.7
1956-60	16.4	11.6
1961-65	18.1	11.8
1966-70	16.9	11.7
1971-75	13.4	11.7
1976-80	12.1	11.7
1981-85	12.7	11.7
1986-90	13.0	11.4

Sources: 1751–1840: Wrigley, 2004: 64; 1841–1890: Cook and Stevenson, 2001: 152–153.

in mortality began and has been such that, in the past 150 years, life expectancy at birth has doubled. From the 1870s fertility fell sharply until around the 1940s. While previous increases in fertility had been driven by patterns of marriage, the post-1870 decline in fertility was largely driven by fertility within marriage (Baines and Woods, 2004). New parents in the 1900s had only half as many children as their parents and their own children had only two-thirds as many children as they had (Thane, 1994: 94–95). Patterns of decline were highly regional and could depend upon occupation. Fertility fell early and fastest for textile workers and others in their environ, while for coal miners and their families the decline in family size came much later. The highest fertility continued to be experienced by agricultural labourers, but even for these families fertility was falling. Farmers and more skilled farm hands experienced much sharper declines in their fertility, while they also employed fewer hands on their land (Garrett, 2001). This has resulted in a ‘modern’ twentieth-century family life-cycle pattern, whereby fewer children were born and children were more likely to live beyond infancy, mothers had their first child at a much younger age and children were clustered in the earlier years of marriage (Anderson, 1985). This means that married couples have had a longer period together in a childless house and more knew their grandchildren. One of the biggest impacts of changing family patterns is on women’s work. Following World War II, women have had two periods of employment: one while they were single and then, because child-rearing has been squeezed into a relatively

short time span early in women's lives, a second period when their children are older. This has largely accounted for the massive rise in part-time employment since 1945. This has generally been outside agriculture in the service sector. Since the 1970s more couples have chosen to cohabit than to marry. In the later twentieth century, family life has attained 'new' characteristics of age-gradedness and predictability, due to a uniform education system, uniform retirement plan, age specific definitions of infancy, childhood, adulthood and old age (Anderson, 1985).

In the late twentieth century families have been much more commonly disrupted by marital breakdown and divorce than by the death of a spouse. Pre-twentieth century disruptions through death affected children more frequently than modern marriage breakdowns because death struck parents and the childless indiscriminately. Rising life expectancy in the twentieth century has also meant that Britain has an ageing population, with all its implications for the labour market and state welfare provision. Many of the elderly are resident in rural areas.

Another important aspect to demographic patterns is trends in migration. It is now firmly established in the historiography that early modern Britain was a highly mobile society, particularly when compared with other European countries and mobility increased even further after 1750 with industrialisation and urbanisation (Wrigley, 2004; Baines and Woods, 2004). There were, of course, seasonal patterns of migration as people moved for harvest work in grain growing areas or for more specialised crops such as hop- and fruit-picking (Thirsk, 1997). This was particularly prevalent down the east coast of England and Scotland. Temporary and seasonal migration from the Highlands of Scotland to supplement income had been common practice since the seventeenth century and continued into the Victorian period. Young women found employment as domestic servants, in textile manufacturing and fish processing, while men undertook seasonal agricultural work and in railway construction (Lee, 2004).

In England and Wales there was considerable migration to the high wage industrialising and urbanising areas, but despite such movement there was a significant labour surplus in the low-wage regions. Disparate population growth was driven by migration from slower growing to faster growing areas and the geography of population growth was very closely related to the employment opportunities available for men outside agriculture (Wrigley, 2004). Between 1851 and 1911 4 million people migrated out of the rural districts of England and Wales. This 'rural exodus' and 'flight from the land' was largely voluntary as labourers moved away to industry, towns or emigrated. London and the eight largest northern cities gained 1.6 million people through migration, 118 other towns gained over 370,000, and mining districts gained 568,000, while 1.5 million persons emigrated (Boyer, 2004: 281). The underemployment and seasonal unemployment that was endemic in much of rural society up to the 1850s had largely disappeared by 1900. Labour-saving methods and machinery were used on the land due to the dearth of labour (Thompson, 1991). Living standards were affected by the vast rural-urban migration. Workers who migrated from rural to urban areas usually experienced not only higher real wages but also higher mortality. In 1861–1870 life expectancy at birth was 46.5 years in rural England and Wales, 37.7 in London and 33–34 in other large cities (Boyer, 2004: 281). Migration transferred

spending power, too, which in turn contributed to the persistence of relative wealth in the high wage areas. Migrants were usually young and skilled workers. The family could play an important role in providing assistance, social introductions and employment opportunities for relatives. In eastern England, transatlantic emigrants moving within or part of a family were never a majority of emigrants, but in northern Scotland up to 80 per cent of emigrants were families and the majority of those leaving were agricultural labourers (Shürer, 1991). In the twentieth century the movement has been out of cities into the suburbs.

Urbanisation occurred earlier than in most other European countries. The proportion of the population living in towns and cities (5,000 or more inhabitants) more than doubled, from 26 per cent in 1776 to 56.4 per cent 80 years later (Wrigley, 2004: 88; Voth, 2004: 284). Since 1851 the experience for the majority has been urban. The pre-1700 old tripartite urban hierarchy of London, the regional and county centres, and small market towns was replaced with an increasingly diffuse system. These urban centres were joined by commercial and industrial cities like Birmingham, Manchester, Leeds and Glasgow, plus specialist towns incorporating resort and leisure centres, industrial towns, Atlantic ports and navel towns, as well as middle-rank and market towns. The new industrial cities changed the urban hierarchy radically. In 1670 London, Norwich, Bristol, York and Newcastle were the top five largest cities, but by 1801 Bristol had slipped to fifth place in ten, Newcastle to ninth, and Norwich to tenth. All the others in the top 10 were newcomers: Manchester, Liverpool and Birmingham, Leeds, Sheffield, Plymouth, and Glasgow (Wrigley, 2004: 90). Implementation of the nineteenth-century public health acts eventually improved the sanitary conditions in cities and there have been repeated bouts of slum clearance in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Improved transportation enabled large-scale suburbanisation. After World War II planned, ‘new towns’ were built in an attempt to reduce migration to existing cities. However, in the later twentieth century concerns have been expressed about urban encroachment on rural areas and measures have been put in place to protect surrounding ‘green belt’ land.

There were important movements of people within and between the countries making up the United Kingdom. During and following the famine in Ireland in the 1850s many Irish migrated to the industrialising areas of England and Scotland. By the 1850s 7 per cent of Scottish population were born in Ireland, more than twice the proportion of England. While the Irish were moving to Scotland, many Scots left for England; in the 1840s over three-quarters of those crossing the England/Scotland border were Scots moving south. Migration within Scotland decisively altered the demographic profile in favour of the Central Lowlands and the cities of Glasgow, Edinburgh and Dundee. There were, of course, additional, uniquely Scottish, reasons for a rapid rise in internal migration, with the first clearances for sheep and the transfer of people from inland straths to the coastlands as the new crofting system was established (see below). The Scots and the Irish also chose, in very large numbers, to leave Scotland and Ireland altogether and there was a large-scale exodus across the Atlantic. Indeed, Scottish and Irish emigration per head of population represented one of the largest outflows recorded in western Europe, comparable only to the Norwegians. The loss of

population in Scotland resulted in a decline in the marriage rate and an ageing population for those who remained, particularly in rural counties (Devine, 2004: 400; Lee, 2004: 430–434). Britain as a whole was a net exporter of people in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, primarily to the colonies. After 1945 there was large-scale black and Asian immigration to Britain from New Commonwealth countries and more immigrants have settled in towns and cities than in rural areas.

4.2 The family and its members

An enduring characteristic across this period is that farmers and their families have formed a relatively socially closed group. This was particularly true in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, but it has endured into the twentieth century. In a survey of 1944 81 per cent of farmers who responded were the sons of farmers. Furthermore, the farming population has become more concentrated during the second half of the twentieth century, with fewer families occupying farms in each neighbourhood in 1975 than in 1935 or 1950. Existing farmers have created the majority of new farms in order to provide for younger children (Holderness, 1985: 129–130). North of the border, many farmers in Scotland were yearly tenants whose sons frequently succeeded their fathers. Proprietors did not permit unlimited subdivision of holdings and so only a few younger sons remained in the household in subordinate positions (Whyte, 1991).

Life-cycle is also of crucial importance to the history of the family in that farm and domestic service was a classic life-cycle phase, as was apprenticeship (Humphries, 2004). Service and apprenticeship redistributed adolescents between those households requiring more or less labour at a particular point in the life-cycles of their own families: labouring families tended to off-load boys aged 10 or more into farming families, who retained their boys and needed to import more male labour. In 1851 fewer than half of all farm servants were under 20 in the northern counties, and the extreme south east, whereas in southern and other south-eastern counties more than 55 per cent of servants were aged under 20 years old. While farm service was particularly prevalent in the north and west – the proportion of the adult male agricultural workforce who were farm servants in 1831 in this region was double (60 per cent) that of the national average (31 per cent) – the most recent scholarship suggests that in the south and east this form of hiring remained both resilient and adaptable to capitalist agriculture (Gritt, 2000: 84, 88–89; Humphries, 2004: 250–252; Howkins and Verdon, 2008). In Scotland there were only one-third as many servants as in England, but the institution of service also persisted here and adapted to new commercialised farming systems. Farm service continued into the twentieth century in the north but servants vanished with great rapidity following the end of World War I (Counce, 1991). By the late eighteenth century fewer pauper apprentices were apprenticed to agricultural occupations and were instead recruited to the factory and mining districts that were fuelling industrialisation (Snell, 1985; Humphries, 2004).

Domestic service probably increased, driven in large part due to urbanisation and rising middle-class incomes and aspirations. There were important status gradations between domestic servants; nevertheless, the solitary maid-of-all-work was the most

common servant of all. In rural Kent (far south-east) and Rutland (Midlands) the majority of servants were employed in the households of farmers and the crafts and trades (Reay, 2004: 53). Domestic service was the principal occupation for women between 1851 and 1931. It was an important, but declining, occupation thereafter, as alternative, and preferable, employment opportunities in the service sector opened up to women.

Men, women and children all contributed to the family economy of the past. Earnings of women and children were crucial in supporting families through the family life-cycle and associated poverty cycle (see below). Between 1787 and 1865 household-based accounts reveal that the wives and children of male agricultural workers contributed, on average, 5 per cent of family incomes in high wage and 12 per cent in low wage agriculture, but their contribution fell over time and families became increasingly dependent upon the male breadwinner. The accounts also confirm the persistent poverty of agricultural families (Humphries, 2004: 259–263). Other research has emphasised the wide range of the proportion of family incomes earned by all family members of labouring households in the 1830s, varying from 4 to 19 per cent for women, 5 and 42 per cent for children and 45 to 84 per cent for men (Verdon, 2002: 60). The differences are accounted for by differing locations and the associated availability of work for women and children. It was largely children, rather than their wives, who made the biggest difference to household incomes. The county where children's contribution was the highest was the Midlands county of Bedfordshire (42 per cent), largely due to the employment opportunities for them in the domestic industries of lace-making and straw-plaiting. There were constraints on the earning power of a wife, who could only continue to work until she had two or three small children, when care for them would prevent her from continuing until they grew older, although she could and did continue to contribute in a host of other, non-earnings ways, such as baking bread, making clothes, and other self-provisioning activities (Humphries, 2004). Agricultural observers in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries believed that a lack of work for women and children in rural areas, and particularly the cereal growing areas of the south-east, was related to soaring levels of poor relief (Snell, 1985). It is likely that, like their fathers, many boys were unemployed in agriculture in the early nineteenth century. Restrictive legislation and the provision of compulsory state elementary education after 1870, along with the rise in secondary schooling, slowly reduced children's labour market participation. The decline in family size in the later nineteenth and early twentieth centuries meant that more resources could be allocated to fewer children; indeed, it is likely that this was one of the motivations for middle-class couples to start to restrict the number of children they had (Baines and Woods, 2004).

The labour of farmers' wives on both the farm and in the farmhouse was vital (Verdon, 2003). Wives undertook a wide variety of tasks in the farmhouse, kitchen garden, dairy and farmyard and their work was crucial to the farm economy: they grew and processed foodstuffs, manufactured butter and cheeses, reared pigs and hens, provided medicines and remedies, provided food and accommodation for servants and supervised their work, and were engaged in carding, greasing and spinning wool. A very broad generalisation can be drawn with farmers' wives remaining more involved in the

farm economy in the north, with more of a retreat by wives on large, corn-growing farms in the south, and particularly in the east. This was due, in part, to fewer servants living in the farmhouse, and so farmers' wives no longer had to share their kitchen tables with their servants, and due, in part, to the association of dairying with science and therefore men. However, there were wide regional disparities in the position of farmers' wives and also by the size of the farm. Dairying faced less favourable circumstances between 1750 and 1890, when foreign imports of cheese and butter invaded the market. But by the later nineteenth century farmers' wives had withdrawn from active participation in the farm economy, due with the dominance of large-scale commercial dairying and poultry rearing. The prosperity of dairying continued during the 'Great Depression' (see below). Urbanisation and the spread of the railways ensured a buoyant market for British milk (Thirsk, 1997; Verdon, 2003).

Within the family gender roles have been extremely enduring over the eighteenth, nineteenth and twentieth centuries, although the exact expectations and circumstances of those roles have varied somewhat by social group, place and time. Resource allocation within the household was generally unequal. The lower nutritional and dietary intake of women is well documented. Children who earned may have had better diets but dependent children had to rely upon their mothers' sacrifices (Humphries, 2004). During the inter-war period such unequal resource allocation might even account for the rise in maternal mortality (Spring Rice, 1939). Women's role and expertise as household managers did not necessarily strengthen their position in the hierarchy of the household. Many men handed over their wage packets to their wives, and were given some spending money for themselves, and the wife was expected to make ends meet within this household budget. Women were expected to 'make and mend' clothing, bake their own bread, and preserve foodstuffs. They could also gain extra income by taking in laundry and needlework or accommodating a lodger (Verdon, 2002; Humphries, 2004).

4.3 The family and income

In the eighteenth century rural agrarian society was socially stratified in the following way. At the peak of the social pyramid were the great landowners, and in particular the landed aristocrats; their presence was not uniformly spread throughout England and they were largely absent in Wales. Second in the pyramid were the greater and lesser landed gentry, who were numerically larger than the aristocracy. Whilst a gentleman might farm, farmers were not gentlemen. The clergy could be part of the gentry but there was a gulf between the substantially endowed rector and the stipendiary curate. Thereafter came the increasingly professional land stewards and agents and then farmers. Large farmers were more mobile and moved on when leases terminated, but small farmers tended to hold a farm for generations. Craftsmen and tradesmen made up the next layer of the social pyramid. At the bottom came cottagers and labourers. Each settled rural community had a core of long-established farming families (Porter, 1989). This form was social stratification, and its impact at the level of the family and household, was fundamentally altered over the next two hundred and fifty years.

The structural transformation in the economy accompanying industrialisation resulted in a massive contraction in the proportion of the workforce employed in agriculture. The agricultural workforce shrank from 70 per cent in 1600, to 55 per cent in 1700, to 40 per cent in 1800, and further to 25 per cent in 1851 (Wrigley, 2004: 90–91). The number of hired farm workers continued to decline: between 1871 and 1900 the numbers fell by 33 per cent, and this trend continued into the twentieth century (Thompson, 1991: 216). In Scotland employment in agriculture and fishing declined by almost half between 1851 and 1951 and rural areas experienced difficulty in creating other employment. Industrialisation in Scotland was located in the western Lowlands, centred upon Glasgow, and through the central belt (Lee, 2004: 433–434). Within England and Wales the farm workers who remained employed were involved in an industry that was now more complex: in 1841 100 agricultural labourers generated subsidiary work for 27 others off the farm; in 1881 the figure was 47; and in 1911 it was 67 (Turner, 2004: 134).

There were important changes in the agricultural workforce. By the mid-nineteenth century opportunities in farm work had altered in favour of adult men: the share of adult males increased from 39 per cent in 1700 to 64 per cent in 1851, at the expense of women and children. At the start of the eighteenth century the agricultural workforce had been built around family labour supplemented by young adults in their late teens hired on annual contracts as servants, but by the mid-nineteenth century the workforce was much older and more male. Many farms employed a core of full-time labour, supplemented by casual workers during the harvest, and they were increasingly using labour-saving technology (Allen, 2004, 105–106). From a long-term perspective, the withdrawal of many women from the labour force in the later nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, with the establishment of the male breadwinner ideology and the notion of the ‘angel of the hearth’, might actually be seen as an aberration, given the relatively high levels of female employment before and after (Humphries, 2004). However, it has been argued that the masculinisation of the agricultural workforce from the later eighteenth century had a greater impact upon reducing women’s employment opportunities in agriculture than did the male breadwinner ideology (Snell, 1985).

Coupled with this decline was a shift to large-scale capitalist farming. By the mid-nineteenth century large-scale agrarian capitalism was dominant in the south and east of England and family farming continued only in the far south-west and north (Shaw-Taylor, 2005).¹ Family farms were a majority in the central northern region, but nowhere else, and such farms formed only a small minority in the south-east. The significance of these differences is not a distinction between a peasant north and a capitalist south, but a distinction between the labour requirements of an admixture of small-scale commercial farming on the urban fringes and extensive grazing on poor upland soils in the north, and the peculiarities of the labour supply and demand of large-scale cultivation in the more arable counties (Gritt, 2000). However, Howkins

¹ ‘Capitalist farms’ are farms which were predominantly dependent upon wage labour. ‘Family farms’ were those predominantly dependent upon family labour, with little dependence upon wage labour (Shaw-Taylor, 2005: 159).

has stressed the importance of small family producers, in terms of their work on their own holdings and of their work as migrants, and he argues that these producers, coupled with farm servants, were a larger group than the supposedly 'normal' landless farm labourer (Howkins, 1994). In addition, the dual economy – whereby families held smallholdings alongside other occupations – has proved an enduring feature over this entire period (Thirsk, 1997; Holderness, 1985).

Some small family farmers were engaged in a variety of other activities, including growing alternative crops, such as rapeseed, woad, and hops, producing food in market gardens, and they were occupied in dairying and poultry-keeping. There was substantial progress for these foodstuffs between 1650 and 1750 and again after from the 1890s, but for the period in between the momentum was gradually lost and mainstream agriculture – grain and meat – was dominant. Market gardens were located near larger towns and expanded with the coming of the railways and were particularly concentrated in south-east England. Steady expansion after 1890 in dairying, horticulture and poultry-keeping was due to the enterprise of small farmers. In the north family farms were entirely suitable for dairying and stock breeding, while in other places small farms flourished while requiring additional waged work to support them. The latter provided a ladder for those starting in the farming business (Thirsk, 1997; Turner, 2004).

There was a massive expansion of demand for farm produce with the growth of the economy, rapid population increase, urbanisation and improved transportation. There was no single market for agricultural output but a series of loosely interconnected markets by produce, such as corn, livestock, market gardening, and straw. These markets were local, regional, national, European, and international depending upon the product. Farms of all sizes contributed to local markets in a number of ways in addition to the sale of cereals and animals. There was small-scale production on many farms for local markets in poultry meat and eggs, and, from the dairy, milk, cream, butter, and cheese, and, in the main, farmers' wives were responsible for the production and sale of these foodstuffs. In addition, it would be hard to over emphasise the importance of the urban market; London, for example, was the most significant market and drew upon agriculture and market gardening in the surrounding counties, and was followed by the industrial population centres of the midlands and the north – Birmingham, Leeds, Liverpool, Manchester and Newcastle. There was high demand for both food and agriculturally produced industrial raw materials from these centres, thereby providing new opportunities for small and middling sized farms.

A very different system existed in the western Highlands of Scotland. In the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries Scottish landowners ('lairds') offered employment via the crofting system. Crofters were small-scale tenants who combined cultivation with kelp production for soap and glass manufacture. Kelp manufacture declined and was later replaced with herring fishing in the middle of the nineteenth century. There was also a class of landless labourers, cottars, who aspired to become crofters. However, landowners increasingly converted land usage to sheep grazing and deer forests for recreational shooting for the Victorian gentry, which necessitated the Highland clearances – the eviction of crofters (Lee, 2004).

In England, changing work patterns had a considerable impact upon the household's market involvement. It has been argued that there was a transformation – the 'industrious revolution' – whereby families specialised in production for local and more distant markets and therefore had to buy items previously produced in the home. This helped to fuel the 'consumer revolution' and by the late eighteenth century there is evidence suggesting a greater diffusion of a variety of consumer goods by social group and location. The extent to which the working class participated in the consumer boom is still under debate, given this group's only modest real wage gains before the 1830s (Humphries, 2004; Voth, 2004). Rising real incomes are more certain in the later nineteenth century and contributed to another phase of rising consumerism, while the buying of 'white goods' and luxury consumer durables was a post-1945 phenomenon. In terms of intra-household resource allocation, households were more likely to buy products associated with men than labour-saving devices associated with women (Bowden and Offer, 1994).

Poor relief was just one element in a wider 'economy of makeshifts' which were essential to the economies of the labouring poor. Olwen Hufton first coined the term in relation to the lower orders in France, but it is a phrase that has come to describe neatly the range of coping strategies exploited by many families for material survival well into the twentieth century. Such strategies obviously included earnings and payments in kind, but also a wide diversity of other sources of non-wage income, such as formal and informal charity and common rights. There were many other opportunities to supplement incomes, such as exemption from local taxes, foraging on wastes, credit, loans, selling and pawning goods, barter, friendly societies, rent arrears, as well as kinship and neighbourhood networks and co-residence. Less legitimate makeshifts included begging, vagrancy, squatting, petty theft, poaching, petty unlicensed brewing, prostitution, and receiving stolen goods (King and Tomkins, 2003). Women and children played a central role in the makeshift economy and so the decline in such activities in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries had profound implications for women's and children's work, particularly for female-headed households. Poor relief and self-provisioning could contribute as much as 15 per cent of low wage agricultural family incomes in the early nineteenth century (Humphries, 2004: 259). There was a strong north-south dimension to access to poor relief and self-provisioning: in the south and east, poor relief became an increasingly central component in the family economies of some of the labouring poor as the economy of makeshifts weakened; by contrast, in the north and west poor relief was more peripheral to family economies and northerners resorted to assistance from friendly societies, charity, and kin (King and Tomkins, 2003).

Credit was ubiquitous and necessary in the eighteenth, nineteenth and twentieth centuries, at the level of the individual, family, and farm. In the eighteenth century a key urban economic role within rural society was in the provision of credit, on which many rural activities depended. Credit networks were dense in both town and country and involved a large section of the population. Farmers extended credit to urban-based dealers, drovers and processors, whilst farmers received loans from country banks. There was a reorganisation of credit, banking and finance in the nineteenth

century and the period witnessed an expansion of country banking and a growth in the overdraft. British farmers used credit-back advances, sales credit and extended loan capital. Farmers experienced a delay in the realisation of income of up to one year due to the time required for the raising of stock and the cultivation of crops and borrowing was both necessary and widespread. In the early twentieth century banks lent half the funds needed for the purchase of land by farmers (Whetham, 1978: 915–917). Although pawnbrokers were a largely urban phenomenon, rural inhabitants could rely upon shop credit more readily, as well as that advanced from urban merchants and craftsmen (King and Tomkins, 2003). Credit was at the heart of the economy of makeshifts and was largely unavoidable for poor labouring families. Second-hand clothes dealing was a substantial urban trade with well-developed social networks of exchange.

Markets and shops became more important in providing necessities and non-essentials as each came to supply items produced earlier either locally or domestically. Rural shopkeeping expanded rapidly from the eighteenth century onwards, including ‘back-street’ shops, and even came to eclipse markets for household consumption. The later nineteenth and early twentieth century saw the growth of larger department stores and the extension of shop credit. There was regional variation, however, and shops were slower to develop and proliferate in the growing industrial heartlands and in Wales, and small farmers and their farm hands continued to draw much of their sustenance from the farm. Women were important in relation to credit: not only were they the most frequent customers of pawnshops, but they were directly involved in certain lines of selling and retailing in shops and markets. The working classes also saved through friendly societies and various coal, clothing and burial clubs. Trade unions also provided welfare benefits (Harris, 2004). Within urban centres a person’s boundaries for belonging and neighbourhood might be drawn by the availability of credit. The availability of credit might also be dependent upon the presence of kin; one woman in the north complained that, ‘My family and mee has no kin in this place and wee cannot get one penny of credit’ (King and Timmins, 2001: 220). Formal and more extensive credit through banks, loan companies and shops has become a central and necessary feature of life in the later twentieth century.

Industrialisation brought a fundamental geographical shift in the location of industry, with important ramifications for rural society. The widespread effect of factory competition was the loss of rural industry in the making of woollens, lace, buttons, pins, gloves and footwear in the south and east of England, where there were few alternative occupations for women and children. Proto-industrialisation in these districts was followed by de-industrialisation. Many of these areas were also experiencing substantial under-employment of men in agriculture and the marginalisation of women in agriculture largely accounts for female migration out of the countryside. The collapse of spinning – a staple form of women’s work – had an impoverishing impact on labouring families in the south and east (Verdon, 2002) and it is unlikely that new forms of work in the north made up for the loss. The domestic industries that still survived in the 1850s – silk, lace and straw plait – had almost disappeared by the 1890s. Cloth making in the east had suffered catastrophic decline by the mid-nineteenth century. There were contrasts even within the industrialising regions, the best known of which was

between the relatively well-paid Lancashire cotton mill workers and the immiserated domestic handloom weavers. In the Lowlands of Scotland, cottar families with small holdings combined subsistence farming with spinning and weaving. By the 1830s handloom weavers were the largest group of Scottish industrial workers. They were extremely poor and about half of handloom weavers fell below the primary poverty line as defined by late nineteenth-century social analysts (Devine, 2004).

During the nineteenth century there was significant agricultural change which affected landlords, owner-occupiers, tenant farmers and farm workers rather differently. In the depression that followed the French wars of 1793–1815, some tenant farmers had their land repossessed by landlords because they were having trouble paying their rents and there was widespread underemployment of farm workers (Turner, 2004; Boyer, 1990). By the end of the 1830s, however, agriculture began a period known as ‘high farming’ (high volume of inputs per acre), which lasted until the 1870s. A great landmark was the repeal of the Corn Laws in 1846 which ushered in a period of free trade. The fears of protectionists that the country would be flooded with cheap overseas food were not realised until the 1870s and markets for farmers remained relatively stable until then (Turner, 2004).

The general description of the period after 1870 as the ‘Great Depression’ has been questioned by historians since the volume of production remained more or less stable, despite a string of poor harvests, imported foodstuffs and falling prices. The period affected different social groups to differing degrees and by location. Farmers in the north and west of England experienced a rise in production and those in the south, east and central counties suffered a decline. Real output grew for farmers in six counties, those in a further twelve were severely depressed, but those elsewhere, accounting for around three-quarters of the land area, were stable (Thompson, 1991: 234–235; Turner, 2004: 152).

Landlords experienced a decline in their real incomes as falling prices led to a dramatic slump in the rents they could demand, particularly for arable farms. The decline in pasture rents in the north and west was far less severe and reflected the easier conditions faced by animal and animal product farmers. Even with the reductions in rents for their arable farms, the real incomes of tenant farmers were still squeezed, particularly in the 1880s and early 1890s, due to the decline in product prices and many went bankrupt. Tenant farmers’ incomes had recovered somewhat by the mid-1890s, before they fell more sharply in the later interwar years. Farm workers, however, fared better during this ‘depression’ and they experienced a rise in their living standards. Their money incomes actually rose, while prices for foodstuffs and other goods were falling, and so their real incomes increased (Thompson, 1991; Turner, 2004). Nevertheless, agriculture was still a low-wage sector and average wage rates for all occupations increased between the 1880s and World War I due to workers shifting from agriculture into high-wage occupations such as coal mining (Boyer, 2004).

After World War II, the economic maturity of the British economy was evident by the small proportion of the total work force engaged in agriculture. By 1950 agriculture, forestry and fishing accounted for just 5 per cent of employment, shrinking to 3 per cent by 1980 (Holderness, 1985: 121). Hobby farming and small holding became

a feature of post-war British agriculture. The nature of farming has changed with decision-making and administration becoming more important due to government intervention, the activities of marketing boards, the European Economic Community and European Union, farmers' lobbies and complex land policy. There has been a rapid contraction in the numbers of farm workers and the term 'labourer' has been abandoned to describe their occupational status. By the 1960s around one-third of all farms in England and up to 45 per cent in Scotland provided insufficient work to be managed full-time and the distinction between full-time and part-time employment among farmers remains an important feature of agricultural life. The post-war period has also been characterised by the growth of owner-occupation: from 15–18 per cent in 1900 to 60 per cent in 1980, as farmers have bought more land (Holderness, 1985: 126–127). There was resistance to the policy of the amalgamation of small farms into larger units with the establishment of the Small Farmers' Association in 1975 (Thirsk, 1997: 205). Family farms have continued to predominate in north-east England and north-east Scotland. In 1965 more than one-fifth of regular full-time farm workers were described as relatives of the employing farmers. Most were sons or brothers not in partnership (Holderness, 1985: 134–135).

4.4 The family, the local community and the state

Outside of the household, families have had to engage with the politics of their local communities and an especial arena of conflict has been the enclosure of common lands (scattered strips of land into consolidated holdings). Access to common or customary rights was mediated through village elites. Early enclosures frequently sparked inhabitants to riot and to destroy ditching and other demarcation (Wood, 2002). The eighteenth and early nineteenth century was the period of parliamentary enclosure. Under such an act, petitioned for by the principal landowners of the parish, grants of land were reallocated to each proprietor according to the value of his or her holdings in the open fields. In 1700 29 per cent of England remained open or common and this proportion shrank to just 5 per cent in 1914. This phase of enclosure was particularly intense in the Midlands, where over half of the farmland was enclosed; most of the remaining open land was common pasture (Allen, 2004: 26, 99, 178).

Enclosure redrew the landscape. The extent to which it disadvantaged families of the labouring poor has been an issue of debate. For those who possessed formal common rights, such rights could be very valuable indeed: it has been estimated that the right to keep a cow was worth between 56 and 80 per cent of wage income (Shaw-Taylor, 2001: 645) and that gleaning and foraging on the wastes and commons may have made a substantial contribution to annual income (King and Tomkins, 2003). There is evidence to suggest that most labourers had already lost their access to formal rights, however. By the early nineteenth century only 15 per cent of labourers in the south and east had such common rights (Shaw-Taylor, 2001: 654). Many smaller farmers sold up after enclosure and this contributed to the process of larger land holdings. Tenants of commonable dwellings were not compensated, only their owners. What is harder to

quantify is the impact of the loss of informal and customary rights for the landless and the withdrawal of access to commons undoubtedly impacted upon the labouring poor. Snell has found a strong association between the extent of parliamentary enclosure in certain counties and expenditure poor relief (Snell, 1985).

Local politics were also important in the negotiation between churchwardens, overseers' of the poor, vestries, Justices of the Peace and the poor from the early modern period onwards. By 1750 there was a well-established and widespread parish-based welfare system in the 'Old Poor Law' (put in place by legislation 1598–1601). There was a substantial growth in social welfare, with an increasingly extensive and 'generous' poor law system, particularly in the rural, agrarian south and east of England (Williams, 2005), but such generosity did not necessarily extend to the north and west, where a very different poor law system operated, with fewer people relieved and less generously (King and Tomkins, 2003). The poor law was part of the more extensive mixed economy of welfare, which also encompassed charitable and voluntary assistance. During the eighteenth century the bulk of recipients of poor relief were the elderly and widows with dependent children, but a rise in payments made to male household heads has been charted from the late eighteenth century in response to rapid price inflation, harvest failures and underemployment, predominantly in the agrarian south and east (Boyer, 1990). Families received a set amount of relief according to a sliding scale based on the price of bread and/or the number of children. Such a system is believed to have been prevalent across much of the rural south-east until the Poor Law Amendment Act of 1834; and, indeed, the hugely influential contemporary Rev. Thomas Malthus believed that child allowances accounted for the rise in population (Boyer, 1990). However, local studies have suggested that not only were such payments specific in time, centring on worsening economic conditions between 1795 and 1801 and following the end of hostilities with France in 1815, and limited in duration, but their value was largely supplementary to earnings. Parishes remained largely committed to regular weekly paupers and, in particular, the elderly and lone parents (Williams, 2004).

There was a radical transformation in the legal framework for the relief of poverty in 1834 with the passing of the Poor Law Amendment Act. The great strength of the 'Old Poor Law' was its flexibility and its reliance upon outdoor relief, that is, payments to the poor and their families in their own homes. However, the New Poor Law was underpinned by four very different principles: less eligibility, the workhouse test, uniformity, and centralisation. Parishes were to group together in larger poor law unions and to provide relief only within a deterrent workhouse, in which families were separated. In practice none of these ideals were ever fully realised; it proved difficult to provide workhouse provision at a level below that of the independent labourer and outdoor relief continued. Workhouses became more specialist and humane after the 1880s. However, the proportion of the population relieved over the nineteenth century undoubtedly fell. Poverty increasingly became an urban problem, but that is not to deny that poverty endured in the countryside (Kidd, 1999; Gazeley, 2003: 49–55). Although the number of families who were relieved under the New Poor Law was low, the proportion of families experiencing poverty was high. By the end of the interwar period the proportion of families in 'primary poverty' had declined sharply,

primarily due to falling family size. When Rowntree undertook his survey for a third time in 1950, the number of families in poverty had contracted still further (Gazeley, 2003: 168-173). Scottish provision for the poor was relatively flexible before 1800, but more rigorous by 1840 with the Poor Law's formal opposition to the right of the able-bodied unemployed for relief. They had no legal right to be relieved under the Scottish poor law, although occasional assistance was provided at times of acute difficulty (Devine, 2004).

Life-cycle and household were also crucial to the experience of poverty. There were five alternating phases of poverty and prosperity for worker households in both the pre-industrial and modern periods (Kidd, 1999; Humphries, 2004). The three phases of poverty came in childhood, as parents of four or more children, and in old age, while the periods of relative prosperity fell for individuals or couples in the year before they had children, and when their children started to earn their own wages. Poverty in childhood and parenthood could last for up to ten years and women were in poverty during the period of child-bearing. Poverty was compounded for couples with young children and the aged by the demographic fact that parents entered old age at the point that their children had young families of their own and thus it was frequently difficult for relatives to assist one another (Smith, 1984).

From the early twentieth century the state started the long process of dismantling the poor law and the elderly and children were the first to be provided with alternative avenues of welfare, in the form of Old Age Pensions (1908) and school meals and medical inspections (1906, 1907). Health and unemployment insurance was instigated from 1911 and amended at least twenty times in the face of mass unemployment in the interwar period. Widows received pensions from 1925 and elementary and secondary education was considerably extended. The biggest state reorganisation of welfare provision came with the establishment of the Welfare State after World War II, reforming health care, unemployment insurance, education and children's services, and providing a largely universal, but insurance-based, welfare system (Harris, 2004).

Relations of rural dwellers with the church have undergone significant change during the period. The Church of England monopolised legally valid marriages and the legal duty to administer them for all religious groups in the period 1754-1837, with the exception of Jews and Quakers. Thereafter the state instituted civil registration of vital events. In the mid-nineteenth century church-going was higher in the English countryside than in towns, was higher in Scotland than in England and highest in Wales. But by the early nineteenth century the Anglican Church was losing touch with large sections of its flock in town and countryside and non-conformity grew rapidly. The Census of Religious Worship of 1851 revealed that over half of all English rural parishes had nonconformist or Catholic chapels (Snell and Ell, 2000). Nevertheless, a large section of the nation was attending no place of worship at all except for baptisms, weddings and funerals. Sunday Schools did provide families with access to education and leisure activities. The long-term decline in church-going started in the 1870s and has continued throughout the twentieth century, although it has been somewhat slower in Scotland (Obelkevitch, 1990).

The agricultural community continued to be tied to the church through tithes, which were still a substantial drain upon land before 1880, although their impact was regionally diverse. Before the 1830s their payment caused considerable friction in the local community. A substantial proportion of enclosed villages abolished tithes under parliamentary enclosure in exchange for a transfer of land to tithe-owners. Under the Tithe Commutation Act of 1836 tithes could no longer be paid in kind or by a money composition and had instead to be calculated as a rent charge. Although their impact declined, tithes were still payable on a considerable area of land in the form of this annual rent-charge (Mingay, 2000; Whetham, 1978). Other taxes were imposed upon landed and wealthier farming interests by the state, including income tax (revived in 1842), death duties and the land tax, but these were not too burdensome before 1914.

Agriculture developed a close relation with the state in the twentieth century. Agriculture was closely supervised by the state during both world wars. During World War I there was greater state involvement from 1917, with guaranteed minimum prices for wheat and oats, a minimum wage, orders for cropping and stocking, and food rationing. The agricultural sector was deemed an 'essential industry' during World War II and it was important to Britain's war-time success. The state directed agricultural production with price incentives to farmers and subsidised food to consumers and this meant that farmers benefited far more than any other group from the war. There was an increased supply and variety of domestic produce and a reduction in imports of food. The Milk Marketing Board guaranteed dairy farmers a market and set milk prices from 1934. Subsidies, which began in the 1930s, extended into the post-war period and were not abolished until Britain joined the EEC in 1973, when national subsidisation was replaced by supra-national subsidisation. Britain had adopted the Common Agricultural Policy by 1978. This was an extremely favourable period for British farmers. However, due to over-production, in 1984 European subsidies were withdrawn and quotas imposed upon farmers, while in 1994 the Milk Marketing Board was disbanded and a free market introduced once again. This has resulted in the bankruptcy of many farms and, most recently, concern over the falling price paid to farmers for foodstuffs with the increasing dominance in the market of a small number of very large supermarkets. Agriculture is the only industry in Britain to have had its own department of state in the form of the Board of Agriculture, now the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Whetham, 1978; Howlett, 2004).

4.5 Conclusions

There has been a fundamental change in rural society and agriculture in the two and a half centuries covered in this chapter. Families and households have had to adapt to the profound changes wrought by industrialisation and urbanisation and the structural shift in the economy away from agriculture, first towards manufacturing, and then towards the service sector. The proportion of those employed in agriculture has fallen from 70 per cent in 1600 to less than 3 per cent in 1980. Farms have become much larger and have embraced agrarian capitalism. In the twentieth century the state, and

then Europe, has controlled the agricultural sector. Rural industry largely collapsed due to industrial and factory competition in the north and this has had important implications for the work opportunities for wives and children. The pervasiveness of the male breadwinner family in the Victorian period reduced the number of women in the labour market, although changes in family size have resulted in a massive growth for part-time work for women since 1945. Children have withdrawn from the labour market into elementary and secondary education. By 2000 only a minority of families were engaged in agriculture and far, far fewer people resided in a rural community.

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NORTHERN FRANCE



Jean-Baptiste Greuze, *L'Accordée de Village*, 1761 (Musée du Louvre, Paris)

5 Northern France, 1000–1750

G rard B AUR and Laurent FELLER

This chapter focuses on the Paris basin, an area of about 150,000 square kilometres, which includes the geographical and historical regions of the  le-de-France, Beauce, Picardy, Normandy, Anjou and Touraine, Berry, part of Poitou, Burgundy, Champagne, Lorraine and the Loire valley; of the Massif Amoricain (about 65,000 square kilometres), which includes Brittany and the surrounding regions; and finally of the North of France (about 15,000 square kilometres), made up of the regions of Flanders, Artois, Hainaut and the Cambr sis. The  le-de-France and the Beauce were the heart of the kingdom at the beginning of this period, and the other regions were incorporated into France later, some during the middle ages, Brittany in 1532, the North during Louis XIV's reign and Lorraine in 1768.

This part of France consists mainly of plains and plateaux with wide valleys (the Loire, the Seine) except in the Massif Amoricain which is very hilly. It benefits from a mild climate, rainy especially in the west, where pasture and grass are suitable for livestock rearing. It is mostly highly suited to agriculture, particularly in the centre and north, where there are chalk soils often with limestone for intensive grain cultivation and clay for livestock rearing. Transport was good in the region because of the two main rivers (Seine and Loire) and their tributaries and thanks to the network of roads established by the monarchy, particularly in the eighteenth century, for political, military and economic reasons.

The principal features of its economic structure were established very early on, around one large city, Paris, and several medium-sized towns, the largest of which was Rouen. They remained in place even though the population underwent many dramatic increases and decreases over the course of these eight centuries. Rapid growth in the eleventh to thirteenth centuries was followed by a dramatic collapse in the fourteenth to fifteenth centuries, recovery during the sixteenth century, stagnation in the seventeenth century and a new period of growth in the eighteenth century. The increase in population in this final period did not, however, have the same causes as that in the medieval period.

Northern France, at least since the medieval period, was a 'full world' (*monde plein*). It had a large rural population, scattered in many small hamlets, or clustered around parish churches, made up of nuclear families with a system for transmitting inheritances that almost always tended towards equal inheritance. It was probably in this area of Northwest France, in Normandy and then in the  le-de-France, that birth control first started, long before any other region.

MAP 5.1 Northern France, 1000–1750



5.1 The family and demography

The period from the year 1000 to about 1500 AD consists of two extremely different phases. From 1000 to about 1300 there was a long period of demographic growth, but the nature of that growth, how it occurred and on what timescale are currently in dispute. From 1300 to c.1450, on the contrary, there occurred an extremely severe crisis followed by recovery. Both crisis and recovery were accompanied by significant changes in family behaviour as well as in economic attitudes.

We know that the population rose rapidly in northern France between 1000 and 1300. It is hard to estimate this growth as most evidence is indirect: charters of the foundation or settlement of villages, references to the construction of castles and signs of population movement give us qualitative evidence that is usable but very imprecise. The first reliable figures date from 1328 when the Valois king Philip VI organised a census of all the hearths in the royal domain. Extrapolation from these results gives a number for the total population of the kingdom of between 19 and 22 million (see table 5.1). This figure is extremely high: estimates have put the population of France at about 6 million around 1000 and 9 million in 1200. Growth must, therefore, have been continuous and quite rapid.

This population growth was based on a high birth rate and improved living conditions. The number of children per household is the main evidence for understanding how this growth occurred. It has been calculated that in the Mâconnais between 980 and 1030, the average number of children per couple was 4.3. In the Chartres region between 1050 and 1250 there were 4.2 children to a household (Duby, 1953; Chédeville, 1973). This figure was not, however, constant. Robert Fossier's work on Picardy has shown that there was a constant increase in the number of children per household during the eleventh century, going from 3.5 between 1000 and 1025 to 5 or 6 after 1075. At the end of the twelfth century the number of children would normally have been about 5 (Fossier, 1968). There were two vital periods: the end of the eleventh century and the end of the twelfth. It was during these two periods that growth was strongest.

The population was essentially rural (around 90 per cent). By the end of the thirteenth century rural population density was highest on the best wheat-growing

Table 5.1: Population in France and northern France, 1000–1750 (millions)

Year	France	northern France (extrapolation)
1000	6	
1200	9	
1328	19–22	
1600	18–21	
1700	21.5	12–13.5
1750	24.5	14–15

Sources: Fossier, 1983: 94–108; Russell, 1969; Dupâquier, 1988: 61–65.

land: about 75 inhabitants per square kilometre, even reaching 100 inhabitants per square kilometre in certain areas of Picardy. These high rates of density set northern France apart from the rest of the kingdom. Long-settled areas benefited the most from demographic growth, attracting and keeping the highest densities of population.

The increase in birth rates was accompanied by a fall in mortality rates, whose combined effect was an increase in life expectancy. It seems that life expectancy at birth rose from 22 years in 1100 to 35 years in 1275 (Fossier, 1982). However, anyone who reached the age of 20 had a much longer life expectancy, and it was possible to live to an advanced age. Nevertheless, general conditions of health were still very bad. Accidents of course could strike anyone but particularly affected the young of working age. Infectious diseases were ever present: tuberculosis, malaria and influenza were the usual causes of death. Illnesses caused by nutritional deficiencies were frequent, and so were those resulting from ergotism and similar ills, which affected the countryside very severely and repeatedly from the eleventh to the thirteenth century before subsiding somewhat.

The number of deaths of women in childbirth was very high, particularly since the low age of marriage –and first pregnancy– increased the likelihood of severe complications for women when giving birth. The general state of health of the population, however, is not well known. Graveyard excavations for the eleventh century showed a population of small stature, often affected by rickets, and with bad teeth. By the thirteenth century the population seems to have been physically transformed. Life expectancy was still very low, but height had increased, teeth were noticeably improved, and rickets had disappeared. These results are taken from archaeological explorations and still need to be confirmed or disproved (Fossier, 1982).

There was no improvement in infant mortality but the general decline in mortality rates can be attributed to an overall improvement in the way of life, which affected both food and living conditions. People ate more rather than better. Food basically consisted of cereals in various forms (bread, pancakes and porridge) and vegetables. Meat was rare, except at the tables of the lords, and fish was expensive. Most calories came from bread and wine, which was thought of as a food rather than a drink. This diet was unbalanced. It was rich in sugars (carbohydrates) but poor in fats and, above all, in protein (meat) and vitamins (Montanari, 1979, 1996; Laurioux 2002). Though their general state of health was not really poor, the thirteenth-century population was still vulnerable and exposed to diseases.

At the end of the thirteenth century the population reached a maximum, and in the first years of the fourteenth century deadly famines reappeared. They ceased to be rare and exceptional events and came repeatedly or lasted for several years. In a society where the diet was composed of such a narrow range of foods the bad harvests led to catastrophic results. The famine of 1315–1317 was widespread. It hit the urban populations severely: in 1316 people were literally dying of hunger in European towns. The undernourished population was left vulnerable to a series of secondary epidemics which further increased the already high mortality rates. The great medievalist Edmond Perroy claimed that this famine had been the major turning point for western Europe, but it was not the first such dearth to strike the West severely (Perroy, 1949; Duby, 1963).

Famines and food shortages were a normal part of economic life in the second half of the thirteenth century. After 1310 the population of western Europe began to decline. This slow decline became catastrophic after 1348–1349 when the Black Death arrived. Signs of stagnation or even decreasing population had been evident since 1330. It is thought that Normandy lost 3 per cent of its population in the 1330s and Champagne about 10 per cent (Bois, 1976). The repeated famines or simply increasing poverty and undernourishment explain this decline. However, the Black Death drastically accelerated this backward slide. The plague arrived in the south of France in the summer of 1348 and took a heavy toll. The impact was different from region to region, however. Some areas escaped completely; others were very severely hit. But in general excess mortality was very high and had long-lasting consequences. The classic example of Givry, in Burgundy, is telling. While about 30 deaths a year were recorded in the 1330s, there were 649 deaths in 1348 alone, with a peak of 302 just in September.

The plague was also recurrent. In the second half of the fourteenth century it returned every twelve to thirteen years. The spread of the disease was aggravated by the wars between the French and English; populations fleeing combat zones carried the infection and helped to spread it. Finally, the disease became endemic at the beginning of the fifteenth century. Its negative effects were combined with those of other causes of mortality, such as influenza, typhus and whooping cough, so it is not always possible to say which of these epidemics had the most severe consequences. Moreover, these extreme mortality rates were accompanied or caused by famines and by the effects of war. As a result, mortality rates remained very high throughout this period.

It has been estimated that in the north of France, in the fourteenth century, there was a food shortage every three years and a real famine every ten. The balance sheet for the fourteenth century was thus catastrophic. Some regions, like the area around Verdun, lost three-quarters of the population. However, from the beginning of the fifteenth century there were signs of recovery and revival, though often they were quickly interrupted by epidemics, famines and serious outbreaks of fighting, as in Normandy in 1436–1442. The process by which the population grew once again was slow and difficult. At first the number of children per household decreased greatly, and the average household numbered only four members (two children to a family) during all of the first half of the fifteenth century. This was below the replacement rate. In spite of a high rate of marriage, a large number of households and shorter intervals between births, the high infant and child mortality prevented a lasting recovery. It was only after the 1450s that the average number of household members was once again five persons to a household, that is, at least three children to a couple, a sign that a higher number of children were surviving. However, the very high levels that had existed before 1348 had still not returned by 1500.

After the low growth levels at the end of the middle ages, the population increased sharply all through the sixteenth century, reaching about 18–21 million on the present territory of France in 1600 (perhaps 10 to 12 million in northern France). The political and economic disorders in the period between 1550 to 1700 slowed down this demographic growth. Although diseases and famine caused many deaths in the sixteenth century, the situation was worse in the seventeenth century, particularly at

the end of the reign of Louis XIV (Lachiver, 1991). There was a zero growth during the seventeenth century, although the situation differed from one region to another. Lorraine was almost depopulated after the Thirty Years War and attracted immigrants from Germany and Switzerland, while Brittany was economically and demographically in rapid expansion and the population of the Paris basin remained high.

Why was there only a slow increase of population? There was no birth control, and it would be, therefore, expected that women ought to have a lot of children, but this was never the case. The so-called Malthusian restraints (though the very idea of a Malthusian ceiling on population growth is strongly questioned) hindered a sharp population rise. First, although fertility was rather high with birth rates around 40 per thousand, it was not as high as might have been expected for two reasons: late marriage and certain practices like breast-feeding which reduced the number of children.

The age of marriage was still very low in the sixteenth century – the mean age for brides was 19 in Athis-Mons, near Paris but in the mid-seventeenth century the age of female spouses had risen to 23.4, and in the eighteenth century young women married at 25 and young men at 27 on average. This reduced the period of fertility within marriage, but anyway it had never been customary for women to bear one child a year. Studies of Crulai and the Beauvais region show that in general the gap between two births was about two and a half years, shorter for younger women, longer for older women, unless the preceding baby died and was quickly replaced with another (Goubert, 1960; Henry and Gautier, 1958). The number of children per marriage was, therefore, restricted: 6 in Brittany, the North and some parts of the Île-de-France, 5.5 in the French Vexin, in Blère (Touraine), near Tonnerre (in Burgundy), 5 in Lower Normandy. Moreover there were considerable inequalities among social groups. In the countryside only rich farmers (*laboureurs*) had enough money to pay for a wet nurse; the day labourers (*journaliers*) and smallholders did not. The labourers' wives had more children, but finally more of them died than did the children of the poor peasants. For instance, the wives of big farmers had a fertility rate (the annual number of children for 1,000 married women from 15 to 44 years old) of 637 per thousand, the winegrowers' wives of 422 per thousand (Moriceau, 1994).

Secondly, high mortality was the rule, particularly for children. About a quarter died before they were one year old, and probably around half before they were 20, with huge variations between regions. During the seventeenth century in the parish of Auneuil, in rural Beauvaisis, the rates were 29 and 51 per cent (Goubert, 1960). They were a little higher in Saint-Lambert-des-Levés in the Loire valley or in Tourouvre-au-Perche (around 30 per cent child mortality) and much higher in the Sologne. This mortality was caused by all kinds of diseases: there was no more plague after the 1720 outbreak around Marseille, but smallpox, dysentery, typhus, typhoid fever remained. Their ravages were amplified by recurring economic crises that reduced family size. When in times of dearth the price of grain rose very high, huge numbers of country people who could not afford to buy bread starved. French historians have long debated whether this mortality was a direct result of starvation or an indirect one, caused by disease. It is clear that in some terrible years many people died of hunger, but epidemics were always the first factor of mortality. For whatever reason, when crises occurred, the

numbers of deaths increased, the number of births fell one year later, and many marriages were postponed and destroyed. When the crisis was over, the marriage rate recovered quickly, followed a few months later by many births, and fewer deaths for some months afterwards, as those in poorest health had been eliminated (Goubert, 1960).

The crises were more acute during dramatic events such as the Wars of Religion, particularly in 1587 and 1596-1597 in the south of the Paris region, the Thirty Years War, notably in 1636-1637 in Lorraine where more than a third of the population disappeared, and the Fronde from 1649 to 1652 in the Île-de-France. But there were also hard times outside these dramatic episodes, as in 1626-1632, or 1661-1662 and in the infamous years 1693-1694, 1709-1710 and finally 1740, which was the last crisis of this traditional kind. In general Brittany was less affected by these crises as its economy was not so dependent on grain production and it could be provisioned by sea. In addition the region was mostly spared from military action. Conversely, the rich plains of the Paris basin were more vulnerable to these disturbances because its economy depended more on grain, because the North was the scene of foreign wars up until the eighteenth century, and because much of the fighting during the civil wars took place in the Paris basin.

If we assume that there were a bit less than 22 million inhabitants in the whole of France at the very beginning of the eighteenth century, it can easily be argued that about two thirds (about 12-13 million) lived in northern France, in a region of about 230,000 square kilometres (less than half the total area of France). This means that population density in this area was approximately 60 inhabitants per square kilometre., 140 in the valley of Montmorency near Paris, and much more in the countryside close around the city. Some parts of this area were very overcrowded in some way, in particular the Paris region (if we include Paris and except the grain-producing plateaux), Normandy, Picardy, Artois, Flanders, and to some extent, Brittany. On the other hand, the southern Paris basin, Champagne, Lorraine and some parts of Burgundy were less populated (Dupâquier, 1988).

Population started to rise again in the first half of the eighteenth century, reaching about 25 million in 1750 (around 15 million for northern France, that is around 65 inhabitants per square kilometre) with regional variations. Brittany had become overcrowded; Lorraine was slowing down after the period of reconstruction and rapid growth during the second half of the seventeenth century. The population around Paris was increasing very fast again.

The 'demographic transition' (towards low natality and mortality) started very early in one part of the area under consideration. Mortality seems to have fallen, above all infant mortality which receded from 350 to 263 per thousand from the end of the seventeenth century to the end of the eighteenth century, for the whole of rural France. The slow advances in hygiene and some slight progress in medicine were partly responsible for the change; so was the disappearance of the great famines. But at the same time the birth rate started to decline in northwest France, from Normandy to the Paris region, from the Beauce to the Beauvaisis. In rural parishes in the Beauvaisis the decline was 10 per cent; from 5 children per mother on average, to 4.5; in the French Vexin from 5.8 in 1680-1709 to 5.25 in 1750-1769 and 4.75 in 1770-1789. Even

among the big farmers in the Île-de France, fertility declined. The fertility rate in the Chartier family fell from 488 for couples married in 1632-1700 to 452 for the period 1703-1750 and then 414 for those in 1751-1783 (Moriceau and Postel-Vinay, 1992). How did this general decline in the birth rate come about? There were two major factors. First, women stopped bearing children at an earlier age. The age of last pregnancy fell slightly from 40 for those married in 1660-1669 to 39 for those in 1730-1759 in the French Vexin. Secondly, the period between births lengthened from 25.1 months for those married in 1670-1699 to 25.6 for those in 1730-1759 in the same region. Thus the discrete circulation of 'baneful secrets' or anticonceptive methods started the decline of fertility in the northwest of the Paris basin, which accelerated in the nineteenth century.

The period from the eleventh to the thirteenth century was crucial in establishing the basic structure of settlement in northern France. As was the case everywhere, the population tended to regroup, either spontaneously or under pressure from lords, and the framework of habitat was established around the village, the parish and the *seigneurie*. The population was relatively mobile and inclined to comply with the lords' encouragement of new settlements or reorganisation of old settlements, which led to specific family behaviour. At the end of the period too many people were crowding onto holdings that had become too small to maintain growth of population or production. The diversification of activities, particularly the development of rural industries, did not happen quickly enough, or on a large enough scale, to help prevent the population crisis.

At first glance, the rural world in northern France was, just as it had always been since at least the ninth century, a society of married people. The framework of family life was formed by the marital unit, a unique and indissoluble union. This feature, which had been evident from the high middle ages, was strengthened from the eleventh century onwards, when the Church made an effort to regain control of lay society, defining the laity as the order of married people, men and women. But in the meantime, the ideological framework had changed, and this altered the place of family structures in the general economy, giving more space to social links than to family obligations.

The Church had taken over the schema of the Three Orders, evident since the ninth century, but reinforced it in the eleventh. By establishing the essential solidarity between *bellatores*, *oratores* and *laboratores*, the Church set up an intellectual framework for a kind of social contract in which the orders were related to each other, and thus put the general structure of society ahead of kinship, which was now only one element of human relationships among others (Duby, 1978; Oexle, 1990).

There were three major features of family structure in the medieval and early modern period.

The general organization of settlement corresponded to the schema of peasant marriage forms, as far as we can tell: on marriage, the couple moved to a new dwelling, the choice of partner tended to be endogamous, and the nuclear family was the rule. New married couples did not live with their parents but lived in a new habitation, though it might be near to their childhood home. It is estimated that, in the thirteenth century, in more than 90 per cent of marriages the spouses came from less than 10 kilometres away. Thus marriages were fundamentally endogamous in spite of the

barriers imposed by ecclesiastical rules. Throughout the period, it was rare for parents to live with married children. The exception was when a surviving parent could not manage alone and moved in with a married child.

For different reasons the family was not as large as historians once thought. The average family had five children of whom two or more died before adulthood. The death of one of the spouses was followed by remarriage, very quickly (only a few months) in the case of men, longer for women, and many families were recomposed with children from several marriages. It was very important to manage the assets of the orphans, and family councils decided who should be the legal guardian and, later on, when the child should be emancipated from tutelage. The legal guardian had to bring up and educate the children and to render accounts when they reached adulthood, but was able to benefit from their labour until then. It is clear that it was easier to find guardians for boys than for girls, for teenagers than babies.

What we know of the marriage patterns of peasants in this period suggests that they married as close at hand as possible, both in terms of geography and of blood ties. Marriage unions within the kinship were necessary to maintain and develop family assets and were organised and carried out in spite of the canonical prohibitions, which incidentally, were lessened after 1215. Fathers were likely to think two or three generations ahead when arranging unions and to organise a series of steps to assure the consolidation or extension of the inheritance (Feller et al., 2005). Also the Church gave dispensations fairly easily beyond the third canonical degree, which made any combination of marriage between second cousins possible, and allowed such marriages to occur again after an interval of two generations.

In the fifteenth century the Church reasserted rules against clandestine marriages and maintained a very strict watch on bans and on the activity of the clergy in these matters. This shows that the peasants were using strategies to get round the prohibitions and to avoid the cost of seeking dispensations by getting married away from their parishes. There was thus a real and no doubt effective resistance to the Church's desire to control families closely (Avignon, 2008).

The need to set up a new household upon marriage was one of the causes behind the voluntary or forced mobility of men during the period of population expansion from the ninth to the thirteenth century. The lords frequently acted as settlement entrepreneurs, and they organised migrations to their new foundations or to complete existing villages. For example, in the twelfth century at Toury in Beauce, Abbot Suger took steps to reorganise the settlement by planning a foundation beside the old population centre (Leturcq, 2007). This suggests that the newcomers were either subject to severe constraints or were offered very attractive conditions. Generally speaking, new land clearing, whether planned or not, occurred when the population was displaced to the edge of the community's land, thus leading to the construction of new hamlets. Young couples were thus able to achieve a double emancipation: in quitting the family roof and in building up assets or a new holding, independent of inheritances.

In fact, apart from some tenant farmers who were able to hand down the farm they rented (which did not belong to them), each family owned only tiny plots. These assets were shared and redistributed among the children, who then exchanged, sold,

and bought land without paying any attention to keeping a specific piece of land since they could not live on these plots in any case. In most of the area under consideration here, it seems that the peasants did not show any particular attachment to the land they cultivated and did not hesitate to sell or exchange it according to their needs or abilities.

From the beginning of the modern era, although there was a long period when peasants' children were not able to go to school but instead had to work on the farm, it seems clear that most households were aware of the need for education. This was especially true of the large farmers' sons, whose schooling was expensive. The Chartier family in the Paris basin spent a lot of money on their children's, or more precisely their sons' education, and it could be argued that the money paid out by the family created the impetus for agricultural improvement. The aim of the farmer was to establish all his sons as farmers, either on the family farm after he retired or on other available farms in the neighbourhood, and it can be estimated that with this strategy a third of farmers' sons became farmers when they married. The other sons became merchants, lawyers or clergymen, all of which occupations put them in reach of bourgeois or even noble status. The new farmer usually got the land, only a small part of which was owned and the rest held on leasehold, as well as the agricultural implements. His wife received money in the form of a dowry, and this money provided funds for managing the farm. The key to the household's successful pursuit of this strategy was continual improvement in agricultural management, which provided the money needed to fund it. Family business was in some way the source of capitalism (Moriceau and Postel-Vinay, 1992).

The middle rank of peasants owned very small farms and had to divide them among the heirs. At each generation the estates were shared, and each heir received a share that was smaller than the father's farm. The heir then began a process of accumulation by buying from brothers and sisters and from other peasants to try to reconstitute a new farm. The land was the retirement portion for the peasants and a means of helping children who got established. After death the estate was shared among heirs, and the process started over. (Béaur, 2000).

Day labourers' sons became servants on large farms as soon as they could work, or at best, learned a trade by being apprenticed to artisans in the village or in a nearby town. When they worked on a farm, they earned money and got married as soon as they could support a household, or, if that was not possible, remained domestics, going from farm to farm, unless they left for the city to become labourers.

When peasants married, the bride and groom received either a dowry to help them or just the right to a future inheritance. Parents generally gave money to the bridegroom and also to the bride unless she had money of her own. Then the family life cycle came to resemble the cycle described by the Russian sociologist Anatoli Chayanov. During the first years of the new family there were more and more mouths to feed and few opportunities to expand the farm. When the parents reached the age of forty, the older children could provide labour on the farm or bring in money while working on the larger farms. For the next few years there was more labour and more money available. The farm could increase in size, the parents might inherit, and the accumulation of land reached its highest point when the peasant neared the age of 55. Then the children gradually left, the family grew smaller, and there was less income. The parents donated

some money to the children to help them set up on their own. The family stopped accumulating and reduced the size of the holding. After retirement the parents passed the farm on to the children. They sold their land or lived from the revenue from their property if they had any. Otherwise they were financially supported by their children, or, in the worst case, taken in by them on written conditions with a *clause d'insupport* stipulated to guarantee the rights of the old folks (Béaur, 2000).

In fact this life cycle has been observed in various places in the eighteenth century, first among the winegrowers in the Beauce near Chartres and at Maintenon, then near Vernon in Normandy (Béaur, 1984; Boudjaaba, 2008). According to the study on the Beauce it appears that the level of accumulation depended on the economic context these families lived in when at the height of their expansion, when the father was between 40 and 55. The farm expanded to a greater or lesser extent according to whether that was a period of prosperity or crisis.

5.2 The family and its members

Historians in the 1970s laid great emphasis on the village, the parish and the seigneurie as new units of organisation in Europe and the fact that they appeared in the eleventh century in the context of a general reorganisation of the landscape and society, a process which the mediaevalist Robert Fossier termed *encellulement* (Fossier, 1982). This change also had an effect on the organisation of family life. The modifications of settlement patterns also affected the rural dwelling. Whatever type it was, a basic structure that only sheltered people, or a mixed building that housed both men and animals, it tended to be the house of a couple and their children. The hearth was the basic institution, and it corresponded both as a taxation unit and as a physical entity to the conjugal family. The house, then, constituted the basic family unit, and this can be seen in its size and in the allocation of rooms. For example, in Burgundy, at Dracy (Côte-d'Or), houses occupying an area of 16 square metres have been found, while at Penn-er-Malo in Brittany, in a roughly circular, mixed-occupancy building of about 50 square metres, the part occupied by humans was only 30 square metres. In Penn-er-Malo, there were two hearths, although it is not possible to infer the presence of more than one family from this. Also, the presence of partitions in the houses excavated shows that houses could be divided and occupation intensified. However, on the whole, every family unit had a separate dwelling.

Inside every family unit the roles were shared according to a schema that stayed the same until modern times, with different tasks for each member of the family. Men worked in the fields, ploughing and harvesting, but women usually made the sheaves. Women took care of the poultry and dairy cows. Finally, most domestic industries depended on women's labour. Women spun some wool, but mainly hemp and flax. Men did the weaving, when it was not done by urban craftsmen; this was an especially important activity in the north of France.

The wife supervised the preparation of food and organised meals, which was evidently vitally important. She performed certain agricultural tasks, typically weeding,

rearing the small animals, tossing hay and spinning. From the fifteenth century onward certain crafts, the equivalent of domestic industry, were normally carried on by women, and brought in extra money. Spinning was the most important of these. It may be that links to the market first came about as a result of women's labour, as soon as this labour ceased to be overtaxed by the lord. Finally, although women did sometimes take part in the heaviest agricultural tasks, mainly at harvest time, they were excluded from certain of them. Women did not till the soil, and it was not acceptable for them to work the plough, although in certain circumstances, such as extreme poverty, or lack of male workers, they could lead the team.

The children were employed on the farm at an early age. First they worked with the livestock, then, later, helped their father with more varied agricultural tasks. If the family holding was too small and the parents needed cash, they could be hired out as domestic servants by the year, or join groups of travelling workers who went from farm to farm seeking work during the harvest. There is good evidence of this practice from the thirteenth century on. It was a temporary solution until the family farm was available or until the young man could start his own holding by taking on land to farm.

Another point which should be mentioned is mutual assistance in farming. This usually happened within the kinship group. Borrowing animals or equipment was absolutely essential for carrying out work. While not an obligation, it expressed a form of solidarity inside a limited group defined by marriage or blood links. However friends and neighbours could be assimilated to the group, they could in any case be asked to contribute to it. These systems of mutual assistance did not, however, put an end to the demand for labour, which was partly regulated by the labour market.

Among free peasants, as a general rule, hereditary transmission of peasant property took place by egalitarian division. This mechanism, which could end in farms being broken up, would have led to a continual and dramatic fragmentation of the estates if it had not been counterbalanced by the series of marriages and exchanges of property which it prompted among heirs.

There were two essential stages in the transmission of family assets: the marriage and the inheritance. The marriage was when the household was first established; the acquisition of family assets came sooner or later thereafter. These assets came mainly from the husband's father, transmitted after the death of both parents. The negotiations between the families at the time of marriage were about creating an interim holding so the young couple could survive in the difficult times when children were still young. To this end some plots were detached from the paternal property, and money was provided for the couple. The dowry mobilised the parents' savings and allowed the couple access to the property market.

The choice of a spouse was also absolutely essential. Farmers sought to reconstruct the holding which was menaced by the division of assets. It was thus both logical and necessary to arrange a series of marriages and keep on making unions within the kinship group. The aim was first of all to prevent land from leaving the family line and second to make it possible to reconstitute the holding that had been broken up by the succession. It took some dexterity, talent and luck. But it was quite possible to achieve this end.

Egalitarian transmission was the general rule. According to customary law, which was mostly codified during the sixteenth century, all children, both sons and daughters, had an equal share. In Normandy, however, women had no right to the land, as it was passed down the male family line (*lignage*), and they instead received a dowry (Yver, 1966; Le Roy Ladurie, 1972). All the sons were heirs to the estate in this last region, except in the Pays de Caux (Upper Normandy), where only one of them got the land.

Though wills were rare, marriage contracts were very frequent. They were concluded a few days before the marriage and laid out the financial situation of the couple and what would happen if one spouse died. The contract stated exactly what the bride and groom owned in money, grain, clothes and furniture, and what each of them was bringing into the marriage. Historians have devoted much time and effort to finding out if the bride brought more than the groom, or vice versa, or if the contribution of each spouse was roughly equal. In fact, parents tried to give each child the same amount and to match the contribution of the other family. This was more or less possible because, most of the time, the daughters-in-law and sons-in-law came from the same social group. Thus, it was not surprising that the contributions noted in these contracts accorded closely with the social hierarchy. The contract also laid out what the widow or widower would get after the death of his or her spouse. The widow generally obtained a dower (*douaire*). The surviving spouse could also benefit from a *preciput*, that is, some assets beyond the legal entitlement, and of course, from his or her own property (*propres*) brought into the marriage from his or her family.

The rules, however, differed from region to region; in areas like Brittany and Lorraine the estate was divided with strict equality, while in the area around Paris, parents were able to make a gift to one child. If this happened the child then had to decide whether to keep the gift and renounce his share of the inheritance, or add it to the rest of the assets and take an equal share with his or her siblings and mother. It is obvious that in practice the heirs received equal inheritances and parents generally refused to give an advantage to one of their children. There were very few wills, and there was nothing in marriage contracts about designating a principal heir, even though most rural families made contracts when they married. But whatever the rules, the result was the same: there was equality among heirs everywhere, or almost everywhere.

There is little solid evidence for institutionalised cohabitation of several generations under the same roof. *Frèresches*, where siblings lived, worked and owned land in common were rather unusual. When different generations shared the same house, it seems to have been a temporary situation, usually related to arrangements made when aged parents retired and were taken in by one of their children. The parents did not exercise any authority over them. In these cases *clauses d'insupport* set out an alternative for what would happen if cohabitation became too hard to bear for either party.

In spite of this, relations within the family were weighed down by the fact that the young people only had access to a portion of family assets up until the parents' retirement. This meant that the father was able to exert power over the children who had left home. Frequently, each child's individual accumulation of assets was subject to paternal control that aimed to coordinate their several projects in order to fit them into the overall family marriage strategy. Parents made the essential decision to accept,

or even decide on, the union according to economic considerations: the amount of dowry, what land was involved; political considerations: strengthening ties between families; symbolic considerations: the reputation of the partner's family and the power they exercised. Also, whether it was owned or worked, families did not have control of all of their landed capital until they received their inheritance. The early years of marriage were, traditionally, difficult, particularly from the time the first children were born until they were old enough to work on the farm.

The parents kept the holding until they were too old to work it alone. In the early modern period they had authority over their children who could not marry without parental consent until the age of 25. Endogamy continued to be strong. Farmers' sons usually married farmers' daughters, and winegrowers' sons married winegrowers' daughters. The parents could not, however, decide who could be an heir and who could not unless they tried to disinherit one of their children.

5.3 The family and income

It is impossible to speak of peasant income during the feudal period without first discussing seigneurial levies (Bourin and Martinez Sopena, 2004 and 2006). To evaluate revenue, we have to take account of the portion that was invariably removed and went to the Church, to the lord and, from the fourteenth century onwards, to the sovereign. From the eleventh century onwards, all inhabitants were affected by seigneurial levies. Whether a peasant was a freeholder or a tenant, the lord had to be paid for the often very real protection he provided. Whatever name they bore, these duties were heavy. According to André Debord, they accounted for 35 per cent of gross revenue in the thirteenth century (Debord, 1984). Since a quarter of the harvest had to be set aside for sowing grain, the household was left with only 40 per cent of its gross income. Of course these amounts are only estimates and obviously varied greatly according to the form under which the lord took his dues.

If the lord chose to receive dues as a proportion of the harvest in the form of a *champart*, he left the peasant with both what he needed for subsistence and something which could be brought to the market (Feller, 2009). The structure and level of peasant income depended in that case on when he could intervene in the market and on the weight of the lord's dues. If the lord required fixed dues in kind, as he usually did in the thirteenth century, the peasant's income was extremely variable; he bore all the risk, and could be faced with dire consequences if the harvest was very poor. Finally, if the peasant paid dues in cash, he could only benefit if they were never re-evaluated; that is, if custom forbade any changes to them. In that case, it was the lord's income that went into long-term decline, forcing him to attempt measures usually labelled as 'seigneurial reaction', for example, reviving obsolete dues or creating duties on property transfers (*lods et ventes*). It appears that during the fifteenth century, that is, during the period of the reconstruction of the seigneurie, lords preferred to take their income in kind in order to take greatest advantage of market opportunities. But in any event, our knowledge of peasant income is still highly unsatisfactory. It depends on

a large number of factors, including, of course, the ability to commercialise produce or at least the possibility of doing so; in other words, the existence of infrastructures and places for exchange. During the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, Northern France developed markets. The King's Chamber of Accounts carefully watched over their implantation, attempting to avoid creating redundant markets, with remarkable awareness of the needs of the population for specialised weekly markets in foodstuffs (Theiller, 2004). The process of *aveux* and *dénombrements* constituted an attempt both to organise exchanges and to establish a true complementary network of markets, according to the days they were held and the products in which they specialised. In addition, laws to protect market exchanges were put into place, and their application carefully supervised. Market justice was designed, as always, to protect transactions by detecting and repressing fraud. It also guaranteed order and personal safety. The seigneuries, watched over by the monarchy through its specialized financial institutions, ensured that markets were set up and that they could function.

The economic crisis of the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries led to structural changes through the markets. Thus, in Hainaut, the development of stock raising for meat production allowed producers, from the fourteenth century onwards, to take advantage of changing consumption patterns in the towns. In the fifteenth century, these markets formed an extremely dense network. Its existence was one sign of French society's vitality, which emerged whenever hostilities subsided. Sensitivity to markets and their changes was real, both among better-off peasants and among the more active lords.

Famines were part of life. They still occurred frequently. Although we are not yet sure of their exact patterns, it is clear that the period of long-term population growth included subsistence crises of greater or lesser intensity. But from the twelfth century onwards, the most alert and clever members of the governing classes knew that it was possible to counter them to some extent. This meant going beyond customary charitable aid. Of course looking after a certain number of poor folk was part of the lord's traditional role, as was guaranteeing that all their dependants, including the tillers of the soil, had enough to feed themselves. What was new in the twelfth century was that public and even feudal authorities managed to intervene simultaneously in the processes of production, distribution and consumption. Thus rulers themselves encouraged the growing of legumes, which could help palliate grain shortages. They were able to intervene directly in markets by setting the prices of foodstuffs like wine, in order to undermine speculation. Other possible measures sometimes imposed were to ban the consumption of products such as beer, because it demanded too much of the grain needed for bread, or to require that oats be put into bread. The ability to use the market for these purposes is noteworthy: it was not a question of the physical existence of grain, but rather of its availability for sale. Distributions of money by authorities, often seigneurial authorities, allowed the poorest to gain access to markets. Frequently imposed regulations limiting the size of bread was part of the same process. Moreover, from the eleventh century onward, information on production and prices was sometimes available over long distances. Around 1030, for example, the bishop of Paderborn in Saxony arranged to purchase enough wheat in Cologne to fill two ships, which sufficed to feed his *familia* as well as the town population. The

role and operation of the grain markets and the question of transport capacity and communications are questions that are currently undergoing profound re-evaluation by scholars. Better distribution of foodstuffs through markets, even distant ones, often stimulated by political authorities, is part of the explanation why population growth took place during this period.

It is usually stated that the so-called peasant economy in France was a subsistence economy and that each peasant was doing his best to stay away from the market and exchanges. In fact, contrary to the traditional picture of the French peasant as allergic to exchanges, very few farmers were independent and self-sufficient. It was very difficult to avoid the market for various reasons: because it was impossible to produce everything the family needed or because farmers had to get cash to pay most dues and taxes, or even to finance dowries or purchase land (Aymard, 1982; Béaur, 2000). Some money was essential to meet these financial obligations. Some producers managed to strike a rough balance between sales of foodstuffs and purchases of food.

From one year to the next, nevertheless, they had grain to sell, and a lot of small sellers came onto the market only once or twice a year. What they gained from these transactions depended on the economic context of the moment, and a grain seller could easily become a grain buyer.

Some big farmers had too much grain and had a lot to sell. The grain came from their land and, in the case of the richest, from the Church or from landlords, if they had leased the right to levy tithes, seigneurial dues and so on from them. These individuals were the only ones who had the horses and carts to carry away the grain, and the workforce and barns to store the sheaves. Thus, they were in a position to sell grain on the market. The market was strictly supervised to avoid speculation, but they could hold back the grain, or sell it outside the market, although such dealings were in principle forbidden. Historians generally assume that when the harvest failed speculation started, and that farmers were waiting for the prices to rise before selling their grain on the market. For this reason, they were accused of profiting from crises. In fact, surprisingly, recent scholarship has shown that they made more money in times of prosperity than in periods of crisis. Records of grain delivered to the market during one crisis year by François Chartier, a big farmer from the Île-de-France, show that he supplied it quite regularly all year long throughout these difficulties. This suggests that he did not try to take advantage of hard times to make more money, either out of prudence or because he feared popular vengeance in the name of what is called the moral economy (Moriceau and Postel-Vinay, 1992).

It was only on these big farms that sheep were bred, which, even if they provided almost no revenue, could be sold for meat. Sheep, it is true, could also be shorn for their wool, but their most important function was producing manure to fertilise the fields. This explains why the soil was generally more productive on this kind of farm. This in turn accounts for the wealth of these big farmers, their domination of rural society, their links with the bourgeoisie and their social ambition to rise to the level of the bourgeoisie or even to that of the aristocracy by purchasing offices and promoting their children's fortunes by education. This farmer 'gentry' received a severe shock at the end of the seventeenth century, with two major crises in 1694 and 1709, and many

found themselves asking for time to pay their rent or for a reduction in the amount they paid. Some went bankrupt and had great difficulty in hanging on to their farms (Moriceau, 1994). The richest managed to survive the crises and used the opportunity to concentrate the land under their control by buying up several farms and becoming even richer than they had been before the hard times had begun.

On the small farms, the situation was the opposite. There was not enough grain even when the harvest was sufficient because these farmers controlled little land and had no hope of borrowing more land. They produced a very small part of what was required to feed their families and had to find additional resources by selling their labour. They had sometimes one or two cows and some poultry and they got some money, milk or meat by selling their produce on the market. They could not buy ploughs, still less feed the horses they needed to draw the plough. They had to borrow farm equipment, seed and all the rest from the bigger farmers, and they had to find extra money to get food for their families in other ways. When they worked for others as wage-earners, they were generally fed on the farm and earned a little cash, unless they were working for free in order to reimburse money or material that they had borrowed. Their children, too, had to work as domestics all year round on nearby farms, as did some peasants who owned no land at all. These young people were waiting for their parents' support in order, perhaps, to establish themselves on a tiny holding and become day labourers (*journaliers*) themselves, after they married or when they inherited a part of their parents' land. Some of these small peasants obtained lower grain yields because they lacked fertilisers, but some, in Artois or the country around Béthune (Rosselle, 1984), got very high yields by intensive cultivation, or lived in regions like Flanders, where there was a long tradition of managing complex agricultural systems.

The situation of peasants living close to an urban market, particularly the Paris market, was quite different. They produced quantities of vegetables, fruits and flowers. This produce was brought to the market, either in carts or, mostly, on foot, mainly carried by women, who had set out from their homes during the night with sacks on their backs. Some of these peasants lived too far away or were too busy to go to town, and sold their produce to merchants who gathered it together and sold it (Abad, 2002). This highly intensive form of agriculture was particularly widespread around Paris from at least the sixteenth century onward, despite the temporary destruction of some of the fields during the civil wars (the Wars of Religion, in the later sixteenth century, and the Fronde, in the middle of the seventeenth century). Paris was a very large city, with the largest urban population in Europe, perhaps unequalled anywhere else in the world except in Asia. It had probably 100,000 inhabitants around 1450 (down from 200,000 in 1328), 150,000 around 1500, 300,000 around 1550 and again around 1600 after a decline during the Wars of Religion, 400,000 around 1650, 500,000 around 1700, and 600,000 before the French Revolution. It included many rich customers for rural produce and had plenty of organic waste to send back to the countryside to fertilise its lands. And finally it was surrounded by grain-producing areas that fed the people living in its supply zones where there was more specialised agriculture.

Vegetables (artichokes and asparagus), fruit (cherries and strawberries), and flowers were brought on their backs or on donkeys by women, who prepared the products in

the evening and sometimes departed in the middle of the night to reach the market in the early morning. Elsewhere the products were shipped by boat along the numerous rivers of Île-de-France (Abad, 2002). A great deal of the small landowners survived by practicing intensive agriculture carried out by the whole family and complemented by other activities such as a cottage industry or by wage-earning on nearby big farms. Here, very few peasants did not own at least some scraps of land. Such smallholders were numerous in the valleys. An example is the winegrowers of the Île-de-France, Touraine, Champagne and Burgundy who sold their wines in Paris. In the Seine valley, winegrowers produced low-grade wine for the common people of Paris on tiny plots of land (at the most two hectares). Argenteuil, practically a suburb of Paris, had more vines – more than 1,000 hectares under cultivation – than any other parish in France (Lachiver, 1982). In Champagne, these winegrowers were dependent on the merchants of Epernay and Reims who, since at least the beginning of the eighteenth century, had been slowly transforming a small part of their production into a sparkling wine of quality, destined for Parisian and foreign markets (Musset, 2009).

Many of these small peasants lived and worked in the towns. This was often the case in Paris until at least the sixteenth century but became less and less common because of pressure on the land, which forced more and more peasants out of the town. Even in the eighteenth century there were still many peasants living in the small and medium towns. For example, they made up around half of the total population of Chartres, a town of 10,000 inhabitants. In any event, all were more or less forced to look for hired work in order for them and their young children to supplement their income.

In western France, the social structure was quite different. The sharecropper (*métayer*) had no land and only precarious occupation of his holding. He had generally no seed and no oxen to till the land and had to share the product of the harvest and the profits from stock breeding with the landowner. The *métayer*'s material living conditions are the subject of some controversy. Sharecroppers are commonly considered to have been poor wretches, incapable of any initiative, totally submissive to the landowner or his agent, the *fermier général*. Perhaps this was the case. But some historians reject this as a fairy-tale and consider the sharecropper to have been a comfortably-off 'farmer', a truly market-oriented entrepreneur, situated far above the rest of the rural population on the social ladder (Antoine, 2003).

We still lack sufficient information on consumer credit, on the loans in foodstuffs which made it possible to get through the gap between one year's harvest and the next, and on the social problems they caused. Traditionally, the clergy played a role in granting credit. In addition to providing charity, loaning money with or without interest was part of the activity of priests in rural society. In the same fashion, lay confraternities also carried out this function, which can be considered as an aspect of community solidarity. Hitherto unused sources allow us to give an account of some of the most practical aspects of this credit, those closest linked to economic life. Recently, the importance of tally sticks has been rediscovered, which served to record both paid transactions and debts, and which, in addition to written records, permitted an ongoing control of current accounts (Coquery et al, 2006). Their existence shows how peasants were capable of bookkeeping practices. They used these instruments to keep track of credit purchases,

which provided simple and irrefutable proof when accounts came due. Most purchases for consumption, particularly of food, did not give rise to an immediate settlement. This type of credit was indispensable in older societies, where cash did not circulate in sufficient quantity and where inflows of specie came at irregular intervals. In addition, from the thirteenth century onward, the agricultural economy became a sector in which financiers could invest. Thus, it was from a Parisian financier that the peasants of Orly obtained the 10,000 *livres parisis* that they offered to the Chapter of Notre-Dame to obtain their enfranchisement. Their lender considered them solvent, either because of the size of their income or the value of their property (Feller, 2007). So credit could involve not only individual concerns but also community affairs managed collectively.

Sometimes peasants had savings that permitted them to face up to economic difficulties or to buy a plot or pay a dowry. If the amount to be paid was too great, they had to find a loan. There were no banks, so they had often to ask their relatives, their neighbours or their friends for help. This informal credit was widespread. Unrecorded loans made by verbal agreement were probably very frequent even though there remains little evidence of these practices. If no one had enough money to lend, people turned to someone with liquid assets, such as a big farmer, a townsman, or to the seigneur himself (Postel-Vinay, 1997). Such borrowing practices required a written and signed contract, called a *billet sous seing privé*. If something went wrong and the creditor had reason to be careful, after 1693 the note could be registered in the *contrôle des actes*, and could be produced eventually in a court of law. If the loans required precautions because the lender had no reason to trust the borrower, a contract was drawn up by a notary and, in the eighteenth century, registered like the *billet sous seing privé*. Two main kinds of contracts were used: bonds (*obligations*), short-term loans in which principal and interest were reimbursed; ‘perpetual loans’ (*rentes constituées*), which were long-term loans bearing annual interest and theoretically lasting forever (Postel-Vinay, 1997; Béaur, 2000).

Loans were very frequently made during crises, when households lacked money. When the price of bread rose, so did the number of credit contracts, particularly bonds. Since in many cases it finally proved impossible to reimburse the loan, in areas where there were many smallholders the sales of plots of land went up after these hard times. Even when there were no crises, it is obvious that most rural households owed money. They borrowed money to buy land or to get seed or food. They had to pay for dowries or reimburse fellow heirs whose shares in successions they had purchased. Often a long time passed before they could obtain the final receipt (*quittance*) by which they wrote off their debt.

The labour market now appears to have been much more complex than longtime perceived. In the French countryside, from the thirteenth century onwards, a wage labour force developed vigorously. At the beginning of the fourteenth century, the documents left by Thierry de Hireçon show that it functioned at two levels. As in England, the large landowners hired numerically stable teams of labourers, large and varied enough to cover the regular work of the demesne (Postan, 1955). These workers were paid by the year; their pay was rather low, but they were housed and fed. However, these crews experienced a considerable amount of turnover and the paid labourers changed from one year to the next on the same demesne. Besides, at the moments

when there was a great deal to be done, managers took on teams of workers who were often paid in kind, proportionately to the harvesting they did. The advantage of the system was that it allowed agricultural workers to complement their yearly stock of grain without having to purchase it on the market.

Since the land most peasants possessed did not produce enough for them to live on, they had to look for supplementary employment. Some toiled as domestics on other farms: as *charretiers*, ploughing the soil and driving carts, or as cowherds, raising cattle. Others worked hard during harvest time as day labourers (*journaliers*) and were paid per day. Domestics and day labourers were usually fed by the farmer. The former were hired for the whole year with a higher wage in summer, and they received this wage at the end of the year; the second were paid by piecework. Winegrowers were considered as vineyard technicians and were paid according to the complexity of the tasks they carried out; the trimming (*taille*) of the vines in spring was particularly well paid. In the same way gardeners were sometimes hired by garden owners.

Whenever a crisis occurred, peasants had less produce and had to buy more grain at a higher price. As more people than before were looking for extra work in order to earn some money, labour supply was abundant. But there was less grain to harvest and thresh, and so the demand for labour was weaker; wage levels consequently fell.

In the fifteenth century, wages were high because population levels were low. In the sixteenth century, however, wages increased more slowly than prices. The same happened again in the eighteenth century, although wages started to climb again during the last decades of that century. The situation changed dramatically with the Revolution. Many workers joined the army or were conscripted. Given the troubled nature of the times, wage demands were very acute, and farmers hesitated to refuse increases. The income of day labourers was higher during the Revolution than before, even though the change did not last long.

All throughout the period, because there were not enough jobs on the spot, or at least not enough well-paid jobs, it was customary for agricultural labourers to make long seasonal migrations to work in the harvest on big farms or estates, or sometimes in the grape harvest, both of which needed plenty of labour (Poitrineau, 1983). One such destination was the vast open fields of the Paris basin, where there was a shortage of local workers to carry out the main farm tasks. Some, for example, came from the bocage borderlands of Normandy or the Perche. They gathered in bands under the leadership of a chief, and travelled eastwards to the Beauce or other grain-producing regions for the harvest. These ‘bands’ moved around from one village to another, from one farm to another and from one region to another, taking advantage of the fact that grain ripened for the harvest later as they travelled northwards. They concluded contracts with the rich farmers. Sometimes, they demanded higher wages and refused to bring in the harvest unless they were better paid. These strikes, called *baccanals*, were often successful, as the farmers preferred to pay workers more rather than lose the production of their farms (Moriceau, 1994).

After the harvest was over in the autumn, the harvesters returned home with their savings to help their family, who otherwise would have been short of money. Other migrants went to the Paris basin because they were craftsmen, specialists in some

trade needed in the countryside or the towns. As soon as the work was finished, they returned to their villages to farm their own little plots, with the money they needed to buy land or to pay dowries. The following year they again travelled far away from their home for another 'campaign' (*campagne*).

Peasants with small or medium-sized farms did not use this kind of workforce; they relied on the labour of their families. It was essential for the large farmers to have these smallholders available for the periods when they required a sizeable workforce. This meant that, to keep them close at hand, they had to leave them their tiny plots on which they could survive. And indeed there were few peasants completely without land who could live only as hired labourers. The problem was that there was not enough employment for all the villagers in winter but too small a workforce in summer. Peasants often worked at home, weaving wool or linen for urban merchants, as domestic industry spread. This was the case in Cambrésis, Beauvaisis and in Champagne for instance (Terrier, 1996). Conversely, farmers needed more and more workers at the start of the harvest, since their farms had grown in size from at least the beginning of the eighteenth century onwards. They found them in the seasonal migrants.

5.4 The family, the local community and the state

The extent of seigniorial control over the transmission of land is not always clear. Those with lordship over the land took a fee when a new occupant took over. When dues on the land were small, this fee tended to be higher. Each generation had to repurchase the right to operate the holding that the father had held. In any event, the lords were extremely attentive to property changes and levied fees when occupants changed, not only to get money, but also to avoid that to let plots of land escape their control by neglect.

The problem was fundamentally the same in the case of serfs. There were large numbers of serfs until at least the fifteenth century. The extensive movement towards enfranchisement in the thirteenth century, which Marc Bloch first studied, was incomplete and limited. Entire regions like the Beauvaisis continued to harbour large numbers of serfs. The rules for the devolution of inheritance for serfs were similar to those for property, but the lords controlled the process much more closely. In the absence of a direct heir, collateral relatives were excluded from the inheritance unless they paid the escheat (*échoite*). If they did not, the land reverted to the lord, who could then choose a successor outside the family line. Moreover, the fee to be paid on each succession was more substantial than in the case of tenures belonging to a freeman, as a serf was not considered to possess true property rights. As a result, each generation had to pay a high price for the right to work the lands of its forefathers. The difference here was a matter of degree: more was asked of serfs than of free men.

From the fifteenth century onwards, there were no more serfs in the northwest of France. Nevertheless, all peasants owed obedience to a lord and were subject to obligations that were more or less harsh according to the region. They still occasionally had to perform *corvées*, unpaid labour, with or without their draught animals and carts.

They had to pay a whole series of dues linked either to the ownership of their tenure, such as *cens*, which were mainly of symbolic value, or the *champart*, which was much more onerous. They had to accept 'services' that the lord provided and which they could not avoid. Even if the lord had ceased to exercise control over the hereditary succession of their tenures, they still paid transmission dues when they purchased one. And of course they were subject to the lord's justice (Soboul, 1970; Gallet, 1999). On top of all these burdens, they had to pay the tithe to the clergy and royal taxes: the *taille* first of all, from the reign of Louis XIV on the *capitation*, and the *vingtième* from the mid-eighteenth century, not to mention a wide range of indirect taxes. They bore all these levies more or less willingly – less rather than more as time went by.

The King's direct taxes were resented because they were considered innovations, and, therefore, illegitimate and contrary to the principle that the King should live off his own resources; his indirect taxes were disliked because they were levied by financiers called *partisans* and *traitants*, and then in the eighteenth century by a private company, the General Farm. Seigneurial dues were universally unpopular and thought to be unjustified, some because the landholders considered themselves as landowners in their own right, others because the seigneurs had ceased to play their roles as protectors to the community. Dues paid to the Church were decried because they were not directed to their proper ends and were employed for the convenience of absentee upper clergy rather than for the needs of the rural clergy, of worship and poor relief.

From the eleventh century onwards, the village and the parish were the framework for a family's existence. These two social and institutional arrangements took on institutional substance in the eleventh-century countryside as they became the constituent elements of local identity. Physically, the church was obviously the essential communal building. Around it, and for the purpose of its support, appropriate institutions appeared and remained. In the north of France, these were the *fabriques*, who took charge of maintaining the building and managing its revenues, whether they came from tithes, if the bishop or some powerful laymen had not laid hold of them, or lands and endowments which the parish held as its own property. The *fabrique* gave peasants a common cause, and allowed them to acquire a kind of autonomy which removed them from the direct control of the clergy and the lords. Moreover, special organisations, the confraternities, which any man or woman, rich or poor, could join, developed from the thirteenth century onwards. These institutions were dedicated to pious devotions and the practice of charity; they gave help in the first instance to their own members and then, by extension, to all the poor of the parish. They got their income initially from the contributions of their members. When these institutions were dedicated to providing charity and assistance, the municipality (*commune*) took over their management and financing. In northern France, these *charités* were and remained lay institutions over which the Church exercised little control. Thus charitable activity ceased to be the monopoly of church institutions, about the same time as municipalities (*communes*) made their appearance.

Municipalities were the institutional expression of the village community. Their members were defined by a threefold identity: they were heads of families, heads of holdings, and parishioners. Municipalities managed and regulated rural life in

cooperation with the lord of the locality, fixing, for example, the date of grain or grape harvests. They also managed common lands and upheld the ongoing rights of the village over uncultivated land. They might take initiatives in military matters, justice and financial affairs, whether in collaboration with the lord or after negotiations with him. Thus the village community acquired political institutions from which the lord was never excluded.

Unless the local lord managed to hold on to authority, in early modern times, the communities of *manants et habitants* came to take decisions on their own. Only those heads of households who had lived in the village for a year or more could participate in its meetings and share in its decisions. Sometimes, as in Lorraine, newcomers had to pay an entry fine to become members. But, in fact, whenever information can be found, it seems that participation in these meetings was not very numerous. As Jean Jacquart showed for the region of the Hurepoix, near Paris, a small minority made the decisions (Jacquart, 1974). Among this minority there was a good deal of turn-over except for a small group who attended all the meetings and who came from the middling social group in the village.

Even when the lord had to authorise meetings, it was this group of farmers who organised them. Even when the lord or his representative could attend meetings, they very frequently accepted all the decisions. However, this was no longer the practice in the Île de France where the lord did not attend and where the community was free to decide. Here the lord had only the power to confirm decisions. The community elected a representative called a *syndic*, sometimes a mayor (*maire*), a procurator (*procurateur*) to exercise local justice and some wardens, called *messiers*, to keep watch over the vines or wheat-fields just before the harvest. They assessed and levied the royal taxes (*taille*); they managed the common lands and sometimes the common rights; they laid down rules and enforced them so that they were respected. They had to keep the streets and rivers clean, maintain the local washing-place (*lavoir*), well and spring. They had to pay the teacher, to provide for the needs for the church and so on. It was more or less the same community who managed Church property in the parish through the *fabrique*. Community representatives were elected, and these elected members came from all social groups, except from the day labourers. The latter were either excluded or excluded themselves insofar as they neglected to participate to the meetings (Jacquart, 1990).

For in this community the poor were more or less kept out of decision-making, either by custom or by their subordinate position. Who were the poor? Some were members of families that had been devastated by disease; others had been reduced to misery when one or both their parents had died. Some were too ill or too old to work; many were children abandoned by mothers who could no longer raise them and had left them to the care of a local hospice or convent, particularly during crisis years. These poor folk were supported, more or less, by the village. They got some help from charities established by the lord or the clergy, or from assistance managed by the *fabrique*. Often, they were able to benefit from rights on the commons. On common lands they could gather some wood or some grass for their cow. They could exercise their rights on the commons, sending their cattle onto the fields after the harvest, or use their gleaning rights to gather the grains of wheat left behind by the harvesters. Everything was

organised to protect the poor man and his cow (Vivier, 1998). Although they were deprived of 'political rights', the poor were generally accepted by the community in which they lived. The attitude of farmers towards the wandering poor, however, was very different. They were rejected, rarely trusted, and, if they were sometimes sheltered for a night, it was more out of fear than charity.

To these 'structural poor' were added the legions of 'temporary poor', when families that had been autonomous up to then fell into poverty because food prices had risen out of reach (Lemarchand, 1989). When the harvest was insufficient, the poorest of these peasants faced the risk of a hunger crisis. These food crises were particularly acute in the rich plains in the centre of the Paris basin, in the Beauce and Brie, and generally all across areas of grain farming, but they could occur anywhere. Whatever the case, the fear of famine forced prices upwards. Households that managed to survive in normal times found it very hard to acquire food on the market. The result was a food shortage and in the worst cases a famine, sometimes linked to an epidemic. Some were able to borrow money and get through the crisis, but some failed because they could no longer offer security. They lost what they owned, became beggars and joined the 'structural *vagabonds* who were forever wandering the roads. Others, who could no longer purchase bread as the prices climbed, were forced to leave home and the countryside to go to the towns, where grain was expected to be available. These wanderers could bring epidemics to the towns, which for this reason tried to keep them out. From the seventeenth century on the State excluded these wanderers who brought diseases, food shortages and riots to the towns. Increasingly, they were shut up in 'general hospitals', which took in all the excluded, the undesirable and the marginal, in order to prevent the disorder which frightened urban populations so much.

5.5 Conclusions

In general, northern France was an egalitarian society as far as inheritance was concerned. Far from being a handicap as is generally thought, this continuous subdivision of holdings was a dynamic element of change or at least no impediment to the capitalist-style expansion noted in the Paris region, buoyed up by a favourable organisation of farm leasing, of credit and of the labour market. This rich area, developed early and well-populated since the middle ages, remained highly vulnerable to bad harvests. Although the Paris basin, with its fertile soils and strong consumer demand from Paris, remained a zone of expansion till the end of the period, the Massif Armoricaïn, which had been prosperous until the seventeenth century, went through a serious crisis in the following century because of over-population and unexpected economic blockage.

And yet it was in the Paris zone that the beginnings of birth control made an appearance in the middle of the eighteenth century, a change that became unexpectedly widespread in the following decades. This transformation slowed population growth in the area around the great city of Paris, and, in response, migration from the west towards the east, and from the periphery of the Paris Basin to its centre, soon accelerated. In

a highly structured labour market, this kind of migration had been the rule for many centuries. Among native Parisians, deaths outnumbered births, and the population would have declined if it had not received migrants from the surrounding countryside each year. But these migrations became more and more pronounced just before the great upheaval of the French Revolution, and led to greater regional distortions in population density and income levels. It was also in the Paris region, as broadly defined, that seigneurial authority was most vigorously contested. This came at the very moment when the weight of taxation, relatively heavier than in other areas, fed grumbling and increasing discontent which continued to grow in the second half of the eighteenth century.

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Jean-François Millet, *L'Angélus*, 1859 (Musée d'Orsay, Paris)

6 Northern France, 1750–2000

Nadine VIVIER and Gérard BÉAUR

Northern France as considered in this chapter covered around 230,000 square kilometres (roughly the area of Great Britain, Belgium and the Netherlands), from Brittany to Lorraine and from Flanders to Berry. This area changed very little in size as there were few territorial changes during this period. Lorraine is the exception: it became French in 1768, was lost in 1871 and recovered in 1918.

The area is clearly bordered by two high, ancient mountain ranges to the east (the Vosges, 1424 metres) and south (the Massif Central, 1886 metres) and by the sea (the Atlantic Ocean, the Channel and the North Sea) to the west, but to the north there is no clear physical barrier separating it from Belgium and the Netherlands. The countryside is rather flat and low with plateaux and plains, hills and valleys, in the Paris Basin and the plains of the North as well as in the Massif Armoricaïn (only 417 metres at its highest point). Soils vary in quality: sometimes very fertile, particularly in the centre of the Paris Basin and in the North; sometimes less fertile (as in the interior of Brittany, Berry and part of Champagne); sometimes with chalk and limestone, good for cereal growing, as in the Beauce, the Brie and Picardy; sometimes with clay, which is advantageous for cattle-raising, as in Normandy. The climate is oceanic, rather mild, not too warm in summer, not too cold in winter, more rainy in the west (Normandy and Brittany) than in the centre (the Beauce and Brie) and the east (Burgundy and Lorraine) where the summer is warmer and the winter colder. These soil and climate variations had important effects on agriculture and, beyond this, on population changes.

Northern France was one of the most densely populated areas of Europe in the eighteenth century. It then underwent an early 'demographic transition'. Fertility rates fell from 1750 onwards in the countryside, although the rural population was slower than the cities in adopting what French historians used to term a neo-Malthusian attitude, i.e. spontaneous birth control aiming at a better way of life. Rural migration, a constant feature of pre-industrial times, increased during the nineteenth century, and consequently reduced the demographic pressure in the countryside after the mid-nineteenth century. However, the coastal regions along the Channel and the North Sea remained areas of highly concentrated population, like the surroundings of Paris.

The rural way of life, and particularly its moral values of work, saving, mutual aid, considered an ideal by urban people, survived far into the twentieth century. 'Deruralisation' only occurred after the 1950s when massive migration and modern media became so influential that the urban lifestyle triumphed in the spoken language as well as in material consumption. The rhythm of change, however, was different in Brittany than in the North because of different family strategies which will be investigated in this chapter.

MAP 6.1 Northern France, 1750-2000



6.1 The family and demography

At the time of the French Revolution two major changes were made in the way demographic data were compiled. Registration became independent from the Church and was thenceforward carried out by municipalities. Censuses were taken regularly from 1801 on, and those after 1821 are considered reliable. They provide data for the whole country and each department. However, there are two problems. First, it is hard to get detailed data for the rural population only, mainly because of the definition of ‘rural’ in France: fewer than 2,000 inhabitants concentrated in a village. The second difficulty is that the centralised system of government in France mostly produced national data, which masks the specific demographic features of Northern France. Here we are attempting to describe the rural family in Northern France, which is not the same thing as a general history of the French population.

Two specific features characterised French population history. The first one was the slow speed of ‘deruralisation’. The population who lived in the countryside reached its peak in 1851 (see table 6.1) and then declined at varying rates depending on the region. In the whole of France, there were about 20 million people living in villages of fewer than 2,000 inhabitants in 1750, around 21.5 in 1775, 22.8 in 1790, 24 million in 1800, 23 million in 1911; it was only in the census of 1931 that the urban population exceeded 50 per cent of the total. The proportion of agricultural workers in the total active population was also slow to fall: it was still 42 per cent in 1921 and 36 per cent in 1936, but it then declined dramatically after World War II: 9 per cent in the 1960s, 4 per cent in 2000. These figures are for the whole of France, and while it should be remembered that Northern France was slightly more urbanised, the evolution of the rural population followed the same pattern in the north and the south of France. However, there were differences between the more rural Brittany or Berry and the more urbanised Flanders, Parisian countryside, and, more recently, Lorraine.

Table 6.1: French population in the countryside, 1750-2001

	Rural population		Population in agriculture
	Number (Millions)	Proportion (%)	Proportion (%)
1750	21*	85*	
1801	24	83*	70*
1851	27	75	65*
1901	24	59	44
1951	19	45	30
2001	14	24	4

* approximative data

Source: Dupâquier, 1988: 123, 130, 255.

Villagers retained links to members of the family who moved to towns, and this broadened their intellectual horizon. The rapid expansion of commercial links by waterways and rail opened up the countryside fairly quickly. The northern region (the departments of the Nord and the Pas-de-Calais), with its coalmines and mills, was particularly affected by industrialisation, before Lorraine with the iron industry.

However, in spite of this opening-up, the rural population outnumbered the urban population for a long time. Around 550,000 inhabitants dwelled in Paris, in 1750 and 1800, 1 million in 1850, 2.7 million in 1900, then 2.8 in the city in 1950 and finally 2.1 in 2000 (nearly 10 million including the suburbs). There were in fact few large cities in Northern France till the twentieth century, and when there were, these medium-sized cities could only be found at the periphery of the area: Lille in the north, Metz and Nancy in the east, Rouen and Nantes in the west ... In this part of France, the urban network was dominated by a huge city: Paris, which was, after London, the largest city in Europe all throughout the period.

The second feature was a very early demographic transition. This started in towns before 1750, particularly among middle-class families who knew about the 'baneful secrets' of contraception, but it was clear to observers that by the mid-eighteenth century, these secrets were reaching the countryside (Ariès, 1946). In Normandy, and parts of the Île-de-France, and among certain groups like winegrowers, this demographic change happened very early, and the birth rate collapsed in the nineteenth century, particularly in the Pays d'Auge (see table 6.2) and the Bessin (in the department of Calvados) or the vineyards near Paris. By the second half of the eighteenth century it is apparent that in some villages and some rural occupational groups, married women suddenly and oddly stopped bearing children, even when they seem to have been capable of having more. Statistics suggest that childbearing stopped earlier and that in some cases the time interval between births increased.

Table 6.2: Fertility in Normandy (Pays d'Auge: plateau) during the eighteenth century

	Numbers of births per woman	Age of women at the last birth	Birth interval in months *	
Period of marriage				
1690–1729	5.24	40.8	1690–1749	39.3
1730–1759	5.19	39.4	1750–1789	42.9
1760–1789	4.25	39.1	1790–1836	50.5
1790–1819	3.09	36.7		

*data for women married more than 15 years (a period long enough to exclude deaths in the early years of marriage).

Source: Renard, 2000: 166, 171 and 175.

The Revolutionary and Napoleonic Wars accelerated this change. At least 1.3 million French soldiers died in these wars, and those young men came mostly from the north of France. This had a profound effect on fertility and instigated the slowdown in population growth during the first half of the nineteenth century. The knowledge of contraceptive techniques probably spread further at that time, and the cohorts of young men were so reduced by death that there were many missing births during and after the wars (Braudel and Labrousse, 1979: vol.3, 173–186).

The rural population in Normandy around Caen and Evreux had actually begun to decrease as early as 1831. Married women in villages in the Île-de-France had an average of 5.9 children in 1794, 5.0 in 1819 and 3.7 in 1844. In villages in Northeast France the figures for the same years were 5.6, 5.5 and 4.2. The proportion of couples practicing contraception in villages in the Vexin rose from 25 per cent in 1789 to 69 per cent in 1879, and as soon as 1844, 60 per cent of women in the Vexin had no children after age 35 (Dupâquier, 1988: vol.3, 355–64). This trend became more pronounced and more widespread after 1851. The French rural population declined from 27.2 million in 1851 to 25.8 in 1872 and 23 million in 1911, with 59 per cent living in scattered hamlets, while the number of people living from agriculture declined for the same period from 19.7 to 15.1 million (Merlin, 1971).

However, the fertility of rural families remained high enough to offset the war losses. The birth rate of rural families was higher (31.2 per thousand) than that of urban ones (25.9 per thousand) because children were useful as a workforce in agriculture, and in industries mostly based in the countryside. For example, in the period from 1826 to 1836 in the Île-de-France, for every 100 marriages 356 children were born in the countryside, compared to 305 in the towns. The average age at first marriage was also very high: 29 for men, 27 for women in 1800, but people married slightly younger in the villages. These late marriages were one of the restraints that helped to reduce fertility and to make it easier to provide for children. The French population did, however, increase from 28.26 million in 1792 to 29.36 in 1801 and 30.57 million in 1815. The rise in population continued slowly until 1846. The growth rate of the French population gradually fell from 5.5 per thousand in 1820–1840 to 1.7 per thousand at the end of the nineteenth century.

What explains these restricted rates of reproduction? During the Revolution and the wars that followed more sections of the population were brought into contact with each other, and the challenges to religion and morality made the use of contraceptive methods more acceptable. Economists, philosophers and influential philanthropists (such as Jean-Baptiste Say, Tanneguy Duchâtel and Hippolyte Passy) reinforced the view that having too many children led to poverty. They expected men to become better workers and to manage their domestic economy through strict control of behaviour, saving money and controlling births. These neo-Malthusian ideas were widely spread in books and convinced notables, farmers and, lastly day labourers, after 1840. No satisfactory explanation has been found for the popularity of these ideas. One suggestion is that it was because of the 1804 Code Civil, which enforced equal inheritance. Le Play, for instance, maintained that in reaction to this legislation, people had reduced the number of children so that the family farm was transmitted from

the all-powerful father to a single heir. However, this explanation is not relevant for Northern France, which had been an area of equal inheritance rights for a long time (Agulhon and Désert, 1976).

Another possible reason for the fall in fertility was the decline in religious practice, as the Catholic Church forbade sexual activity without the intent of procreation. However, the opposite could also have been true. The desire to limit births might have driven people away from the Church, since priests strictly forbade contraception and questioned women about it during confession. Demographers also established a correlation between religious practice and mortality. Areas where religion was important were usually more conservative in every domain, politics as well as medicine, and the mortality rate was higher. However, in most conservative areas where religious practice was intense family structures were complex, and religion was only one element in the overall context (Dupâquier, 1988: vol.3). There were two other factors connected with the fall of the birth rate. Children had to attend school from ages 6 to 13. This became compulsory in 1882, but as early as 1862, 84 per cent of boys attended school regularly, and it can be assumed that school attendance had long been higher in Normandy and the Paris region. As soon as young children had to go to school, they could no longer work on the farm and provide a cheap workforce. In the second place, the model of the middle-sized farm, run by the owner and his family, became widespread. Farmers who increasingly hoped for stability had an incentive to restrict the number of children in order to keep the hard-won farm and hand it down to their children. The idea of linking birth restriction to equal inheritance rights really appeared only at the end of the nineteenth century to avoid sharing the estate among heirs.

The mortality rate started to decrease around 1750, and continued to do so during the revolutionary decade, in spite of wars, subsistence crises and diseases. There were crises throughout the eighteenth century, but not as severe as those during the reign of Louis XIV. In 1740, 1768, 1789, 1793, 1795, and again in 1817 and 1846–1847, there were real grain shortages. Mortality did not peak in the way it had done in the seventeenth century, with the exception of 1795, but that crisis was closely linked to the war, and was more urban than rural. The increased spread of vaccination (inoculated cowpox) may partly explain the fall in mortality. However, the mortality rate decreased very slowly. Epidemics were severe though they mainly struck towns: cholera, tuberculosis, fevers and dysentery (Bourdelaïs, 1987). Hygiene was inadequate and medical advice was sought only on exceptional occasions. As the demographic pressure became too great for the available resources, migration increased. Those who left the villages were mainly young men and women, looking for more attractive work, first in small- and medium-sized towns, and finally in large cities (Dupâquier, 1988: vol.3).

Most of the time migration from the village to the big town was a long and complex journey, taking place over two generations (Farcy and Faure, 2003; Rosental, 1999). It has been argued that this migration had much to do with compulsory military service and the creation of the railway network. However, the data do not entirely confirm this traditional view. Rural people were not more likely to migrate if they lived near a station or if they had done military service.

It is commonly stated that rural migration in France was very slow and that this was because peasants were conservative and attached to their roots. However, for several years there has been a lively debate between those who argue that the rural population was sedentary and those who argue that it was easy to move from one place to another (Croix, 1999; Dupâquier, 2002; Poussou, 2002; Rosental, 1999). Unfortunately there is no evidence for the extent of migration until the nineteenth century. However, it may be assumed that temporary migration after the Revolution was lower than in the eighteenth century. Peasants had less need for additional resources as they had acquired some plots of land from the *biens nationaux*, and peasants and other landowners no longer had to pay seigneurial and ecclesiastical dues. The seasonal migrations of peasants to harvest grapes or grain in other regions for money or food declined at that time. However, in general the northern regions did not supply migrants but rather received them. The exceptions were workers from Lorraine, the Nord or the Normandy *bocage* who worked on the big farms around Paris.

Rural migration became more significant again after 1850. There was a first peak around 1860 caused by the departure of destitute day labourers and poor artisans suffering from competition from modern industry. A second peak in the 1880s was caused by the agricultural crisis and low prices in agriculture. Migration slowed down again after 1900 (Dupâquier, 1988: vol.3, 130). It has been calculated that rural France lost 4.3 million inhabitants between 1846 and 1911, that is 15.8 per cent. This occurred in spite of the negative views of migration as something to be feared and condemned. The massive numbers arriving in towns were thought to be a threat to urban order as well as to the morality of the rural migrants (Farcy and Faure, 2003).

However, the question might also be whether the rate of migration was too low. Was it sufficient to provide the workers needed in industry and in the towns? This tension in the industrial and urban labour markets explains why, in comparison with neighbouring countries, overseas migration was very small: 25,000 to 30,000 a year, rising to 44,000 in 1910. At the same time, France was welcoming high numbers of foreign labourers to work in industry and in agriculture, especially Belgian workers who settled in the North of France and the Paris basin (about 100,000 of them in 1891, plus a similar number of seasonal and cross-border workers).

World War I was a massacre, and the French people did not recover from the trauma before 1945. The rural population paid a heavy toll during the war, making up about 50 per cent of the total 1.35 million dead and 3.5 million wounded. Peasants who made up 40 per cent of the active population suffered 49.5 per cent of the losses. During the interwar period 80 per cent of rural municipalities (those with fewer than 2,000 inhabitants) lost inhabitants. Their proportion of the total population dropped from 33.3 per cent in 1911 to 31.1 per cent in 1921 and 26.7 per cent by 1936, while that of municipalities with more than 5,000 inhabitants increased. However, foreign workers were needed in agriculture, and their number increased to 248,853 in 1929, 278,850 in 1936, and 296,000 in 1946. These workers were mainly men, but there was also a significant proportion of women. During World War I Spanish workers took over from Belgians, followed in the 1920s by Polish (1921–1923) and Czech and Slovak (1923–1925) immigrants, usually on two or three year contracts (Hubscher, 2005: 34–38).

Within the overall French pattern there were different regional patterns of behaviour. Three mainly rural regions will be examined more in detail, western Brittany, Normandy and Picardy. The Nord, Pas-de-Calais and Île-de-France will not be discussed because in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries they were densely populated and heavily urbanised, which makes it difficult to separate the urban and rural populations.

Western Brittany was distinct from the eastern region around Rennes and Nantes, where the birth rate fell early. The birth rate in western Brittany remained high throughout the nineteenth century in spite of a rather late marriage age for women (28 years). The mortality rate also stayed high, particularly for new born children (100 per thousand). The surplus of births over deaths mounted up to 900,000 in the period 1826–1913. Until 1870 most out-migration was seasonal. Hence the population increased but not the standard of living (Haudebourg, 1998). There were many poor and undernourished people, and many youngsters were too short to serve in the army (over 10 per cent of 19-year-old men measured less than 155 cm). Then, after 1870 half of the natural surplus departed for the Paris basin, to Paris itself or to smaller towns. Men worked in industry and women became servants (this trend was caricatured in the comic strip *Bécassine*). In the interwar period the population of Brittany decreased, falling by 7.9 per cent over the years 1911 to 1936. Very few foreigners settled there, barely 0.25 per cent of the total regional population in 1936. In this granite region there was a noticeable difference between the coastal areas, which turned to market gardening and intensive agriculture for export, and the interior, with traditional agriculture on poor soils and bad transport links. More than half the active population still made a living from agriculture in 1954.

In Normandy, from the mid-nineteenth century onwards the regional population declined (see table 6.3), when the numbers of deaths exceeded the number of births (Désert, 2007). Infant mortality was also very high (140 per thousand). Most of the farms turned to breeding cattle for meat, butter and cheese. Many people, especially men, migrated and the female/male ratio rose to 109. The population slightly decreased in the rural areas. The only exception was the area around Rouen and the lower Seine valley where there were large textile mills and a higher birth rate.

In Picardy, as in other plains of the Paris basin situated on a fertile plateau, large farms combined wheat and sugar beet cultivation with sheep rearing (Hubscher, 1980: vol.1). Between Paris and the North (Artois and Flanders) there was intense industrial activity: cottage industry then textile mills developing from the first half of the nineteenth century. The total population increased because craftsmen activities and intensified agriculture kept the workforce in the villages. The use of farm machinery did not have a significant effect before the turn of the century. However, as the previous natural surplus of births had become a deficit as early as 1851, the local population could not meet the rising demand for labour. Many migrants came from other French villages and from abroad, mainly Belgium but also Italy, and settled in the east of the region. In 1880, they made up 9 per cent of the population (Pinchemel, 1957).

In the second half of the twentieth century (1939–2000) French couples restricted births less drastically. French people became more and more worried about the falling birth rate. In the interwar period a new trend developed. The *Alliance nationale pour*

Table 6.3: Population growth in France and northern France, 1806–1999*

	France		Brittany		Picardy		Normandy		Nord-Pas-de-Calais	
	Population (millions)	growth rate(%)	Population (millions)	growth rate (%)	Population (millions)	growth rate(%)	Population (millions)	growth rate(%)	Population (millions)	growth rate (%)
1806		1.19	1.88		1.3		2.57		1.41	
1821		0.65	1.98	0.35	1.34	0.2	2.57	0	1.53	0.55
1831		0.61	2.1	0.59	1.45	0.79	2.63	0.23	1.61	0.51
1841		0.41	2.18	0.37	1.49	0.27	2.69	0.23	1.77	0.95
1851	36.45	0.23	2.3	0.54	1.53	0.27	2.7	0.04	1.85	0.44
1861	37.38	0.25	2.32	0.09	1.53	0	2.67	-0.11	2.02	0.88
1872	37.65	0.07	2.34	0.08	1.48	-0.3	2.56	-0.38	2.21	0.82
1881	39.23	0.46	2.44	0.47	1.52	0.3	2.51	-0.22	2.42	1.1
1891	39.94	0.18	2.51	0.28	1.51	-0.07	2.48	-0.12	2.61	0.76
1901	40.68	0.18	2.56	0.2	1.48	-0.2	2.4	-0.33	2.82	0.78
1911	41.48	0.19	2.6	0.16	1.46	-0.14	2.38	-0.08	3.03	0.72
1921	39.21	-0.56	2.42	-0.71	1.35	-0.78	2.26	-0.52	2.77	-0.89
1931	41.83	0.65	2.38	-0.17	1.33	-0.15	2.31	0.22	3.23	1.55
1936	41.91	0.04	2.39	0.08	1.34	0.15	2.34	0.26	3.2	-0.19
1946	40.5	-0.34	2.33	-0.25	1.35	0.07	2.26	-0.35	3.08	-0.38
1954	42.77	0.68	2.33	0	1.39	0.37	2.43	0.91	3.37	1.13
1962	46.24	0.98	2.37	0.21	1.44	0.44	2.58	0.75	3.62	0.9
1968	49.78	1.24	2.46	0.62	1.48	0.46	2.75	1.07	3.81	0.86
1975	52.65	0.8	2.59	0.74	1.52	0.38	2.89	0.71	3.91	0.37
1982	54.33	0.45	2.7	0.6	1.56	0.37	3	0.54	3.93	0.07
1990	56.61	0.52	2.79	0.41	1.59	0.24	3.04	0.17	3.96	0.1
1999	58.51	0.37	2.9	0.43	1.64	0.34	3.2	0.57	3.99	0.08

*Growth rate: yearly growth before the year indicated

Source: INSEE, *Recensements de la population*.

l'accroissement de la population (Alliance for the increase of the French population), created in 1896, became influential after 1920. This movement had an impact on the passing of two new laws: one on family allowances (November 1938) and the other was a Family Law Code (July 1939). Petain, head of the *État Français* (1940–1944), encouraged this trend. He stated that France had collapsed in 1940 because it had ‘too few children’. He made the family an object of reverence and held up the farm family as a model. In 1941 a single pay allowance was created to help mothers stay at home to rear children. It was at first intended for urban workers, but was extended to farmers in 1955. This family policy was so well received that it was reinforced after 1945. A family quotient was introduced into the calculation of income tax. All these measures were aimed at boosting the birth rate. The cost of rearing a child should not penalise modest families, and their welfare had to be guaranteed by law. Schooling also became free of all charges, even for textbooks.

Most demographers agree that this pro-birth policy was successful, although some think that it accompanied the trend rather than caused it (Landais, 2007). The post-1945 baby boom was stronger and longer in France than in neighbouring countries. There was wide agreement that an ideal family consisted of two or three children. The couple with an only child, which had been the prevailing model in the interwar years, ceased to be a model. Childless couples, or those with only one child, became rare, as did those with more than three children. A new change happened in the 1970s when the birth rate dropped again, as in other European countries. Nevertheless, natural growth in France remained one of the highest in Western Europe, with a birth rate of 14.1 per thousand in 1975, and 13.1 per thousand in 2000 (see figure 6.1). The total

Figure 6.4: Population movement per thousand in France, 1800–2000



Sources: *Annuaire statistique de la France* (retrospective), 1961; INSEE.

fertility rate was 2.73 in 1960, 1.93 in 1975 and 1.87 in 2000 (Agreste, 2000). Within France, the north-western part had a particularly high fertility rate, particularly in a 'fertile crescent' stretching from Brittany to Flanders to Lorraine. The mortality rate decreased significantly throughout this period, particularly infant and child mortality, thanks to the expanding welfare system and improved medical knowledge. It dropped sharply with the creation of the social security system from 1945 onward, and with the special program for babies and old people, introduced in 1970. In spite of the ageing population, mortality rates fell from 10.6 per thousand in 1975 to 8.9 per thousand in 2000, and infant mortality declined further from 14 per thousand to 4.5 per thousand, far from the 250 per thousand common two centuries earlier. Increasingly, the behaviour of rural families came into line with that of urban ones, all the more so because today in farmer families one spouse often works outside agriculture (Gervais, 1976).

The next group to leave the countryside, after the poor and the artisans, were the hired labourers. Those who owned some property, but not enough to live on, went to the towns, selling or renting out their land. Many women escaped from a hard life in the countryside to more comfort and better wages in towns. Farms were increasingly worked without women, especially the small traditional farms. In 1962 there were 135 men for 100 women in the 20–29 age group of the agriculturally active population. Wage-workers continued to arrive as immigrants. After 1945 the composition of this group changed; many came from Spain and Italy. They included an increasing number of women, and the average age was higher. Today, Northern France is the more juvenile part of the country. The age group consisting of those over 60 makes up 18 to 22 per cent of the population in Northern France and 22 to 26 per cent in Brittany (Agreste, 2000).

In Northern France, from Brittany to Flanders and from the Beauce to Lorraine, the nuclear family was predominant. The diverse demographic patterns have been discussed in the previous section; households adapted their size according to the needs of the family, the farm economy and the life cycle.

In the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries the rural population can be grouped roughly into three categories. The first is the small- or medium-sized farm¹ on leasehold (for instance in Brittany and the villages of Upper Normandy around Rouen). Families used to move from one farm to another at the end of the lease (after 6 or 9 years) making it possible to adjust the size of the farm to the size of the family. Young people had some liberty in the choice of partners within groups of a similar social status. In any case, the community kept a close watch on young unmarried women. When a young couple married, they could stay with the parents for some time, but usually found a farm quickly. Their household then expanded with the birth of children (five on average). There might be male or female servants living in the house. When the children grew older, they took the place of hired workers. Then the children married and moved out, and the ageing parents worked as long as they were able. One child, often the youngest girl, might stay and take care of them in their own house, or they could ask to go to

¹ Small farms (fewer than 10 to 15 hectares) could not produce enough to sustain a family unless they specialised in market-oriented production of fruits, vines or vegetables. Middle-sized farms (20 to 40 hectares) were run by the family with some extra workers.

a married son or daughter's house and pay money for board (as Jean-Marie Déguinet (1834–1905) described in his *Mémoires d'un paysan bas-breton*).

The second case is the middle-sized owner-occupied farm typical of Normandy and Maine, but found sometimes in other places. The life cycle is similar to the one above, but the family was settled on the family farm and did not move. In this case there were usually only two or three children because of the low birth rate, and thus there were servants and domestics living in the house. Jean-Claude Farcy studied the life cycle of peasants in nineteenth-century Beauce (Farcy, 2004). When the children reached the age of 13, they were sent out to another farm as apprentices unless they went to a vocational school (only 3 per cent did so). This employment lasted about 10 years, giving them time to learn the different jobs and save some money. Although these young workers came very cheap for the employer household, the money they saved was important for them and helped towards settling down and starting a family. Ageing parents with few children, used to a system of equal division of inheritance, might choose to let their farm to someone outside the family in exchange for life annuities, as happened for instance in Maine.

The third and last case is the large farm typical of Picardy, the Beauce or Île-de-France. Often the farmer owned part of it and rented the rest. He moved only when he was young, before finally settling down. His large household included two or three children, servants, domestics, and several temporary workers. As in other areas of equal inheritance one child would keep the part of the farm on leasehold (generally the main part), and the brothers took up another occupation unless their parents had been able to rent a new farm for them. He got a share of the estates held in ownership, but since the inheritance was shared equally, he had to buy or rent his brothers' shares except if his parents were able to compensate them for what they should receive. The daughters had the same rights on the estates but usually got money (of the same value as the land given to the sons) and married a farmer or another landowner. Until World War II there were still many small peasants with tiny plots or no land at all, who survived by working as day labourers for the big farmers and whose children were employed as domestics or servants before becoming agricultural workers, living either on the farm or, as they became older, in their own very modest houses near the farm.

During the twentieth century, household composition tended to become more standardised. The number of small farms decreased dramatically; middle-sized farms prevailed. Labour shortages, the introduction of machines and the departure of hired labour all contributed to reducing household size. The number of children decreased after World War I. There was frequently only one child per family in the interwar period, and usually two or three after World War II. Hired workers no longer had to live in the farmhouse. From 1954 to 1970 the number of permanent workers with board and lodging on the farm fell from 59,400 to 22,900, while the number without board rose from 14,700 to 34,000 (Gervais, 1976: 254). This meant that more and more couples lived in their own separate houses. In the 1960s many new houses were built for young couples and salaried workers. It became unusual for two or three generations to live together. Welfare measures gave old farmers the means to retire. Endogamy and homogamy became progressively less common. Marriage partners came from a

wider area. Couples living together out of wedlock, illegitimate births and the birth of children to unmarried couples became common, as did divorce. Of course this kind of behaviour appeared later and in smaller proportions in the countryside than in the towns, but it spread in the 1980s, particularly in the northeast. Divorce was more common in the north than in Brittany. The rural household became limited to the couple and their children, a model similar to the urban one. Divorces and blended families are factors of instability and uncertainty in the work unit as well as in personal life; sometimes they even lead to the break up of farms (INSEE, 1993).

6.2 The family and its members

Farming long remained a family business, organised as in medieval and early modern times. Nevertheless, changes occurred in these relationships, mostly due to the transformation of agricultural labour. Patriarchy and gender relations were particularly affected.

We can discern three successive periods in the management of the farm and in its consequences on household relations after 1750. From about 1750 to about 1880 everyone in the household contributed to production. The gradual intensification of production required a large workforce. Women worked in the fields along with men who performed the tasks needing physical strength. Young children provided an unskilled labour force to tend flocks or weed crops. In parts of Northern France (the Paris basin and Normandy, for example) many boys and even girls went to school to acquire some basic knowledge. As schooling became more important, the children were only free in the evenings and the summer months (often for up to five months). In middle-sized and large farms the farmer's wife usually managed the house, the poultry and the cows, with the help of servants, and she took care of feeding the domestics and day labourers, who worked under the farmer. From spring ploughing through to the harvest and threshing of grain in the autumn, there were plenty of day labourers on the farm. Their numbers fell during winter when their wages decreased.

Change came in the years between 1880 and 1900. The increase in wages and the need to produce wheat more cheaply stimulated the use of machines such as threshing machines and harvesters. Men monopolised the machines and fieldwork. Specialisation increased, with women developing the dairy and poultry production. Because school attendance was now compulsory, children could not work regularly until they were 13 years old. Education replaced the practice of hiring them out to other farms. This led to the interwar model familiar from pictures, advertisements and novels: the man drove the machine in the fields; the wife took care of the children inside the house and the animals around it. Farmers' daughters were educated for these tasks in rural housekeeping schools (*écoles ménagères*).

After the 1950s significant changes in farming methods sparked a kind of revolution, which partly disconnected family and farm business. On a French farm in 1988, on average, the family took charge of 84 per cent of working hours (51 per cent done by the farm manager, 20 per cent by the partner, 13 per cent by other members), permanent wage-labourers accounted for 10 per cent and seasonal workers for 6 per cent (SCEES,

1988). In 2000 there were 491,618 farm managers included in the 787,944 family workers and 150,103 wage-workers (Agreste, 2000). These average figures include two types of farms. One is the family farm run by one person, with the spouse working outside in another job, in industry or the tertiary sector. The second category is the big farm, or the specialised production farm; both require wage-labourers living outside the farm.

Relationships within the peasant family underwent major transformations in the last two centuries, moving from a patriarchal society to an association of generations.

Until the middle of the twentieth century the farm was ruled by the male farmer. His authority prevailed over domestics and labourers and every member of the household, even the sons until they inherited. If the wife's influence was decisive, it had to be concealed. Patriarchy became even more prevalent when the family farm became the model at the end of the nineteenth century. In the previous period, 1600–1750, customs somewhat limited the power of parents over children. Even if they maintained control of the choice of the spouse of their sons and daughters, they had no right, or did not exercise their right, to choose one heir to the detriment of the others. There were few exceptions to this rule. There was equal sharing of estates among heirs everywhere in Northern France, daughters included. Hence, when the Revolution established strict equality among heirs, there were no real changes. Problems could have occurred in Normandy as daughters had been previously excluded from inheritance (in Lower Normandy) or one son chosen as heir (Upper Normandy). But this was not the case. It seems that the Normans shifted their inheritance rules towards equality very quickly. Parents could have used the new power given by the law to favour one or more of the heirs. The Napoleonic Code Civil prescribed equality but allowed the parents to use a share, 'the quotity', to be given to one principal heir. Even if it was possible to break with egalitarian practices in favour of one heir and maintain a viable household instead of breaking up the estate into tiny households, they did not. When farmers retired they made a gift equally to all the children and asked for support payments for their old age.

Legislators, who wished to prevent the farm from being split up at every generation in the egalitarian property transmission system, worried about the division of ownership, and after long debates two laws (12 July 1909, 17 July 1938) were approved to introduce preferential attribution of the farm to one of the heirs, on condition the others received monetary compensation. This strengthened the patriarchal system in a household made up of the father and one heir. It has been demonstrated, however, that ways of transmitting estates did not really change since the eighteenth century, and that egalitarian sharing of land remained the rule in this part of the country until around 2000 (Gervais, 1976).

The technical transformations of the 1960s brought new ideas. Young men received good training and they wanted to have a say in managing the farm instead of just obeying their fathers. They considered the farm as a business, no longer as a family concern. Agricultural laws were voted in 1960–1963 'to define the orientation of French agriculture for a generation or more', and they met the demands of the *Centre National des Jeunes Agriculteurs* (National Centre for Young Farmers). This led to the end of patriarchy. Older peasants were encouraged to retire with an IVD (*Indemnité Viagère de Département*), a life annuity for retirement, and to leave their farm to someone

younger. This measure followed the introduction of an independent pension plan in 1952, which made 65 the legal age for retirement. Gradually the idea of retirement was accepted. The creation of the GAEC (*Groupement Agricole d'Exploitation en Commun*), an agricultural interest group for farming in common, also helped in this transition; their numbers increased gradually, mostly after 1974 (14,000) and reached 38,000 in 1988 (SCEES, 1988). They first aimed at economies of scale by encouraging farmers to pool their means of production. They were more interested in improving salaries than returns to capital. The GAEC often assisted the father and the son(s) in making a gradual transfer of the farm. It flourished primarily in regions of family farming: Brittany, Picardy and Champagne. Another law, passed on 11 July 1985 also facilitated transmission; it created the limited liability farm (EARL, *Exploitation agricole à responsabilité limitée*). Private capital was separated from professional capital. The parents could keep part of the capital, and this gave them additional income. After this the transmission became less important, and tenant farmers came to outnumber owner-occupiers (INSEE, 1993: *passim*).

After 1945, every member of the household gradually acquired his or her independence. While young men wanted to be involved in the decisions on agricultural matters, young women wanted to run their own home and have the responsibility of bringing up children free from the supervision of their mother-in-law. They gradually succeeded. First they acquired legal status as workers, whereas up until 1960 they had only been farmers' wives, unless they were in charge of the farm. This status gave them the right to pensions and health insurance.

After the 1960s it soon became rare for young couples to live with the parents. A building boom made it possible for them to settle in new houses, well equipped with household appliances. Even though family values remained more deeply rooted than in towns, only 5 per cent of households consisted of two families in 1982, and this proportion continued to decrease.

As the last step in this evolution farming no longer leads to a special working relationship within the family. In 1988, 48 per cent of farmers' wives were actively involved in working the farm (58 per cent for those over 40, 33 per cent for those under 40, with fewer on small farms than on big ones). In 1988, 12 per cent of farmers' spouses were working outside the farm (6 per cent over 40, 22 per cent of those under 40), a rate that increased dramatically to reach 25 per cent in 2000. Mostly they were employees, in jobs that did not leave spare time for farm activities (SCEES, 1955 and 1988).

6.3 The family and income

The income of rural families underwent important changes from 1750 to 2000. This change took place in three main areas: the source of the revenue, exchange and credit, and the labour market.

The sources of revenue went through three phases, from diverse activities, to concentration on agriculture and then back to diversification. In the first period, 1750–1880, a wide range of complementary activities contributed to family income.

In the following period (c.1880–1945) income was purely dependent on agricultural production. Finally there came a new period of diversification in the second half of the twentieth century: farm tourism, home-made products like jams, biscuits and cheese.

From the end of the eighteenth century until 1855 most income came from vegetal production, with animal products supplying only a quarter. The increase in agricultural production led to a rise in the price of leases. The growth of rent was slow between 1750 and 1770. Farmers, and it has been argued, big rather than small farmers, resisted the landowners' demands. After 1768–1770 rent increased very sharply, doubling between 1768 and 1780. During this phase of prosperity the farmers agreed to pay higher and higher rents. This shift, which is notable at the beginning of the 1780s, led to difficulties for the farmers, and rent stagnated until the eve of the Revolution, although many historians argue that prosperity continued until the Revolution itself.

During the Revolution farmers suffered from requisitions (of grain, horses, carts) for the army and to feed the cities. Their workers were conscripted into the army, but they had no more seigneurial duties and tithes to pay, and almost no taxes for 10 years. Although landowners tried to increase rent because farmers benefited from the abolition of the tithe, they did not really achieve very much. In addition to the fall in the payment of dues the price of grain was high, and although farmers claimed to have suffered misfortunes, at the end of this troubled period they seem to have been rather richer than at the beginning.

After the rise during the Revolution and Empire, landlords' rents may have doubled between 1815 and 1880, though not at a steady rate. The periods 1830–1840 and 1848–1852 were less favourable. The economic situation was often much more difficult for the farmer than for the landlord. Because of this, most of the rural families were obliged to practice several activities, especially from the 1830s on, when demographic pressure reached a peak. Besides the agricultural tasks on their own farm or working as day labourers, craftsmen or innkeepers, members of the family could also be found occupying jobs in local industries. There were textile industries in most villages in Northern France, hemp and flax were cultivated, and wool and linen were spun and woven, either in small mills or in the home as a woman's job (as in lacemaking) or as an evening family activity. There were also many active small metal-working businesses, making knives, ploughs, boilers, etc. Small mills and forges had their most active time in winter when the water in the rivers was highest, so these activities were a complement to agriculture. In some areas these two sources of income were not sufficient to feed the whole family. Some others found employment in activities catering to the needs of neighbouring towns, such as wet nurses around Paris and in caring for abandoned children in Maine and Normandy. Seasonal migration could also provide some extra revenue, particularly for the men from Brittany (no longer from Normandy) who went to harvest in July in the Beauce and in August in Picardy. These seasonal activities were necessary to a hired worker's survival, and even made it possible for him to save up to buy a small piece of land to increase his economic autonomy (Châtelain, 1976).

Around the 1880s these complex additions to local agricultural activities came to an end. The intensification of transport made cheap industrial products available everywhere. Within a quarter century, in the period from 1860 to 1885, most rural

activities became uncompetitive in the face of market forces. Seasonal migration became insufficient despite rising wages, so poor families who could not survive from agricultural income alone left for the towns. In the period 1880–1945 there was a concentration on agricultural income alone, in which the proportion of animal products increased. There was much more price stability after 1855, when the long period of violent annual price fluctuations came to an end. However, inflation returned with World War I, and agricultural prices quadrupled. The farm family earned more but could only save the surplus because there were no industrial products to purchase. After 1919 those families where the husband survived were able to use these savings to buy farms given up by bereaved families. This gave a feeling of prosperity to rural families who could afford better food and some limited luxuries. The high food prices in the 1920s did not provide a high income because industrial prices went up more rapidly and buildings and agricultural implements had to be maintained or replaced.

The small family farm was considered to be the basis of social stability; it was praised and encouraged to focus on activities inside the farm. The crisis of the 1930s accentuated this attitude, and the collapse of prices led to withdrawal from the market. Legislators passed bills to help farmers stock wheat and to stimulate exports. In August 1936 the ONIB or *Office National Interprofessionnel du Blé* (National Inter-professional Wheat Board) was created to organise the wheat market and provide better and more regular payment to producers. In 1940 it was changed to the ONIC (National Interprofessional Grain Board), with its control extended to the marketing of all cereals. Between 1938 and 1944 conservative politicians obtained approval for laws favouring the family farm, awarding them tax relief and longer child benefits for training on the farm. In the 1930s agriculture became a secluded world protected by state subsidies, isolated from the general movements of both foreign markets and domestic labour markets because of low wages (Barral, 1982: vol.4, 3, 839).

After World War II, rural family income increased and diversified with three sources of revenue: production, tax credits and new activities. Income from agricultural production increased notably after 1950. This was owing to a rise in productivity, even though the amount of industrial input grew. Prices climbed thanks to market demand and because of the price guarantee awarded to farmers. The Common Agricultural Policy (CAP, or PAC in French) after 1967–1968 consolidated the orientation of French government policy and led to a considerable increase in farmers' income. The prices set for cereals, sugar beets and rape seed were conducive to profits. The income from animal products grew quickly thanks to increasing demand. Nevertheless, there were still wide price fluctuations, particularly on pigs, and surpluses soon led to difficulties (as with milk). Wages of agricultural labourers on large farms improved because of the shortage of labour. In 1968 a minimum agricultural wage (SMAG) was created, modelled on the minimum industrial wage (SMIG).

In the eight years from 1950 to 1958 the gross income of farmers rose by barely 5 per cent; however, it increased markedly afterwards. A *Commission des comptes de l'agriculture* (Commission for agricultural accounts), created in 1964, established that purchasing power had grown by 4 per cent a year in the period 1965–75. This increase,

however, was no higher than that in other occupations. After the CAP reforms of the 1980s the average income of farmers once more fell below that of other occupations, but this income varied a great deal depending on the type of farm. The large farms in the centre of the Paris basin, with their cereals and cattle, earned 35 per cent more than the average revenue. The revenue of farmers in Brittany was at the national average, while those in Lower Normandy earned less than that; specialised vegetal production gave higher revenues than stock breeding (Comité National, 1984).

The European Community provided tax relief to help modernise the agricultural holding, especially in the years 1958–1980, and the French government gradually introduced social protection for farmers, in accordance with what had previously been given in other occupations (child benefits in 1939, a retirement pension in 1952, and compulsory health insurance in 1961). These forms of social insurance were at first lower than in other sectors, but later were incorporated into the general system. In spite of this improvement in income, farmers' consumption remained far below the standard of living of urban families. Because income was not always sufficient, additional activities were once more encouraged. In the 1950s many rural industries developed, sometimes crafts based on local resources, but most often food industries transforming local products. Many cooperatives created small enterprises of this type, using the peasant workforce (dairy produce, preserves, biscuits and sweets) (Barral 1982: vol.4, 3, 1439). From the 1980s on the proportion of farmers working outside the farm increased: part-time peasants and their wives. When the whole family worked on the farm, other activities were developed: either the marketing of homemade products like cider, jam or cheese, or tourist accommodation. Farm tourism became important in 1980–2000, mainly near coastal resorts, and it was boosted by the fashionable vogue for nature, care of the environment and the search for genuine natural products.

The changes described above show the growing participation in the market and the need for investments. It is broadly true that over the two centuries from 1750 to 1950, farmers mainly funded their investments by their own savings. Some efforts to develop rural credit were made in the period 1880–1910, when the land bank, *le Crédit Agricole*, was developed. It was, however, only after 1950 that agriculture was considered everywhere to be an enterprise that, like industry, needed investments and could benefit from credit. This is the overall picture, but of course the big farms of Northern France and the Beauce had been seeking credit during the whole period.

It would be wrong, however, to assume that the rural credit market was weak. There were numerous credit agreements in the countryside at the end of the eighteenth century. There was an increase in borrowing capital everywhere, though there were few guarantees for the lender, since there was no way to register mortgages. Historians have debated if the increasing number of loans meant there were more difficulties in the country, especially at the time of the crisis, or if there were more investments in farms. In fact it seems that the loans were not massively invested to improve farms but rather to pay for dowries or to buy land, even on the big farms which had a much larger stock of implements and equipment, such as carts and ploughs. The Revolution destroyed this flow of credit because of the dramatic fall in the value of paper money (the notorious *assignats*) between 1792 and 1795. Although the lenders were trying to

escape being fobbed off, many borrowers succeeded in freeing themselves from debt, while those who had lent to them were ruined by the reimbursement of ancient debts with worthless banknotes. The countryside profited from this major change, and the peasants were able to get rid of lenders from the towns. The long-term consequences were less favourable, however, as there was a credit shortage for many years after the Revolution. Levels of interest were very high at the beginning of the nineteenth century, with rates of over 10 per cent and even 20 per cent in the countryside. Lenders no longer had confidence in loans. It took a long time before the flow of money reached the countryside again, and credit expanded at varying speeds in different parts of France. This positive change was accelerated by the creation of mortgage registration in 1799.

A national market slowly emerged in the first half of the nineteenth century. Adapting to this market demanded more capital input, and many farmers started to look for credit, especially during the good years from 1840 to 1845 and between 1852 and 1865. Funds mainly came from their own savings, informal loans in the community and loans from notaries seeking to invest owners' profits. The need for funds increased as farmers sought to acquire more land in order to be independent. Notaries remained important intermediaries in the rural credit market because they had information on borrowers and lenders. Bonds (*obligations*) became the usual form of credit contract. The creation of a national information system for mortgages, with a first attempt in 1771 then definitively in 1799, reduced the segmentation of the credit market. This meant that banks had henceforth access to the information, and could compete with notaries. Although the amount of capital invested in agriculture was higher than the amount invested in industry by the mid-century, the loans were still insufficient. For the most part they were given to large landowners who used them to pay death duties (*droits de succession*), buy land, or build *châteaux*. They only invested 30 per cent of the loans in land improvements. This varied from one region to another. In the Beauce the lack of capital explains the limited changes to farms after 1860. On the other hand, in Artois, notaries and banks provided capital for intensive agriculture and to build refineries (Postel-Vinay, 1998).

In the 1850s the government tried to create credit infrastructures (*Crédit Foncier*), but the results were unsatisfactory. Funds were first allocated to finance farm losses during the years 1846–1848 and the reimbursement of debts incurred during the 1840–1846 period of modernisation. However, many debt-ridden farms could not keep up interest payments, and much land was sold. From the end of the 1870s on, credit cooperatives developed, and the *Crédit Foncier*, a semi-public organisation, received increased resources and was able to grant more credit. From the 1880s on the *Crédit Agricole* developed and rapidly became the main financial provider; unofficial and notarial credit decreased dramatically, and the other banks disregarded agriculture (Gueslin, 1985). The lack of capital and agricultural credit explains the low investment rate, and hence the slow development of French agriculture in the period 1880–1940. Farmers were not able to build up savings that could have been invested in industrial development. Investment in farm buildings was almost nonexistent, while farm machinery only made up 2 per cent of the annual production value. During World War I farmers were able to save because of high food prices and lack of industrial products to buy. After

1919 new equipment was still being paid for from savings and from loans from credit cooperatives or notaries. The crisis of the 1930s marked a break in the general trend to increase market dependency. Farmers tried to limit their losses by retreating from the market. Grenadou, a farmer with 75 hectares near Chartres producing wheat and pigs, can be cited as an example. When prices fell, he was rich enough to wait for them to rise again, and avoided selling at the worst moment. Nevertheless, he had to save on everything. He produced all the family's food, sold only what was necessary to pay taxes, and only bought what he could not himself provide. He shod his horses himself to save on the blacksmith's bill. This was not a timid conservative attitude but a good survival strategy. Actually, Grenadou showed himself to be a very efficient and modern farmer in the 1920s when he put together the farm from inherited land and purchases, as well as after 1945 when he worked over 100 hectares and chaired the cooperative which introduced the combine harvester (Grenadou, 1966).

The situation changed in the 1950s. Farms had to be integrated into the European economy and improve their productivity. A high level of investment was required for equipment and input. This led first to the creation of cooperatives for the common use of machines (the so-called CUMA: *Cooperatives d'Utilisation du Matériel Agricole*) to buy expensive equipment like harvesters. Afterwards in times of prosperity, farmers usually acquired their own equipment, funded by bank loans. The government also encouraged credit with loans at reduced interest rates. Banks, mainly *Crédit Agricole*, were now more willing to lend money to cultivators (Gueslin, 1985). The pattern of farm indebtedness followed a geographical distribution similar to that of average farm income. The Paris basin and Brittany were the main beneficiaries of loans from the *Crédit Agricole* in 1980. The amount of farm debt grew dramatically at the end of the twentieth century.

The labour market changed dramatically during the nineteenth century. Although an abundant workforce used to suffer from underemployment in the countryside for a long time, then gradually a shortage of labour occurred in the second part of the nineteenth century as depopulation combined with the intensification of agriculture increased. Finally, in the twentieth century, mechanisation solved the labour problem.

At the end of the eighteenth century there was seasonal underemployment, and therefore many workers left the countryside looking for jobs in towns. The Revolutionary and Napoleonic Wars led to labour shortages because many young men were conscripted into the army. But this was only an interlude, and after 1815 the lack of work again became acute. Many parts of the country provided a workforce for the towns and for the rural areas where intensification of agricultural production led to a rising demand for labour. Each year from 1850 to 1914, 100,000 to 150,000 people left their villages forever. First the day labourers and craftsmen left the Paris basin for the towns, and were partly replaced by seasonal harvesters from Belgium and Brittany. In the whole of France the number of day labourers and domestics fell from 3.4 million in 1866 (2.55 million men and 0.85 million women) to 2.1 million in 1906 (1.65 million men and 0.5 million women). All through the second half of the nineteenth century, the absence of a workforce was a recurring theme, and landlords deplored its high cost and demands. In spite of the labour shortage, wages remained low and workers' unions were weak. After World War I the labour shortage increased

even more dramatically, so the French government decided to recruit foreign workers, who accepted low wages.

During the twentieth century the average age of farmers increased. In 1936, 21 per cent were over 60, at a time when over-sixties made up only 8 per cent of the general active population. After 1945 older farmers were encouraged to retire; as a result the average age of farmers is now much lower. The total number of both farmers and farm labourers shrank dramatically to 1,449,000 and 300,000 respectively, by 1982. An increasing number of farms are run by part-time farmers, or have one member of the family working outside the farm. Many farms are worked by less than one annual work unit (AWU) and the bigger holdings by 1.5. In 2000 about half of the work was done by salaried employees, either because the holding was incorporated as a company or a *Groupement Agricole d'Exploitation En Commun* (GAEC) and paid salaries, or because it employed non-family members as seasonal or permanent labour (Agreste, 2000).

The general trends discussed in the previous section need to be qualified by the size of the farm and its specialisation. There are three main types: middle-sized mixed farms, small market-oriented farms and large cereal exploitations.

Middle-sized mixed farming was prevalent in Brittany and Normandy. The family farm was an ideal within the reach of an increasing number of families in the second half of the nineteenth century. There were also similar farms in the northwest, mostly in the coastal areas. Depending on the amount of land owned, the farmer could round out his revenue either by renting additional fields or by working as a day labourer on another holding. From 1750 to 1850, these farms were characterised by a mixed production of animal and arable products (cereals and potatoes in Brittany and Northern France), which was mostly for self-sufficiency, although these farms were undeniably dependent on the market. A significant part of the income on these farms came from other sources: growing flax and selling linen and lace (Alençon, Calais) on local markets and also through merchants and from metalworking (the production of hardware in Normandy, and locks in Vimieu). Agricultural production increased through the second half of the nineteenth century and was increasingly sold on the market. Every area developed a specialisation: Normandy, Artois and Thiérache specialised in dairy farming (cheese, fresh butter, and *fromage frais*), while Maine supplied Parisian butchers with beef. In inland Brittany, mixed farming obtained improved results with better-adapted rotation systems, and animals became more productive thanks to crossbreeding. Labour productivity rose considerably. In the Calvados a 25-hectare dairy farm employed two domestics and two servants to help the family in 1848; in 1894, on the same farm, the couple and their children needed no help (Désert, 2007: 493). In the second half of the twentieth century low birth rate and migration to the towns restrained further the family; dairy farming on natural meadows in Normandy provided a modest income. The vegetal production of inland Brittany improved when high rates of input were used. Battery farming for poultry and pigs was developed, and this required large investments funded by Common Agricultural Policy subsidies and bank loans. The result was a higher farm income, which came at a higher rate of indebtedness. In Brittany as well as Normandy most family farms had a rather low overall income, sufficient for survival but only at a low

standard of living, so they needed supplementary income from the outside work of a spouse, from direct marketing of production and from the sale of homemade products. Some farmers also offered tourist accommodation.

The small market-oriented farms were found on the Channel coast of Brittany, where the mild climate favoured the production of early vegetables (cauliflower, artichokes, carrots and tomatoes) and fruits (strawberries). There were also small market-garden farms providing salads, vegetables and garden plants around Paris and the towns of Northern France, especially Saint Omer (*hortillonnages*). This specialised market-oriented production had existed for a long time. It developed in the nineteenth century, when improved standards of living encouraged urban demand, and when exports to Great Britain and Northern Europe were stimulated by railway connections. Production was usually intensified by increased labour input and a moderate amount of investment. The whole family could work on the farm, and seasonal workers were often employed as well. As a result, these farming families did not need any other activities besides production and marketing. Their condition worsened in the second half of the twentieth century as expenses increased. Land taxes went up because these farms were mostly in suburban or coastal areas, both threatened by building development. In 2000 the average price of arable land was 4580 euros per hectare in France, but arable land reached 7000 euros in these areas and even more in suburban areas (Agreste, 2000). Falling prices for agricultural products aggravated the problems caused by higher wages and the difficulty of keeping regular workers. So did the fact that the main customers for their goods were no longer individual consumers but the industry that transformed the product. Farmers organised themselves in cooperatives for packaging, preserving, marketing and transporting. Big markets were created for selling produce in the framework of a national public network, such as the *marché au cadran* in Saint Pol de Léon in Brittany.

The large cereal holdings in the central Paris basin (the *plateaux* of the Île-de-France, Picardy, the Beauce and Artois), which had existed since the middle ages, underwent constant modernisation. They were completely involved in the market, particularly the Paris market. During the Revolution farmers sometimes bought land, but the main part of their holdings, mostly over 100 hectares, was rented. Already by 1840–1860 farmers were improving rotations and developing the combinations of cereals, sheep and sugar beets, at the time when beet sugar became competitive with cane sugar. This strategy required heavy investments to buy sheep and build sugar plants and grain silos. Farmers in Picardy, and to a lesser extent in the Beauce, borrowed money from notaries and local banks to finance these investments. They suffered in the crisis of the 1880s as the price of wheat and wool collapsed. They needed more loans to adapt production to the market and to buy machines to increase productivity (Hubscher, 1980). These large farmers also suffered in the crisis of the 1930s. Where previously the farmer and his wife had hired many labourers, machines replaced them. From the 1950s on, the farmers were trained in high-level vocational schools or in the university and managed the holding as a business that always needed more input to increase the already high productivity. For example, in 2000, in the village of Clermont (Aisne),

no fewer than 1757 hectares of cereals were cultivated on just six holdings. The work was done by 10 full-time farmers and 24 annual work units (AWU), with an average of 1 AWU for each 73 hectares (Agreste, 2000). The revenue of these farmers was the highest in France, but they were also heavily in debt. Nevertheless, their standard of living was comparable to that of the urban bourgeoisie, and much higher than that of other groups of farmers.

6.4 The family, the local community and the state

During the Old Regime there were significant differences in institutions from one rural community to another, but after 1789 they became identical all throughout the whole of France. In the next two centuries the institutional structures did not change much. The *prefect* supervised the implementation of laws in the *département*. He had the help of the *Conseil général* and municipal councils. Representation in both councils was based on tax qualifications until the adoption of universal male suffrage in 1848. Female suffrage was not granted until 1945. These representatives were at first under the supervision of the prefect, but they obtained some independence and extended powers by the laws of 1867 and 1884. During the nineteenth century, among the most important policy issues for rural families, applied everywhere were land taxes, schools, roads and conscription.

Between 1807 and 1840 the *cadastre* (land registration) was completed everywhere. After a while every village became convinced of the benefits of having an up-to-date *cadastre*, which avoided conflicts over the payment of land taxes. Guizot's law of 1833 provided for the opening of a primary school in every village. From then on, villages implemented the law as soon as they obtained allocations from the *Conseil général* or the state. By the 1860s each village had at least one school, and 80 per cent of boys attended school, among whom 50 per cent did not pay fees. The Jules Ferry laws of 1881 and 1882 stipulated free, compulsory, non-religious state education for all children between the ages of 6 and 13.

The July Monarchy set out to build good secondary roads in the 1830s. Considerable efforts were made under the Second Empire, between 1850 and 1870. A good network of roads thus became available, connecting villages to the nearest railway station and opening them to the outside world. The state postal service developed quickly after 1850, and also contributed to opening up the countryside. Another main concern for rural families was conscription. In the war period from 1792 to 1815, 19 per cent of young men were conscripted into the army; this caused much suffering, and desertions were common. In the period from 1815 to 1870 one out of six young men was forced into a seven-year period of military service. Nevertheless, a family could pay for another man to take the place of their son, but this was very expensive, and only well-to-do families could afford it. The 1872 law established a five-year period of service but with many exemptions. From 1889 to 2001 there were no longer any exemptions, and every young man was liable to military service. Military service became a fundamental ritual in the life of rural men all through the twentieth century.

In this general context the relations of the farmer's family within the local community could take different forms. Using Pierre Barral's typology (1967: 42–62), we can distinguish three major types of external family relations in Northern France.

In Brittany ties within kinship were very strong. Families were large because of the high birth rate; every family was included in a large network within village and surrounding communities. They lived in a society of people with similar levels of wealth. Most of the farmers' families were poor or modest in this egalitarian system of transmission (Segalen, 1965). The persistence of this behaviour may explain the widespread development of farm groups (GAEC). However, this was accompanied by a strict hierarchical system. The old nobility retained its prestige. There were many members of the gentry, not all of them rich. Whatever their wealth, their reputation was maintained in the eyes of the rural community. Nobles and the local bourgeoisie usually held municipal power.

This rigidity in the mental structures of the population can also be seen in the environment. At the end of the Old Regime, around 40 per cent of inland Brittany was made up of uncultivated commons where animals could graze. The use of the commons belonged to vassals of the lords. When this system was abolished in 1789, the former vassals received legal ownership of the land. Nevertheless, lawsuits were required to determine exactly who had the right to own part of a common, a very complex question since the manors overlapped and communities could hardly afford such expensive legal procedures. The 1850 law made matters much simpler, and from then on commons were divided and cultivated, and agricultural production in Brittany increased markedly. This society, which was characterised by hierarchical dependence on the nobility and urban notables, was also controlled by the Catholic Church. Priests were used to exercise influence. Most of them were born in modest rural families where vocations flourished, and were well adapted to the society they had to control. They were generally subject to the influence of conservative nobles and encouraged people in inland Brittany to vote for monarchists. The precepts of the Catholic Church were obeyed, particularly those relating to charity. Until the twentieth century there was no government structure to help the poor, because everyone gave charity individually. The numerous beggars were more or less integrated into society and were indeed welcomed by farmers because they acted as cultural mediators, spreading news and songs (Haudebourg, 1998).

In the Paris basin area, with its large holdings, society was also strictly hierarchical, although in a quite different way. Here individualism triumphed, as the ties within the kinship group and among community members were weaker. Peasants were morally independent of the big farmers; their dependence was mainly economic. The landowners were urban citizens most of the time, and strangers to the community. The most influential persons in the local communities were the farmers. They were elected to the municipal council, and decided on local and even regional policy. Jean-Pierre Jessene has termed this system a '*fermocratie*' (Jessene, 1987). Nothing much changed in the domination of the villages by the big farmers, as it was already the case before the Revolution. The farmers lost power only for a short time during the *Terreur* (1793), when some small farmers replaced them in the municipal councils. Later the big farmers became heads of the farmers' unions.

The municipal councils were concerned with the poor, and they gradually developed welfare offices. Funded by individual gifts and municipal subsidies, welfare offices delivered bread, soup, clothes, and, after 1850, free vaccinations and health care. In times of economic crisis the councils set up ‘charity workshops’ where the unemployed could come and work for a day wage, mainly on the roads. Big farmers also took care of their own workers. After 1860 the scarcity of labour encouraged them in paternalistic actions, providing help and sometimes creating insurance programmes. In the area of Péronne, local councils consisting of big farmers voted to allot the remaining commons in small parcels in order to encourage workers to settle in the villages. The political choice of these communities usually swung between centre right and centre left. They looked for that order which protected their economic interests in the best way. In this choice the clergy had hardly any influence. Local religious practice was mainly limited to mass at Christmas and Easter and christenings, weddings and funerals in the church.

In between, in regions with family farms such as Normandy, Maine and some northern areas around Calais, an egalitarian system prevailed, which was more ‘democratic’ than hierarchical. The prestige of the nobility remained but was less strong. Nobles were not heads of municipal councils; farmers or doctors were often elected. The prestige of the clergy may also have been weak; some areas were anticlerical, for example in Maine and around Rouen. In these rural democracies material interests prevailed over political passions. Did the society Flaubert and Maupassant portrayed in their novels persist? Désert assumed that the peasants in Calvados were keen on social tranquillity. They feared the right-wing monarchists as much as the socialists, and in 1852 they welcomed Napoleon III with his left-wing Bonapartism in place of the Republic (Désert, 2007: 677–704).

These three different models partly converged over time. Everywhere, farmers lost their power in the second half of the twentieth century. They became a small minority, in municipal councils, and their communities were increasingly ruled by non-agricultural inhabitants. Today two village patterns coexist. On the one hand, in densely populated areas, agricultural families make up 10 per cent of the village population. The majority are people working in the neighbouring towns (Picardy), or urban bourgeois who come to the country only for the weekend (Paris basin, Normandy). On the other hand, farmer families live in an ‘isolated rural world’, mainly in regions situated further away from the North Sea coast, as in some parts of the Ardennes. In villages that are shrinking to hamlets, farmers are becoming fewer in number and more isolated, precisely in a period when they are increasingly asked to maintain the physical environment (Béteille, 1994).

6.5 Conclusions

From 1750 to 2000, the Northern region remained the most densely populated area of rural France, and also the most dynamic one. Birth rates, which had been rather low in the nineteenth century in comparison with other European countries, were high for France and remained so in the twentieth century. Thus farmers today are rather young, and the older ones retire earlier. Technical improvements have been constant

and have led to highly productive agriculture in regions from Brittany to the North of France, especially in comparison with some now abandoned rural areas, mostly situated in the centre of France.

The sharp contrasts in family strategies are striking. On the one hand, the very large holdings of the Paris basin are managed by a couple and provide high standards of living. Well trained in high schools, they live like the well-to-do urban bourgeoisie. On the other hand, most farms are still middle-sized family farms often run by a single worker, while the other spouse supplements the family income with a regular external job. Their income, except in the brief sunny interlude from 1960 to 1980, remains lower than that of urban workers, all the more so if their educational levels are taken into account.

There is a renewed interest in peasant activities on the part of urban people in search of nature and authenticity. The new rural dwellers, working in nearby towns and settling in the village, are looking for an imaginary perfect countryside. Like other urban people, they criticise, in the name of environmental protection, high levels of input, seed selection and high density animal rearing. They hinder agricultural work, sometimes with legal proceedings, all the more readily now that farmers have lost power in their villages.

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THE LOW COUNTRIES



AUGUSTUS.

Oegst-maent.

Harvest scene with men and women from a popular eighteenth-century almanac, c.1730
(Ghent University Library)

7 The Low Countries, 1000–1750

Isabelle DEVOS, Thijs LAMBRECHT and Richard PAPING

Historically, the Low Countries refer to the geographical area around the low-lying delta of the Rhine, Scheldt and Meuse rivers, roughly covering the present countries of Belgium, Luxemburg and the Netherlands and comprising many medieval principalities with frequently changing territorial boundaries. In this chapter we make a distinction between the southern and the northern Low Countries or Netherlands. The southern Netherlands comprised broadly speaking the county of Flanders and duchy of Brabant in the west, the counties of Hainaut and Namur in the centre, the duchies of Limbourg and Luxembourg and the independent prince-bishopric of Liège in the east. The northern Netherlands can be divided into a coastal area (Zeeland, Holland, Groningen and Friesland), and an interior part (Drenthe, Overijssel, most of Guelders and Utrecht). The Dutch Republic arose as a union of these seven northern provinces after the Revolt against Spain in the course of the 1580s, while the southern parts largely remained under Spanish and later Austrian rule until the end of the eighteenth century.

This political division set the populations of the north and south on fundamentally different paths of development, economically, politically and culturally, from the middle of the sixteenth century onwards. Despite the differences, both regions were also quite similar in a number of respects, as will become clear in our discussion of the development of the demographic and economic strategies of rural households in the period 1000–1750 in this relatively small, but rather densely populated and heavily urbanised part of north-western Europe. Much more than elsewhere the lives of rural people in the Low Countries were influenced by market-demand, non-agrarian economic activities and nearby cities. This overview draws heavily on the comparatively well-documented historiography of Flanders and Holland. In addition, we pay particular attention to the difference between the coastal, more fertile and the inland sandy areas. Chapter 8 on 1750–2000 will focus even more on these regional differences by using the concept of agro-systems to distinguish three different types of rural economies for explaining the process of convergence of rural household behaviour during the last two centuries in the Low Countries.

7.1 The family and demography

The first reliable estimates of the population in the Low Countries date back to the last part of the fourteenth century. Population development for the following centuries is better documented. While calculations between authors and sources vary, it is estimated that the population of Belgium (present boundaries) rose from approximately 1,400,000 in 1375 to about 2,300,000 in 1750 (table 7.1). In the territory of the Netherlands today, the number of inhabitants more than doubled from an estimated 800,000 in 1400 to about 1,900,000 in 1750. In 1750, about 70 inhabitants per square

MAP 7.1 The Low Countries, 1000–1750



kilometre lived in the Netherlands. In Flanders, Brabant and the coastal parts of the Netherlands population density was also relatively high. However, in most parts of the inland provinces of the northern Netherlands, in Limbourg, Luxembourg and Namur in the southeast of the Low Countries population density was rather limited.

The population development of the Low Countries can be defined as a series of long-term waves of growth and recession that essentially run parallel with those in the rest of the North Sea area. Nevertheless, in several respects their demographic history reveals some distinct features. To begin with, the fast growth of new urban centres resulted in an extremely high urbanisation rate, making the Low Countries – together with northern Italy – on the eve of the fifteenth century one of the most densely populated regions in the world. Around 1375–1400 about a third of the inhabitants of both present-day Belgium and the Netherlands were living in settlements with municipal rights.

Around the year 1000 almost the entire population of the Low Countries still lived in the countryside. The first centuries of the second millennium were characterised by a population explosion with a large part of the new population flowing into old and especially new urban settlements. Early urbanisation had strong rural foundations, with villages growing in size, accumulating non-agricultural functions and obtaining municipal rights. The origin of most present-day cities in the Low Countries dates back to the middle ages. However, some of the new juridical towns were very small, comparable to large villages and mainly oriented towards agriculture. The steady process of urbanisation was in the first instance stimulated by the agrarian expansion of the eleventh and twelfth centuries. In the south the basis of this early urbanisation was the widespread development of urban textile industries making all types of cloth for the international market. Especially Walloon-Flanders and Artois, nowadays in northern France, experienced a massive surge of urban development already during the twelfth and thirteenth centuries.

By the early thirteenth century urbanisation also manifested itself in Dutch-speaking parts of Flanders. The twelfth-century rise of the big Flemish cities (the commercial

Table 7.1 Population in the Low Countries, 1375–1750 (thousands)

Year	Belgium	Netherlands	Total Low Countries
1400	1,400 (1375)	800	2,200
1500	1,240	950	2,190
1550	1,670	1,150	2,820
1600	1,275	1,420	2,695
1650	1,760	1,820	3,580
1700	1,895	1,910	3,805
1750	2,300	1,900	4,200

Sources: Belgium (including Luxembourg) estimated from Klep, 1991: 505. Netherlands: new estimates of Paping (work in progress) mainly based on the interpolations of regional estimates in the literature. The estimates relate to present-day boundaries.

city of Bruges and the industrial giants of Ypres and Ghent) overshadowed the urban centres in Walloon-Flanders. In the fourteenth century, when the cities already had declining population numbers, Ghent numbered more than 64,000, Bruges more than 46,000 and Ypres more than 20,000 inhabitants (Stabel, 1998: 184). In this highly urbanised area there were also a lot of very small towns with populations of fewer than 1500 inhabitants and a whole range of middle-sized towns with population figures of about 5000. Half the urban population lived in these middle-sized towns (Stabel, 1997). To a large extent, it was due to the growing rural capital flows to the towns such as feudal dues and rents that the large urban network could exist and that the possibilities of consumption for townspeople increased, especially for the bourgeoisie. The strong urbanisation also created rural opportunities for an intensive agriculture with high yields, widespread dairy farming, the increasing growth of industrial crops and vegetables. Besides, urban entrepreneurs also used the relatively cheap rural labour force for the urban cloth industries (Stabel, 1998: 191). Between 1000 and 1350 not only the urban, but also the rural Flemish population increased, although definitely at a slower pace.

Holland was until the fourteenth century still slightly less urbanised than Flanders, with the rise of a few reasonably large towns such as Dordrecht, Haarlem, Delft and Leiden, and numerous small towns. In all other parts of the north of the Netherlands small and medium-sized towns also arose or grew remarkably in size after 1200, most of them having an important short- and long-distance (Hanse) trading function.

The crisis of the urban export industry in Flanders during the early fourteenth century – due to the growing competition for fine cloth from Brabantine and Dutch industries, and later from English cloth – was a turning point. The urban textile industries now specialised in luxury products intended for rich and international customers. Cloth of medium quality was made in smaller textile centres, while the countryside produced cheaper coarse cloth and linens. In the countryside where production was not regulated, the growing proto-industrialisation was around 1300 heavily contested by the Flemish cities as it began to compete more and more with the urban export industry. In the course of the fifteenth century, the rural linen industry expanded, especially in the valley of the Lys, and began to produce for markets in England, in the Mediterranean and later on in the New World. In western Flanders, in the area around Ypres, the woollen industry developed well (Stabel, 1998: 193–194).

The boom of the proto-industries necessitated a market system directed towards a gateway-city, first Bruges, and from the late fifteenth century onwards, Antwerp. The important rise of the urbanisation ratio in Brabant by the third quarter of the fifteenth century was mainly caused by the spectacular growth of Antwerp, numbering more than 100,000 inhabitants by around 1580. Ghent, the most important city in Flanders, had about 57,000 inhabitants (Stabel, 1996). By contrast, Amsterdam with 30,000 inhabitants was at that time the largest city of the northern Netherlands. However, because of the many small and middle-sized cities, the broad urbanisation rate of the north was higher than that of the south, slowly increasing from 32 per cent around 1400 to 36 per cent around 1500, 40 per cent around 1600, reaching a peak of about 47 per cent around 1670–1700 (estimates partly based on Lourens and Lucassen, 1997).

In a region so urbanised and with a relatively high population density as the Low Countries, it is remarkable that the Black Death seemed to have had only limited consequences. There is no evidence that this region experienced the drastic decimation of the population that took place in other parts of Europe in the century after 1348 (Thoen and Devos, 1999). It remains to be answered why the population decline was smaller than elsewhere. The population decline in Flanders, for instance, was fairly confined compared to rest of Europe, whereas it was quite unfavourable compared to Brabant and Holland. In Flanders the late medieval crisis did not last as long as in England, but it persisted nevertheless longer than in France and Germany. Demographic renewal occurred only after the end of the fifteenth century (Thoen, 1988). In the northern Low Countries population growth already resumed in the period 1400–1500 in such diverse regions as Drenthe, Overijssel and Holland. In the latter region, urbanisation took off swiftly with a marked increase in relatively large middle-sized towns. The poly-nuclear pattern, however, changed in the seventeenth and eighteenth century with the rise of Amsterdam as centre for international trade comprising 217,000 inhabitants by 1795.

In the beginning of the sixteenth century, the population of the Low Countries – both north and south – began to grow rapidly, although the rhythm varied regionally. By the mid- sixteenth century, the total population had grown by a quarter compared to the level of 1500. The population of the southern Netherlands fell sharply immediately after 1585 – due to the massive emigration of Protestants (including a large number of skilled workers, rich merchants and entrepreneurs) to the northern Netherlands and other parts of Europe – and needed almost a century to reach the same level again. The population growth of the new Republic, on the other hand, only paused, and stimulated by a large migration from the south quickly resumed its earlier growth path. By the mid-seventeenth century the population of the north had grown by an estimated 90 per cent since 1500. Nowhere else than in the Republic did the population growth of the long sixteenth century persist so long into the seventeenth century. The near absence of military actions and food crises appear important reasons for this long sustained growth. Nearly the entire rise in population before 1650 took place in the coastal provinces, while the inland sandy region generally experienced only relatively limited growth.

The doubling of the population in the northern Netherlands between 1500 and 1700 can be attributed mostly to the fast growth of cities in Holland, Zeeland and Friesland, resulting in nearly half of the total Dutch population living in towns by 1650 and reinforcing the position of the Low Countries as the most urbanised area in the world. If we restrict ourselves only to cities with more than 5000 inhabitants the urbanisation of Holland was with 57 per cent in 1650 even higher than that of the peak which Flanders – now in crisis – attained in 1475 and around 1550. It was especially after 1580 that the growth rates of the urban population in Holland dwarfed the growth of the rural population. A regular stream of rural migrants went to the cities, which were beset by higher mortality rates, and constantly needed new blood from the countryside (especially of craftsmen and servants) to keep the population constant, and even more to let it rise. For the rural population of the Low Countries (especially

the unmarried) the city was never far away, and always a possible place to settle. The urban migrants in rapidly urbanising Holland, however, came for a considerable extent from outside the region, especially from Germany, the southern Netherlands, but also as far away as Scandinavia.

The next century 1650–1750 was characterised by a sharp slowdown in the growth of total population numbers in the northern Low Countries. Although inland rural population growth accelerated after 1670, the number of inhabitants in the coastal countryside stagnated from 1620 onwards. In the same period most cities experienced a reduction of the population, resulting in a slow de-urbanisation process, just as in the southern Low Countries. In the latter region, after the demographic crisis of 1580s following the revolt which resulted in mass emigration to the Republic, the population grew considerably until 1650. The rise in the southern Netherlands was primarily concentrated in small urban centres and networks. At that time Brabant formed the heart of the urban system. A period of stagnation then ensued in some parts of coastal Flanders whilst other inland areas showed some decline. From the early eighteenth century onwards, especially the rural population of the southern Low Countries was increasing again (Vandenbroeke, 1976). At the start of the eighteenth century, 45 per cent of the population in Brabant lived in urban settlements with at least 5000 inhabitants compared to only 16 per cent in England. However, this figure decreased to 31 per cent on the eve of the nineteenth century.

Notwithstanding the very high urbanisation rate, it must not be forgotten that the majority of the early modern population of the Low Countries still lived in the countryside. In the north the rural population (defined as those not living in juridical towns) increased from approximately 600,000 around 1500 to nearly 1,100,000 in 1750, whereas in the south – experiencing de-urbanisation – the rural population probably more than doubled in the same period. This last development mostly took place after 1600, when the south was confronted with very rapid rural population growth, which only temporarily slowed down in the second half of the seventeenth century (De Vries and Van der Woude, 1996).

Detailed information on individual demographic behaviour for the Low Countries is only available from the seventeenth century onwards, when we can draw on parish registers and micro-studies carried out for some villages. Mortality levels declined in the last three decades of the seventeenth century, as plague epidemics – which had been endemic until the fifteenth century and had major outbreaks up to 1670 – disappeared. Other threats to life expanded soon and replaced the retreating plague, but none had its frightening severity. Mortality was dominated by other infectious diseases such as dysentery and especially smallpox that accounted for nearly 10 per cent of total mortality. During the eighteenth century it was probably the main cause of death for children. These newly potent diseases were joined in the coastal regions by malaria (Devos, 2001). For instance, death rates in the marshland parishes of the Flemish polders were excessively high (35 to 40 per thousand) compared with inland parishes and even higher than in the city of Ghent. The ecological situation (slow circulation of surface water and the increased brackishness of the polders) seem to have forced up mortality rates.

In addition to the incidence of malaria, the high mortality in the coastal regions of the Low Countries is generally related to the poor quality of the drinking water and perhaps the shorter breastfeeding period. In the Flemish polders infant mortality exceeded more than 250 per thousand around 1700. At the same time, birth rates were higher in these regions to compensate for the excessive infant deaths. Fertility was nevertheless restricted by late marriage, although possibly for different reasons. Both coast and inland areas fit well into Hajnal's West European Marriage Pattern in the seventeenth century. Women married on average around the age of 25 to 27, while men were on average one to three years older. However, there are indications that, at least in the rapidly growing coastal area, average ages at marriage had been considerably lower before 1600. Actually, early modern individual ages at first marriage showed very large variations, with for instance some girls marrying around the age of twenty, while others were already in their thirties. Information on average age at first marriage points towards a more restricted nuptiality pattern in the interior part of the Low Countries, for instance in Flanders where there was a strong development of proto-industrialisation, especially during the eighteenth century (Vandenbroeke, 1976). In this respect, the numbers suggest a demographic division between the more fertile, more market-oriented and more prosperous coastal areas and the inland sandy areas.

7.2 The family and its members

In the period 1000–1750, the rising rural population of the Low Countries experienced marked tendencies towards increasing differences in the family economy of households, both within villages, as between regions, mainly due to diverging processes of proto-industrialisation, proletarianisation, specialisation and fragmentation, but also sometimes of concentration of holdings.

At the start of the second millennium, nearly all rural households in the Low Countries were dependent on a farm holding for their living. Agriculture was the main activity and most of the production and consumption happened within the family with only a limited exchange outside the household. In the next few centuries rural households in most of the Low Countries – despite their continuous rise in numbers – were able to supply a rising surplus of agricultural and industrial products for a continuously growing urban population. A process of proto-industrialisation started before 1300, when an important wool-processing cottage industry already existed in rural Flanders. During the period of medieval urban growth members of rural families were confronted with the pull of rising towns as well as the push from the changing rural society (especially due to growing population pressure). However, rural population pressure was relieved by the growth of proto-industrialisation creating new means of existence. Proto-industrialisation accelerated in the fifteenth and the first half of the sixteenth century in both Holland and Flanders resulting in numerous rural households becoming dependent on the combination of small-scale farming and non-agrarian activities for their livelihood (see also section 7.3).

A second wave of proto-industrialisation was restricted to Flanders and began during the crisis of the seventeenth century, expanding in magnitude and significance in the eighteenth century. The density of the population of Flanders, the small-scale division of land, and the limited means of livelihood forced the peasants into supplementing their income with cottage industries, making proto-industry an integral part of the commercial survival economy of the peasants. The cottage industry most probably provided more work and income in the countryside, thereby having an immediate influence on changes in population. Research, however, has not provided any definite answers to how the developments in population, urbanisation and proto-industrialisation were interrelated. Proto-industry in Flanders at the end of the fifteenth and beginning of the sixteenth century could have contributed to the relatively favourable demographic changes. The 'normal' demographic pattern with a strong positive correlation between welfare and fertility seems to have been replaced in fifteenth-century Flanders by a situation in which the natural growth of the various social classes did not differ much. The result was a vigorous rural population growth and further proletarianisation and fragmentation of the size of farms which went on until long after 1750. The relative high growth of the rural population in the eighteenth century in the south of the Netherlands was not as Mendels (1981) argued due to a lower marriage age; in fact the age of marriage of most peasants was rising (Vandenbroeke, 1981).

In Holland, proto-industrialisation after 1550 made way for proletarianisation and specialisation, diminishing the number of households depending on the supplementing of small-scale farming with other sources of income. Smallholders mostly turned into landless labourers or left for the growing cities. This process also resulted in the rise of a considerable group of relatively well-to-do farmers with middle or large farms, who were extremely market-oriented, while a considerable part of the rural population found their main occupation in industry and services. Already in the fifteenth century, a similar process of concentration of land holdings and proletarianisation had started in the Guelders river area, coastal Flanders, and presumably also in Friesland and Groningen (Van Bavel, 2010). The family economy of the different kinds of households in these coastal and near coastal regions all became strongly attached to the market (see section 7.3).

In the less densely populated inland parts of the northern Netherlands enormous tracks of uncultivated (common) land were still available which with the help of labour power and manure could be converted into arable fields. In the interior provinces of the north the nearly continuous rural population increase from the fifteenth to the eighteenth century nevertheless resulted in a fall in the average farm size, especially due to a rising proportion of cottagers with very small farms, as for instance in Overijssel and Drenthe (Slicher van Bath, 1957; Bieleman, 1987). Only in some parts where population pressure became high (for instance in Twente, the Achterhoek and northern Brabant) a cottage industry developed. In the sparsely populated hilly parts of the south (Luxembourg, Namur) very large market-oriented leasehold farms – often remnants of feudal manors – were accompanied by an increasing number of smallholders, who found additional work on these farms or sometimes in proto-industry (Van Bavel, 2010).

Lastly, the inland rural population consisted mainly of larger and smaller farmers, or rather peasants, accompanied by a rising group of cottagers (very small peasants). Agriculture was the basis of the family economy, and households performing non-agricultural activities as their main livelihood were quite rare in the rural villages, with the exception of the proto-industrial regions, where many families were active in both textile production and agriculture. Although most rural people worked in agriculture and had some land at their disposal, large differences already existed on the village level between substantial farmers, smallholder peasants and cottagers, weavers and labourers by 1600.

The distinction between more commercially oriented and more subsistence oriented regions that emerged in the Low Countries during the later middle ages and sixteenth century resulted also in differences in the size and composition of rural households, at least from the sixteenth century onwards (older data are missing). The commercial economy of the Flemish coastal areas, for instance, resulted in a large demand for agricultural labour, a predominantly young and male population and larger households due to the presence of live-in servants, while in the peasant survival economy of inland Flanders where land was limited and households were smaller, there was a larger percentage of females and an older population.

In the northern Netherlands the situation seems to have been quite different. Average household size in the coastal area was smaller than in the inland region in the early modern period. Around 1750 the mean size of rural households in Overijssel was 5.2, in Veluwe (Gelderland) 4.5, whereas in Friesland and the northern part of Holland it was only 3.8 (Van der Woude, 1972). In the highly specialised coastal area the numerous non-farmer households of labourers, cottagers, proto-industrial workers and artisans were mostly small, on average considerably fewer than 4, inasmuch as only a limited amount of labour was needed in their households. Households of the minority of the more well-to-do farmers were generally much larger. They had less need to get rid of the older children, and often a few male or female servants lived on the farm.

In the inland provinces of the north the average household was relatively large, and there were slightly more three-generation households. Because nearly all had land at their disposal, very small households were rare. However, three-generation households remained quite infrequent in the early modern period because of the high average age at marriage and high adult mortality (although lower than in the coastal regions) combined with a preference for neolocality. Usually the situation of three generations living together was only a short phase in the life cycle of the household. However, non-nuclear or extended households might have been more frequent in the medieval Low Countries, which would correspond with the suggestion of a weakening of family ties with more distant kin in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, as can be concluded from the increasing government involvement with the care for orphans and the diminishing interest in family feuds (Van Bavel, 2010).

Presumably already in the medieval period, large parts of the rural population in the Low Countries experienced a specific age-related life cycle. Until the age of 12 to 16, children usually lived with their parents, afterwards followed some 10 to 15 years of service in different, usually more wealthy, households controlling more land or other

capital resources (see for servants also section 7.3). Only the children born in affluent rural households with abundant land or other resources were likely to remain at home until their marriage. Presumably the chances for older children to stay with their parents were also greater in proto-industrial households which had enough income-earning opportunities for them. Due to the high ages at marriage in the early modern period, it was especially this large age group of unmarried juveniles which was heavily engaged in migration to other villages and to cities in search of work and a good starting position for their later life. It has to be kept in mind that such migration strategies could be attractive, taking into account that there did not exist a rigid standard life course in the early modern Low Countries. For instance – in accordance with Hajnal's West European Marriage Pattern – a considerable portion of the rural men and women (approximately 10 per cent around 1750) remained unmarried until their old age.

After marriage most new couples started a household of their own (neolocality). Some were capable of taking over the household of one of the parental couples; some started to live with them for a shorter or longer period, while others had to establish a new household elsewhere. Taking into account the rise in the rural population in the Low Countries in the medieval and early modern period this establishment of new households was not completely uncommon. Some years after marriage, it became rather unusual for rural families to migrate or to move to a different house. Most of the established households clung to their original economic position and usually went through the normal family life cycle with children growing older and in the end leaving the household. However, there were many exceptions to this normal family life cycle due among other factors to high mortality, high remarriage rates and childlessness. Normally, the surviving partner (male or female) remained in charge as head of the household as long as possible. The elderly from the lower strata of society often had to resort to poor relief during their last years.

Research on long-term trends in inheritance practices and strategies for the Netherlands is scarce and constitutes a topic that still needs to be addressed more extensively from a social and economic perspective. Nevertheless, it is possible to reflect briefly on the possible social and economic impact of different inheritance practices on families. In general, the egalitarian division of the inheritance between sons and daughters was the norm in the Low Countries, with the exception of Luxembourg where the oldest son was favoured (primogeniture). There are reasons to believe that in the middle ages sons were sometimes better-off. In Groningen, for instance, according to Frisian law sons received twice as much as daughters in medieval times. However, during the seventeenth century farmers and other more well-to-do rural dwellers concluded marriage contracts in which they explicitly stated that sons and daughters should be treated equally.

In theory, offspring received an equal portion of the estate of the parents. However, in practice the farmstead was often handed over entirely to one of the sons or sometimes to a daughter (impartible inheritance). The other inheriting children received either a cash sum or an annuity that equalled their share in the inheritance. However, there are indications that during periods of population growth and rising land prices, farmsteads were literally divided between the offspring resulting in fragmentation of holdings. This

pattern can be observed for example in the south during the sixteenth and eighteenth centuries. Especially where peasants owned the land themselves, equal inheritances stimulated fragmentation, as happened in Flanders and medieval Holland, a process which was usually accompanied by an important land market. However, when leasehold farms were dominant, landowners often resisted division, giving the lease to one of the succeeding children, usually a son, as happened in Twente, Salland (Overijssel), the Achterhoek (Gelderland) in the eastern Low Countries and in the sparsely populated leasehold regions in the southeast of the Low Countries (see volume on *Social relations: Property and Power*). As a consequence, in regions with many leaseholds as the Guelders river area or Holland after 1560, the number of farm holdings could even diminish through the combination of several leaseholds.

In the commercial coastal region, the continuity of the lineages on the farmstead was by no means self-evident. In the eastern Marne (Groningen) during the seventeenth century more than half the (usually leased) farmsteads went to non-related people, while a minority went to succeeding sons or daughters, with a significant preference for sons especially on the larger farms. Widows and widowers had a very strong position, and usually were capable of remaining in charge of the farm after remarriage. As a result, the age at marriage was high and new couples often had to acquire a farm themselves elsewhere. Family strategies were less directed towards preservation of the family farm for the next generation; however, the exception was the largest farms which significantly more frequently remained within a family for more generations. The weak ties between farm and family also played a role in the high social mobility in the coastal countryside, as did the diverse social structure with large differences in farm size and numerous trades and labourer households. In the eighteenth-century Groningen countryside about half of the married males and females acquired a socio-economic position different from that of their parents, presumably pointing to ample possibilities to shape one's own life in the very market-oriented coastal region (Paping, 2009).

In the inland territory, the use of most farms might have been handed over to the next generation more frequently, with a strong preference for sons as successors. Chances of social mobility seemed to have been rather low, because there were only few opportunities within the local village to become something other than a farmer or a peasant. The control of land was of imminent importance and because the land market was relatively limited (especially in regions with a high proportion of leaseholds), people often had to rely on inheritances. As has become clear, the situation was often less simple in reality, inasmuch as most of the land in the countryside was often not owned by the user. Numerous farmsteads and cottages were rented out by landowners – who could be relatives and co-heirs of the users, but also religious institutions, lords or city dwellers – and the hold on the land of these tenant farmers could diverge strongly. Possibly, it was the need for some kind of farm holding as a means of livelihood that stimulated later marriages and a high rate of celibacy; however, lack of research on family succession makes this difficult to prove.

Specialisation on the one hand and proto-industrialisation on the other hand accounted for the most important shifts in the organisation in rural household labour. Especially during the early modern period the role and contribution of women

and children to the household economy witnessed some important changes. The agricultural labour market for married women and young children (below the age of 12 to 14) was restricted due to technological and cultural reasons. As a result demand for wage labour in agriculture was primarily aimed at adult males and unmarried adolescents (servants). The share of married women and young children, although there may be some geographical variations, presumably did not account for more than 20 per cent of the total labour input. The main tasks of women and children on the labour market consisted of weeding and collecting the crops during the harvest. However, as agriculture was specialising and employment in proto-industry increased, the contribution of women and children became more important. This can be illustrated using the Flemish linen industry as an example. Production of linen in these households drew mainly on the labour of its members. The preparation and spinning of the yarn was carried out by the women and children, and the adult male (sometimes assisted by a son) wove the linen (Mendels, 1981).

Throughout the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries two main developments can be observed in Flanders and Brabant. Firstly, more members of the household were engaged in proto-industrial production. Not only the number of households owning tools to process and produce linen was rising, the number of tools owned per household was also increasing. Secondly, members of the household contributed longer to the household economy under proto-industrialisation. Compared to primarily agricultural regions, children in proto-industrial households started to work at an earlier age. Also, elderly people and especially women could continue to contribute to the household income even when they were unable to work in the fields. The early modern era was characterised by an increase in the labour input on the level of the peasant household in correspondence with the 'industrious revolution' that can be observed during this period. The increased labour input undoubtedly resulted in a higher income, but also had some profound effects on the quality of living. Data for the end of the eighteenth century undisputedly show that illiteracy levels reached a peak where the involvement of children in proto-industry was the highest, and physicians testified to the negative physical consequences of labour-market participation at an early age (Vandenbroeke, 1981).

At first glance, the proto-industrialisation process in Holland offered fewer labour opportunities for female members of rural households than in the southern Netherlands. However, because the males were often occupied with proto-industrial activities, the running of the small farm must have become the task of the women during a considerable part of the year. So while females had a relatively low share in waged labour (with the exception of servants), they had a high share in household-based labour. As a result the official position of females in the coastal societies had become rather strong by the late middle ages. Labour opportunities for the wives from the sixteenth century onwards, however, might have been more limited, as these women were usually only employed on the farms during harvest time. In the inland parts of the northern Low Countries the labour market and the specialisation of economic activities were of less importance. On the usually small-sized family farms the work of men and women, sons and daughters all played a decisive role; the specific tasks on the

farms were usually divided along lines of sex and ages. Presumably, in these societies older children were bound to their parental household in a stronger way than in the coastal area.

Everywhere in the Low Countries the married male as head of the household was officially taking the most important decisions. However, the position of married women was protected in several legal and traditional ways. Inside the household bargaining processes will have taken place among husband, wife and older children. Although officially very strong, the control of parents over their children between the age of 20 and 25 presumably weakened in the early modern period, partly as a result of the opportunities the nearby cities and the rural wage-labour market offered. After the death of the male head usually the widow took over his position as head of the household with all its responsibilities and influence without much dispute.

7.3 The family and income

Around 1000 rural households in the Netherlands depended almost exclusively upon agricultural activities for their income. The small agricultural surplus usually went to feudal landowners and to tithes. Presumably, this period was characterised by farms mainly run by relatives. Money was only of limited importance. The rise of the cities from the eleventh century onwards must have resulted in a much stronger market-orientation of farms, and was accompanied by higher rural food surpluses and a slow monetisation of society. Although the relatively high urbanisation made international imports necessary, the food provision from for instance inland Flanders played an important role in the survival economy of the neighbouring towns during times of shortage. In coastal Flanders, farmers usually produced large surpluses for the urban market.

As mentioned, already at an early stage the Low Countries experienced important shifts in their occupational structure. Not only the activities rural people were engaging in diversified rapidly, but also the proportion of the population working part-time for a wage increased considerably. Both the northern and the southern Netherlands were characterised by an early and important penetration of non-agricultural wage labour in the countryside (Van Bavel, 2006). The greatest difference was that these non-agrarian means of livelihood in Flanders were mostly connected to the wool and flax industries, whereas in Holland these were related to fishing, shipping, peat cutting and dike maintenance.

In Holland, small farm exploitations were combined with all kinds of temporary proto-industrial wage work. Recent estimates suggest that around 1500 only 25 per cent of the population of Holland was active in agriculture. The origins of this situation can be traced back to the crisis of the second half of the fourteenth century. Peat digging constituted an important form of by-employment for peasants in the coastal regions during the middle ages. Erosion of peat soils and rising of the water level resulted in increasing economic pressure after 1350. These ecological problems forced the Holland peasants to develop new activities to ensure their survival. Due to difficulties with rising water levels the productivity of agricultural labour was diminishing, ultimately

resulting in a strong incentive to engage in various forms of non-agricultural labour. In Holland the shift in the countryside from an agricultural population to a more mixed occupational structure can be dated to this period.

The scarcity of labour resulted in an economy that was primarily capital and not labour oriented (Van Bavel and Van Zanden, 2004). In addition to weaving and spinning, the peasantry of Holland increasingly engaged in brick production and lime-burning (Van Bavel, 2003). Also, coastal fishing became an important part of the annual labour cycle. The occupational structure continued to diversify, stimulated by agricultural specialisation in regions like Friesland and unhindered by urban guild privileges. Already by the middle of the sixteenth century a vast proportion of the rural population in Holland, Zeeland, Friesland and Groningen was working outside agriculture, selling and marketing non-agricultural goods and services (De Vries, 1974). The coastal regions in the southern Netherlands experienced a similar transition to a more diversified occupational structure, albeit at a slower speed and on a smaller scale.

The relatively rising wages in the seventeenth century made an existence as a wage-earner without a tiny farm holding a feasible alternative in the Holland countryside. In the previous centuries, the same rise of a landless labouring class had occurred in coastal Flanders, Zeeland, Friesland and Groningen. Also the proportion of rural heads of households fully employed in industry and services – mainly performing specialised work for locals as craftsmen, merchants and the like – became very high in the coastal area, possibly even 40 per cent in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. In Friesland in 1749, this group amounted to 39 per cent of the heads of the rural households (Faber, 1973: 440–441). Specialised workers like artisans earned a significantly higher daily wage than unskilled (farm) labourers. In the period 1650–1750 an unskilled adult labourer in the building industry earned on average about 18 stuivers a day in Holland, 13–14 stuivers in the eastern Netherlands (including coastal Groningen) and 12–14 stuivers in Brabant and Flanders (De Vries and Van der Woude, 1996). Proto-industrial wages seemed to have been even lower.

Perhaps due to the low money wages in combination with a limited demand for wage work, wage income outside the coastal region still was often supplemented with small-scale farming or self-subsistence agriculture in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. In these inland regions, specialised artisans and tradesmen were a much smaller group (only about 10–20 per cent) and completely landless labourers were rare. While proto-industrial activities diminished in importance in the coastal area, they remained the backbone of the economy in large parts of the interior of the Low Countries, especially in the south. The combination of proto-industrial wage-earning activities with subsistence agriculture secured the livelihood of many families, supplying them with both the necessary cash (for taxes and rents) and sufficient food.

It has already been mentioned that peasant households often already engaged in non-agricultural activities in the southern Low Countries from the thirteenth century onwards, especially in densely populated Flanders. By-employment in textile industries was one of the defining features of the Flemish rural economy until the nineteenth century. In southern Flanders already some 50 per cent of the rural households possessed looms in the middle of the sixteenth century. Around 1570, some 60 per cent

of the active population in southern Flanders engaged part-time in textile production (linen, cloth and tapestries) in this region (Thoen, 1988). During the early modern period these patterns persisted. In the southern Netherlands rural textile production increased steadily from the sixteenth century onwards and enabled the peasantries to survive exploiting a small holding. At the end of the eighteenth century more than 80 per cent of holdings smaller than 5 hectares engaged in this type of proto-industrial activity (Mendels, 1981).

Clearly, a striking feature of the Low Countries' rural economy was the importance of wage labour. Although the emergence of a labour market dates back to the eleventh century, the most profound changes can be observed during the later middle ages. Around 1550 between 25 and 60 per cent of the total rural labour input can be categorised as wage labour. This evolution, however, was quite unevenly spread throughout the Netherlands. Holland was the region that witnessed the first and most profound transition to wage labour, closely connected to the occupational shift in the direction of proto-industry during the late medieval period. For these non-agricultural activities workers were paid a wage and did not participate in the ownership of the production infrastructure. During the late middle ages Holland was already characterised by exceptionally high wage levels, which can be attributed to a lack of labour power in this region and resulted in the adoption of labour-saving techniques. In densely populated Flanders labour was more abundantly available and wage levels were lower. According to Van Bavel, in Holland almost half of the labour input in the middle of the sixteenth century consisted of wage labour. In some regions like the provinces of Groningen, Friesland, the Guelders clay area and the polder regions north of Bruges the creation of large farms coincided with a rise of agricultural wage labour (Knibbe, 2006; Soens, 2009; Van Bavel, 2006). However, although the number of households relying on part-time wage labour was certainly rising, this was in the first instance possibly only for a small part due to changes within agriculture.

The picture in Flanders is quite different. Unlike Holland, the spread of non-agricultural activities did not coincide with a strong rise in wage labour. In this region only 25 per cent of the labour input was made up of wage labour. In the non-agricultural sector and textile industry in particular, the peasants owned all the means of production (tools, raw materials etc.) and could produce goods without the capital input from urban entrepreneurs. Data for the 1720s indicate that less than 10 per cent of the rural households active in proto-industry actually worked for a wage (Lambrecht, 2007).

In accordance with other rural developments between 1000 and 1750, there was a shift in the Low Countries from mostly intra-village exchange to urban and rural markets. During the eleventh and twelfth centuries, rural markets emerged everywhere, although – due to political reasons – the northern Netherlands were certainly more advanced in terms of the number of rural markets. Both the high urbanisation levels and the number of rural markets in the Low Countries stimulated peasant households to strongly engage in specialised market-oriented activities (either agricultural or proto-industrial). By 1700, the coastal countryside of the Netherlands produced agricultural surpluses (grain, cattle and cheese) that were sold on both domestic and

foreign markets. In the coastal parts of the north large imports of grain and livestock (meat) to feed the large urban population nevertheless remained necessary.

The emergence of markets after 1000 resulted in a rising need for money and coincided with a rise in the number of coins made available by the government. By the sixteenth century, the economy of the coastal areas had become completely monetised, with rents nearly always being paid in cash. However, in the inland parts of the northern Low Countries (like Drenthe) rents in kind were still widespread. In these regions market dependence was considerably less, however, by no means absent. The dominance of surplus agriculture (mostly to pay rents and taxes), with a considerable amount of self-provision guaranteed the inland peasants security and diminished the chance on bankruptcies. For farmers in the coastal area high market dependence resulted in higher risks, more volatile income streams, increasing prices of land, but also greater welfare.

In general the volume of rural transactions far exceeded the money supply (Lucassen, 1999). This chronic shortage of cash resulted in both a high velocity of coins in circulation and the widespread use of credit. Credit became an essential part of the rural economy to facilitate exchange and to overcome short- and long-term imbalances between income and expenditure. Both production and consumption were mainly financed through extended payment and credit (Lambrecht, 2009). Long-term rural credit was closely linked to land and the land market. For instance, the annuity, the most important credit instrument in the Netherlands, was secured by land. The annuities collected from the late thirteenth century suggest an interest rate of approximately 10 per cent (Hoppenbrouwers, 1992). These interest rates gradually declined during the next centuries. Especially during the sixteenth and eighteenth centuries, interest rates experienced a sharp fall, while demand for credit was rising considerably. In the first half of the sixteenth century, interest rates had decreased to 6.25 per cent. In the course of the eighteenth century interest rates would decline from 5 to less than 3 per cent in the south (Servais, 1982) and to 3-4 per cent in Groningen, Drenthe and Holland in the north.

Loans like annuities played an important role at the moment of acquiring a farm, when large sums were needed to finance these investments. The availability of cheap credit, especially since the sixteenth century, also allowed households to actively participate in the land market and might have contributed to loosening the ties between household formation and intergenerational transfers of land and capital. During the high middle ages ecclesiastical institutions were still the largest suppliers of rural credit in the Netherlands. However, during the later middle ages they were slowly replaced by urban citizens. For them the annuity was not only a safe and interesting investment opportunity, but also could act as a means to accumulate land in the countryside. Urban credit served as an important source of capital during the early modern period, for instance for the reconstruction of the rural economic infrastructure after a war.

Because coins were scarce, the intra-village exchange of goods and services was also mostly done on short-term credit or payment was delayed. These informal networks forged and strengthened social relations within the village. Informal credit networks were of special importance to the members of rural society at the lower end of the

social scale. As they sometimes did not own land and thus did not have access to the formal credit market, access to informal networks was an essential feature of their survival strategy. These informal networks, and their economic importance for the smallholders, were expanding throughout the early modern period in the Flemish countryside (Vermoesen, 2010).

In the Netherlands, the emergence of a supralocal market for wage labour can be retraced to the end of the eleventh century (and perhaps even earlier) when the local supply of labour by *corvées* was insufficient on the large domains to absorb labour demand from the large-scale reclamations taking place during this period (Verhulst, 1990). There was, however, a vast difference between the northern and the southern Netherlands. Around 1300 the northern Netherlands were still a region where land reclamation could result in a demand for labour far exceeding the local supply. Compared to the southern Netherlands this resulted in relatively high wages. During the sixteenth century wage labour in the Low Countries was moulded into the basic characteristics that would last until the end of the early modern period.

As in other respects, there were distinct differences between the way wage labour was organised in the coastal and inland provinces, although there was some mutual dependency. From the sixteenth century onwards the coastal regions of the Netherlands relied increasingly on migrant labour drawn from the inland regions. The emergence of a structural labour system based on seasonal migration reached maturity in the course of the seventeenth century (Lucassen, 1987). The coastal area of the Netherlands attracted seasonal labour for different reasons. The creation of large specialised farms in the coastal zones during the late fifteenth and sixteenth centuries led to a sharp increase in labour demand during specific parts of the year. These large arable farms relied increasingly on temporary immigrants drawn from the inland regions inside the Low Countries and adjacent countries like Germany. Not only agriculture, but also land reclamation peaking in the first half of the seventeenth century and the construction of dikes created extra labour demand that drew on specialised migrant labourers. After 1650, land reclamations declined, but there remained enough other work opportunities for seasonal migrant labourers. This migration pattern, for which Jan Lucassen coined the term 'North Sea system' survived well into the nineteenth century. In essence the inland regions traded their surplus labour for high wages in the coastal provinces. As a consequence, temporary migration (especially of adult males) became an important part of the income strategy of the smallholders in some inland regions.

In addition to seasonal migrants, farmers in the Netherlands used labour supplied by live-in unmarried servants, local smallholders and labourers. The timing of the emergence of life-cycle servants in husbandry remains unclear at this stage. The population decline and labour scarcity after the middle of the fourteenth century may have induced farmers to hire labour for longer periods like six months or one year (Mertens, 1970). The first legal texts concerning servants date from the fifteenth centuries, but especially during the sixteenth century a legal framework for this type of labour was constructed. These strict regulations hint at a shortage of servant labourers in this period. Only from the early seventeenth century onwards are we able to check their numerical importance.

During the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries servants comprised between 8 and 15 per cent of the rural population (Vandenbroeke, 1976; Van der Woude, 1972). The regional and temporal differences in the incidence of servants were influenced by two factors. Firstly, population decline favoured the employment of unmarried servants over day labourers, who were often married. As the population expanded and labour supply increased, servants were partly replaced by cheaper day labourers. Secondly, the agricultural characteristics of regions explain the character of rural employment. Regions specialising in arable agriculture mainly resorted to male labour hired for only part of the year, with the exception of harvest time when female labourers were also hired in massive numbers. In pastoral agriculture and regions specialising in dairy production workers were employed the year round and the input of female labour was more important. Data for eighteenth-century Flanders indicate that servants were mainly working in the coastal areas with large farms. Most servants in this region were also drawn from the ranks of the smallholders in the southern regions.

The most numerous group of wage workers were cottagers and day labourers living in a household of their own. In contrast to servants, most of them were married, worked their own holding and were less mobile. Day labourers worked on the large farms and estates within their own community. As mentioned above, in the coastal regions their numbers grew substantially when the creation of large farms reduced many smallholders to landless day labourers. Both, increasing fragmentation of holdings and proletarianisation in the inland regions also released a surplus of cheap wage labour. These smallholder households had to combine work on their own small holding with either proto-industrial or agricultural wage labour (Mendels, 1981).

Most of the smallholders did not work more than 100 to 150 days annually as a day labourer. The social and economic bonds of the day labourers were more intense compared to migrant labourers and servants. The day-labouring households engaged in a reciprocal exchange relationship with the large farmers in their community (Lambrecht, 2003). The peasant households supplied cheap labour and could in return hire capital goods of the larger farms (horses for example) to work on their own small holding. This enabled both parties to increase the productivity of their holdings. During the eighteenth century, the number of households performing day labour was declining in the southern Low Countries. The strong demographic growth, fuelling the process of dividing small holdings, created a rural proletariat with only limited employment opportunities in agriculture. In the coastal regions in the north, on the other hand, for most of the numerous full-time landless labourers wage labour on the many large farms had become by far the most important source of household income.

7.4 The family, the local community and the state

With the exception of the church, local institutions were not very well developed in the countryside until the late middle ages. By that time, there was a functioning legal system and often the community was organised in a parish administration or an association governing the commons. In the coastal region water and polder boards – usually

dating from the first four centuries of the second millennium – were of great importance. In the southern Netherlands, intra-village legal relationships were supervised and controlled by a college of aldermen who were appointed by the lord. The tasks and responsibilities of these aldermen varied greatly over time and space. One of their main tasks consisted of safeguarding the inheritances of orphaned children. In origin the aldermen had considerable rights over the villagers, settled intra-village conflicts over debts, inheritances etc. and were able to engage in criminal lawsuits. Because they were appointed by the lord, they were also responsible for looking after his economic and financial interests.

Poor relief institutions also gradually developed throughout the territory of the Low Countries. By the thirteenth century almost every rural community in the south had founded a poor relief board to provide for the needs of their parishioners (Prevenier, 1978). Their income consisted mainly of land, annuities and charitable gifts. In the north, every parish had its own poor relief board in the seventeenth century and presumably also in earlier centuries. The rural boards were usually not very rich and to a considerable extent dependent on annual gifts. From the seventeenth century onwards the northern boards were organised along religious lines in this mixed society with Calvinists, Roman Catholics and Mennonites frequently living together in one village.

Very large parts of the rural society ran at least some risk of eventually becoming too poor to maintain themselves in specific circumstances, so the poor relief board functioned as a social safety net for the local people. The actual proportion of paupers in the countryside in the northern Low Countries usually remained rather small, comprising approximately 5-15 per cent of the population. Especially orphans, the disabled, widows and the elderly (the structurally poor) were provided relief, partly with money and partly with goods (food, cloth, fuel). In the eighteenth century in inland Drenthe, local poor relief was very anxious to restore the means of support of paupers by giving them for instance cows or sowing-seed (Gras, 1989). Distribution of meals to the paupers kept expenditures as low as possible.

The structure and organisation of poor relief had two important effects on rural households. Firstly, since support was mainly aimed at the elderly, orphans and widows, poor relief reduced the financial impact of poor kin on the members of the stem family and household resources. Secondly, access to poor relief was determined by place of birth rather than place of residence resulting in low migration rates of poor households and restraining the temporary migration of labour between regions. During periods of economic crisis and scarcity the means of the poor relief board were often insufficient to actively support all the needy households. Because their expenditure level was determined by their fixed income, poor relief never developed into a flexible institution as in England. The importance of these institutions was not restricted to poor relief. In the south, for instance, the assets of the poor relief boards were used to facilitate and speed up the process of recovery after devastating wars. Poor relief institutions could also rent out land at a lower price and extend credit to local households who were unable to secure a loan from the traditional credit networks.

In many inland parts of the northern Netherlands, mainly consisting of sandy soil and moors, vast tracks of uncultivated land were regarded as common land governed

by the local community. The share of this common land differed from region to region, being for instance extremely high in sparsely populated areas as Drenthe and large parts of the southeast of the Low Countries (Ardennes), though much lower elsewhere. Thanks to the availability of uncultivated land, population growth could result in land reclamation without the land/labour ratio going down in the long run. However, often access to common land was severely restricted by the local community, hindering the formation of new households. Furthermore, it was difficult to make a living if a new couple only had uncultivated land at its disposal. As a result, population growth in the period 1000–1550 remained limited in the inland regions, and even nearly stopped for a century after 1550 in the north. Exceptions, however, were the extensive moors in the interior parts of Groningen and Friesland which were transformed into densely populated areas during the process of peat digging from the sixteenth century onwards.

In the coastal area and in Flanders, common land nearly completely disappeared in the first centuries of the second millennium. For instance, in Heusden (Holland) common land had become a rarity by 1500 and the few parts left had only a negligible size and were usually of low quality (Hoppenbrouwers, 1992: 43–49). In this process of disappearance two factors were important: on the one hand the quality of the coastal land was very high which made intensive use and division attractive. The rising population on the other hand increased the demand for this land. The disappearance of the commons meant that only intensive growth was possible in the coastal region. Population growth usually meant a lower man/land ratio, a development slightly toned down by the reclamation of land from the water (polders). In the southern Netherlands commons also disappeared quite rapidly in the later middle ages. Only in some economically backward regions (for example the Campine area) they survived until the end of the early modern period. Access to the commons and common resources consisted mainly of pasture rights for cattle and the rights to gather fuel (De Moor, 2003).

It is difficult to say which of the external forces were most important for the local community, all interfered on slightly different levels. It is clear that decision-making processes of the rural people were strongly influenced by the government (raising taxes), by nearby cities (trying to control their economic activities), by local lords (enforcing laws and extracting the surplus) and other landowners and by the church (setting the norms for human relations). Only during the fourteenth century did the Low Countries witness some important signs of rural rebellion.

During the middle ages and the first half of the sixteenth century cities exerted a considerable influence on the countryside. The aim of the medieval city governments was to control the urban hinterland and exert a considerable political and economic influence upon them (Stabel, 1997). In the early modern period, however, their powers were significantly restricted by the central government, at least in the southern Low Countries. During the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries the government – in the process of state building – began to refine and expand its taxation system to secure a regular income. The introduction of all kinds of new taxes laid a heavy burden on the countryside. In the province of Groningen for example it was only around 1500 that ordinary land taxes and excises were introduced. This rising demand for resources by the government made it necessary for rural land users to create higher surpluses.

Especially during the second half of the seventeenth century taxes for the countryside were rising considerably. In return for their increased financial contribution the state shielded the rural communities from the influence of the cities, at least in the southern Netherlands. The political and economic influence of the urban centres over the countryside dwindled resulting in commercial and industrial rural expansion. In the northern Netherlands several cities controlled an extensive economic hinterland, enforced a staple-market and prohibited economic activities. However, the influence of these cities seems to have been less oppressive, because the prosperity of the near countryside was also in their interest.

Originally the local communities in most of the Netherlands mainly had to deal with the lord. However, in some parts the power of the nobility was relatively weak or a feudal nobility was essentially missing (especially in Friesland, Groningen and Drenthe). In these regions local institutions were partly controlled by large farmers from the middle ages onwards. Elsewhere already during the high middle ages the power of the local lords was declining. The dense urbanisation of Flanders and the frequent warfare activities in the countryside resulted in a slow but steady migration of the nobility to the cities. Also a large portion of the rural population in the southern Low Countries could register as out-burgers of a town so as to become subject to urban law and institutions. In the middle of the fifteenth century the proportion of out-burgers in the Flemish villages amounted to more than 50 per cent and sometimes even reached more than 90 per cent. A large part of the population was thus to some degree withdrawn from the authority of local institutions. Also the competences and executive powers of lords and rural communities were increasingly usurped by regional and central institutions from the sixteenth century onwards. At the end of the eighteenth century the village community and its institutions were mainly executing orders from hierarchically superior institutions (Blockmans, Mertens and Verhulst, 1987).

In large parts of the Low Countries, the economic role of lordship, however, remained important, and even in the smallest *seigneuries* the lord enjoyed some financial rights over the villagers. These rights consisted of both fixed sums of cash or agricultural produce (slowly eroding under inflation) and variable rights resulting from the sale of land or inheritances. Because, in the south, large parts of the rural population registered themselves as out-burgers, they could shield themselves partly from the financial extractions of the lord. The financial impact of lordship thus gradually declined, although the late eighteenth century saw a minor seigniorial reaction with lords trying to reclaim some right that had passed into disuse since the middle ages. The legal, political and economic power of the lord was characterised by a slow, but steady decline between 1000 and 1750 (Thoen, 2001).

The lords were not the only landowners in the countryside. The amount of free holding and local non-noble ownership differed markedly from region to region (see volume on *Social relations: Property and Power*), but in only a few places did this comprise more than half of the land. Rents were also paid to local and urban institutions, while especially city-dwellers slowly and continuously increased their holdings in the surrounding countryside. In theory, land owners could have a strong grasp on local family formation by deciding who received land or who was allowed to

marry (in case of serfdom). Unfortunately we are not well informed about this for the middle ages. In the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries only in some places did relicts of serfdom still exist. For example in Twente (Overijssel) a lot of the large farmers were in name still serfs and needed permission to marry. However, in practise these serfs were among the richest land users of the region, because of their very strong hold on the land they rented. Perhaps it was this strong position of the serfs that stimulated lords to abolish serfdom, which could mean more freedom for the rural people in exchange for the owner's stronger hold on the land. In most of the Low Countries serfdom had disappeared completely by the fifteenth century.

As in most European countries the church initially played an important role in village society. The church had acted as one of the most important agents of land reclamation during the early middle ages. From the late middle ages onwards at a local level the legal powers of the church were restricted. Religious offences were either heard by the college of aldermen or at a diocesan level. The church initially played an important role in the provision of poor relief, but their influence was slowly eroded. Especially during the early modern period the rights and duties of the church were set by central governmental institutions. Because the finances of the church were largely based on local contributions, conflicts between the church and the village community loom large during this period in the south, especially concerning tithes. In the northern Netherlands the payment of tithes remained of importance throughout the early modern period in Zeeland, while in for example Groningen and Drenthe the already relatively unimportant remnants of the medieval tithes slowly faded away in this period.

7.5 Conclusions

Already at an early stage the Low Countries displayed some of the basic characteristics of an advanced economy. Within a European context urbanisation was already relatively high since the fourteenth century, employment outside agriculture widespread and market-orientation pronounced, while in the meantime the rural population nearly doubled by 1750. Although we can observe the trends of increasing urbanisation and specialisation at a general level, some important differences within the Low Countries can be discerned, which had a profound impact on the income strategies of rural households, the labour markets involved and the process of household formation.

In large parts of the inland region high population density, proto-industrialisation and fragmentation went hand in hand (inland Flanders, Brabant, parts of Twente). These regions were characterised by fewer large farms and a majority of smallholders living near subsistence levels. In other inland parts, however, population density was low, uncultivated land (commons) preponderant, proto-industry insignificant and fragmentation of land holdings quite limited (for instance Drenthe). There were even inland parts where large landholdings started to dominate and where numerous near or completely landless cottagers lived (Guelders river area, Ardennes), a situation which was comparable to the coastal regions. In these very commercial coastal regions, sometimes earlier (coastal Flanders, Friesland, Groningen), sometimes later

after a phase of strong proto-industrialisation in the late medieval period (Holland) the rural household economy came to be dependent on large-scale farming, though far more often on the specialised non-agricultural work of artisans and merchants, or on the wage work of mostly male landless labourers. These differences in farm size had important effects on the organisation of labour. In the regions characterised by small farms, households were in general smaller. These smaller households were predominantly the result of fewer servants. Regions with larger farms attracted more labour. As a result, households were larger as they frequently included farm servants. These large farms also relied increasingly on migrant harvest labourers from the sixteenth century.

Especially in the coastal parts, household formation became less dependent on intergenerational land and capital transfers. The large employment opportunities as wage worker outside agriculture loosened the tie between land and marriage. Local institutions aided this transition to a more modern economy. Property rights were secured and protected by law at a local level so a land and credit market could operate efficiently. This also contributed to loosening the land-family bond in an important way. Where alternative employment opportunities were lacking, as in many inland regions, access to land still could play a role as a prerequisite for marriage. Large parts of the inland regions displayed the characteristics of a flexible niche model: land was necessary, but the amount that was needed to set up a new household was declining due to more intense cultivation of existing land and increasing proto-industrial employment. In the latter, land was still of pivotal importance for income strategies whereas in the coastal areas subsistence agriculture was largely replaced by wage labour. However, through seasonal labour and market transfers (supply of food and non-agricultural products) both regions, inland and coast, also depended upon each other. Differences in inheritance patterns can also be observed in the coastal and inland areas. In the inland areas all children enjoyed equal inheritance rights. When the population grew and land became more scarce, this resulted in fragmentation of peasant holdings. In the coastal area, the bond between farm and family was less strong as most of the large farms were leased. With the exception of the very large farms, a high degree of tenant mobility can be observed in this region. Unlike the inland regions, the family-land bond was relatively weak.

In both the coastal and inland regions there is evidence of growing pauperisation already from the late middle ages onwards. Especially from the end of the sixteenth century, an increasing rural population was confronted with on the one hand on-going division of many landholdings, and on the other hand concentration of coastal landholding and ensuing proletarianisation. The process of fragmentation was even reinforced in the inland regions during the late seventeenth century, resulting in the decline of income opportunities from land and labour for many rural households, which was to a limited extent offset by a rise in proto-industrial activities. This evolution was only partly slowed down by charitable institutions. Early modern rural households in general could not structurally rely on poor relief as an alternative form of income as it mostly restricted its support to incomplete households, orphans, the disabled and the elderly.

Both during the middle ages and the early modern period the Low Countries experienced significant economic growth. Geographically and chronologically, this growth was unevenly spread. The strength of the rural economy was an important factor in this economic success. The household economies of the rural population in the Low Countries interacted with the economy in many ways. In some cases, the economy presented opportunities for rural commercial expansion. Especially in the coastal areas large farmers were the vanguard of commercialisation. In the inland regions, the household decision-making process was governed by necessity. Here too, a commercial attitude governed the household economy, but the profits accrued by them were rather small.

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Dutch farmer in the province of Groningen with his employees and live-in servants, c. 1900 (Coll. RHC Groninger Archieven, 818-17254)



Families of spinsters in East-Flanders in the village of Zele, c.1900 (A. De Winne, *Door arm Vlaanderen, met een brief van Ed. Anseele*, Ghent, 1903, p. 33)

8 The Low Countries, 1750–2000

Erwin KAREL, Eric VANHAUTE and Richard PAPING

Rural households in the Low Countries encountered enormous changes in the period 1750–2000. Whereas in the beginning of this period a large majority of the households still depended, in one way or another, on agricultural activities, nowadays only few of them earn their income in the agricultural sector. This transition coincided with an adaptation to so-called urbanised lifestyles; the term ‘deruralisation’ was coined to denote this process. The concept deruralisation aims to grasp the decreasing impact of the former rural and agricultural ways of living, both in an economic and a social sense. Deruralisation does not necessarily imply urbanisation or the depopulation of the countryside, but it definitely leads to a dominance of labour and income strategies that are detached from former rural ways of living. In the past two centuries rural households developed multiple strategies to adapt to these new patterns of living. In the Low Countries, this process of deruralisation is linked to a rapid population growth, especially after 1850. The guiding questions in this overview are: How did these transitions affect household demographic and economic survival strategies? How important were regional differences, and do we notice a process of convergence with more general patterns?

In the nineteenth and twentieth centuries the Low Countries comprised the states of Belgium (about 10.7 million inhabitants in 2010), Luxembourg (0.5 million inhabitants) and the Netherlands (16.5 million inhabitants). Politically these countries were united in one nation from 1815 until 1830. Economically and socially the regional differences within and among these three countries were considerable. In this contribution, we try to grasp the impact of these regional differences by using an ‘ideal-typical’ distinction between three agro-systems that by and large shaped the rural economies in the Low Countries. These agro-systems, with roots much older than the eighteenth century, preconfigured family formation and income and labour strategies until deep in the twentieth century. The first type is characterised by (relatively large) market-oriented farms, and a large supply of agricultural wage labour. Typical regions were the clay areas (such as Groningen, Friesland, Holland, the Brabant region south of Brussels) and the coastal and Scheldt polders. In the second type of agro-system farmers and peasants with relatively small and partly market-oriented farms were dominant, as in the eastern and south-eastern parts of the Netherlands (Drenthe and parts of Overijssel, Gelderland, Utrecht, Brabant and Limbourg), the Dutch and Belgian Campine and the Ardennes region. Wage labour was only of limited importance. In the third agro-system households had a long tradition of combining agricultural and proto-industrial production. The textile industries in the rural regions of Inner-Flanders and Twente and the iron making region around Liège are well-known examples.

These agro-systems underwent huge transformations after 1850. Thriving proto-industrial regions decayed, sometimes at a rapid speed as the story of Flanders

MAP 8.1 The Low Countries, 1750–2000



illustrates. Other rural areas transformed into expansive industrial or agricultural labour markets. In the Walloon Meuse valley a flourishing mine and metallurgic industry absorbed the excess rural labour supply. Agro-industrial complexes such as the Groningen and Drenthe peat colonies created flexible labour markets that allowed workers to combine agricultural and industrial labour (sugar, potato-flour and strawboard industry). Many hybrid or transitional forms of these three regional agro-systems existed. However, in analysing the impact of the changing and disappearing agro-systems on the living and working conditions of the households this subdivision can be clarifying. In addition, we must stress that country-specific differences between Belgium and the Netherlands also played a major role, especially on the level of national legislation, social and economic policies and religion-related cultural differences.

Finally, it is important to draw attention to the timing of the process of deruralisation. Although in this respect too regional developments can diverge strongly, it is possible to discern three major periods of transition. First, from the eighteenth until the third quarter of the nineteenth century, the 'old' agricultural and proto-industrial systems came under growing pressure. The majority of the (increasing number of) rural households faced major problems due to the decreasing opportunities of the traditional survival strategies. Second, from the last quarter of the nineteenth until the middle of the twentieth century, a 'modernised' family-based agriculture developed together with a growing supply of rural commuters. Third, in the second half of the twentieth century the industrialisation of farm work erased regional differences in favour of a much more uniform agricultural system. Most of the country dwellers adopted a (sub) urban lifestyle (Segers and Van Molle, 2004; Karel, 2005).

8.1 The family and demography

Population figures in the Low Countries not only reveal similar trends, but also show remarkable differences. All regions went through the 'classic' demographic transition. However, in the Netherlands this process was accompanied by persistently higher birth rates and much more rapid downswings in death rates than in Belgium. Consequently, population growth in the Netherlands was much faster, multiplying (nearly) eight times between 1800 and 2000, as against (just over) three times in Belgium and Luxembourg. These diverging trends can mostly be explained by differences in economic and cultural patterns. Belgian industrialisation triggered a fast decline in fertility rates in the Walloon provinces Hainaut and Liège from the last quarter of the nineteenth century onwards. In the Netherlands industrialisation started later, partly explaining the high birth rates. In the historical literature the perpetuation of traditional cultural patterns in the Catholic part of the population (about 40 per cent of the total population) is often mentioned as an important factor. As a religious minority in the north, their elites aimed to strengthen their position by propagating families with many children. This moral and intellectual stance prevented the acceptance of modern patterns of family planning for a considerable time - at least until the sixties of the twentieth century. Moreover, the birth rates within the orthodox branches of the Dutch Protestants also remained relatively high during most of the twentieth century. The principle of 'self

regulation within one's own religious group' prevented direct state intervention in the sphere of the family (in the form of birth control and family planning). As a result large families were rather common in the Dutch countryside until the second part of the twentieth century. It was only in the 1960s that contraceptive practices became virtually universal in the Netherlands (Schoonheim, 2005).

The timing of the demographic transition was marked by significant regional differences as well. This becomes evident when we look at the age and frequency of marriage in the Netherlands. Until the 1950s marriage frequency in urban regions in the Netherlands was higher than in rural areas. This was more pronounced in non-coastal areas, where rural dwellers tended to marry later than urban couples. The percentage of married men between 20 and 29 years old was 10 to 20 per cent lower in the countryside than in the cities (Van Poppel, 1984). However, this did not have much impact on birth rates, because these were higher in rural areas. In general, deruralisation made it easier to earn an income and to start a family at a young age. In the nineteenth-century Dutch rural regions mean ages at marriage were generally high and celibacy was a frequent phenomenon, although this was less so for the farmers and labourers in the market-oriented coastal areas than for the peasants living in the countryside of North Brabant, Gelderland and Limbourg (Van Poppel, 1992). The mean age of marriage in the Netherlands dropped significantly from the late nineteenth century onwards, from 27.6 in 1860 to 22.7 in 1970 for females, and from 29.3 to 24.7 for males. After 1970 the mean age of first marriage rose again towards respectively 30.0 and 32.8 in 2007, partly because alternatives to marriage (living together and partnership contract) have become more common from the end of the twentieth century onwards.

In Belgium the demographic transition towards lower marriage and fertility rates took off in the third quarter of the nineteenth century in the industrial regions in the Walloon area, due to a combination of deconfessionalisation and changing working and living patterns (Lesthaeghe, 1977). This caused huge regional differences in fertility patterns. Around 1900 in Walloon industrial villages marital fertility had dropped significantly, whereas in the Flemish countryside the fertility ratios were more than

Table 8.1: Population in the Low Countries, 1750–2000 (millions)

	Belgium	The Netherlands	Luxembourg
1750	2.2	1.9	0.1
1800	3.0	2.1	0.13
1850	4.43	3.08	0.19
1900	6.69	5.18	0.23
1950	8.65	10.20	0.29
2000	10.23	15.86	0.43

Sources: Historisch Demografische Databank Nederland (HDGN), Central database of historical local statistics in Belgium (HISSTAT); Institut National de la Statistique et des Études Économiques du Grand-Duché du Luxembourg (STATEC).

Table 8.2: Birth and death rates per thousand in the Low Countries, 1801–2000

	Belgium		The Netherlands		Luxembourg	
	birth rate	mortality rate	birth rate	mortality rate	birth rate	mortality rate
1801–1850	32.0	24.4	34.8	28.0	.	.
1851–1900	30.5	21.5	34.2	22.8	.	.
1901–1950	18.9	14.1	25.2	11.4	20.6	15.2
1951–2000	13.8	11.5	16.5	8.2	13.3	11.1

Sources: Historisch Demografische Databank Nederland (HDGN), Central database of historical local statistics in Belgium (HISSTAT); Institut National de la Statistique et des Études Économiques du Grand-Duché du Luxembourg (STATEC).

twice as high as in the southern part of Belgium. Until the 1880s the rural pattern of high female age of marriage (29 years around 1850) and a high proportion of never married women (25 per cent around 1850) was dominant. Just as in the Netherlands the mean female age of marriage dropped sharply between 1880 and 1950, from 29 to 22 years. In 1950 less than 10 per cent of the women never married. Together with the general spread of contraception this pushed back the rates of natural growth from the 1930s onwards. Rural regions such as the Campine area, which showed the slowest changes, were the fastest growers in the twentieth century (Devos, 1999).

Differences in timing of the demographic transition were also caused by a disparity in mortality rates. Until the 1880s average mortality was higher in the northern part of the Low Countries (Netherlands) as opposed to the southern part (Belgium). In general, mortality risks were higher in urban and industrial areas. In the Netherlands, however, (except the western part) average mortality in rural areas exceeded the urban rates. After the 1920s regional differences disappeared (Van Poppel, 1984). High mortality rates of young children (under one year) depressed life expectancy significantly until the last quarter of the nineteenth century. Mean figures of life expectancy only started to rise after 1880, from less than 40 years to more than 60 years in 1950, and more than 75 years in 2000.

Since the high middle ages the Low Countries have been one of the most densely populated regions in the world. Population density in Belgium and the Netherlands (land area) rose from 98 and 65 inhabitants per square km in 1800 to 351 and 488 in 2009 respectively.¹ Taking into account that only the extended urban agglomerations of Brussels and Amsterdam accommodate more than one million people, this means a relatively high spacing of population density. Deruralisation equalled suburbanisation, defined as a sharp rise of the (non-agricultural) population in the former rural zones.

¹ In 1850, 1900, 1950 and 2000 these numbers were respectively 144, 219, 285 and 332 (Belgium) and 95,157, 301, 468 (Netherlands).

This generated specific rural-urban dynamics and further complicates the definition of rural versus urban population. According to modern international standards hardly any rural zone is left in Flanders and the Netherlands. On the other hand, the notion of what can be considered as rural has been changing continuously during the past century.

Until the middle of the nineteenth century the Netherlands witnessed a modest process of de-urbanisation. The proportion of people living in urbanised settings decreased from 45 per cent in 1795 to 41 per cent in 1850.² De-urbanisation was most pronounced in the Dutch coastal regions. Here 49 per cent of the people lived in an urban community around 1860, as against 33 per cent in the rest of the Netherlands. After 1870 the process of urbanisation accelerated. Around 1970 about 67 per cent of the people in the coastal area lived in urban settlements, as against 53 per cent in the other regions of the Netherlands. In Belgium, modern urbanisation took off earlier because of the industrialisation process (Vanhaute, 2005). Around 1800 more than three quarters of the Belgium population still lived in villages with fewer than 5000 inhabitants. This ratio shrank to 66 per cent in 1860, 45 per cent in 1900 and less than one third around 1950. However, hardly one in every eight urban dwellers in 1900 was living in centres with more than 100,000 inhabitants. Urbanisation rates rose most rapidly in the east-west Walloon industrial basin and on the north-south axis Antwerp-Brussels. The expanding industry, followed by trade and services, caused a process of urban growth and suburbanisation. Cities like Brussels, Antwerp, Liège, Rotterdam and Eindhoven are good examples of new, twentieth-century urban growth poles in the Low Countries. Eventually, this economic transformation promoted the marginalisation of agriculture and rural industries, and, consequently, of rural family and survival patterns.

Until the early twentieth century, regional differences in household composition were apparent. In the coastal areas, farmer households used to be large, comprising not only the farmer, his wife and their children, but also several live-in servants. Farmer children usually stayed with their parents until marriage in their late twenties. These large households were vital to secure the supply of labour on the farmstead. In 1830–1850 in the Groningen clay area, for example, the average size of farmer households was 6.7, whereas labourer households only numbered 3.9 persons on average (consisting mainly of parents with their young children). However, from the end of the nineteenth century onwards social differences in household size decreased with the disappearance of the system of life-cycle servants. Neolocality was the rule in the Dutch coastal areas. Only a maximum of 10 per cent of the households could be characterised as extended (three-generations) or multiple (including other relatives). Extended households were usually a temporary stage in the family life cycle. Newly-wed couples stayed with their parents for a short time or elderly people lived with their children for caring reasons.

In less market-integrated parts of the Low Countries the nuclear family was also dominant. In the eastern part of North Brabant, as in some other regions where smallholders were dominant, the multi-generation family remained an exception.

² For the Netherlands we defined cities as municipal communities with at least 0.2 per cent of the total Dutch population, including towns that historically had the privileges of a city.

The proportion of ‘non-nuclear’ members (relatives, servants, lodgers and so on) usually was not higher than 10 per cent (Van den Brink, 1996). After marriage, most children started a farm elsewhere, and parents usually did not move in with their children at the end of the life cycle. In many cases the freshly married couples chose to settle in neighbouring villages. This means that short distance migration was of great importance, as in many other regions. However, in several parts of the Low Countries the number of three-generation families tended to grow during the period 1850–1950, in some villages even up to about 60 per cent of the farmer families. Probably this was due to a fall in marriage and mortality rates during the demographic transition, which resulted in a supply shortage of farms and houses. After 1950, when the modern western way of family life was actively propagated, the extended household became again a less accepted form of family life.

In Belgium, patterns of household composition were very similar (Vanhaute, 2002, 2005). The standard family size of five family members on the Belgian countryside remained stable until the end of the nineteenth century. The average family shrank to fewer than four members after 1910 and fewer than three after 1960. Forms differed highly however. Until 1900 about one in every five households consisted of singles. Eight out of ten households were nuclear families. Only 20 per cent of the households lodged other (family or non-family) members. These static data hide important differences and dynamics in living patterns. In the nineteenth century these point to growing tensions within the household, as shown in the ratios of extra-matrimonial conceptual behaviour. In the Flemish countryside pre-marital conceptions rose from 8–15 per cent (of all first conceptions) in the second half of the eighteenth century to 30–35 per cent in the first half of the nineteenth century. The ratio of illegitimate births multiplied in the same period from less than one per cent to seven per cent. The proportions dropped only slowly after 1880 (Matthijs, 2001). These tensions were considerably fewer in more open, market-oriented regions as the North Holland countryside. Here pre-marital sex reached a peak of about 3.5 per cent in 1810–1815. In the next decades the proportion of illegal births declined rapidly again, reaching 1–2 per cent in the second half of the nineteenth century (Kok, 1991).

In most parts of the Low Countries the marriage life cycle followed a general pattern in the nineteenth and early twentieth century. After marriage and when the children were still young, the number of external members in the household was relatively high. This number decreased after the children reached the age of 12–14, old enough to work. Only at the end of the life cycle of the parents did the number of external members grow slightly again. A considerable proportion of the children older than 12 years of age were put to work on a temporary basis outside the household. Especially in poor families this generated extra income and less pressure on spending. At the same time these servants were cheap workers for the receiving households. This explains why the number of non-relatives in wealthy households was much higher than in families of smallholders. This pattern disappeared in the twentieth century, partly because children stayed at school longer and worked in non-agrarian enterprises. Until the twentieth century standard families of parents and kids formed only a small part of the personal life cycle due to the high mortality risks. Two out of every five marriages broke down

within the first ten years, two out of every three kids lost at least one parent before the age of twenty. One in every three marriages was a re-marriage for at least one partner. In the twentieth century (at least for a short time) the nuclear family became the real standard, because of falling mortality risks and lower fertility rates.

The patterns of the demographic transition in the Low Countries were only marginally affected by international migration. After the agricultural crisis of the 1840s and during the depression in the last quarter of the nineteenth century some regions experienced a modest emigration wave to America. More important was the outmigration towards expanding neighbouring industrial regions such as northern France (around Roubaix) and the German *Ruhrgebiet*. In 1900 about 500,000 descendants of Belgian natives resided in France, of whom 60 per cent lived in the *Département du Nord*. Between 1850 and 1900 emigration surpluses skimmed 8 per cent of the total national birth surplus. During World War I many Belgian citizens fled to the Netherlands, but this was only temporary. Just after World War II the majority of emigrants were farmers, moving to new lands, especially Canada and Australia. The Dutch and Belgian governments supported this outmigration of mostly young families and unmarried men. In Belgium thousands of farmers moved to bigger farms in the Walloon area. These emigrants never made up more than a fraction of the rural population. From the 1960s onwards both countries were confronted with a rather constant stream of immigrants (foreign labourers, immigrants from former colonies, reuniting families, political and economical refugees). In some regions (Belgian and Dutch Limbourg, and Luxembourg coalmining and steel industry regions) and cities this migration changed the structure of the population, but the overall demographic impact remained small, especially in the countryside.

More important was domestic migration. These internal migration flows were strongly influenced by changing labour markets. Between 1830 and 1900 the proto-industrial region of Inner-Flanders lost more than 350,000 inhabitants, while the provinces of Antwerp and Brabant (Brussels) were able to attract about the same number. After 1850 tens of thousands of redundant labourers in Flanders moved temporarily or definitively to the industrial basins in the south. In the Netherlands a similar process developed at the end of the nineteenth century between rural villages and industrial centres. More peripheral regions were affected by stagnation and even depopulation after 1870, such as the Ardennes region and Luxembourg, but also parts of Groningen and Friesland (Alter, Neven and Oris, 2008).

8.2 The family and its members

In the Low Countries, as in most other parts of the world, farming was primarily a family business. Other forms of farm management remained exceptions. However, this does not mean that the past centuries did not witness huge changes in the relationship between farm and family. On the one hand, family labour became more and more restricted to the nuclear household, gradually excluding all forms of labour exchange with other family and non-family groups. On the other hand, more inputs than ever came from outside one's own farm and village, making the farmers more

dependent on outside factors. This change in household dynamics is fundamental for our understanding of the ‘great transformation’ of the past two centuries. Again, it is useful to discern regional differences in order to interpret trends and variations in determinants such as household labour organisation, especially regarding the role of gender and generations.

Gender relations determined the internal household patterns. In the coastal areas labour within the household, on the farm and in commercial activities was traditionally subdivided along distinct gender lines. Housekeeping was the task of females. On the farm women usually took care of the cows (milking and butter making), sheep, pigs and poultry, and they were in charge of the gardens. Weeding in springtime was also an important female activity. The males were occupied with the work with horses and did most of the labour on the land. They threshed the grain in the winter, and in harvest times they reaped the grain and cut the hay, while the women bound the shelves and helped with transport. There was no demand for hired female labour in winter time. During these months male labourers were hired for threshing grain, cleaning ditches and digging the soil. With the introduction of artificial fertilisers from the 1880s onwards farm specialisation became more pronounced. For instance, in Groningen most of the farms specialised in arable farming. The numbers of livestock decreased, reducing the role of the farmers’ wives in the enterprise. In farms specialising in livestock production, female labour input decreased also because milk factories took over the butter-making process. The more the process of mechanisation accelerated, the more the input of women’s labour on the farm contracted. In the course of the twentieth century farming in the Groningen countryside and elsewhere along the coast became predominantly a male enterprise.

In the nineteenth century about half of the children of the rural population became life-cycle servants. Children of large farmers usually stayed at home. After 1900 the system of life-cycle service collapsed. Higher real wages, new job possibilities, extended school education and possibly a growing need for individual freedom made the position of life-cycle servants increasingly more unattractive. The new attitude toward keeping children at home longer can also be seen as an investment, made possible by the rise in real wages. As a result, male life-cycle servants on farms became rare after World War I, while large farmers kept only one female servant for the housekeeping work at most (Paping, 2004).

Elsewhere in the Low Countries middle-sized farms and smallholders were dominant. Typical was the mixed farm with some arable and pastureland. The mostly poor soils required permanent fertilisation, which explains the labour-intensive way of working. The smallholder farm was almost entirely a family business; those with (temporary) servants were a small minority. Woman and daughters participated in both the work on the land and around the farmstead, caring for the (small) livestock. In sandy regions labour participation in rural households used to be rather equally shared. Household-based activities, such as peasant farming, proto-industrial production and petty trade were divided among husband, wife, children and -if present- other family members. Nonetheless, profits were low and harvest surpluses were hardly sufficient to pay the rent. Declining income perspectives after 1750 were countered by an ever

more intensive labour input. In Inner-Flanders, for example, this resulted in heightened pressure on income and labour inputs. Between 1750 and 1850 labour input per hectare rose by 50 per cent, transforming the small fields into gardens (the so-called ‘Flemish horticulture’). Although per capita returns did not rise accordingly, around 1850 still two out of every three families in Belgium relied at least partly on an agrarian income. Basic essentials in most farms were bread grains, potatoes, beans, eggs and butter. The spread of potatoes as a crop after 1750 supported this form of survival farming. This process of intensification, together with additional earnings from proto-industrial activities or seasonal migration, stimulated the rise of relatively poor smallholders on the sandy soils well into the nineteenth century.

After 1880 industrialisation started to play an important role in the family economy of smallholders. New industrial and commuting labour patterns reallocated the household-based activities (children, house, garden, and livestock) to the wife and daughters. The disappearance of the traditional marketing of butter, eggs, small cattle and vegetables accelerated the changes in a more gendered labour division. Children were able to exchange farm work for a job in one of the new factories, often based in the towns or in specific rural areas, for example the Philips factories in Eindhoven and chemical and non-ferro industries in the canal zones in the Campine area. Rural patterns of income pooling disappeared more slowly, as children remained relatively longer in the parents’ home and contributed their industrial income to the family economy. Nonetheless, from the end of the nineteenth century new industrial households started to shape new patterns of family formation. In other regions, such as the eastern part of the Netherlands, the tendency to migrate to the cities, such as the textile town Enschede, was stronger, and income earned in industry by juveniles did not always become part of the family economy.

In the twentieth century the labour division in- and outside the agricultural sector became even more gendered, evolving towards a more patriarchal model. For example, in Belgium the official (registered) female labour participation (ages 15–64 years old) dropped from 67 per cent in 1850 to 36 per cent in 1950. Whereas the proportion of women in the total agricultural labour force until 1900 fluctuated around 40 per cent, this dropped to about 25 per cent after 1950 (Vanhaute, 2005). The contours of a breadwinner/housewife model can also be seen in the farmers’ families, with a clearer designated task division among husband, wife and children. In this process the ‘education’ of farmers’ wives and daughters by agriculture housekeeping schools or farmers’ wives’ organisations reoriented them towards household based tasks, supporting male activities in running the modern farm. During the process of modernisation of the Dutch farms between 1955 and 1970 the participation of farmers’ wives and children dropped significantly (Karel, 2005; Bieleman, 2010). In Belgium around 1980 60 per cent of the farms had no co-working family-members (wife/children) any longer; in 2000 this number increased to 80 per cent. In the late twentieth century the gendered household-farm model came under pressure again, mainly because of the lack of family heirs. However, the number of women who manage a farm is still relatively small. In 2008 only about 5 per cent of the Dutch farm managers were female (including widows).

Intergenerational relationships were in large part preconfigured by inheritance practices. The market-oriented farmers of Flemish Zeeland, for instance, combined equal inheritances with the indivisibility of the farm holding. However, because of their strong market orientation and the time lag between the marriage of the children and the death of the last living parent, these farmers were not firmly attached to the native ground (Van Cruyningen, 2000). As a result, family succession on farms in the nineteenth-century coastal areas was not the rule. In Groningen about half of the farms went to non-related successors. Farmers tried to cling to their farms as long as possible, and therefore their children were often forced to look for a new holding. The risk of downward social mobility for farmer children was large, certainly when the number of surviving children increased in the late nineteenth and the twentieth century. Often some of these descendants of farmers became artisans, shopkeepers or merchants; some even ended up as labourers. In the twentieth century chances for farmer children expanded, mostly because well-paying alternatives became available. The children of rich farmers were usually well-educated and could easily find a job in the rapidly expanding urban and rural job markets during the twentieth-century process of economic modernisation. From the end of the nineteenth century onwards retiring farmers built comfortable houses in the villages and rented out the farm to one of their children. Thus, as elsewhere, family succession on farms became increasingly the standard in twentieth century Groningen. Especially sons profited from this development. As a result of the intensifying process of mechanisation, they stood first in line to inherit the large and valuable farm. However, it has to be kept in mind that due to the relative large number of surviving children in this period of high population growth, the majority of the sons and daughters were not able to take over a family farm. In more modest labouring households, servanthood for boys and girls between the age of 14 and the date of marriage was a normal stage in their life cycle, at least until the end of the nineteenth century. Until the age of 18 their wages were paid to the parents; afterwards they were able to save the money. The system with annual contracts prevented unemployment and provided security in return for a near complete loss of freedom.

In most regions with a predominance of smallholders the farm was often subdivided among the children. In order to preserve the parental farm in some cases unmarried brothers and sisters stayed together (*frèresches*). A more common practice was that only one child succeeded to the parental farm, after having paid off sisters and brothers. This means that the majority of the children had to rent, buy and build up their own farm. In proto-industrial regions extra wage income could encourage the decision of young couples to start an independent holding, at least in good times. Since income from cottage industries was in decline from at least the late eighteenth century, there was no tendency here towards younger ages of marriage and leaving the parental home. Late nineteenth-century and early twentieth-century industrialisation, especially in the countryside, forced a breakdown of the old intergenerational patterns. Because of the diminishing opportunity to take over the family farm and the possibility of earning wages at a young age, couples started independent families at a lower age. After 1945 increasing non-agricultural income perspectives and the ideal of the (small)

modern Western family put an end to former rural family patterns. Most children of smallholders lost their ambition to succeed to their parental farm and looked instead for work outside the agricultural sector. Moreover, the modernisation and scaling up of the farms after 1950 put the problem of inheritance in a new perspective. Due to government policy many small farms disappeared and the land was absorbed by the surviving, mostly middle-sized farms. In contrast to the children of smallholders, the descendants of middle-sized farmers had a better perspective in developing an economically healthy farm business. However, family succession became more expensive and risky. Income perspectives were lower than average, the traditional back-up networks of the household or the village economy had disappeared, and farms became ever more capital intensive. Household logics and farm strategies did not coincide any longer. Capital intensive farms were increasingly passed on from one generation to the next via complex juridical constructions (De Haan, 1994).

8.3 The family and income

Demographic patterns, credit and income systems, and labour markets underwent fundamental transformations in the period 1750–2000. The process of specialisation and intensification of labour input and industrialisation of farm labour forced families to adapt their survival strategies to the new labour opportunities and income perspectives. This transformed the former village structures and the supportive systems of exchange and credit, and pushed the centre of gravity from the local to the national level. This general process shows specific regional patterns, preconfigured by the existing agro-systems.

The agro-system that is characterised by market-oriented farms and a large supply of agricultural wage labour is most striking in the region of Groningen. The rural economy of most parts of the province of Groningen, just as of rural Friesland, Holland, Zeeland and the small Belgium coastal area, combined commercial market-oriented agriculture with specialisation in non-agricultural activities already from the sixteenth century onwards. Only a minority of rural households consisted of farmers. Farm-sizes were very diverse throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, starting from five hectares of agricultural land for small farmer households up to more than 100 hectares for a few large landowners. At the end of the twentieth century, however, even 'modest' farmers needed up to 60 hectares of arable land to survive. Farmers usually hired external farm labourers to do part of the work and were inclined to specialise in either arable production (Groningen and Zeeland) or in dairy farming and beef production (Friesland, Holland, Belgian polder region). Their main goal was to produce as much as possible and to sell this produce for the highest price to merchants or directly on local or urban markets. This strong market orientation caused farmers to be very sensitive to market developments and fluctuations in agricultural prices. In general, the number of these farms grew only to a limited extent, for example in the Dutch coastal area from about 30,000 in 1807 to nearly 45,000 in 1910 (Van Zanden, 1985: 377). In the second half of the twentieth century the number of farms dropped sharply. Numerically more important in these regions were farm labourers, at

least from the early nineteenth century onwards. These labourers usually did not have any land at their disposal, except for a small vegetable and potato garden. Although mainly employed in agriculture, these labourer families performed other unskilled activities, such as dike maintenance and peat digging. Real wages fluctuated in opposite direction to the food prices. During expensive years such as between 1795 and 1818 and around 1850 (potato blight and Crimean War) real wages were low, and labourer families came into difficulties. Fortunately, in most times the employment situation developed opposite to the real wage levels. Cheap years such as the periods 1820–1840 and 1880–1895 concurred with high real wages, but also with a strong increase in winter unemployment. It was only in the final decades of the nineteenth century that the real wages of farm labourers structurally started to rise, a development which continued throughout the twentieth century.

The number of farm labourer households rose rapidly from the end of the eighteenth century until 1880. Labour supply per hectare increased significantly, because the coastal areas had only limited growth possibilities. Land reclamation had reached its maximum, and undivided commons were nearly non-existent. This intensification process resulted in a slight fall in labour productivity, at least until the middle of the nineteenth century. The rising labour input was stimulated by the favourable development of agricultural production and prices in the period 1830–1880. When agricultural prices fell from 1880 onwards, the rise in population suddenly came to an end. Farmers tried to economise on hired labour, and labourer households reacted to rising unemployment by migrating to the cities and to North America. However, it was only after World War I that the number of farm labourers really started to decline. The second half of the twentieth century witnessed the nearly complete disappearance of this group. In regions with significant industrialisation this group transformed from an agricultural to an industrial labour class, also accelerating after 1950. For instance, in eastern Groningen many former farm labourers found work in agro-industry, while in Holland many rural dwellers became employed in urban industries.

Another large group of households made their main living outside agriculture, by supplying the local community with products and services (artisans, millers, shippers, merchants, schoolmasters and others). Usually the father was self-employed, or worked with one apprentice and one or more family members. Already in the seventeenth century, the high proportion of rural non-agricultural workers pointed to the extreme specialisation in the coastal areas of the Low Countries as compared to other parts of western Europe. Especially remarkable was that these households were mostly not active in export-oriented (proto)-industries, but that they were completely dependent on local demand. In the twentieth century the number of small firms in industry and services decreased rapidly. Wage-work became more important, first in industry, after the 1960s also in services. Many of the workers became daily commuters to regional industrial centres.

New farmers usually had to pre-finance an important part of their capital investments (farm buildings, land, cattle and farm equipment) by loans. The coastal regions were already in the eighteenth century a full-grown money economy. Credit from suppliers and long-term loans were used by households to make up temporary and more structural deficits of money and capital. Farmers had to rely on informal loans

from relatives or villagers. In some cases noblemen and patricians supplied loans. In the twentieth century the credit system slowly changed. Banks assumed a bigger role, and renting the farm became more important, which substantially decreased the need for 'immovable' capital. On the other hand, modern farms necessitate a much higher investment in capital for technology.

The Dutch province of Drenthe is a typical region with an agro-system based on small and only partly market-oriented farmers and peasants. Until the 1970s the economy in this region remained essentially agricultural. Because industrial development was marginal during the nineteenth and most of the twentieth century, the labour market for men, women and children was dominated by farm work. The large-scale exploitation of peat, requiring a considerable number of part-time peat workers, was the main exception. Traditionally, the village population consisted of a mix of landowners, tenants, farmers with medium-sized farms and in possession of horses, smallholders without horses, farm workers, and a few craftsmen and public servants. Most of them tilled some farmland, if only as a vegetable garden. In the nineteenth century heath and moor land was still abundantly available and was usually worked as common property. The working of the mostly very fragmented arable land and of the commons (waste land) required some form of mutual agreement. The large landowners and the middle-sized farmers could generate enough income from the land and their farms. The labour supply was partly met by domestic servants and journeymen. These journeymen were smallholders; the servants were mostly their children. Other smallholders earned additional income as craftsmen (shoemakers, carpenters, blacksmiths) or small vendors. A common life course of a smallholder started with the parental family until the age of 12, followed by out boarding between 12 and 16 in another farming family, domestic service until marriage, which was the start for working on his own smallholding (Trienekens, 2004; Lindner, 1989; Van den Brink, 1996).

After 1880, and accelerating after 1900, this peasant-based agro-system disappeared. The use of artificial fertilisers made it possible to reclaim the remaining heath and moor lands. On their extended pieces of land the new generation of farmers could produce tubers and roots for the new industries (potato flour and sugar). After the harvest season, these factories employed the peat workers and their families. Elsewhere in the rural villages, labourers could often take their chances to climb to the status of smallholder. The group of smallholders grew relatively quickly in the period 1880–1920. The expansion of a network of farmers' cooperatives made it easier for family farms to produce for the market (Bieleman, 1987). After 1920 the labour markets for peat workers and farm labourers deteriorated rapidly. Migration among peat workers increased. The Dutch government stimulated the industrialisation of the former peat lands around the city of Emmen. Emmen became a typical example of a deruralising society. The municipality, a conglomerate of fifteen rural villages, exchanged the old agro-system for industry, in origin strongly connected to the exploitation of the peat lands, and for the provision of services. The population rose from 1500 in 1800 to 20,000 in 1900 and 40,000 in 1940. Most of the inhabitants were former peat workers and their families. Further industrialisation continued the growth of the population reaching about 100,000 in 2000.

At the end of the nineteenth century the money economy became dominant in more peripheral regions too. The former credit systems of postponed payments disappeared, and farmers had to pay their domestic servants and journeymen in hard currency. Until then, in many sandy small-scale agricultural regions exchanging goods and services remained a custom. This often meant that payments were settled only once a year after debts and credits had been eliminated. This process of monetarisation also affected the so-called *boerwerken*, local social tasks that farmers had to fulfil for the community. More and more these tasks were paid for by taxes and executed by the local authorities. Still, until the second half of the twentieth century, farmers depended on their extended family relations (parents, uncles and aunts, grandparents) to make investments, for example to buy a farm. After the Second World War banks took over the role of credit supplier.

After 1950, the agro-system in Drenthe changed for a second time. This was the result of the general trend of modernisation in Dutch agriculture, which triggered both the specialisation of farms, the unprecedented expansion of the farm size, and the rise of productivity. In 1950 about 410,000 farms were counted in the Netherlands. In 2004 no more than 85,000 remained. In the period 1950–1970 the percentage of farms in Drenthe with fewer than ten hectares of land dropped from 66 per cent to 32 per cent. Many smallholdings were liquidated (Karel, 2005). This marginalisation of agriculture made the family succession of farms much less obvious. Many farmers' children chose for a career outside the primary sector. Without an internal or external heir, the land was mostly sold. Farms today are exploited in several forms of modern partnership. Taking over of the capital-intensive enterprises by the next generation requires careful planning. Although capital investment of farms became more dependent on banks, these enterprises are still to a considerable extent financed by family capital (undivided inheritances). At the same time, the main goals in running the farm shifted. Until the fifties of the twentieth century a main objective seems to have been to pass farms on to the next generation; thereafter the maximisation of profit became a more prominent aim.

In yet another agro-system the combination of agricultural and proto-industrial production has deep historical roots. Until the nineteenth century, the Flemish sandy soils (Inner-Flanders) presented a clear example of this mixed peasant economy. Since the disappearance of the domanial power structures in the high middle ages, the major part of the holdings in this area of the Flemish countryside were small household farms, dominated by the logic of peasant survival strategies. In addition, an extensive rural flax industry developed in the heart of this region, reaching its momentum at the beginning of the nineteenth century. This agriculture, the so-called 'Flemish husbandry', was based on a triple equilibrium: within the holding, within the village economy and in a regional context (Thoen, 2001; Vanhaute, 2007). First, all holdings, large and small, were mixed farms. The combination of a striking variation in arable farming and the breeding of small stock and, if possible, some cattle, was the key to success in peasant agriculture. Due to extremely high labour input, rotation systems were developed, and agricultural productivity was high. Typically, in the middle of the nineteenth century in a Flemish holding smaller than 0.5 hectare (tilled with the spade), 40 per cent of

the land was sown with bread grains (mainly rye) and 30 per cent was planted with potatoes. Secondly, the small family holdings were strongly embedded in the local village economy, and, via the local markets and big farmers, in a broader, regional and sometimes national and -via linen export- even international economy. Big and small holdings were linked to each other via complex dependence relationships and credit systems in the form of labour, goods, services and sometimes money. Small peasants exchanged their labour surplus for the capital and goods surpluses of larger farmers (including horsepower). These local credit networks linked the two logics, the one of survival farming with the one of the external markets (Lambrecht, 2002). In the third place, the mixed holding had to control the equilibrium between production for personal use and sufficient exchange possibilities within the patchwork of local and regional market circuits. The small family farm, with its particularly intensive mixed agriculture, could only survive thanks to a combination of self-sufficiency with income from the sale of some arable produce (e.g. industrial crops and fruit), and meat and dairy produce (e.g. butter and eggs), and, especially, from (proto)-industrial flax processing.

In the eighteenth and the first half of the nineteenth centuries these developments were accompanied by an increasing differentiation and polarisation (Vanhaute, 2007). In the most densely populated regions of the country, Flanders and the western part of Belgian Brabant, 40 to 50 per cent of the farms were smaller than one hectare and 80 to 85 per cent smaller than five hectares. The typical size of the holding fluctuated between one and two hectares. During the eighteenth and nineteenth century, land fragmentation increased, due to the combination of the equal inheritance tradition, the landowner's policy of splitting up farms, the debt increase among peasants, the high population pressure and the introduction of the potato. As a consequence, the need for additional income further increased. In addition, a growing portion of the land and the farms had to be rented. In Inner-Flanders, in the second half of the eighteenth century, two out of three farms were already fully cultivated on lease. More severe land competition increased the rents. Whereas around 1750 a hectare of arable land could be rented for one year for a counter value of 30 daily wages, this price had doubled by about 1800 and tripled by 1850. Rents became a growing part of the peasant's total financial liabilities (rents and taxes): from approximately 50 per cent in 1750 to 90 per cent in 1850. Consequently, productivity returns were predominantly pruned away by landowners. The sharpest rent increases did not occur by accident in regions where farm fragmentation was strongest, lease practice was dominant, and cottage industry was widely spread. This process went hand in hand with an accelerated commercialisation of rural life (many small and regional markets) and a relative revival of small and medium-sized cities. This was not only the consequence of rural society's internal dynamics, but also of the (sub)urban bourgeoisie sponging off rising flows of money from the productive countryside. Landowners, the bourgeoisie from big and medium-sized cities, but also traders and artisans in villages, saw their fortunes grow. They discovered an additional source of income thanks to the increasing demand for credit, so part of the rents went immediately back to agriculture in the form of loans. Farmers contracted huge debts in their struggle for

a piece of arable or pasture land of their own. Proto-industrial expansion probably increased the demand for credit in the villages. Credit granters used their position to appropriate properties under debt.

The Flemish peasants responded to this increased financial pressure with a further self-exploitation, on the land, but also behind the spinning wheel and the loom. In the first half of the nineteenth century, one fourth to half of the population of Inner-Flanders worked in the rural flax and linen industry: 300,000 to 400,000 villagers earned some income in this proto-industrial activity until the 1840s (Vandenbroeke, 1984). Decreasing yarn and cloth prices from the 1820s onwards, however, increased pressure on the Flemish peasants' income. Already in the 1830s, one out of every five Flemish families was registered as indigent.

The second half of the nineteenth century marked the end of the small, mixed and intensively exploited peasant farms. Rents reached historical heights in the third quarter of the century; income possibilities outside agriculture remained marginal. After 1880, surviving family farms were gradually reoriented towards commercial crop and livestock growing. Other smallholdings served as income supplements for the families commuting towards the mines and factories in Wallonia and northern France, and later, to the expanding economic centres around Ghent, Antwerp en Brussels. In addition, between 1880 and 1950 tens of thousands of men and boys travelled each year to the large farms in the south of Belgium and France to earn an extra income during the harvest months. Girls and women could earn some meagre extra income in new rural sweating industries such as lace and clothing industries. Living standards remained low in the countryside well into the twentieth century. The heritage of 'Poor Flanders' could only be left behind in the 1950s and 1960s, with the expansion of non-agricultural activities in the countryside, the fast rise of real wages and the multiplication of government subventions. Farming families became a (small) minority, organising themselves into powerful farmer leagues and adapting themselves to new crops such as maize, flowers and vegetables, and diary and pig farming. In Flanders, the proportion of farms with fewer than ten hectares decreased from 72 per cent in 1959 to 26 per cent in 2000 (Segers and Van Molle, 2004).

When the existing rural economy came under increasing pressure after 1800, rural households in the Low Countries adapted their income strategies in divergent ways. Predominant were the transformations in the regional labour markets, in the first place rising and declining labour opportunities that could be fit into rural household income strategies. Regional trends started to converge again after the 1880s, coinciding with the declining impact of regional agro-systems. The modernisation of agriculture pushed out all 'non market efficient' smallholdings. Expelled surplus labour could largely be absorbed by urban and rural industrialisation, and by the new service sectors. This process of industrialisation of both farms and labour accelerated after 1950. For the vast majority of the rural, and now also sub-urbanised households, former agricultural income strategies became redundant. This also affected the nature of the village societies and the social relations that constitute these villages.

8.4 The family, the local community and the state

While in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries the Low Countries comprehended three national states, and consequently three legal regimes, the central tendency was, nonetheless, one of unification and codification, erasing regional and local differences. This process of centralisation was not linear, leaving room in the nineteenth century for local and regional customs. Examples are the common rights in the more peripheral sandy and forest regions in the east and the south and the already mentioned *boerwerken* in east Netherlands, which forced the villagers to participate in a range of public tasks such as road building. However, it is clear that the central authorities from the late eighteenth-century French reforms onwards expanded their grip on public life, for instance through a central taxation system and the forced dissolution of the commons. In general this transformation redefined the relationship between the public and the private sphere, affecting also the limits between which rural households could organise their survival. More in particular this compressed the informal space organised by local relationships of help and exchange. Especially in the more peasant oriented societies in the sandy regions and on the afforested hills in the Ardennes, these village networks survived until the twentieth century. These networks were tied together by a complex of credit relations between the larger and smaller farms, between households with a capital surplus and households with a labour surplus. This facilitated the exchange of labour, services and commodities on a local level. Horse labour and transport facilities were exchanged for the labour of children and adults on the larger farms, and on spinning and weaving machines (Lambrecht, 2002). Only after rural societies lost their economic basis and the central states could build up national systems of insurance and protection, these informal networks of credit and exchange disappeared. In this period of transformation, roughly encompassing the nineteenth century, income perspectives for the poorer households deteriorated. That is why, after 1850, they resorted to new, poorly paid rural sweating industries, to exhausting forms of commuting labour, or to selling the labour of their adolescents as servants in neighbouring towns and cities. Income differentials in the villages became bigger; social inequality became more outspoken.

Until the twentieth century local communities were in charge of the support of their own poor, among other things. In most cases this was a combined task for the civil and ecclesiastical authorities. Central was the position of the larger farmers, organising both formal and informal relief systems. The formal support was limited to 'structural' paupers such as the aged, widows, the disabled and orphans originating from the labouring class and the lowest parts of the middle class. In almost all rural areas labourer households comprising an able-bodied male only received support in crisis periods. Around the middle of the nineteenth century, for example, because of the potato blight and the resultant food crisis, a high number of rural households (husband, wife and children) received relief (temporarily). Often the percentage of paupers doubled (from 5 per cent to 10 per cent in the Netherlands) or tripled (up to 50 per cent in the former proto-industrial Flemish villages). The combination of the structural dissolution of the rural flax industry, the declining returns on the ever smaller

farmsteads and the acute food crisis caused a classic famine in Inner-Flanders, that only could be overcome by swift and bold public action, both on a local and national scale (Vanhaute, 2007). The coastal region was also hit hard by the mid-nineteenth century rural crisis. The (almost) landless labourer families were extremely vulnerable, and possibilities to increase their income were lacking because of the absence of commons and uncultivated land. The position of the rural poor in the eastern and southern part of the Netherlands was somewhat better. They could often find some uncultivated land to support a living. In the course of the nineteenth century, formal regulations for poor relief – first on a local, from the end of the century on a national scale – prevailed over the more informal systems of support for the local paupers, illustrating the dissolution of the former support networks within the village society. This process was strengthened by the dissolution of the commons in the less market-integrated regions. In the eastern parts of the Netherlands and Belgium much of the uncultivated land was in common use until well into the nineteenth century. Villagers did decide together how to use and preserve this land. Sometimes this was the responsibility of separate organisations of farmers, such as the *markegenootschappen* in eastern Netherlands, until the nineteenth century one of the most important village institutions. In the second half of the nineteenth century the common (mostly uncultivated) land was gradually privatised. Often this was pushed by the local elites, in former times the main protectors of the common rights.

Until the second half of the twentieth century, the large farmers not only dominated the system of poor relief, but nearly monopolised the municipal councils. In other regions, the big land owners could accumulate the most important political offices. In some coastal areas, farmers were less influential due to the strong position of nobles (Friesland) and gentry and the more limited property rights of farmers on the land. Until well into the twentieth century rural local politics were mostly controlled by the minority of farmers supplemented by some males from the non-agricultural group. Pushed by the rise of labour unions at the end of the nineteenth century, especially in regions with a considerable rural labour class, this group also began to be represented in local government. This story of the broken monopoly of the power of larger farms and landowners was repeated in the other rural areas, where they used to occupy all the important local offices (*maire*, tax collector). At the same time large farmers lost their interest in local politics, especially after 1950. They no longer were dependent on the local market for their labour, and local situations became less relevant to their business strategies. Moreover, the number of farmers declined dramatically.

8.5 Conclusions

How did the process of deruralisation in the Low Countries in the past two and a half centuries affect the demographic and economic behaviour of households? Until the third quarter of the nineteenth century demographic patterns in rural households were predominantly shaped by the structure of and transformations in the regional agro-system. Demographic spurts or declines were more pronounced in some regions,

causing important regional differences. In Flanders, for example, this generated intense population pressure in the nineteenth century, while other, more peripheral regions were confronted with a demographic spurt in the first half of the twentieth century. In the eastern and southern parts of the Low Countries traditional survival patterns survived well into the nineteenth century, while in the coastal areas the market-oriented agro-system had been dominant already for a long time. After 1850, non-agricultural alternatives such as sub-contracting production, commuting and new industrial activities relieved the growing tension between labour and income, but they marked also the start of the dismantling of former rural household patterns of cohabitation and survival. Village communities that were transformed into industrial settings first adopted new demographic patterns. The process of suburbanisation, starting in the last quarter of the nineteenth century, generalised this transformation. In some areas such as Holland the countryside became completely entangled in the expanding cities. Elsewhere the process was more smooth, with the rural communities adapting 'urban' social and economic patterns without becoming urbanised.

The 'traditional' rural societies and their households survived because of a set of social equilibriums, both in their internal organisation (labour division, production cycles) and their external relations. Central in this model were family-based farms with a mixed output (crops and livestock; in some regions industrial goods) and integrated village-based credit systems (exchange of goods, labour, services). This was the spine of two of the three agro-systems in the Low Countries until the nineteenth century. In the long run new economic developments did undermine these foundations of the rural economy. Most fundamental were increasing non-farm income sources, higher rents, the loss of land and the subdivision of farms. An ever growing proportion of the households fell outside the income security of the mixed family farm and the credit-based village economy. This trend culminated in the nineteenth century, marking the end of the age-old peasant societies. From the mid-nineteenth century onward this rural society differentiated into a smaller fraction of market-oriented, specialising family farmers and a growing number of households pooling their income outside agriculture and outside the village economy. Villages in these regions did suburbanise, by becoming part of larger systems of employment, transport and provisioning. In the long run, the broken ties with agriculture of the large majority of rural households opened the road to a continuous rise in economic welfare in the twentieth century.

This development differs with the third major agro-system in the Low Countries. In coastal and clay areas farms were already for some centuries capitalistic family enterprises aiming predominantly at external market production. The majority of the rural households, workers and craftsmen depended, albeit often indirectly, on these capitalistic farms. They offered them wages in return for labour, and money in return for local products and services. Nineteenth-century population growth resulted mainly in a rise in this near landless group, increasing the social differences. The means of existence of all households in these regions were strongly dependent on market forces. When, after 1880, the prices of agricultural products started to fall, the economic position of a considerable number of households worsened. However, outmigration to urban areas and overseas offered a way out, but the system did not change radically.

Gender relations in rural society started to follow new urban patterns. Until the nineteenth century women mostly carried out a set of specific agricultural tasks. Due to the mechanisation of farm work, rural women, as in urban families, dedicated themselves more and more to household work. In regions with a dominant arable farming system this happened at a much earlier stage. Housewives and daughters in small farmer families living near industrial centres often found work in the factories, earning an income in addition to the farm work of the man. After World War II, parallel to the accelerated modernisation of farming, the breadwinner/housewife model became standard almost everywhere. Recent developments, however, caused by economic difficulties in the agricultural sector, have stimulated a revival of the participation of women in specific new tasks of farm work. They start farm shops, camping sites etc., thus creating 'urban farms'.

In the course of the twentieth century the demand for labour in agriculture declined strongly in almost all rural villages, which resulted in the nearly complete disappearance of the large group of labourer households. Even this process changed the rural social order only slowly, with the large farmers and the old rural middle class remaining in place. After World War I deruralisation became more and more manifest. The differences between urban and rural spaces tended to decrease, certainly after World War II. This process accelerated after 1970. Local systems of provisioning (shops) and education (schools) disappeared. Rural dynamics were taken over by suburban patterns of living, working (commuting) and reproducing. Although many aspects of traditional rural life are still visible, social life changed because communities integrated into new urban and suburban labour markets. In addition, the modernisation of the farms stimulated by state planning after 1950 and the resulting dependence on specialised markets, created farmers who were orientated towards national and international developments, rather than local circumstances. Nevertheless most remaining farms in the Low Countries are still family businesses.

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NORTH-WEST GERMANY



Albrecht Dürer, *Peasants at the market*, 1519 (Dresden, Kupferstichkabinett)

9 North-west Germany, 1000–1750

Michael LIMBERGER

North-west Germany can be defined as the coastal areas of East Frisia, Schleswig-Holstein, and the further inland principalities of contemporary Lower Saxony and Westfalia. Within the dichotomy between eastern and western Germany in terms of power relations between landlords and peasants that characterises the historiography on rural Germany, the area corresponds clearly with the western German case. The proportion of large holdings held directly by the lords was low, and *corvée* labour was very limited. Furthermore, the property rights of the peasants on their land were stronger than in eastern Germany (Robisheaux, 1998: 111). Except for the eastern part of Schleswig Holstein, the system of *Gutsherrschaft* was absent. Besides this institutional west-east differentiation there is also a clear geographical distinction to be made between northern and southern Germany, also called Lower- and Upper Germany respectively. The northern part of Germany was mostly flat, in contrast to the more mountainous south. Throughout north-western Germany and Westphalia the soil was generally fertile. North-west Germany, however, was not a homogenous area. Regional differences in terms of geography, social, legal, political and economic structures were considerable. They manifested themselves in different social agro-systems, which in their turn affected family and household structures. Hence, the areas located along the North Sea marshes and along the river Weser and the sandy Geest plains were characterised by cattle farming. In the Geest regions a small proportion of the land consisted of intensively cultivated fields and meadows, whereas the greater part was moors, heaths, or other forms of landscape used for extensive grazing. Fen colonies were settled in the seventeenth century for peat production along navigable waterways and eventually were transformed into agrarian settlements. Further inland, in Lower Saxony and Westfalia, the proportion of grain farming was more substantial. These economic differences on the local level were reflected in degrees of population density, types of settlement and the social and economic organisation of the rural household.

Family and household structures emerged as a field of research in German rural history with some delay in the 1970s. The early studies of the household were based on the concept of the ‘whole house’ as a basic category of the social history of the pre-modern period as put forward by Brunner (1968) who saw the household as the social, economic and moral-emotional centre of existence. This concept followed early modern conceptions of the household as put forward in the German *Hausväterliteratur* of the sixteenth and seventeenth century, among others. Thus, agrarian history, which up to then was mainly analysed from the point of view of power relationships between lords and peasants and from the movements of prices and wages, turned into a social history of rural households (Blickle, 2006). In comparison with southern Germany and Austria, where pioneering work was done by Mitterauer, Sabean, Berkner and others, relatively little research has been done on family structures in north-western Germany, especially

MAP 9.1 North-west Germany, 1000–1750



for the middle ages. A small number of outstanding case-studies is, however, available for the later part of our period, i.e. the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, due to the micro-historical analysis of the phenomenon of proto-industrialisation, among which the thorough study by Schlumbohm (1997) stands out. For the earlier periods, we have to rely on general syntheses on agrarian history such as Henning (1979 and 1991), Trossbach (1993), Holenstein (1996) or Scott (2002). As in the other chapters, the history of the rural household will be treated here from different perspectives: the demographic development and its impact on the structure and dynamics of the rural family, the composition and internal relations within the household, the economic role of the household and finally the external relations between the household and its surroundings, i.e. the village community, the lords, the state and the church.

9.1 The family and demography

A first factor influencing household structures was demographic conditions. Between 1000 and 1750 the population of north-western Germany underwent profound changes, much like many other parts of Europe. Changes in birth rates or mortality as well as the size and density of the population affected the basic elements of the household structure: family-size, age-composition, number of children, age of marriage, etc. Demographic patterns for the high middle ages are only known in very general terms. Between the ninth and twelfth centuries, the population of Germany is estimated to have increased from 1.2–1.5 to 3.5 million people. This corresponds to a yearly growth of 0.3 per cent. The long-term birth rate during this period is estimated to have been 30–40 per thousand and the mortality rate about 27–37 per thousand. In normal years mortality was probably lower than this average, and higher during years of famine, disease or war. A high degree of infant and child mortality resulted in an average life expectancy of 25 years. However, life expectancy after the age of 10 was over 40, and at age 20 more than 50. People over 60 were less numerous. Even in the eighteenth century, population registers contain comments saying: “people over 60, who have almost all died” (Henning, 1964: 122). The increasing population density from ca. 4.5–5 inhabitants per square kilometre around 800 to ca. 12–15 inhabitants per square kilometre around 1150 led to an increase in the cultivated area, but also to an increase in number of land-poor, who had to turn to rural manufacture as a source of income.

The crisis of the fourteenth century hit Germany very hard. The population witnessed a sharp decline of almost 30 per cent as a result of the Black Death in 1349 and subsequent outbreaks of the plague for example in 1383. This period of decline was followed by a period of stagnation until ca. 1470, when the first signs of recovery appeared. All over Germany, ca. 25 per cent of the villages were abandoned in a process called ‘Wüstungen’, most of which were not rebuilt afterwards (Abel, 1976). Abandoned villages should, however, not be seen only as an indicator of high mortality; they included also villages that were abandoned as a result of migration to towns, places that were rebuilt on a more favourable location, or various smaller villages that merged into a major centre. From the sixteenth century on, the population increased significantly, especially in the 1530–1570s, when the yearly growth rate was 0.7 per

cent. Local research shows that the age at marriage and the rates of celibacy during this period were low. This indicates that the restrictive Western European marriage pattern, which was characterised by late marriage and a high degree of celibacy, probably only became fully developed by the end of the sixteenth century. This period of population growth led to large-scale land reclamation along the North Sea coast. In many areas there are indications of population pressure in the last decades of the sixteenth century. This period of growth was followed by stagnation due to climatic changes and epidemics in the 1630s, and by heavy losses of population during the Thirty Years War. Throughout the sixteenth century, there had been periodic mortality crises, which were followed, however, by a quick recovery of the population through high marriage and birth rates. In the late sixteenth and early seventeenth century the worsening climate conditions led to increasing pauperisation and hence to a diminished resistance against epidemics and famines (Pfister, 1994: 11–13). Furthermore, a large part of Germany was devastated during the Thirty Years War, although north-western Germany was not among the areas most severely affected. Population losses can be estimated at less than 15 per cent here, while in some other areas of Germany they could reach up to 60 per cent (Franz, 1979). Schleswig-Holstein and East Frisia were in fact among the few areas that were spared by the war (Knodel, 1988: 28). Mortality was particularly high in the 1620s and 1630s, not so much as a result of the actual fighting, but rather as a result of the plague and other diseases (dysentery, typhoid etc.), which were spread by soldiers and refugees. Due to very high infant mortality the recovery of the population progressed very slowly. Migration to towns and emigration further contributed to this slow recovery (Pfister, 1994: 18).

Throughout the second half of the seventeenth and the eighteenth centuries there was a general trend of strong population growth (see table 9.1). In Germany as a whole, the population doubled in that period (Dipper, 1991: 42). Between 1650 and 1830

Table 9.1: Population in Germany, 800–1800 (millions)

9th c.	1.2–1.5
12th c.	3.5
1300	14
1500	9–10
1550	13–14
1600	16.2
1650	10
1700	14.1
1750	17.5
1800	22

Sources: Pfister, 1994 and 1996.

the population in the Osnabrück area and other proto-industrial areas such as the Ravensberg and Minden area near Bielefeld grew almost threefold, although much of this growth can be considered a recovery from the losses of the Thirty Years War (Franz, 1979). The growth of the population was not evenly spread among the social groups. The number of big and mid-sized farms remained stable. The greatest proportion of population growth took place within the group of the landless. During the Thirty Years War the landless class was hit particularly hard by mortality. At the end of the seventeenth century the number of landless had, however, recovered and reached the level of 1600 again. As a result the percentage of households without landed property rose from c.39 per cent in 1600 to almost 70 per cent in 1800 (Schlumbohm, 1997: 55). Also in the Ammerland in Oldenburg, the proportion of cottars and *Brinksitzers* (people living on marginal plots of lands) increased sharply, i.e. by 250 per cent and 700 per cent respectively. This led to the increasing opposition of the landowning groups to these rapidly growing marginal groups (Krämer and Reinders, 1986).

The average population figures mask a strong regional variation, that we can only estimate to some extent. For example, mortality was chronically higher in the coastal marshes of the Oldenburg area than in other areas. This caused a demographic vacuum in the area during the eighteenth century, which attracted immigrants. Furthermore, this high degree of mortality was not compensated for by early marriage or higher birth rates. In fact, quite the opposite was the case. The high degree of landless households led to very low birth rates. On the other hand, the areas located along the marshes along the river Weser and the Geest area show a different profile, characterised by relatively high birth surpluses (Krämer and Reinders, 1986). These regional differences are reflected by differences in population density. For the middle ages and the early modern era, only rough estimates about population density exist, and only for the whole of Germany. Population density in western Germany is held to have been between 15 to 18 inhabitants per square kilometre around 1500. The lowlands of northern and eastern Germany had, however, a lower population density than central and southern Germany, with the Rhine, Main and Neckar valleys as the most densely settled areas (Robisheaux, 1998: 117). For the period around 1800, when more precise data concerning the regional variation of population density within Germany are available, the areas of Holstein, East Frisia and the area north of Osnabrück had population densities of ca. 40 inhabitants per square kilometre, while in other principalities, such as the duchy of Bremen, Bentheim and Hoya Diepholz, figures were lower than 30. These principalities are part of a wider area covering a large part of northern Germany with a very low population density. Further south, in Osnabrück, Calenberg and Göttingen the density was slightly higher and could reach levels around 50 inhabitants per square kilometre (Pfister, 1994: 16–17).

Urbanisation was moderate in comparison with the Low Countries, northern France and the Rhine valley. In 1500 16 per cent of the German population lived in towns of more than 5,000 inhabitants, 4 per cent in big towns with more than 10,000 inhabitants. By 1600 the percentage of the urban population had decreased to 12 per cent, while the percentage of people living in big towns remained stable. The largest towns in north-western Germany were Hamburg, Lübeck, Bremen and Brunswick. Among

these, only Hamburg reached the dimensions of a major city. It witnessed a considerable population growth during the early modern period, from 15,000 in 1500 to 40,000 in 1600, 70,000 in 1700 and 117,000 in 1800. Lübeck, Bremen and Brunswick did not exceed 30,000 inhabitants before 1800. Migration from other areas can be observed particularly along the North Sea coast, and in particular along the estuaries of the big rivers and in moors. Near Bremen and along the river Weser, Dutch and Flemish immigrants who were used to dyke building were attracted (Henning, 1991: 315).

Among the demographic factors contributing to this population development infant and child mortality has received particular attention. Infant and child mortality showed a significant social and regional variation. Rates of infant mortality were lower in northern Germany than in the south. They were relatively moderate in east Frisia (13 per cent), possibly as a result of a great extent of breastfeeding, while in the Swabian village of Gabelbach values were as high as 34 per cent. Breastfeeding had also the effect of delaying pregnancy and even helped to decrease the mortality rate of the mothers (Imhof, 1998). Imhof interpreted these variations in terms of confessional differences, that is, the different attitude towards death between Catholic and Protestant mothers as well as midwives. However, more recent studies stress rather the geographical differences and the regional agro-systems as well as the individual social and economic profiles. Women's labour conditions and diet influenced infant mortality rather than religious differences (Imhof, 1981; Lee and Marschalck, 2002). While there was a decrease in child mortality from the middle of the eighteenth century onwards, infant mortality did not show a significant decline until the end of the nineteenth century (Knodel, 1988: 39).

As far as the other major demographic factor, fertility, is concerned, historians have mainly looked at the timing of marriage, as this was the major way of controlling fertility levels in pre-modern rural society. The so-called West European marriage pattern prevailed in Germany during the early modern period. As in other western European areas, the age at the moment of first marriage was high, and followed an increasing trend throughout the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. A considerable number of people (13 per cent) remained unmarried (Imhof, 1990: 69). In the sixteenth century, the mean age of marriage for women was at 22.5 and went down to 19.5 at the end of that century, probably due to epidemics and economic crisis. During the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, there was a sharp rise in the age of marriage to 25–27 years. The age of marriage differed also between property groups. Landless labourers married later than children of the owners of larger farms (Knodel, 1988: 141–143). On the other hand, the group of unmarried young people formed a demographic reserve for periods of high mortality, when they could get married and replace the demographic losses.

Information about household structures in north-western Germany in the middle ages is very scarce. We can only estimate the average age and health conditions as well as the number of household members from graveyards and archeological sources. Generally it is thought that since the Carolingian era the core family occupying a peasant household became the typical family form (Keller, 1986). Data for the early modern period are more reliable. Generally, the household was formed by the nuclear

family, consisting of the owner-couple and their children, and could also include resident kin, servants or other lodgers. Household sizes averaged between 3 to 7 persons, that is small families, generally consisting of the nuclear family and some servants. In some cases unmarried family members joined the family. Other factors leading to these small households were high infant mortality and the high mortality after the age of 50.

The size of households differed according to regional as well as social factors. In Belm near Osnabrück households of full farmers were on average larger than those of *Heuerlinge* (the term refers to leaseholders *and* wage-labourers; see below). In 1651, 80 per cent of the households holding a full farm comprised 5 persons or more, while only 59 per cent of small farms and only 30 per cent of *Heuerlinge* were as numerous. Furthermore, there was also a change over time. The size of full farmers' households increased in the seventeenth to the eighteenth centuries, while for the other classes it rather decreased or stagnated (Schlumbohm, 1997: 211). Due to the increasing number of cottars during the same period, problems of housing arose. They had to be lodged in barns, stables and other buildings, many of which were inhabited by more than one family. Thus on average 6 to 7 persons lived in these cottages. In the later sixteenth and early seventeenth century there were attempts to discourage these practices, but the number of cottages continued to grow. In the eighteenth century the landless were increasingly employed as wage-labourers on the larger farms, and thus played an essential part in the agrarian system.

However, household size and structures were not static. Household structures were affected by life cycles and other factors contributing to fluctuations in household size and composition. The concept of life cycles should not lead to generalisations about changes in household size and composition. These varied strongly from household to household and were the result of multiple individual decisions. Due to the existence of numerous large farms, north-western Germany was characterised by a relatively high number of servants. In Belm (Osnabrück) full farms had an average of 1.2 servants, while small farms had only 0.4 and landless households only 0.2. 71 per cent of the servants worked on large farms (Schlumbohm, 1997). Other factors influencing the number of servants were landholding, heritage practices and economic factors, such as the prevailing farm system. For example, cattle farming required a higher number of servants than grain farming, and isolated farms employed more servants than holdings in a village (Mitterauer, 1992). Service in another household was common for young males and females between the age of 15 and the age of marriage and enabled them to earn a living and acquire some savings in order to establish their own household at a later moment. In the middle of the seventeenth century servants in the Blumenau area near Hannover were on average 22.2 years old while maids were slightly younger: 21.6 years on average. Few servants were older than 24. While children of large farm households could often live in their parents' household until the moment of marriage, most smallholdings could not afford to maintain them (Holenstein, 1996: 8). From the point of view of the employer, servants compensated for the fluctuations in family size, and formed a temporary source of additional labour supply. This was the case either in the early phase before the children could be included in the labour process or

after the children had left the household (Berkner, 1972: 410). Service can, therefore, be seen as a flexible system to create a balance between the necessary labour on larger farms and the need for income of the young members of the lower classes.

The key moment for household formation was marriage. As heritage was limited to legitimate, i.e. intra-marital children, marriage was essential for the transfer of landed property within the family. As marriage went generally hand in hand with the foundation of a new household, access to marriage was dependent on the existence of the necessary means for survival. In many cases this was at the moment of inheritance. Marriage was not only dependent on the economic possibilities of bride and groom, but also on the consent of the parents and to a certain extent also of the landlord and the village community. Even the Church and the state interfered with marriage due to its crucial function in the social order. In the eighteenth century, state intervention in marriage policy was considered normal and even necessary. According to the influential eighteenth-century demographer Johann Peter Süßmilch, who wrote a treatise entitled '*The divine order in the change of the human race, as proved from its birth, death and reproduction*' (1741), the state had the task of removing all obstacles to the wise and sensible institution of marriage as being the base of the reproduction of the population. On the other hand, not everyone who had the physical capabilities and was of a suitable age to get married should be entitled to do so. The constitution of civic and social life and policy imposed limits on marriage. Marriage required the means for maintaining a family and thus a 'holding' (*Nahrung, Hantierung*); if these were absent, marriage should be discouraged. For Süßmilch the state should, however, not only limit access to marriage for those who had insufficient means, it was also its duty to provide the means for sustaining the population and thus encourage marriage (Ehmer, 1991: 34–36). The access to marriage of certain social groups, such as servants and wage-labourers, was limited and under strong social control by the head of the household and in some territories was even subject to state legislation. Both were interested in retaining their control over this group in order to maintain public order and to guarantee their availability as a labour force. This restrictive policy contributed to a relatively high rate of celibacy, which in some areas rose to 30 per cent. These limitations went hand in hand with strong mechanisms of control to prevent illegitimate, that is, extra-marital births. Life-cycle service under these conditions, therefore, played an important role in the late age of marriage in north-western Germany (Ehmer, 1991: 111–114).

Due to high mortality, second marriages were also frequent. Widowers with children tended to remarry very quickly, while widows remained alone for a longer period. If the parents left the management of the farm to their children during their lifetime, they could live in the household of their children, for example in a room of their own or in a separate house (*Ausgedinge, Altenteil, Leibzucht*). This became a common practice only in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. In the middle ages, old farmers lived in the households of their kin or even in the household of strangers. In that case a system of rotation among the inhabitants of the village could be established by the intervention of the landlord (Gaunt, 1983). Living in the same house with the heirs could lead to conflicts between the two generations. In Blumenau (Calenberg) only 22 per cent of the farms were inhabited by members of three generations (Berkner, 1976).

9.2 The family and its members

The internal relations within the rural households of pre-modern Germany are generally described as patriarchal. The owner of the property, that is the father, was the head of the household. He represented the household towards the external world and had the responsibility for the economic survival and internal order within the household. From the sixteenth century on the authority of the father as the head of the household was stressed by church and civil authorities as being part of a divine order. This moral order within the household was also spread through the popular *Hauwäterliteratur* of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries (van Dülmen, 1999: 38–46). The mother was second in the hierarchy, although in practice decisions were generally made by the couple by mutual agreement. Although the man was the head of the household, the woman's or mother's role was essential. She was responsible for the raising and education of the children, she generally organised the tasks within the house, and through her dowry, she also contributed to the household capital. Her economic function within the household could vary, but generally she held an important position in its internal organisation, whereas the fieldwork and cattle-raising were considered the father's responsibility. This did not exclude her, however, from collaboration in most aspects of the agrarian activities. In practice, the household was, therefore, led by the owner-couple and had a complex system of division of labour. The owner of the house and his wife each had their specific tasks, while others were carried out together. Generally, the cultivation of the fields was the task of the man, while cooking, gardening, and taking care of the children was the classic task of the woman. Harvesting and haying were rather tasks the family members carried out together. The division of labour and hence household structures in proto-industrial households were less patriarchal. Here, father and mother, as well as the children were integrated in rural manufacture. In fact, women were especially skilled in activities such as spinning and weaving, which gave them a stronger position in the household, but at the same time also a considerable workload. Households without either father or mother were rather the exception, but still could make up between 10 to 15 per cent of the households (Holenstein, 1996: 8). Younger sons and daughters without a holding of their own often remained on the family farm in a status comparable with household servants or farmhands and were thus provided for. Also children were integrated in the family economy, either for caring for their younger brothers and sisters, or for tasks such as sheep herding etc.

While servants were part of the household and therefore subject to the authority of the head of the household, lodgers (*Häusler*, *Husselten*, *Heuerlinge*, *Brinksitzer*...) often made up a household on their own. They lived in an annex building of the farm but were closely connected to the farm through leasehold or labour relations. In the area of Osnabrück, these were called *Heuerlinge*, a term that covered both the term leaseholder and wage-labourer. These lodgers/leaseholders received a small plot of leasehold land, they were entitled to have their cattle graze on the common pasture, and at the same time they were obliged to provide wage labour on the owner's farm in case of necessity. The degree of economic dependency of the farmer was stronger in predominantly agrarian areas, and especially in highly hierarchical grain producing areas with a high demand for seasonal labour.

Inheritance customs had important consequences for the structure of rural society and the economy. In an influential study Huppertz (1939) showed that northern and eastern Germany had a tradition of predominantly impartible inheritance while in the southwest partible heritage prevailed. Thus the North Sea area was mainly part of the first system, excluding a narrow strip along the Frisian and Schleswig coast where a mixed system existed (Henning, 1991: 317). However, inheritance systems were not a static phenomenon. They were the result of a long-term development. Furthermore, impartible and partible systems were only principles. The actual practice was very often situated in between these two extremes, because the parting heirs had to receive their share of the patrimony. While the farm buildings and a great part of the land were transferred to the principal heir, his siblings could receive money, movable property or plots of land (Scott, 2002: 80). Another possibility of dividing the heritage was the sale of the property and the division of the money obtained. This occurred relatively rarely for farms, but was quite frequent for small plots of land. The impartible character was in the interest of the heirs and of the landlords who could expect higher outputs of large holdings. Legal protection of the impartible character of the holdings, as in Schleswig Holstein, was, therefore, mainly aimed at the large holdings, while smallholdings had greater flexibility in that respect (Holenstein, 1996: 12; Rouette, 2003). The ties of families with their holdings grew stronger throughout the early modern period. More and more, owners and even leaseholders remained attached to their farms during several generations. Impartible heritage could take the form of primogeniture, i.e. the first son inherited the farm, but also ultimogeniture. In East Frisia as well as in the area of Osnabrück it was the youngest son who inherited, and if absent, the youngest daughter. In Brunswick Wolfenbüttel the choice was left to the parents (Scott, 2002: 77). Daughters could inherit, but had to be married. In practice, however, in most cases, it was the sons who inherited. Daughters received a dowry, which was essential for their prospects for a good marriage, and sons starting capital, as for example in Schleswig.

The transfer of the farm could also take place *inter vivos*, especially if a widowed parent did not remarry. In that case, the parent or parents retired and left the farm to the heirs. A common arrangement was the establishment of a separate house for the elderly parents (*Ausgedinge*). This solution required, however, an important capital input, as two households had to be provided for by the same holding, and therefore was rather reserved for the wealthier households. This early transfer of property was favoured by landlords and the state with a view to encourage young vigorous farmers and therefore a dynamic agrarian economy. The share of the retired farmer was stipulated in intra-familial agreements. However, in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, some state governments, such as in the principalities of Ravensberg and Osnabrück, issued laws regulating the transmission and the shares of retirement (Gaunt, 1983).

In a study of the Hannover area, Berkner has shown that different heritage systems could have enormous consequences for the number of holdings: in the villages around Calenberg, where unpartitioned heritage prevailed, the number of holdings increased by only 18 per cent between 1664 and 1766, whereas in the area of Göttingen, an area of partitioned heritage, the number increased by 400 per cent. As a result, impartible

inheritance may have contributed to the development of a relatively wealthy landowning class in the north-western region, while the south was subject to land subdivision and therefore a prevailing property structure characterised by smallholdings (Berkner, 1976). Both systems had also negative consequences: in the first case, those who did not inherit had to move away and make their living through wage labour or through marriage into another household, whereas the other system led to the subdivision of holdings and therefore a decreasing number of farms capable of providing for the subsistence of their holders.

9.3 The family and income

The household was a social as well as an economic unit of production. The predominance of the economic aspect depended, however, on the economic structure of the household. It was stronger in farmers' households than in the case of smallholders, who were dependent to a greater degree on extra-household activities. In case of migratory labour or activities requiring high mobility (such as the transport sector) the economic activity took place at least temporarily outside the household. The predominant source of income for the rural population was agriculture. The agrarian economy of north-western Germany was characterised by the cultivation of rye, mainly in combination with oats and barley, but only little wheat and, in the eighteenth century, potatoes. Other major crops were peas and flax, the latter forming the basis for home industries. The major type of livestock was cattle and horses, while pigs and sheep were less common (Schlumbohm, 1997: 51; Saalfeld, 1991). Three-course rotation was predominant in the greatest part of Germany, while along the Baltic coast and in Saxony four- or even five-year rotations were usual. In a considerable part of the north German plain continuous cultivation of rye could be achieved by the extensive use of manure. In the pasture lands of Schleswig Holstein and Frisia convertible husbandry prevailed, in which the land was cultivated during a series of years and then used as grazing land for another period of from three to six years (Scott, 2002: 80–82; Abel, 1962). Furthermore, a considerable part remained woodland, which was used for the provision of fuel and timber as well as for grazing cattle. Apart of these general features, the economic structure of the countryside was subject to local geographical differences. In the coastal areas of Schleswig, for example, extensive livestock breeding prevailed (Sheehan, 1994: 79). Schleswig-Holstein specialised in the production of dairy products; especially during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries dairy farming increased significantly (Lange, 2004). In East Frisia along the moors of the North Sea coast land was reclaimed during the sixteenth century through dyke construction, similar to the Dutch practice. According to Abel, about 40,000 hectares of new land was reclaimed that way (Robisheaux, 1998: 122). Also in the county of Oldenburg, the urbanised Lower Weser area attracted a considerable number of immigrants from Flanders and Holland. This immigration was related to the drainage activities along the coast (Krämer and Reinders, 1986: 98).

Considering the pre-eminent position of agriculture as the main economic activity, access to land, through landed property or leasehold was a crucial factor in

the family economy. In north-western Germany farms were relatively large. Full farmers had an average of 27 hectares of land, but farm sizes could reach up to 100 hectares; smaller farms ranged from between 0.25 hectare to c.3 hectares. The large farms (the richest 25 per cent) held between 50 and 60 per cent of the land, whereas the poorer half held about 25 per cent. Together with the increase in the population the area of private farmland also increased. The commons were reduced considerably. This was the consequence of a policy of indivisibility of large farms in order to maintain the tax income. As a result, the number of agrarian holdings did not increase in spite of population growth. The common land was incorporated into existing holdings; higher population levels had to be supported by a constant number of farms, and hence alternative sources of income had to be found. In the area of the coastal marshes of Oldenburg, the concentration of landholding was extraordinarily strong: 28 per cent of the population held almost all the land, and 60 per cent of the population belonged to the lower class. They were day labourers, dyke builders, servants, craftsmen, sailors or received charity. The latter were not involved in proto-industrial activities and were, therefore, vulnerable to economic shifts. The marshlands in the west formed a society highly different from the surrounding areas, which display clear parallels with other marshlands adjacent to the North Sea (Krämer and Reinders, 1986: 104). Further inland, common land continued to make up 40 per cent of the land, which favoured the position of the poorer segments of the population. Furthermore, different branches of home industries and migration to Holland added to alternative sources of income.

In spite of the heavy losses of population during the Thirty Years' War, the number of landless remained more or less stable. In the following years their numbers increased sharply. In 1772, 60 per cent of the population of the Belm district in Osnabrück had no landed property. In the Paderborn district 21 per cent of the population held between 5 and 20 hectares of land, 40 per cent had only a smallholding, 18 per cent were wage-labourers and 5 per cent were shepherds. The number of peasant holdings increased between the seventeenth and nineteenth centuries, while common land, consisting mainly of heath and woodlands, diminished progressively. Holdings consisted for 55 per cent of farmland and 14 per cent of meadows, although the common lands increased the latter considerably.

Besides agriculture, rural households were involved in other activities, including various crafts and cottage industries. Generally the long-term tendency was one of an increasing specialisation. While a great portion of the necessary economic activities took place within the household during the early and high middle ages, specialists were responsible for an ever-increasing number of tasks from the later middle ages on. In the eighteenth century, ploughmakers, wheelwrights, sawyers, carpenters, tailors, shoemakers, turners, brewers, blacksmiths, coopers and tavern-keepers could be found in many villages, while other tasks such as baking bread were still done on the farm. During the early modern period commercial ties with the towns and interregional trade networks increased and influenced the rural economy. The urban impact was strongest in the surroundings of the larger towns such as Hamburg, Lübeck, Bremen or Brunswick. In the area around Osnabrück, rural linen production increased during the sixteenth century and was integrated into the interregional commercial network and was even intended

for export to overseas colonies. After the Thirty Years' War, textile production revived and continued to expand throughout the eighteenth century. The linen industry in the Osnabrück area remained a side activity in combination with agriculture. Only few weavers were full-time craftsmen. The entire production process, the cultivation of flax, spinning and weaving took place within the household. The organisation, therefore, was that of a *Kaufsystem*. Interestingly linen production was not limited to the poor households; most of the larger farms also produced linen. Actually the proportion of large farms in the total production of linen was considerably higher than that of poor households, due to the larger number of household members, including servants, who could be employed. On the other hand, they did not appropriate the production of their inmates (*Heuerlinge*), who sold their production themselves. The sale of linen contributed especially to the need for cash, for example for the payment of the lease (Schlumbohm, 1997).

The demographic impact of proto-industrial activities on the family structures has been one of the major topics of German rural history of the last decades. Kriedte, Medick and Schlumbohm have formulated the hypothesis that proto-industrial activities allowed earlier marriage and therefore higher birth rates thus escaping the economic limits of the homeostatic Western European marriage pattern (Kriedte et al, 1982). The economic logic of proto-industrial labour made the families independent of the availability of a holding, and even made a greater number of children advantageous. Regional case-studies have shown, however, that there is no direct link between proto-industry and age of marriage. Regional variations were substantial (Pfister, 1994: 122).

Poor peasants with little landed property could earn additional income via different channels: intermittent employment, savings, credit, assistance from family members and public poor relief. Employment opportunities presented themselves on larger farms or by the exercising of a craft. Village craftsmen worked a plot of land in most cases, and were, therefore, not a completely separate professional group. The most typical village crafts were carpenters and smiths. In the high middle ages these free crafts were still relatively rare. Many villages could do without them. In the early modern period, the degree of specialisation increased. Young and unmarried members of the village who could not found their own peasant holding could become household servants or farmhands on larger holdings. In Belm, 71 per cent of the servants worked on large farms, 13 per cent on small farms and only 6 per cent in households without landed property. Servants received free lodging and food, and were paid partly in cash and partly in kind, for example in clothing. Along the North Sea coast, shipping was another alternative source of income, as data on eighteenth-century East Frisian villages show (Knodel, 1988: 30). Also in the Lower Weser valley, shipping became a major source of income and attracted migratory labour. Other activities in the coastal areas were knitting, weaving of mats, cutting of corks or the production of writing quills (Krämer and Reinders, 1986). Finally, migration was an alternative for many peasants with limited economic prospects. Studies on the textile industry of Wuppertal show that a great portion of the labour force came from the rural county of Mark (Knieriem, 1986). Seasonal migration to Holland and Frisia was a frequent phenomenon, especially in those areas that did not have proto-industrial activities. The income provided by each

of these occupations was often insufficient to provide the means for survival. Survival strategies, therefore, mostly consisted of a combination of two or more activities. People often switched between activities on a seasonal basis or throughout their life cycle (Fontaine and Schlumbohm, 2000: 1–2).

9.4 The family, the local community, and the state

The household was not an isolated entity. It was embedded in a communal as well as in a seigniorial, ecclesiastical and state context. Family ties, neighbourhoods and village communities were essential for the survival of the individual. In the high middle ages, the manorial centres were the main focus of rural life. The manorial system constituted the basic framework of rural society. Large manorial centres dominated their surroundings on the economic as well as on the juridical and social level. With the dissolution of the classical manorial system in the twelfth century, the village community started to play an increasingly important role. The village became the predominant form of rural settlement in western Germany. However, there were strong regional differences in the form of the settlements. In the pasture areas of northern Germany, many peasants lived in isolated houses or in small hamlets of three or four houses. In the west, large nuclear villages existed from which farmers went out to their fields. In East Frisia and along the rivers Elbe and Weser there were also long villages stretching out along a street. Besides village communities there were alternative forms of communal organisation, which had political, economic and legal functions. These could be called *Kirchspiele* (church districts), *Bauernschaften* (farmer communities) or *Markgenossenschaften* (neighbour associations), which could include more than one village. The *Kirchspiel* of Belm in the prince bishopric of Osnabrück, for example, consisted of the nuclear village of Belm, where the church was situated, and eight smaller hamlets, comprising several farms, and even smaller settlements made up of one or a few more farms (Schlumbohm, 1997).

The village community regulated essential aspects of social, political, economic and religious life (Wunder, 1986). It imposed common rules, which were generally accepted by its members and put the common interest of the community at the centre. Membership in the village community became the hallmark of peasant status rather than subjection to a manorial structure (Scott, 2002: 153). Economic coordination was essential in village communities with a communal agrarian structure. The inhabitants of village communities organised the use of common pastures and woods. In many cases villages also had their own economic infrastructure, like a well, an oven etc. The village community had also social functions. It formed the social environment where young males and females could meet during village feasts or dances. The young men were often organised in corporations that exercised moral control upon their members. Village communities also played a role in the seigniorial administration. Within the framework of the *seigneurie* self-administrative institutions existed. In many cases, villages had a group of aldermen (*Schöffen*) who controlled local decision-making and could have executive functions. In northern Germany, the head of this executive body

was the *Burmeister*, *Bauermeister* or *Burrichter*. He was either elected from among the holders of large farms, nominated by rotation, or the function could also be linked to the holder of one particular farm. The *Bauermeister* had a dual position: he was, on the one hand, the representative of the authority in the village, and, on the other hand, the voice of the community vis-à-vis the authorities. In areas with a strong tradition of communal organisation rural communities obtained representation in the regional diets, such as for example in the bishopric of Bremen. The level of autonomy was particularly high in areas remote from the centre of state authority, such as in Frisia and in Ditmarschen, north of the river Elbe (Scott, 2002: 54). During the peasant revolts of the sixteenth century rural communities tried to obtain even more autonomy, but these attempts were suppressed. The limits of the village community strongly coincided with the parish. Larger villages generally had a parish church, which also formed the centre of the village. Often, the initiative for the establishment of a parish came from the local lord. The parish community was to a large degree identical with the village community, although it had specific functions such as the maintenance of the church and its goods, liturgical questions, education and poor relief (Bader, 1974).

Social stratification within the villages was relatively little differentiated in the early and high middle ages, and depended mainly on differences of legal status. Towards the later middle ages and throughout the early modern period, however, social structures became increasingly complex. Agents of the landlord, *Maier* and *Huber* played a leading role among the peasantry. The middle class, generally speaking, consisted of the holders of a farm or another economic unit. In several areas, poor peasants with little landed property formed a separate group. They could earn additional income by working on larger farms or by exercising a craft. Economic differences could also be determined by the importance of non-agrarian activities. Within the crafts there were also internal hierarchies and dependencies. The dynamics of village communities should, however, not be understood in terms of social stratification alone. Neighbourhood, kinship and other social networks conditioned the social relations within the village but could also transcend the limits of the village. On the other hand, the heterogeneous character of the village community points to the potential for conflict within the village. From the seventeenth century on, for example, tensions arose because of the increasing proportion of cottars among the inhabitants, which led to conflicts. *Hüsselten*, landless cottagers were considered servants who had left their farm in order to work as day labourers. The high mobility of these people was looked upon with suspicion. They included ‘foreign’ people, unrelated to the landowners, trying to earn an income through occasional wage labour, and *Heuerleute* or *Heuerlinge*, who held a little plot for rent and worked on the farm on a regular basis. In some cases they were literally thrown out of the church during the service (Schaer, 1978). This fits in a more general pattern of increasing tensions between the landholding peasants and the cottars with respect to communal resources such as pastures and woods, but also the struggle for social status and order and the disciplining of the youth, women and the village poor (Robisheaux, 1989; Scott, 2002).

The relations between lords and peasants in the early middle ages were regulated within the classical manorial system, which was widespread (with some exceptions such

as the coastal areas along the North Sea). The centres of villafication (manorial farms, castles) had their own staff in the service of the lord. Especially abbeys were centres of such great scale. However, as a result of the large-scale cultivation of new land along the coast, along rivers and through the cutting of forests in the twelfth century, property rights and the legal position of peasants in general improved. The manorial system was gradually transformed into a system based on land rents, which was maintained for the rest of the period. Also, the economic dependence of the centre of villafication diminished through the increasing role of the market (Rösener, 1992). The degree of autonomy was highest in the marshes, where there was virtually no feudal lordship. By the twelfth century the seigniorial structures were consolidated and formed the framework of rural society. The feudal arrangements contributed essentially to the social and economic institutions and therefore framed the life of the rural population fundamentally. They included also communal aspects such as the use of common land and forests (Henning, 1991: 38). The legal status of peasants differed also significantly and could reach from free to unfree in the high middle ages. In the twelfth century, there was a strong levelling tendency toward a semi-free status. The dissolution of the manorial system affected also the rural family and household structures. While the grip of the lord on the unfree peasantry led to a strong control of marriage, which was in principle limited to subjects of the same seigneur, we can see an increasing liberty in the choice of the marriage partner from the eleventh century on. In the twelfth century the consent of the marriage partners was decisive. The seigniorial right of partner choice was reduced to the payment of a recognition fee (Keller, 1986: 226–239).

Within Germany, the relations between lords and peasants varied considerably from region to region. In contrast with France and England, free allodial holdings were quite common in Germany, especially east of the Rhine (Wunder, 1986: 299). These contributed to a strong heterogeneity of seigniorial relations. Seignuries were, moreover, highly fragmented. Most seigniorial units did not cover whole villages but only part. This can partly be explained by the heterogeneous power structures in the German empire and the great diversity of the group of lords. Lütge distinguished between several regional types. The northwest-German type of lordship, one of these regional types (Lütge, 1963), was characterised by relatively large demesne holdings of noble and ecclesiastic lords, and the diffusion of labour services, which makes it a transitional form towards the eastern-German *Gutsherrschaft*. In the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries the property relations in a large part of north-western Germany were regulated in the so-called *Meierrecht*, which gave the peasants a hereditary usage right, but not full ownership of the land. In Frisia and on the western coast of Holstein short-term leasehold was widespread. Also from the Rhineland leasehold spread towards Westfalia and north-west Germany. The relative weight of the seigniorial dues and rents can hardly be quantified for the medieval period. Unlike in France, England and the Low Countries written documents date from a relatively late period. Data from the abbey of Siegburg in the Eifel area from 1121 show that the rent payable in grain in three villages did not surpass 10 per cent of the harvest. Until the twelfth century money rents were negligible. For the early modern period, Saalfeld showed that 32–50 per cent of the income in the Brunswick area went into land rent and similar charges

(Saalfeld, 1991). Larger holdings had a smaller per hectare charge, which increased their ability to make profits. Feudal holdings were abolished in Prussia in 1717–1732; however, seigniorial relationships continued until the nineteenth century.

Given the antagonistic character of the relationship between peasants and lords, conflicts between the village community and the lords were common. They could range from protests or the refusal to pay certain levies to outright rebellion. These rebellions became especially widespread in the late middle ages and culminated in the Peasants' War of 1525. North-western Germany was much less affected by peasant revolts than southern Germany, but still there were major uprisings in Frisia, the Ditmarschen area and in the area of Stedingen on the Lower Weser in the thirteenth century. The peasant uprising of Stedingen led to the declaration of a crusade against the peasants which ended in their defeat at the battle of Altenesch in 1234 (Rösener, 1992: 30–31). In the later sixteenth century, there were rural revolts in Hessen and Lower Saxony. However, these were rather due to opposition against state taxation and religious motives than to resistance against lordly power (Scott, 2002: 247).

State authority was highly fragmented in Germany. The German empire was composed of countless principalities of vastly different status and organisation. However, there are some general tendencies in the intervention of the state in questions concerning the rural household. From the sixteenth century on the state tried to intervene in the social and legal order of society and to increase its control. Legislation was used, for example, for the control of the use of forests by means of ordinances against pasture clearings and charcoal burning (Holenstein, 1996: 38). The states also issued laws forbidding the partition of properties in order to reinforce the role of the landholding peasantry. The household as centre of social life received legal protection through a variety of ordinances. The role of the property owners was strengthened by upgrading parental consent for marriage, and the status of servants was regulated by law. Interference of the state in marriage questions occurred already from the seventeenth century on. Especially after the Thirty Years' war, in several German principalities certain social groups, especially servants, but also civil servants, military, students, widows and journeymen, were obliged to solicit official permission to marry. These measures could be applied for different reasons, such as the prevention of pauperisation or to make soldiers available. In general it was part of a broader policy of social control. By regulating the property relations, the state authorities contributed to a stronger guarantee of the peasants' property rights at the cost of the lords. In the seventeenth century, some states, such as the principality of Brunswick, limited the extent of seigniorial labour services. This policy was called *Bauernschutz* (peasant protection). It has to be viewed in the context of fiscal interests and of competition between the state and the nobility (Holenstein, 1996: 30–38). During the second half of the eighteenth century state governments implemented reforms, like the spread of agricultural knowledge. Swamps were drained, land cultivation programs took place along the coast, and fallow land was re-cultivated. Government loans were granted to those who subscribed to modernisation programs. Moreover, some enlightened princes tried to introduce changes in the social order. Common lands were distributed and privatised. Other rulers such as Frederik II and Joseph II abolished seigniorial

rights. However, the nobility remained strong enough in most areas to maintain their position until the nineteenth century.

The Church played a multiple role in rural society. Ecclesiastical institutions, such as abbeys, bishoprics and parishes, played a role as feudal lords or landowners, and at the same time as a moral institution. As landlords the Church played an important role in the land reclamation of the high middle ages. In the twelfth and thirteenth centuries abbeys of the orders of Cîteaux and Prémontr  worked their farms themselves rather than give them out in tenure. On the other hand, the Church provided a moral framework which provided behavioural standards, such as in the case of extra-marital sexuality, which was generally sanctioned (Pfister, 1994: 30). The parish was the basic framework of local communities. It played a strong social, moral and even juridical role in pre-modern society and as such also influenced family life and marriage patterns. Also poor relief was organised on a parish level. With the spread of the Reformation and the subsequent confessionalisation of German society both Catholic and Protestant church authorities tried to increase their grip on popular culture, not only as far as such popular pleasures as feasts, dance, drinking and sexuality were concerned, but, on a more general level, the establishment of a new moral order was pursued. Moral and church courts were established in order to eliminate paganism, popular magic and other deviations from religious orthodoxy. One important field was legislation concerning marriage. During the sixteenth century, the Church, both Catholic and Protestant, increased its efforts for effective control over marriage. While matrimony until then was based on the agreement between the spouses and physical consummation, even without the consent of the parents or ecclesiastical benediction, reforms were introduced requiring public announcement of the marriage, in order to clarify protests or obstacles. At the same time ecclesiastic marriage became a requirement (Harrington, 1995).

9.5 Conclusions

In spite of the obvious regional diversity, this survey of the history of rural household structures in north-western Germany shows some characteristics, that were distinctive for the whole area. The farms on the fertile coastal plains, both arable and cattle farms, were of considerable size. They were held in copyhold or leasehold by a group of farmers who formed the social backbone of rural society. In addition to these full farmers there was a large group of smallholders and cottars, and, especially from the seventeenth century on, landless labourers. These three groups formed the members of village society, although the role of the landless and cottars was rather marginal as compared to that of the full farmers. From the twelfth century onwards, a household structure gradually developed that was characterised by the predominance of nuclear families, that is, the holder-couple and their children, some servants or resident kin, in some cases the retired parents of the owner. Associated with the household, there could have been lodgers or retired farmers living on their own. Life-cycle servants, that is servants who served in another household between the age of ca. 15 years and marriage, were a typical feature of farms in north-western Germany. They provided the main

source of extra labour on larger farms, rather than wage-labourers. Another common feature was the transfer of property *inter vivos* by means of retirement arrangements for the leaving farmers. Farms were transferred according to an impartible inheritance system in most of the area, which contributed to the maintenance of large holdings. Marriage patterns were characterised by a tendency toward late marriage, which was generally linked to the condition of having the means of income to create a household on their own and the approval of the head of the household. The social predominance of landowning farmers and their social control over the rest of the rural population was also in the interest of the state. Through legislation and other means the position of the landholding farmers was supported. Together with the church they promoted a household ideology that aimed at maintaining social stability and moral order. This strong control of the church and the territorial state over the household, particularly where marriage was concerned, is a feature whose origins dated essentially from the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries and which can be related to a more general offensive of state and church authorities in response to the Reformation.

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A children's crib made of iron wire from the industrialising village of Aplerbeck, Ruhr area, 19th century (Bildarchiv der Volkskundlichen Kommission für Westfalen, Landschaftsverband Westfalen-Lippe, Münster)

10 North-west Germany, 1750–2000

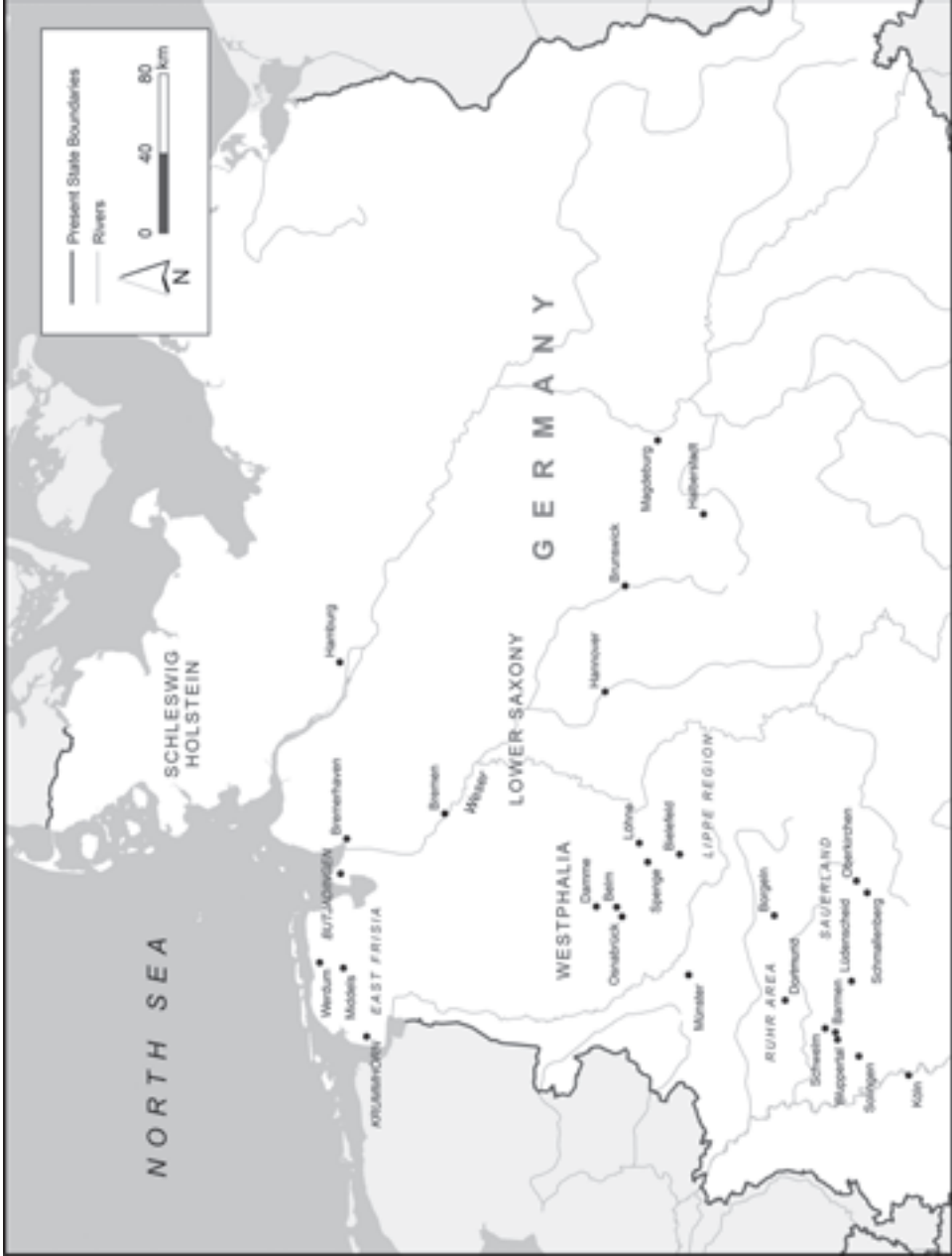
Georg FERTIG and Ulrich PFISTER

In the northern German countryside as in the other regions in north-western Europe, people managed to escape poverty sometime between the Old Regime and the present. There are basically three possibilities for how that happened: by intensifying non-agricultural production, by introducing preventive checks on population growth, or, and possibly most importantly, by organising agricultural production in a more efficient way. This was a process that took a very long time, but it is safe to say that most agrarian growth occurred during the period discussed in this chapter. Families were the organisational focus of and most important actor in this grand escape from hunger. This is true in terms of agriculture, organised in family farms rather than large estates, and also in terms of non-agricultural income and demographic family strategies.

Conventionally, north-western Germany is understood as the area west of the Elbe river and north of the hilly and mountainous areas of Central and Upper Germany. This broad definition would include the Rhineland and large parts of the current *Bundesland* of Sachsen-Anhalt ('Eastphalia', east of the Weser river and stretching east towards the high-yield agricultural lands around Magdeburg, see Harnisch, 1980). However, the bulk of research that is to be reported in this overview refers to historic Westphalia and includes territories that currently belong to the *Bundesland* of Lower Saxony (west of the river Weser) and the Westphalian part of North-Rhine-Westphalia. It should also be noted that legal obstacles have until very recently prevented the study of person-level data from post-1874 parish registers. It has therefore been difficult to carry out the same type of in-depth research on social organisation for the period from the last quarter of the nineteenth century, as was possible for the eighteenth and earlier nineteenth centuries. While some general trends can be described for the twentieth century, most information presented in this chapter relates to research on the period c. late eighteenth to the third quarter of the nineteenth century, for which time period the source material is best.

In terms of ecotypes, north-west Germany seems to be much more heterogeneous than other parts of north-west Europe, or possibly we see here a tendency in German regional research traditions to emphasise the differences rather than the commonalities. We will draw to some degree on research we conducted on three contrasting parishes in Westphalia, but it makes little sense to claim that there were only three main ecotypes in this region. Löhne was characterised by subsistence agriculture and widespread linen spinning (comparable to Spenge studied by Mager and his students, Reinders-Düselder's Damme, and Schlumbohm's Belm). Oberkirchen was situated in an area with high hills and steep valleys where only marginal agriculture could be practiced, and peddling was an important source of income. Borgeln was located in a fertile lowland area and progressively specialised in commercial agriculture whose produce was exported to the growing industrial agglomeration of the nearby Ruhr

MAP 10.1 North-west Germany, 1750–2000



area. But north-west German ecotypes were infinitely more varied (Müller-Wille, 1952; Ditt, 1996). Apart from the contexts covered by the community studies mentioned so far, only the marshland zone on the coast has been studied in depth by historians (Norden, 1984, on Butjadingen) and biologists (Beise, 2001, on the Krummhörn). In any case, north-west German agrarian history has not yet achieved the degree of aggregation and synthesis necessary to summarise its results in terms of a few regional ecosystems. This is why much of the argument provided below is on a local level.

After the geographic overview, this chapter (like others) starts with demography and thus the ultimate effect of family relations—population being, quite obviously, the result of fertility, and fertility being a result of relations within the family. Causally, family relations are strongly influenced by the necessities and options established by income systems and markets. These, at last, are socially and legally constructed through what we will finally discuss under the heading of external relations: institutions of the village, state, church, or feudalism. We are thus actually writing ‘uphill’ against the causal logic we suggest, and which might become more visible when readers try to read this chapter backwards.

10.1 The family and demography

At the beginning of the nineteenth century, Lower Saxony and Westphalia together comprised about half of the population of what constitutes today the part of Germany that lies to the north of the central mountain area and east of the Rhine river and the Dutch border (2.6 million out of 4.9 million, see table 10.1 and Gehrmann, 2000: 97). Before that time, only rough extrapolations for the whole territory are available. They suggest that the population grew about 0.4 per cent annually during the second half of the eighteenth century. While Lower Saxony’s population continued to grow at this slow pace until national unification in 1871, early industrialisation in Westphalia increased the rate of population growth to 1.0 per cent in 1818–1871 and 2.0 per cent in 1871–1905, which was the high period of the heavy industries in the Ruhr basin. During the later nineteenth century population growth accelerated in Lower Saxony too (1.0 per cent annually in 1871–1905). From the early twentieth century, both growth-rates level and regional differences levelled off somewhat, save for the immediate post-World War II period, when Niedersachsen and to a lesser degree Nordrhein-Westfalen absorbed great numbers of refugees from the former eastern territories and the Soviet zone that was later to become the German Democratic Republic. Migration has always been an important component of population movement in this well-connected region. This is true in terms of seasonal migration to the North Sea coast, of permanent out-migration to America since the building of Bremerhaven harbour in 1834, and in terms of immigration to the emerging industrial core district of the Ruhr since the middle of the nineteenth century.

One important aspect of changes in population was the growth of cities, mainly brought about by migration from the countryside. The largest centre attracting rural migrants was half-rural itself, the *Ruhr* industrial and mining district stretching from the lower Rhine to central Westphalia. The *Ruhr* district was the core of agricultural

Table 10.1: Population, urbanisation and agricultural landholdings in north-west Germany, 1750–2000

	Inhabitants of Lower Saxony (millions)	Inhabitants of Westphalia (millions)	Communities >5000 in Westphalia (% pop.)	Number of agricultural landholdings (thousands) in Westphalia
1750	1.2	0.8	2	
1800	1.6	1.0	7	
1850	2.3	1.5	12	209
1900	3.5	3.7	58	383
1950	6.8	6.2	71	267
2000	7.9	8.1	100	54

Note: Lower Saxony is the present-day *Bundesland Niedersachsen*, which in the nineteenth century was covered by Hanover, Oldenburg, Brunswick, and Schaumburg-Lippe. Westphalia is the Prussian province of Westphalia, not including Lippe.

Sources: On population, see Gehrman, 2000; Kraus, 1980, unpublished data provided by Rolf Gehrman, and publicly available official statistics (for 2000 only). For Lower Saxony, see also Uelschen, 1966: 6–7; for Westphalia, see Reekers, 1956: 6–7. Data on the size of cities in Westphalia are based on an ongoing research project by Ulrich Pfister and Friederike Scholten, using a corrected version of Bairoch et al., 1988, and on Reekers, 1956: 154–155. On the number of farms for 1850, see figures given by Nitsch/Gudermann, 2009: 79–80; figures for 1849; these figures relate to all agricultural landholdings; for 1900, see figures relating to 1907 in Brakensiek/Mahlerwein, 2010: 258 and table 10.2; for 1950 (figures for 1949) and 2000 (figures for 2003), see Landwirtschaftskammer NRW, 2005.

productivity of a large region, and miner families typically combined high-wage work by the husbands with small-scale agriculture and gardening by the wives. Generally, urbanisation rates are not very easy to establish for north-west Germany. The conventional approach that counts places with over 2,000 or 5,000 inhabitants as cities is misleading since communal organisation was not based on the village or settlement place, but on the parish. Parishes could span many villages and dispersed settlements, and often had several thousand inhabitants. Since the 1970s, community boundaries have been redrawn, often joining many small communities into one new entity, which was given city rights. The Westphalian city of Schmallerberg, for instance, today has about 25,000 inhabitants, dispersed over 83 settlements. About 60 per cent of the city's 303 square kilometres are used as forests, and 30 per cent for agriculture. With such deeply rural cities, urbanisation has since the mid-twentieth century become a meaningless concept. Still, data based on the size of communities show that over time the period of most rapid urbanisation was the late nineteenth century, particularly in Westphalia, where the Ruhr industrial district was growing rapidly. Data from the eighteenth century,

based on the criterion of city right rather than size (Gehrmann, 2000: 247), show that only the most eastern parts of what we have defined as north-west Germany had a high ratio of urban population (e.g. Halberstadt in what is Sachsen-Anhalt today, about 40 per cent urban in 1740). This is related to the traditional Prussian administrative practice of making a sharp distinction between cities and the *flaches Land* ('flat countryside'), the absolutely non-urban in the bureaucratic imagination. Prussian economic policies tended to impose a clear division of economic functions between cities and countryside. Industry and trade were to be concentrated in the towns and cities; village dwellers were expected to produce agricultural goods. This policy was not effective in the western parts of northern Germany, both Prussian and other. Consequently, in these regions the countryside was more populated and less agricultural than in the east (e.g. Minden-Ravensberg, about 17 per cent urban in 1740). While urbanisation was a process largely of the late nineteenth century, the number of families who owned farms decreased massively after 1950, due to the mechanisation of agriculture. We are thus looking at many more families involved in agriculture when we discuss the eighteenth or nineteenth century, than when we look at the countryside today.

Population growth was moderate in most rural areas of the region concerned even when population growth accelerated during the nineteenth century. Proto-industrialisation in eastern Westphalia (including Osnabrück) and the Sauerland (southern Westphalia) was connected with more rapid increase. However, even these regions did not constitute a demographic hothouse (Schlumbohm, 1994: chapter 3, 185; G. Fertig, 1999; Küpker, 2008: 288–311), while coastal regions were marked by low fertility and the absence of demographic growth (Norden, 1984).

In models that aim at explaining population growth, familial strategies play a more or less driving role. Classical transition theory emphasises the impact of changes in mortality, brought about by improvements in public health, market integration, and agrarian production. Families thus had to react to changes in mortality by adjusting fertility downwards. A much more active role is given to families by theories that emphasise changes in fertility. In this view, population follows the demand for labour. Opportunities for proto-industrial or industrial production induced couples to migrate, marry early, or have more children. Much of German social history revolves around the issue of proletarianisation, assuming that an earlier agrarian regime of reluctant nuptiality broke down in the early nineteenth century.

Empirical evidence suitable for testing such contrasting demographic theories is available for some parts of north-west Germany, in particular for the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Demographic standard measures of fertility (namely, the gross reproduction rate, that is daughters per woman) and mortality (life expectancies) have been estimated by Gehrmann (2000) for the Prussian territories of Mark and eastern Frisia in the eighteenth century, and by the authors of this chapter for all of Westphalia for the period 1750 to 1870, using a preliminary dataset. Figure 13.1 (in the conclusion to this volume) presents these estimates in comparison to similar data for France, England, and Sweden. Also, we have estimated the strength of fertility and mortality reactions to fluctuations in real wages or prices for the same period, conventionally labelled the Malthusian 'preventive' and 'positive check'. The analysis

is based on a subset of the data used in Pfister and Fertig 2010, and on the same procedures; however, here we use the rye prices of Muenster (Fertig, 1999) instead of Pfister's real-wage series which refers to all of Germany. One result of these analyses points to a remarkable continuity: in Westphalia, the preventive check, that is the strength of fertility reactions to price fluctuations, remained constant over the entire period from 1750 to 1870, oscillating around a value of the cumulated elasticity of about 0.2.

When we look at levels of fertility and mortality as well as at the strength of the positive check, three periods of population history can be distinguished. First, until and including the crisis year of 1770, life expectancies were as low as in *ancien régime* France, sometimes less than 25 years. Still, and in contrast to Germany as a whole, no evidence for a positive check, or hunger crises, can be detected in our series. Deaths started to react to grain price fluctuations only in the early to mid-nineteenth century, and for a limited time. We have shown elsewhere (Fertig, 1999: 256) that the impact of prices on marriages also was changing over time in rural parishes of Westphalia. During the second half of the eighteenth century, there was a positive relationship between rye prices and the number of marriages, which turned into a negative one during the first part of the nineteenth century. Both the price elasticities of marriage rates and of mortality suggest that most of the rural population of Westphalia turned from surplus producers into buyers of grain over time. Thus, the conditions Malthusian checks operated under were changing, even if the consistent practice to postpone births when prices were high seems to contradict this observation.

The second period was sometime between 1780 and 1820. In Germany as a whole, this was a period when the real wage rose by at least 50 per cent. In Westphalia, life expectancy by 1820 had risen to a level close to the one occupied by England at the same time, almost at 35 years. Similar to England, in the decennia until 1820 fertility rates climbed, and fell again, up to a gross reproduction rate of 2.8 daughters per woman, and down again to the usual level of 2.5. As in England, no price had to be paid in terms of increased mortality for this temporary rise in fertility. In a third period after 1820, the main direction of the demographic shifts was again towards an elevated life expectancy, with some episodes of increased mortality during the periods of economic hardship of the 1830s and 1840s ('pauperism' as discussed widely in the contemporary literature); this was also the only period when positive checks, of hunger crises, can be detected in our series.

Comparable analyses by Gehrman (2000) on the industrialised inland district of Mark in southern Westphalia and on eastern Frisia at the North Sea coast demonstrate that levels of fertility and mortality could vary from region to region. An upward tendency of the intrinsic growth rate (r) can be observed in these cases as well as in the case of Westphalia. This was clearly driven by the fall in mortality, and only in the case of Mark, an increase in fertility (the gross reproduction rate). Mark was a territory that industrialised early, and that was well integrated in markets of agricultural goods. Some pockets of fertility growth seem in fact to be associated with rural industry or proto-industry, but on a small scale. In north-west Germany, population growth was mostly not fertility driven (as in England), but mortality driven. In other words, in

the aggregate view, changes in mortality were more important than marriage ages or numbers of children. This seems to corroborate classical forms of demographic transition theory; however, the process was long and not without setbacks. Familial reactions to falling (infant) mortality in terms of reduced marital fertility have been demonstrated for Prussia only for the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries (Galloway, Hammel and Lee, 1994).

The moderate demographic climate of north-western Germany before the demographic transition was partly due to prolonged breastfeeding (about 14 months: G. Fertig, 2007: 64; Norden, 1984: 67), which limited the frequency of births within marriage as well as the mortality of children. Also, the age at first marriage was high, close to 30 years for men, and between 25 and 28 years for women, and celibacy was a widespread practice and actually a serious option for many descendants of farming families who did not take over the business of running the farm (Schlumbohm, 1994: 99–104; G. Fertig, 2003). At the end of the nineteenth century, most of north-west Germany was part of a zone characterised by elevated celibacy rates (of 50 per cent or more) among men in the age bracket between 25 and 29, but low celibacy rates (5 to 9 per cent) among men between 45 and 49 (Ehmer, 1991: 104–106); only in the West (Münster, Osnabrück, and Oldenburg) were celibacy rates higher (15 to 19 per cent at 45 to 49 years). In a few dynamic proto-industrialised regions marriage ages were two or three years lower than on average (Ebeling and Klein, 1988: 35), as well as in unhealthy coastal marshland environments characterised by high agricultural productivity, high mortality, and net immigration (Norden, 1984: 144). In other words, marriage ages did react somewhat to elevated demands for labour in atypical regions where non-agricultural income was high or mortality levels tended to create a permanent deficit in people. However, claims by contemporary observers that those who lived from non-agricultural income married very early have been proven wrong; it seems rather that cottagers habitually followed the marriage patterns of peasants they had close social relations with (Ebeling and Klein, 1988: 36–37). The high marriage age seems to have continued among the agricultural population until the mid-twentieth century. In two parishes analysed by Exner (1997: 348–369) the marriage age of men during the eight years preceding World War II was still around 32 years, of women about 28 years. In the 1950s both sexes married about one year earlier, which is a much slower decline than in West Germany as a whole. Even higher values are given by Albers (2001: 114–121) for a region to the north-west of Münster. Peasant household formation, therefore, reacted much less to the rising demand for labour than the population as a whole. This is also indicated by the fact that, in contrast to the nineteenth century, in the twentieth century late marriage was predominantly a farmer phenomenon, whereas members from other rural strata tended to marry earlier.

The persistence of a demographic regime characterised by low population pressure is also related to the fact that proto-industrialisation did not lead to a break-up of established marriage patterns, as suggested by early writing on the subject (Schlumbohm, 1994; Küpker, 2008: 335–372). Farmers usually married earlier than proto-industrial lower classes (see also Ebeling and Klein, 1988: 35). In a comparison of three parishes, the inheritance system proved more important than the development of proto-industrial

linen manufacture as an explanation for the marriage age: ultimogeniture was consistently (and plausibly) related to a low marriage age (G. Fertig, 2003). This does not imply that family formation was exclusively or even predominantly governed by niche inheritance, although, as demonstrated below, property of land assumed an important position in the social organisation of north-western Germany. In fact, the moment at which males married was not linked to the father's death in a systematic way in any of the parishes on which research on family formation has been conducted so far. Together with other factors access to property of land was nevertheless a relevant variable in the process of family formation. Some studies have been able to disentangle the effects of these different variables, and their results thus bear on a larger discussion of the relative importance of niche inheritance versus the income-marriage link in governing population dynamics before the late nineteenth century.

An event history analysis of marriage in three contrasting parishes during the middle decades of the nineteenth century gives some information about family formation (G. Fertig, 2003). Drawing on a wealth of information, the influence of a number of variables on the timing of marriage was tested. These variables were grouped into four broad categories, namely spontaneous love (indicated by pre-marital pregnancy), the family constellation (particularly whether parents are alive, dead or re-married), property access (inheritance, purchase) and market conditions in terms of the prices of important goods (rye, linen). The last group of variables is able to tell us to what extent the accumulation of a marriage fund (as opposed to property transfer) influenced family formation. In all three parishes transfer of a farm constituted a major factor that favoured marriage. In view of the importance of property transfers as a decisive moment in the peasant family cycle this is not surprising. However, only in Oberkirchen and Löhne, not in Borgeln, was marriage also related to property access by way of purchase of a farm or individual parcels. This corresponds to the observation elaborated below that the development of commercial agriculture and rising incomes did not promote a land market and therefore did not open up new avenues to family formation. This also implies that the accumulation of a marriage fund by young adults—a potentially important perspective for the large servant class of this parish—was not a realistic avenue to family formation. By contrast, incomes derived from non-agricultural activities (i. e., peddling, flax spinning) favoured family formation through the capacity to purchase a farm in the two other parishes. At least for Löhne this meant that the presence of siblings (which implied a reduction of the share in transferable resources) did not retard marriage.

The family constellation (in terms of whether one parent was deceased) had its strongest effect on marriage timing in Borgeln. This is consistent with the great importance of transfers for family formation in this parish (for a similar result see Küpker, 2008: 356). Even here, the effect of parental deaths was much weaker than the effect of bequests *inter vivos* (among living parents and children). There was no automatic link between niche inheritance and family formation. Rather, marriage was embedded in the strategies involving the whole family group. These strategies linked property transmission, marriage and considerations related to the welfare of one or both parents and of the siblings that would not inherit the farm. The fact that marriage or marriage prospects of the heir are sometimes mentioned in transfer contracts attests to that.

The link between marriage and transfers *inter vivos* implied that at least in the areas characterised by impartible inheritance a stem-family phase in the later part of the family cycle was widespread among peasant households. Many farmsteads include a small separate house where the retired parent(s) could withdraw to if they wished to do so. Accordingly, complex households that included kin beyond the nuclear family were common among peasant households (Berkner, 1976; Schlumbohm, 1994: 252–290; Reinders-Düselder, 1995: 58, 63, 220). The southern areas of Lower Saxony and Westphalia where partible inheritance was common were by contrast characterised by a nuclear family structure (Berkner, 1976; G. Fertig, 1999: 259). Schlumbohm (1994) has shown, however, that even in areas with impartible inheritance forms of co-residence were not only governed by considerations related to property. In Belm co-residence of couples belonging to two different generations was also common among the lower classes. In this case, co-residence performed a protection function. Living with parents enabled young married couples to save on costs of living space, while household budget sharing may also have brought some relief for the elderly poor.

In addition to the transfer system, market conditions also mattered for family formation. In proto-industrial Löhne, marriages were correlated with linen prices. Favourable market conditions for manufactures made it possible to accumulate a marriage fund rapidly and to buy land, if necessary to create a household. Note, however, that this was not the case in all proto-industrial contexts since in some areas peasants processed flax or hemp grown on their own fields; the absence of markets for yarn made it difficult for young adults to marry without gaining access to land (Küpker, 2008: 352–359). In Borgeln, the development of commercial agriculture meant that high rye prices led to early marriage. The level of the income derived from farming was a relevant parameter for the decision over the moment when the elder generation transferred property to a successor who was going to marry. To some extent, the effect of favourable rye prices on the demand for servants may have helped the latter to accumulate a marriage fund and to marry irrespective of lacking property. Time-series analysis on the aggregate level indeed suggests a relationship of this kind for Westphalia as a whole during the latter half of the eighteenth and the early nineteenth century, while a Malthusian preventive check would suggest the opposite (high food prices leading to fewer marriages). However, with the spread of proletarianisation, the relationship between rye prices and the marriage rate turned negative during later periods of the nineteenth century (G. Fertig, 1999; also Küpker, 2008).

Finally, demographic reasoning about family formation tends to obscure its spontaneous aspects. Marriage was often a consequence of sexual activity rather than the social licence to procreation. As Lischka (2006) has shown, intimacy was a crucial symbol of relations that would lead to marriage as early as in the eighteenth century. In other words, marriage was not the societal licence that made the beginning of an intimate relation possible—conversely, the public demonstration of an intimate relation paved the road to marriage. Statistically, in all three parishes covered by G. Fertig (2003), pre-marital pregnancy (or having begotten a child in the case of men) was an important factor precipitating marriage. This might have produced some uncontrolled marriages and fertility in a Malthusian sense, contributing to a gradual pauperisation, at least in the middle decades of the nineteenth century. Contrasts between Löhne and Borgeln

(in the nineteenth century) seem to be particularly interesting (C. Fertig, 2010). As can be shown from family contracts as well as celibacy rates (about 6 per cent of males who died after age 45), marriage was practically the one and only way of life in Löhne. This fits well with the inward oriented version of the Protestant ('Pietist') religion dominant in this parish (as in many other regions of north-west Germany). Both the propertied (farmers) and the working classes (*Heuerlinge*) organised in the form of households headed by married couples. If a daughter was pregnant, she and her partner were soon convinced they should marry. Illegitimacy rates were low, and to remain celibate was not really an option. The timing of marriage was typically linked to the legal taking over of a farm, which was normally organised during the life time of the elder couple. In Borgeln, as in Löhne, it was possible for everybody to marry, including the poorest. But as farm transfer contracts between parents and children show (as do regional and local celibacy rates, over 16 per cent), it was a serious option to remain unmarried, and the timing of marriage was more detached from farm transfers than in Löhne. Borgeln was a society coordinated through the labour market rather than through social networks, kinship, and Pietist religion. Servant rates were high, and pregnant women, particularly maids, remained unmarried more frequently.

As shown above, results of distributed lag regressions quite consistently demonstrate that in bad times, couples tended to have fewer children (see also G. Fertig, 2001a: 423, G. Fertig, 2001b: 75; Küpker, 2008: 376). At least until 1870, this effect persisted. It seems equally conceivable that this was a strategic behaviour (the spacing of births in stressful times, using the widespread practice of long breastfeeding), or that it was the result of corporeal processes such as reduced fecundity or intrauterine mortality that happened behind people's backs. At least for the eighteenth century we have to deal with the contradictory pattern that high grain prices (and good agricultural incomes) induced people to marry more, but to beget fewer children. Low fertility levels in coastal areas have also been interpreted in terms of strategy (Norden, 1984). But then, the combination of high agricultural productivity and immigration seems to suggest a high level of income in this region. This should encourage early marriage and high marital fertility. In fact, marriage was early in parts of the coastal marshland, but marital fertility was low (for Butjadingen see Norden, 1984: 159, but see Knodel, 1986 for contrasting patterns of late marriage, low mortality, and low fertility in nearby Middels and Werdum). This suggests again that low birth rates could be brought about by environmental processes operating behind people's backs such as low fecundity or intrauterine mortality. It seems doubtful that the entire array of fertility patterns, ranging from marriage to birth and survival, can be interpreted in terms of one consistent strategic orientation towards the prevention of population pressure, be it in the sense of things one talked about or be it in the sense of habitualised practices.

In sum, both the long-term development of vital rates and the evidence of the preventive check (or rather its weakness and inconsistency) collected here seem to point to a rather passive role of families in shaping demographic change. In the first century or so discussed here, the biggest demographic impact was the early if slow decline in mortality, linked probably to economic growth and market integration in the agricultural sector as well as to state based vaccination campaigns. The decline

in fertility came much later, around 1900, and has been linked to female industrial labour and modern market institutions, as Galloway et al. (1994) have shown.

10.2 The family and its members

The overall pattern that emerges indicates that despite its moderate demographic climate, Malthusian preventive checks were limited in north-west Germany. In the short term, marriage was not primarily governed by market prices, and while marital fertility indeed did react to changing prices, it is quite unclear if this was based on any systematic practice, or if it was just a result of the involuntary ending of pregnancies brought about by undernourished bodies. In the long term, the only strong reactions of nuptiality or fertility to changing economic opportunities seem to be connected to the secular rise in real wages since 1800 or 1820; they were, however, of a temporary nature. In the short term, nuptiality reactions pointed to a paradox. Population growth was rather driven by factors that worked through mortality, such as nutrition or epidemics. In contrast to the preventive check, there are few strategies families could deploy against these exogenous factors, except producing or earning enough food while caring for their children and the elderly. A prerequisite for this everyday functioning of rural families is that interests are well-defined and agreed upon internally. Particularly, agricultural family production requires that everybody cooperates and participates in the well-being they collectively bring about. Property and inheritance, not the parental control of the next generation's marriage choices, are therefore the most important aspect of intra-household relations in north-west German agricultural households (for a different interpretation based on data from the *Krummhörn* region, particularly emphasising the competition among siblings, see Beise, 2001).

Relations within the peasant family are very much a consequence of property rights, in other words, the form of legal relations to the local nobility, the village corporation, and to the state. These external relations will be discussed below in section 4.

Contrary to the expectations of early nineteenth-century reformers, almost no land market developed during the decades after the land reforms, which had provided farmers with individual property rights. Redistribution of land among family members remained the dominant mode of land circulation right into the twentieth century. These included mostly transactions *inter vivos*, inheritance and support among relatives, all of them related in one way or another to the transmission of land from one generation to the next. To the extent that a market for land existed at all, it was of a non-price-making variety. Turn-over rates were modest, and land markets were unimportant for the access to land compared to transfers *inter vivos* and inheritance (G. Fertig, 2007). As a result, the land-family bond was probably stronger than in early modern England: in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries between 51 and 73 per cent of all farm successors' farms in three Westphalian parishes were direct descendants of the previous owners, and only 7 to 10 per cent of all farm successions were to non-relatives (C. Fertig and G. Fertig, 2006: 173).

The strong land-family bond in turn was related at least in part to the persistence of the undivided transmission of farms either to the first or the last born in much of Westphalia and Lower Saxony even after the land reforms and although civil law, as elsewhere in Europe, had prescribed equality among heirs both in its older, Roman form and in the modern codifications introduced around 1800. From a custom emerging from the interaction between seignors and peasants and formalised in some territories by the property regulations (*Eigentumsordnungen*) of the eighteenth century, undivided transmission of farms turned into a peasant strategy from the second quarter of the nineteenth century (for the following, see C. Fertig and G. Fertig, 2006, and the literature cited therein; earlier studies include Begemann, 1990: 132–205).

Strategic behaviour on the part of peasants is shown by the fact that a substantial proportion of farms was handed over to the next generation in the form of contracts *inter vivos*. In case a couple had several children this was a necessity if the unity of the farm was to be maintained—in case of intestate inheritance civil law stipulated the equal division of all property.

Earlier scholarship has considered the impartible transmission of family farms as advantageous because this practice guaranteed the stable size of large farms, and large farms were considered more efficient than small farms. More recent research has cast serious doubt on the existence of economies of scale in farming, and an argument that relies on the nature of the production function of family farms does not appear as a valid explanation for the persistence of impartible farm inheritance in the case of nineteenth- and twentieth-century north-western Germany. Rather, the transmission contracts dating from the middle decades of the nineteenth century that the Münster research group has been able to study suggest that the farm was the focus of entitlements of newly formed marriages, of retiring peasants and even of non-inheriting siblings who left the parental family farm (see Figure 13.2, in the conclusion of this volume). The importance of the family farm as a unity of reference in peasant society (*Hof idee* in the terminology of Sauermann, 1970) becomes also visible through naming practices: families often called themselves after the farmstead they occupied, and males marrying from outside into a farm changed their names accordingly.

The relationship that certainly has found the largest share of attention in the existing literature concerns the one between the older generation and the successor who will take over the family farm. As mentioned above local customs either favoured (male) primogeniture or ultimogeniture. There was considerable variation, however, probably because many potential heirs were unsuitable physically or mentally to manage a farm. In some villages, one fifth and more of all transmissions involved the inheritance of farms by daughters. The local custom was also less strictly followed on small farms than on large farms, possibly because there were attractive alternatives to inheriting a small farm. In fact some presumptive heirs declined the offer of having a farm transferred to them and preferred to set up a household elsewhere (C. Fertig, 2010). From the early eighteenth to the third quarter of the nineteenth century the degree of adherence to the respective local custom increased; it must remain open whether this reflected the progressive consolidation of a cultural tradition or the increase of material welfare, which reduced the rate of prospective heirs that were physically or mentally inept (also Schlumbohm, 1994: 388–389).

Property transmission was only loosely connected with marriage. In the parishes of Borgeln and Löhne respectively only 18 and 35 per cent of all marriages of heirs of farms concluded during the first eight decades of the nineteenth century took place during the time span of three months before and after the establishment of a transfer contract. Nevertheless, the perspective of marriage was frequently mentioned as a motive for transmitting a farm to an unmarried heir particularly in Löhne. This suggests that it was not the property transfer that functioned as a precondition for marriage, as proponents of niche inheritance would have it, but rather that marriage motivated resource transfers between generations. More precisely it appears that offering a child the future inheritance of the family farm constituted an important means to compensate the faltering labour power of the older generation through the integration of an able-bodied young person. This is particularly evident in the not infrequent cases in which parents surrendering the property of their farm to a child and his or her spouse reserved the usufruct of the farm during their own lifetime and demanded the obedience of the young couple with respect to all aspects of organising work on the farm. The transfer amounted to little more than a promise of future inheritance in these cases.

But even when parents handed over the management of the family farm to the successor, they retained the right to live on the premises of the farm (in a separate room or a small house) and to use some plots for their maintenance (so-called *Leibzucht*). The occupier of the farm was obliged to provide services for the cultivation of this land such as ploughing and provide for the parents in case of sickness. Conversely, the latter usually promised to contribute with their labour to the cultivation of the family farm. While contracts implicitly presupposed that the two generations would get on well together, about half of them stipulated alternatives to the *Leibzucht* in case of serious conflict. This usually consisted of an allowance in cash, which should enable the older couple to live in an independent household. Since it was the right of the old couple to decide whether cohabitation had become unbearable, the risk of having to pay a cash allowance must have exerted a strong pressure towards conformity and subservience on the part of the young couple.

The timing and nature of transfer varied with respect to the family constellation. Old couples were more inclined to maintain usufruct of the farm they transferred to the successor than widowed persons. Widows were reluctant to relinquish management of the family farm through a transmission contract, and if they felt forced to do so, they were particularly careful to stipulate their future entitlements in detail and alternatives in case of conflict. This shows the weak position of women even if they were superior with respect to age. Finally, widowers were particularly likely to hand their farms over to a daughter. We interpret this result with the complementarity of gendered work roles in rural households; in particular, the presence of a closely related female in the household would guarantee dedicated care in the case of sickness.

An important element of Figure 13.2 (in the conclusion of this volume) is that it distinguishes between inheritance and the transmission of the property of the family farm. All children could feel entitled to inherit some of their parents' wealth, and the prospect of inheriting the family farm was only one type of resource flow between the generations and between the family farm and individuals. The (prospective) transfer

of the lion's share of the parents' wealth to the successor on the family farm was partly compensated by marriage portions. Resource transfers between generations were more strongly connected to marriage in the case of heirs leaving the family farm than in the case of heirs of farmsteads, and it was marriage that triggered these flows rather than inheritance being the basis of family formation. Since it was unusual to establish inventories at the time of property transmissions, it is difficult to assess the wealth shares attributed to different types of heirs. A rough guesstimate places compensations to non-succeeding heirs at about 70 per cent of an equal share in inheritance. It appears that this share did not increase as farms grew more productive in the course of the nineteenth century and total wealth increased, suggesting that the ratio mentioned was considered as largely adequate given the risks and obligations that the heir succeeding to the family farm took over.

Compensations took the form of dowries for daughters, the material part of which was elaborately decorated on wagons and carried to the groom's home on the day of marriage (so-called *Brautschätze*). Males leaving the family farm also received marriage portions that helped them to establish an independent household. Dowries for daughters and marriage portions of sons leaving the family farm usually were of equal size. Marriage portions consisted of money, cattle and, particularly for brides, household items such as linen and furniture. Finally transmission contracts sometimes included stipulated provisions for handicapped children of the old couple. The family farm thus had an important function to create some degree of social security for sick family members and for children who had left the family farm but became needy.

Why did nineteenth-century parents endeavour to combine impartible farm transmission with the provision of adequate portions of their wealth to all children? The most plausible explanation relates to motivational arguments. It was mentioned above that livestock farming grew in importance during the nineteenth century. However, livestock farming is an activity with high costs of supervision; tending and feeding cows and processing milk require a high degree of attention and care. On family farms, which were too small to engage specialised servants (called *Holländerinnen* and *Schweizer* in north-western Germany), it was preferable to have these activities carried out by family members and motivate the latter through cultivating the notion of a distinct family farm (*Hof idee*) and the prospect of a fair share in the family wealth which their effort and care helped to accumulate. The course of agricultural intensification during the nineteenth century accentuated the *prima facie* pre-modern patterns of family cohesion.

In sum, in areas where agriculture was the predominant economic activity, family formation strongly depended on property transfer. This did not imply niche inheritance, as parental death exerted only a moderate influence on the timing of marriage, and as the latter depended on strategic decision-making within the whole family unit. The availability of income from non-agricultural activities made it possible to acquire a marriage fund and acquire property through purchase rather than transfer or inheritance. As the persistently high marriage age suggests, there was no breakup of demographic equilibrium; the speed with which a marriage fund could be accumulated depended on prices for agricultural goods and manufactures.

In the twentieth century, relations between parents, children, and siblings in agriculture were fundamentally altered. Labour markets outside agriculture became

more attractive, while both servant and day labour disappeared. This made learning the agricultural trade less attractive for those children who would not take over the parental farm. Conversely, the labour demand of farms declined, while their capital needs increased strongly with mechanisation. Hence, it became more difficult for those who took over to pay shares to their siblings. The view that those who took over were ‘heirs’, and their siblings ‘non-heirs’ who had to leave with nothing, was an ideological construction in the nineteenth century. In the twentieth century, this invented tradition became common practice.

10.3 Family and income

The majority of income strategies in rural societies rely upon the availability of land. This is true not only for farmers but also for day labourers who typically worked small plots of garden land. As has been shown above, income strategies of landowners are very much connected with the cooperation within the family. Their main purpose is to motivate family members to stay and work on the farm. They have consequently been discussed in that context. In this section, we will broaden the discussion to the income farmers gained when they sold their produce on markets, and to the extra-familial labour (or labour substituting support) strategies of the non-farmers.

Before the advent of modern agriculture, north-western Germany was characterised by distinct local patterns of land use. Open field rotation systems, widespread in other parts of Europe, were infrequent until the early nineteenth century. ‘Eternal’ rye cultivation on dry sandy elevations heavily manured with turf in a cooperatively organised one-field system was fairly widespread. An important part of the arable also comprised enclosed plots called *Kamp*. Large stretches of the territory originally were common lands consisting of moors and heath land. During the early nineteenth century communal lands were dissolved (Brakensiek, 1991) and rotation systems became more widespread (Müller-Wille, 1938). From the late nineteenth century on, cooperative forms of cultivating the arable were progressively dissolved. North-west German farming families thus gained their income from relatively autonomous and large economic units, in contrast to areas where field rotation was the norm and the cooperation of social classes was ensured on the community level rather than through labour markets (which was the case e.g. in the Paderborn area in southern Westphalia). Income strategies of the lower classes thus focussed on labour markets rather than on small property.

An important aspect of institutional change concerns the division of the commons, which started in the middle of the eighteenth century, gained momentum with the Prussian edict of 1821 and continued until the late nineteenth century (Brakensiek, 1991). The initiative to divide up the commons was taken by larger farmers or by the public authorities. Farmers were also the major beneficiaries in the sense that they received the lion’s share of the distributed land. By contrast, lower-class households lost an important prop to their survival strategies in that the commons had permitted feeding cows and gathering supplementary foodstuffs and energy. The lower classes however benefitted from a growing market for small plots of former common land

upon which they could build their own houses and cultivate small fields. Where the quality of the distributed land made it suitable for intensive use such as the cultivation of fodder crops or potatoes, the dissolution of the commons also created new employment opportunities for the poor (G. Fertig, 2001a).

Growing demand for agricultural products from the increasing industrial population of the Ruhr area and railway construction during the third quarter of the nineteenth century led to regional specialisation, an increase of agricultural production for commercial use (wheat, dairy products, pork; sugar beets in the vicinity of Magdeburg) and a rise in the productivity of labour and land (Kopsidis, 2006: chapter 4). As elsewhere in Germany, the “second agricultural revolution” was slow in coming, and only after World War II did the use of engines and chemical fertilisers become the rule. This occurred at least in part as a reaction to the rapid reduction of the agricultural workforce as a reaction to high wages in industry and services and a transformation of the family farm (Exner, 1997: 87–110).

While some areas of the region have always been characterised by a predominance of agriculture and have remained so until the late twentieth century, others have experienced a proto-industrial development in which agriculture was strongly connected with handicraft production both on the local level and within the same rural household. This was especially true for linen production, which had been widespread on the left bank of the lower Rhine since the seventeenth century. In the hilly area stretching from north-west of Osnabrück to east of Paderborn, important segments of the population combined work in the linen trade with seasonal migration to the Netherlands until the mid-nineteenth century. From the middle decades of the nineteenth century, the north-western parts of the Münster region experienced the rise of cotton processing, which employed a large rural (mainly female) workforce until the 1960s (Schüren, 1985). The hilly region stretching east of Cologne (Sauerland), finally, was an old stronghold of iron processing. Hammers were mostly made in rural areas, and also textile manufacture (mostly cotton) was organised under the domestic system. During the nineteenth century, these dispersed semi-rural settlements (such as Barmen, Solingen, Schwelm, and Lüdenscheid) gradually evolved into industrial towns.

The social regulation of property (see below) that predominated in the areas characterised by impartible inheritance implies that the number of farming households was more or less unable to grow. Nevertheless, the near universality of marriage (with some exceptions particularly in the Münsterland) and the tendency of parents to attribute portions to the children that would not inherit the farm led to the creation of new households of small peasants and day labourers. The patterns of property transmission and family formation thus contributed both to population growth and to a process of structural downward mobility leading to the expansion of sub-peasant classes between the late seventeenth and the mid-nineteenth century. In Belm, for instance, almost all farmers marrying between 1771 and 1860 were themselves descendants of farmers (94 per cent). By contrast, 15 to 20 per cent of sons of farmers became small farmers and *Heuerlinge*, and a declining number of *Heuerlinge* was recruited from sons of farmers (11 per cent among the men marrying 1771–1800, 7 per cent among those marrying 1801–1830 and 4 per cent among the marriage cohort of

1831–1860; Schlumbohm, 1994: 371–373). As a result, by the early nineteenth century there were areas in eastern Westphalia and the western and southern parts of Lower Saxony where households with sub-peasant status were between three to five times more numerous than households occupying farmsteads (Berkner, 1976; Mooser, 1984: 199; Begemann, 1990: 22–31; Reinders-Düselder, 1995: 52–75; Schlumbohm, 1994: 54–66). The main types of lower-class households were small farms that produced less food than required for subsistence, cottagers who possessed little or no land beyond their garden and *Heuerlinge* who rented a small household and possibly small plots of land on a small farmstead.

For their subsistence, lower-class households were dependent on incomes either from extra-domestic labour or from producing non-agricultural goods for markets. Four labour strategies were particularly widespread: life-cycle servanthood, the *Heuerling* arrangement, migrant labour, and proto-industry.

High agricultural productivity and the development of market production in the fertile lowlands were not connected with a multiplication of small family farms, but rather with a multiplication of households providing for wage labour. Already by the middle decades of the eighteenth century 6 of the 19 Westphalian parishes analysed by G. Fertig (1999: 259) recorded a proportion of servants in the total population of one sixth and more, the maximum being 25 per cent. Lünemann (1999), working on one of these parishes in the middle decades of the nineteenth century, found that the overwhelming proportion of the population aged 15–24 lived in the relatively few households of the big farms, while lower-class households were largely devoid of persons in this age group, underscoring the importance of life-cycle servanthood and the function of lower-class households as labour reservoirs for intensive agriculture.

Where access to land ownership was difficult for the lower classes, the *Heuerling* arrangement was common, particularly in the north-eastern parts of Westphalia and in western Lower Saxony. This can be described as a minifundium lease arrangement between a peasant farmer and a leaseholder. The farmer provided the leaseholder with living space (often in a former baking house or stable) and a small plot of land; in some areas *Heuerlinge* were also allowed to stock communal lands with a cow. The *Heuerling* and his family had to provide labour services for the peasant farmer whenever the latter demanded it. Leases were usually contracted for a year and were often not renewed. There has been a discussion over whether *Heuerlinge* represented a class (Mooser, 1984: chapter 7) or whether this arrangement rather represented a clientelistic relationship (Schlumbohm, 1994: chapter 7). C. Fertig's (2010) micro-study of a parish in eastern Westphalia (Löhne) in fact suggests a strong integration of the lower classes into local networks.

A consideration of the labour strategies pursued by *Heuerlinge* and their families can clear up some points in this discussion (in general, see Reinders-Düselder, 1995: 167–181). Near Bielefeld and during the first half of the nineteenth century a large group of *Heuerling* households developed that engaged exclusively in the weaving of fine linen, and their lease contracts no longer included labour services on the farm. For peasant farmers, such contracts were principally a means to increase their land rent, and the status of *Heuerlinge* approached the one of a rural working class separated from the

land. Similarly, the extent of seasonal labour migration to the Netherlands, Holland in particular, was strongly correlated with the proportion of *Heuerlinge* in the local population. The seasonal pattern of migration was tuned to the seasonal variation of labour requirements of agriculture at home (Bölsker-Schlicht, 1990; Küpker, 2008: 180–191). Evidently, this form of family economy was only partly class-based.

The demise of the rural linen industry and the substitution of seasonal migration by transatlantic emigration in the great crisis of the middle of the nineteenth century led to a sensible reduction in the importance of the *Heuerling* status. Nevertheless, the *Heuerling* arrangement constituted an essential labour regime during the labour-intensive phase of agrarian development, and its rapid demise occurred only in the wake of rising real wages and sweeping mechanisation during the two decades following World War II (see the classic study in rural sociology by Seraphim, 1948). The same process also led to the final demise of rural wage labour. In 1933 there were still 0.41 servants per farm in Westfalia; by 1950 this proportion had decreased to 0.16. The corresponding proportions of the number of day labourers per farm are 0.13 and 0.08; by the late 1950s contemporaries considered dependent wage labour in agriculture as a marginal phenomenon (Exner, 1997: 112–116, 460).

Other forms of extra-domestic labour strategies included peddling, which was common in many marginal areas where sandy soils were not apt for flax cultivation and iron processing did not gain a foothold. Important examples include the *Tödden* (peddlers) originating from an area between Münster and Osnabrück (Oberpenning, 1996; Küpker, 2008: 160–180), and Winterberg on top of the mountainous Sauerland in the south, which commercialised iron goods from the neighbouring areas (Höher, 1985). Peddling was conducted in family groups that were engaged at least part-time in marginal agriculture.

Many households combined agriculture, albeit frequently on a small scale, with protoindustrial activities. Flax growing and spinning was an important activity between agriculture and industrial markets that suited land-poor lower-class households. Flax and hemp growing were labour-intensive cultures, and so was the processing of these fibres. The extensive lace-making industries of Antwerp, Bruges and parts of northern France relied heavily on white yarn bleached in the middle Wupper valley (today the city of Wuppertal). The merchants of this emerging industrial city bought brown yarn from a wide area in eastern Westphalia and the southern parts of Lower Saxony. In these regions, substantial parts of the arable land were devoted to the cultivation of fibre plants, and important segments of the population were occupied with growing and processing them (Achilles, 1975).

Weaving was organised in different ways. Around Bielefeld yarn became a widely traded commodity, and there emerged a group of specialised weavers for fine linen cloth that formed a rural lower class that had largely severed its links with agriculture (Mooser, 1984: 63–65). Farther to the north-west, in Tecklenburg and around Osnabrück coarser varieties of linen were produced (*Osnabrucks* exported to Amsterdam and London served for sail cloth and for the clothing of slaves; Küpker, 2008: 147–159). No markets for yarn developed there. As a consequence, weaving remained embedded in the household economy of peasant farmers, and no proto-industrial lower class emerged.

Schlumbohm (1994: 70–71) in fact shows that yearly production volume on the household level depended on land size.

The mechanisation of the textile industry led to the demise of the domestic system. Yet, a number of mills—particularly cotton spinning mills in the north-west of Münster and the adjacent parts of Lower Saxony—were erected in rural areas. As an important part of their workforce consisted of women (and the technical innovations in spinning occurring during the late nineteenth century permeated this), they contributed to the persistence of a rural family economy that combined small-scale agriculture with industrial employment over much of the twentieth century.

Before the widespread use of steam power in the processing of iron from the middle of the nineteenth century onwards, this branch constituted an important dispersed industry in the southern hilly part of Westphalia and Berg (east of Cologne). Water mills had to be dispersed by definition, and the seasonal variation of their energy supply implied that the workforce depending on them needed to engage in part-time agriculture. Forging and—before the onset of deep-shaft mining in the Ruhr-Emscher area from the 1830s—coalmining were also part-time rural occupations at least until the first half of the nineteenth century. Even the rapid expansion of coalmining in the north part of the Ruhr district from the late nineteenth century did not mean an end to dual occupations altogether. Since urban settlements were non-existent in this area, housing for an expanding workforce of miners had to be provided by the mining companies. These settlements were provided with ample ground for gardening, growing some potatoes and apples and keeping a goat. The nineteenth-century expansion of small-stock farming was to an important extent due to the reduction of the household economy of what was becoming an industrial proletariat to small-scale agriculture.

The shifts in the labour strategies of lower-class households occurring from the late nineteenth century and culminating in the decade and a half after the foundation of the Federal Republic (in 1949), together with the rapid mechanisation of agriculture, profoundly affected the domestic labour strategies of peasant households. Subsistence-oriented agricultural side-activities by sub-peasant households largely disappeared as a result of wage increases in the non-agricultural sector and the fact that mechanisation, due to high fixed costs, raised the minimum size of agricultural holdings. Evidence of this process is, first, the reduction in the number of small holdings. In Westphalia for instance the proportion of holdings with a size of less than five hectares declined from 63.5 per cent in 1933 to 51.4 per cent in 1970 and 27.2 per cent in 2003. Second, in the same region, goats—which came to be considered as the poor man's cow in the course of the nineteenth century—largely disappeared: in 1933 they still numbered 172,815 (about one per farm); by 1960 the figure had dropped to 33,289 (Exner, 1997: 92, 105, 460). However, subsistence survived as a familial goal among those farmers who continued mixed farming under the conditions of agriculture regulated by the European Union. In an interview study conducted in the early 2000s, farmers emphasised their interests in the quality of self-produced food in spite of adverse market conditions. Also, they emphasised the importance of local social relations that were made possible by what would seem like underproductivity from an economic perspective (Baier et al., 2005).

Households of farmers experienced a familisation of both patterns of co-residence and work-roles particularly during the late 1940s and 1960s. The disappearance of agricultural wage labour and of the *Heuerling* arrangement implied that the co-resident group became restricted to the kin group, which could still extend to three generations. Mechanisation in turn led to a reduction of the necessity to cooperate in agricultural tasks. On the one hand, this relieved pressure to exploit child labour, particularly during harvest time. Non-congenital bodily malformations among children of farmers, while still widespread during the 1950s, thus became progressively less frequent from the 1960s. Second, many tasks that were traditionally performed in neighbourhood gangs now were carried out mostly with family labour. This holds particularly for harvesting and threshing. Harvesting potatoes in long rows of women—partly derisively, partly referentially called the Estates because of the size of the event and the gossiping taking place—largely disappeared by the 1960s (Exner, 1977: 106–108; Albers, 2001: 62–110).

In sum, the rise of industrial wages and the mechanisation of agriculture during the early post-World War II decades not only changed the labour strategies of the lower classes but also led to a radical transformation of rural household organisation and local networks: the former peasant household moderately connected to markets through product and labour markets and at least in some regions strongly embedded in local marriage and godparenthood networks turned into a commercial family farm relying exclusively on the labour of the nuclear household.

10.4 The family, the local community and the state

The strategies rural families could follow were embedded in more or less institutionalised relations beyond the household. One dimension of such relations was political dominance (*Herrschaft*, as German political theory would have it)—hierarchical relations that allowed the legitimate exercise of authority. These included both the rule of local or regional noblemen or seigniors (*Grundherren*), and the modernising state that had taken over many competences since the beginning of the nineteenth century. Families strategies such as keeping the property in the descent line were contingent upon structures of dominance that generated property rights in the first place. A second dimension of external relations was the horizontal structure of political self-rule typical for south-west Germany. Such ‘communalist’ institutions were however rather weak in most of north-west Germany (with the exception of Frisian regions at the coast). Competences that were typically concentrated in one organisation in the south-west, the village with its church, priest, charity fund, commons, mayor, court, and assembly, were dispersed in the north-west. Parishes spanned multiple political villages, the commons were governed not by the village but by seigniors and a limited number of rightholders, local financial institutions were underdeveloped, and villages hardly ever participated in collective political action. Also, the communal consensus to marriage, an important aspect of nineteenth-century class conflicts in the south, was absent in north-west Germany. The village community as an institution thus did not matter for family strategies. However, and third, neighbours and kin did, particularly as sources of everyday support and cooperation. We therefore will discuss the impact of informal

social networks such as kinship at some length. Since no comparable research has been done on social networks in rural north-west Germany for the second Empire and later periods, this discussion will be limited to the period up to 1870.

Under the seigniorial system during the Old Regime, the property rights of farmholders in most of north-western Germany were limited. Part of the peasantry was personally free (*Freibauern*, roughly equivalent to English yeomen or freemen; and *Erbzinsbauern* or *Meyer*, roughly equivalent to copyholders). A large group of *Eigenbehörige* was personally unfree (comparable to English customary tenure). In sharp contrast to the areas east of the river Elbe, however, seigniors managed only a very limited proportion of the land directly, left farm management decisions to the peasants, and used little *corvée* labour of unfree peasants for their own farms—mostly fewer than 15 days per year. The most important aspect of seigniorial control was the consent required for marriage, or more precisely, for the consequences marriage had where joint property of husbands and wives was the norm and where incoming wives or (a little less frequently) husbands brought considerable property with them (*Brautschatz*, which in contrast to dowries was given to the couple and not to the husband). In monetary terms, lords could extract as much as 50 per cent of farm worth at each death of a personally unfree farmer (*Sterbfall*). Over the years, average extraction rates during the later eighteenth century were in the range of 17 to 25 per cent of gross returns in the bishopric of Paderborn, probably somewhat higher in the Damme hills north-east of Osnabrück, where the overwhelming majority of farmsteads were leased to *Eigenbehörige* (Henning, 1969: 167; Reinders-Düselder, 1995: 159–164). In the course of the eighteenth century property relations in northern Westphalia became formalised through the enactment of *Eigentumsordnungen* (property regulations; Osnabrück, 1722; Minden-Ravensberg, 1741; Münster, 1770; Recklinghausen, 1781). Probably in the majority of regions, relations between lords and farmers also became largely monetised by the early 1800s (Kopsidis, 2006: chapter 4).

In the wake of the sweeping agrarian reforms enacted in the early nineteenth century farmers were ‘liberated’. Changes were gradual rather than revolutionary, however: only those rights that pertained to the peasant’s person rather than the land (including *corvée*) were abandoned, the rest was converted into monetary terms and capitalised. In juridical terms, peasants held no property rights (only contractual use rights) to the farms they occupied in many regions before 1800; after 1825 their new status was defined as holding sub-property (*dominium utile*), while lords kept supra-property (*dominium directum*). By creating state banks specialised in the business of dissolving lord-farmer relations by way of mortgage credit (*Rentenbanken*), the Prussian state helped peasants to acquire and pay off the capitalised rights of the seignors. The rise of real food prices from the 1830s greatly enhanced the capability of peasants to redeem the former feudal dues. Depending on local circumstances the bulk of redemption procedures occurred during the 1840s and 1850s, but many farms were burdened by instalment payments until the final years of the nineteenth century (Bracht, 2006, 2009).

The hallmark of manorial supra-property was *Heimfall*, the right to regain a farm when a farmer died without heirs. *Heimfall* implied indivisibility if the lord (and holder of *dominium directum*) did not give his consent to the sale of parcels or the division of the farm. However, the institutional change to a liberal system of full farmer property

rights in the wake of the agrarian reforms made it in principle possible that farmers sold parcels and divided their land. It remained common practice to avoid partition in succession in most of north-west Germany even after the introduction of a civil law code (in Prussia in 1795) and the agrarian reforms. Indivisible succession became a core element of peasant ideology even before the founding of organised interest groups in the late nineteenth century (Rouette, 2001). However, attempts failed as early as 1836 to enforce undivided farm succession by means of a law directed specifically at the rural population (C. Fertig and G. Fertig, 2006: 183–185). In the twentieth century, indivisible succession was a crucial goal of Nazi agrarian politics and ideology, but has remained the usual practice to the present.

One important competence of rural communities was that each community was obliged to care for its own poor. The logic of the system is well known from many parts of Europe and has not undergone fundamental changes since the middle ages (more or less, it even holds today). As elsewhere, provision for the needy was (and is) organised in a hierarchical, subsidiary system. The main levels of this system were the family, the local community, the state, and Christianity. Parents and children (or, as family contracts show, the farm successor for his or her siblings) had a primary obligation to care for each other. On a second level, the community cared for its poor citizens if there were no primary kin who could help. Up until the early twentieth century this was organised by allowing the needy to collect alms on specific days, or by allowing them to eat each day on a different farm (Bringemeier, 1931). A problem for such a local system was that some of the needy were not citizens of the locality where they worked and lived. This was addressed, in Prussia, when the local citizenship and poor law was reformed in 1842. Then, communities had to accept responsibility for those who had lived within their territory for at least three years, and obstacles to internal migration were removed. Third, state responsibility for the poor was covered by organising and if necessary financing transfers through the communities, by legislating and enforcing support (and labour obligations of the receivers), but also by the establishment of poorhouses or workhouses for subjects who were not local citizens. Mobile able-bodied poor were the traditional target of the repressive side of state poor policies, which became sharper during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Between 1933 and 1945, workhouses for the non-local poor were transformed into concentration camps, and only in 1969 were the reinstated workhouses finally dissolved (Elling-Ruhwinkel, 2005, Lerche, 2009). Public support remains a relevant income source for the lower strata of the rural population.

As the role of the local communities as income providers for the needy was rather limited, it remains to be discussed to what extent networks created by common descent (consanguineal kinship), marriage (affinal kinship) and ritual kinship established through godparenthood structured local communities. The following tackles this question on the basis of a comparison of the two nineteenth-century Westphalian parishes Borgeln and Löhne, which we have already encountered in the previous sections (C. Fertig, 2009, 2010).

Local communities in north-western Germany certainly were not ‘kinship-hot societies’ (Sabeian, 1998) in the sense that the circulation of critical resources was

little connected to kinship networks. This was particularly true of Borgeln, which experienced the development of commercial agriculture on the basis of family farms in the course of the nineteenth century. Despite a strong development of product markets, the land market was illiquid and credit was procured largely from outside; during the period 1830–1866 only 6 per cent of all mortgage credit came from local lenders. Local society was obviously fairly individualistic—the rich farmers rarely interacted with each other on markets. Perhaps because land was hard to get, informal ties among in-laws constituted a relevant channel for the conclusion of a sales contract: affinal kin interacted on the land market more frequently than expected on the basis of matching by change (G. Fertig, 2007: 148–154). To a considerable extent this was also true for marriage circles: class endogamy was more marked than in Löhne, but, at the same time, the density of marriage networks among land owners was weak. Mid-nineteenth-century Borgeln appears like a protean example of a rural class society where the nuclear family formed highly individualised units.

In proto-industrial Löhne by contrast, local ties were stronger. The land market comprised a considerable third of all transactions in landed property (the bulk of the rest consisting of the family transactions analysed in section 2 above), and local lenders provided about a quarter of all mortgage credit. The majority of local credit was provided by relatives, both consanguineal and affinal, but few individuals engaged in more than one (mortgage) credit operation more than once in his life. By contrast, interaction on the land market did not follow kinship ties, suggesting that these were not of an exclusive nature. Social endogamy was less pronounced than in Borgeln, implying a continuous flow of dowries from the households of rich farmers to families of sub-peasant status. At the same time, there existed a large moderately integrated network of intermarriage among land-owning families. Since marriages among close kin were not particularly prominent, this suggests a kind of generalised exchange in Levi-Strauss's terms. Some wealthy individuals with numerous children acted as integrators of this network; at the same time they frequently showed up on land markets in order to set up independent farms for their children and acted as providers of credit. In sum, Löhne appears as a strongly network-based community with a high density of local interaction in different fields and resource flows between different strata of society.

However, even where social networks mattered, they do not seem to have evolved into a mechanism channelling resource flows and excluding outsiders from such flows — kinship networks were related neither to clientelistic nor to class patterns of social organisation (cf. Sabeau 1998). In Borgeln there was some tendency for the richest farmers to marry consanguineal kin, and both in this parish and Löhne marriages among affinal kin occurred somewhat more frequently than expected on the basis of random matching. However, since there were few systematic resource flows connected with kinship ties beyond the nuclear family, marriage among kin may primarily reflect the direction and scope of information networks specific to possible marriage partners.

The conclusion with respect to ritual kinship established through godparenthood is somewhat different, however. In the Protestant parts of the region under study between three and five godparents were admitted at each baptism so that networks established through godparenthood were fairly extensive. An analysis of parents' capacity to place

their children in advantageous marriage or to provide them with a house outside of the family farm nevertheless suggests that an especially large number of godparents per child did not support children's social carriers in any way, implying that godparents did not supply tangible resources to their godchildren. By contrast, the frequency of parents being asked as godparents was systematically related to parental success with respect to the niche placement of their children. Prestige expressed in network terms (and independent from material wealth as measured by farm value) thus constituted an important determinant of social biographies. Note again, however, that there is no evidence of tangible benefits accruing from godparenthood beyond a possible extension of information networks. Accepting the role of a godparent demonstrated a commitment to a binding reciprocal relationship. Such unmeasured aspects of prestige may be more relevant for parental success in the niche placement of the children than the informational advantages of a central network position.

10.5 Conclusions

It was the leading question of this overview to ask what kind of strategies families pursued to ensure their income particularly in a long-term perspective: demographic strategies, labour strategies, land strategies, social network strategies. We have seen that demographic strategies (preventive checks in a Malthusian sense) and also network strategies had a limited weight, but strategies aimed at the factors of production, land and labour, were much more important. The main focus of family strategies was not the Malthusian preventive check, i.e. making one's children marry late, but family income and cooperation within the family. Inheritance should be interpreted in this context. The main external driving force was the integration of interregional (and international) product markets, not state and reform or the dissolution of *Gemeinschaft*. Over the centuries, the biggest change seems to be that more opportunities arose outside the agricultural sector. For labour migration, the decisive steps were the building of Bremerhaven since 1834, which opened the way to America, and the continuous growth of coalmining and modern industry near the Ruhr valley. Markets for the output of rural producers, both agricultural and non-agricultural, had existed before 1750, but in the modern era they broadened and intensified particularly when the railway was built in the mid-nineteenth century, and later when an Atlantic grain market developed. If families were to profit from these opportunities as well as from opportunities outside local agriculture, they had to find a balance between enabling their children to go elsewhere and motivating family members to work the farm well. In the nineteenth century, succession contracts within the family were the legal instrument used to organise this balance. Social transfers into the agricultural sector organised through agrarian protectionism in the twentieth century (and in the present) do not fundamentally alter this logic, nor did the immigration of farmers from the east after the second World War. Mechanisation however made a difference, not in eliminating the necessity to organise the family around the farm, but rather in sharpening the inequality between siblings and thus finally establishing closed inheritance as a general practice among farmers after a century of political interventions in inheritance. The

family farm is still the focus of agricultural income, only in an economy where income from agricultural product sales has been marginalised and needs to be supplemented in multiple ways, where agricultural labour markets have almost disappeared as a consequence of mechanisation, and where more and more alternatives are available to the children of farmers. Networks did (and do) matter, but not everywhere in the same way. Cooperation forms between households changed from interlocking input markets (*Heuerling* system, modest clientelism, but also early labour-market society) and micro-regional food markets to today's re-familialised, EU-regulated production for bigger regional or European markets (with some persistence of subsistence goals particularly where agriculture becomes a hobbyhorse). Cooperation within the family and the habitualised succession practices of north-west Germany persisted.

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SCANDINAVIA



Peasant Happiness (*bondehlyckan*), c.1750 (Nordiska Museet, Stockholm)

11 Scandinavia, 1000–1750

Carl-Johan GADD, Hans Chr. JOHANSEN and Thomas LINDKVIST

The countries of Denmark, Norway and Sweden cover together a large area, especially along their north-south axis. From the latitude of Denmark's southernmost point it is the same distance to Norway's northernmost point as it is to Sicily. These long distances create widely heterogeneous conditions for agriculture.

On the Danish islands and the plains of Skåne (Scania) both climate and soil provide good conditions for agriculture. It was here in the medieval and early modern periods that the most cultivated parts of Scandinavia were to be found. Around 1700 about 50 per cent of the land was arable in the Danish isles and the most cultivated parts of Skåne. High levels of ground water resulted in large stretches of wetland, which put a limit to further land clearance, as did the necessity to reserve relatively large areas for meadow and pasture. A large number of draught animals was necessary since the arable land was tilled with big ploughs harnessed to 2–4 pairs of animals. On most of the Jutland peninsula conditions for arable farming were poorer, allowing comparative advantages to livestock raising (Frandsen, 1988: 13–29; Gadd, 2000: 26–27).

From northern Skåne up to about 400 kilometres further north there are extensive forested upland areas. In the middle ages large parts of these woodlands were practically uninhabited, but during the following centuries they were settled to an increasing extent, although far from reaching the cultivation rate of the plains. Even around 1700 arable in the woodlands covered on average one to two per cent of the total area and agriculture on the small arable fields was often supplemented by swiddens (burn-beaten clearings) in the surrounding forests. Livestock raising was important here.

At the latitudes of the big Swedish lakes there begins a region of plains and areas of mixed character, but even in the most cultivated areas the arable acreage seldom surpassed 20–25 per cent of the land by 1700. Together with Skåne, the eastern plains were the main granaries of Sweden around 1700, while livestock raising was more important in the western plains where, however, a rapid process of land clearance was taking place.

In the interior parts of Sweden at latitudes somewhat north of Stockholm a large mining region, Bergslagen, developed from the twelfth century on. Around 1700 Sweden was the largest iron exporter in Europe and the cash flows generated by exports helped to make barren Bergslagen one of the main domestic markets for agricultural produce.

From a line roughly 150 kilometres north of Stockholm and further north we find Norrland, where the population was concentrated in the river valleys and the coastal areas. Although arable farming existed along the coast almost up to the Arctic Circle, the harsh climate limited its scope, and farming was largely animal. In the interior of Norrland few permanent settlements were to be found and scarcely any arable areas, the land being inhabited by largely nomadic Sami (Laplanders) who lived by herding reindeer, hunting and fishing (Gadd, 2000: 25–41).

MAP 11.1 Scandinavia, 1000-1750



Norway's surface is mainly taken up by mountain massifs and high plateaus which allow no scope for arable farming. Up to the present less than three per cent of Norwegian land has ever been cultivated. Relatively densely populated agricultural districts existed in some coastal lowland regions, especially in the vicinity of Oslo, Trondheim and Bergen. Livestock raising was important in Norwegian agriculture and both in Norway and Swedish Norrland a transhumance system existed where cattle and goats were herded into summer farms or large shielings (No. *seter*, Sw. *fäbod*) each summer (Øye, 2004: 36–41; Lunden, 2004: 188–189).

The Scandinavian countries were among the most sparsely populated regions of medieval and early modern Europe. Denmark had within its present-day borders a population density of about 10 inhabitants per square kilometre in c.1500. While parts of the Scanian and Mid-Swedish plains probably had a population density approaching that of Denmark, the average for the southern two-fifths (Götaland and Svealand) of present-day Swedish territory was about 3 inhabitants per square kilometre by 1500. Norrland, which comprises 60 per cent of Swedish territory but only c.10 per cent of its population, had a density of c.0.2 inhabitants per square kilometre. In 1500 Norway had an average population density of 0.6 inhabitants per square kilometre, but since about 90 per cent of the land was more or less uninhabited, the density of the populated areas was much higher.

Denmark exported agricultural products: grain was exported to Norway while oxen were a more important export item internationally, finding markets in Holland and Germany. Norway had been an importer of grain since the middle ages. For the fourteenth century imports have been estimated at c.5 per cent of total food energy consumption, for the eighteenth century as much as c.20 per cent (Lunden 2004: 190).

Sweden exported butter and other animal products in the sixteenth century and periodically even some grain, but became a grain importer around 1680. By 1750 imports amounted to about 7 per cent of domestic grain consumption (Heckscher, 1949: 149, 169).

In spite of the great distances and differences in natural circumstances Denmark and the southern half of the Scandinavian Peninsula still formed culturally a fairly homogenous area around the year 1000, which manifested itself e.g. in the common language, Old Scandinavian, which had as yet developed only dialectal differences. A Danish kingdom was consolidated around the middle of the tenth century. Kingdoms approaching present-day sizes were established in Norway soon after the year 1000 and in Sweden later in the eleventh century. Large parts of present-day south and west Sweden fell to Denmark and Norway in the middle ages while Sweden, gradually integrating Finland, had its centre more to the east than today.

A union between the three kingdoms was established by the end of the fourteenth century, from which Sweden loosened itself permanently in the 1520s, while Norway remained politically united with Denmark for almost a further 300 years. By the middle of the seventeenth century Sweden had seized several provinces from Denmark-Norway and the borders between the three countries became those of the present day. In this article Denmark and Norway are treated as separate units except when stated. All data for Sweden exclude Finland.

11.1 The family and demography

The demographic cycles found in western Europe as a whole during the period 1000–1750 were also present in Scandinavia. The three centuries after AD 1000 were a period of growth and expansion of settlement. Land was cleared and the number of farms increased both in plains and woodland areas. In the fourteenth century the Scandinavian populations went into a period of recession and stagnation. There are indications that the population crisis began around 1300 in Denmark, which was earlier than in Norway and Sweden where the decline seems to have begun about 1350 with the Black Death. Norway especially was badly hit by the demographic decline (Porsmose, 1988: 201–211; Lunden, 2004:144; Myrdal, 1999: 111–112). Scandinavian population levels were at their lowest between 1400 and 1450.

Estimates of the long-term development of the populations of the three countries are shown in table 11.1. Figures include urban populations, but the urban proportions were relatively small. The figures for the period before 1600 are uncertain, but indicate that Sweden and Denmark experienced similar rates of population decrease after 1350, or some 40 per cent. From 1450 the two countries differed widely in development, however. While Sweden had regained her population size of 1350 by 1600, Denmark had a much slower growth and did not reach her pre-plague level until the first decades of the nineteenth century, which was very late from a European point of view. In Norway the late medieval population decrease was a crushing 60–65 per cent and the recovery does not seem to have begun before c.1500. Although the rate of population increase thereafter was more rapid than Sweden's, Norway did not reach her pre-plague level until the early eighteenth century.

Table 11.1: Population in Denmark, Norway and Sweden*, 1000-1750 (millions)

	Denmark		Norway	Sweden		Total
	pre-1645	post-1660		pre-1645	post-1660	
1000	0.55		0.25	0.3		1.1
1350	0.95	(0.75)	0.55	0.7	(0.9)	2.2
1450	0.55		0.2	0.4		1.2
1500	0.6		0.2	0.5		1.3
1600	0.7	0.5	0.4	0.7	0.9	1.8
1700		0.6	0.5		1.4	2.5
1750		0.71	0.66		1.78	3.15

*Sweden excluding Finland; Sweden and Denmark with pre-1645 and post-1660 borders.

Sources: 1000-1500: three countries: Myrdal (unpubl.); Denmark: Johansen, 2002; Norway 1350-1700: Lunden, 2004: 144, 159; Norway 1750: Statistics Norway website, Historical Statistics, resident population; Sweden after 1500: Palm, 2000: 198.

Scandinavian early modern population growth reflected to some extent the strong economic development of the North Sea region in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries which moved the core of the world economy closer to Scandinavia. Importantly, the great wars of the seventeenth century increased the international demand for primary products such as iron, copper, wood and tar. This favoured exports from Sweden and Norway and, within these countries, the forest and mountain regions where population increase was the fastest. The more cultivated plains regions in Denmark and present-day southern and eastern Sweden experienced slower development (for Sweden, see Palm, 2000). Denmark after the middle ages was also affected by ecological difficulties such as sand drift and rising levels of ground water following deforestation (Kjærgaard, 1994).

In general the marriage age of women was low in Scandinavia before 1400. The earliest age of marriage was, according to the legal sources, 12 or 13 for women and 14 to 15 for men (Lindal, 1976; Hedberg, 1976). Osteological evidence indicates that mortality was higher for women than for men in the age-range 20–39, childbirth being a frequent cause of death for the mother.

Swedish accounts of miracles indicate that women gave birth to children at an earlier age in the 1410s than in the 1470s. Thus an increase in age at marriage may have taken place during the fifteenth century, suggesting the beginnings of a Northwestern European marriage pattern (Myrdal, 1999: 166–169). Fewer cases of early-age pregnancy probably explain why life expectancy for women seems to have increased during the late middle ages (Benedictow, 1993: 56, 79).

Especially in Norway and in the Swedish forest and transitional areas the resumed growth of the rural population after c.1450 implied that farms that had been abandoned during the fourteenth and early fifteenth-century decline were now cultivated again. The increase in the number of people and of land clearances also led to farm division, a process that made the number of farms in villages and hamlets grow and transformed solitary farms into hamlets (Gadd, 2000: 67–69; Øye, 2004: 114–115; Lunden 2004: 212). In Norway the number of peasant farms almost tripled between 1520 and 1801 (Lunden, 2004: 164) and regional studies in Sweden indicate that the number of peasant farms roughly doubled between 1570 and 1750 (Larsson, 1972: 175; Larsson, 1983: 224). In Denmark, on the other hand, the number of peasant farms was stagnant between 1550 and 1800 (Skrubbeltrang, 1978: 68; Frandsen, 1988: 193; Bjørn, 1988: 38). Instead there was a considerable increase in the number of Danish ‘cottagers’ or *husmænd*, the main stratum below the ‘peasant farmers’ or *bønder*.¹ In Denmark the cottagers were about as many in number as the peasant farmers in 1750, while in Norway and Sweden they remained relatively much fewer (see below).

Estimates of general birth and death rates exist for Denmark from 1665 and for Sweden from 1630. For Denmark between 1665–1750 birth rates were about 30.9 per thousand and for Sweden between 1630–1750 on average 34.2. The death rates for

¹ We use the expression ‘peasant farmer’ to translate the Scandinavian word *bonde*. The latter word has a narrower range of meaning than the word peasant and did not include crofters, cottagers and other rural landless and semi-landless.

corresponding periods were 29.5 and 28.5 per thousand respectively (calculated from Larsson, 2006: 6; Johansen, 2002: 44). Thus birth rates seem to have been higher, and death rates somewhat lower in Sweden than in Denmark, which is consistent with the more rapid population increase in Sweden.

Deviations from normal to worse mortality levels occurred relatively frequently in Denmark before 1660 and in Sweden before 1720. In the period 1620–1660 Denmark was hit by war, invasion and occupation on several occasions, leading to plunder, extortion of contributions and, not least, serious epidemics. Death rates were very high, especially in the 1650s when in many places they exceeded four to nine times those recorded in normal years. Danish population crises were less severe in the late seventeenth and the eighteenth century. Figures for Danish dioceses in 1665–1750 show that only two out of these 85 years, 1710–11, had a death rate above 40 per thousand (Johansen, 2002: 33–41, 61). In Sweden the occurrence of crisis mortality was significantly lower after 1720. According to averages for 14 Swedish parishes mortality rose above 50 per thousand on four occasions between 1647–1720, but not again until the early 1770s (Larsson, 2006: 31).

The cause of these crisis mortalities was different between areas that normally had a surplus of grain – especially Denmark and Skåne – and areas where consumption and production were in equilibrium or which covered grain shortages through imports, which applied to much of Sweden north of Skåne. In these areas of Sweden the main cause of crisis mortality was bad harvests followed by outbreaks of hunger-related diseases such as typhus and dysentery. In Denmark, too, bad harvests resulted in higher death rates, but there and in Skåne the worst crisis years occurred as a result of ‘external’ factors such as plague and war-time diseases (Larsson, 2006: 94–95, 121–128; Johansen, 2002: 14, 45–46).

The frequency of death at an early age meant that the average life expectancy for a newborn Scandinavian was about 35 years in 1750 (Johansen, 2002: 60; Gadd, 2000: 58). No doubt low by modern standards, this average however was probably higher than in Scandinavia during the middle ages and in line with the highest national averages in eighteenth-century Europe. If a person had survived to the age of 20, there was a good chance of growing relatively old. In the first censuses (1749 in Sweden, 1769 in Denmark and Norway) 3–4 per cent of the population was seventy years old or over.

Census-type data do not exist for medieval Scandinavia, but judging from law codes the nuclear family was the core of the medieval Scandinavian household. The size of the households is difficult to estimate since sources are mostly normative. The peasant farmer, *bonde*, was the head of the household, and it is evident from Norwegian and Swedish laws that the household comprised both the family (two or three generations) and ancillary workers. As will be treated more in detail later, slavery played an important role in the Scandinavian agrarian economy up to the thirteenth century. Gradually, however, slaves were replaced by free ancillary workers who were members of the peasantry as a class. The system of ‘life-cycle service’ may have been present, especially in the later middle ages, but is not clearly recorded in the medieval period. In Norway, by the middle of the fifteenth century, ancillary workers would in some cases stay on a farm for as long as 10–20 years or their entire lifetime, but shorter terms seem to have been normal (Øye, 2002: 255).

Probably from about 1500 on the so-called Western European marriage pattern, characterised by comparatively high ages at first marriage, prevailed in the Scandinavian countries and in Denmark especially. However, it is only from about 1630 that sources become detailed enough to estimate the marriage age. Investigations into a number of parishes show Danish women's marriage ages to have been between 25–31 in the period 1630–65 and above 30 in the 1670s. In Sweden similar investigations indicate that Swedish women's marriage age was much lower, or 20–24 in the period 1640–1700 and rose in the years of the Great Nordic War, 1700–21, to a maximum of 27 by 1720.² Around 1750 Danish women's marriage age was 29, Swedish 25. Norwegian investigations from the first half of the eighteenth century indicate levels similar to the Swedish, but with great regional differences. Men's age at first marriage was generally two or three years more than women's. Around 1750 Danish men married at 31, and Swedish men at 27 (Larsson, 2006: 134–135; Johansen, 2002: 38, 70; Palm, 2000: 57–66).

In Danish and Swedish rural marriages in the period 1670–1746 the average span between births was as long as 30 months except for the interval between first and second birth which was 26–27 months (Johansen, 2002: 74; Larsson, 2006: 150). A possible explanation for the relatively long time-span between births is long breastfeeding periods, but it is also possible that family planning occurred (see next chapter on Scandinavia, 1750–2000). The variations in marriage age had considerable effects on reproduction. If a woman had her first child at the age of 23 she could hypothetically bear eight children before the age of 41, which was three more than a woman starting her childbearing period at the age of 29. The relatively low marriage age is probably the most important immediate explanation for the higher birth rates in Norway and Sweden than in Denmark. An obvious reason for the lower ages of marriage in Sweden and Norway was the better chances of forming new peasant-farmer households created by the greater possibilities of land clearance and of additional income from activities such as charcoal production or winter handicrafts. True, the number of cottager households increased sharply in Denmark, but as a rule the cottagers married at a higher age than did the peasant farmers, and the number of children in cottager families tended to be less than among peasant farmers (Winberg, 1975: 215; Johansen, 2002: 83).

In early modern Scandinavia the betrothal – the agreement between two families about marriage – rather than the church wedding marked the beginning of married life. In the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries between a third and a half of Danish and Swedish peasant wives were pregnant before the wedding. From the first years

² The female marriage age in parts of seventeenth-century Sweden was in fact so low that the prevalence of a Western European marriage pattern has been questioned (Palm, 1991: 106–109). However, Hajnal's theory of marriage patterns concerns not only age at marriage but also household formation behaviour and household size (Hajnal, 1982). In seventeenth-century Sweden there are hardly any signs of the large, joint households typical of the 'Eastern' system. Therefore, in our opinion, the relatively low age at marriage in Sweden can be explained by the good opportunities for creating new households resulting from land clearance and sideline occupations, making parts of seventeenth-century Sweden a somewhat special 'low-age-at marriage' case of the Western European household system.

of a new peasant-farmer family's lifespan there would be children in the household (Johansen, 2002: 74; Winberg, 1975: 217–222), perhaps a survivor from the older generation and in addition one or two live-in servants. The average number of servants in a Danish eighteenth-century peasant-farmer household was c.1.6, while in Sweden, where earlier marriages entailed a shorter period of live-in service, it was around 1.0 (investigations for various periods c.1700–1780 in Johansen, 2002: 48, 83; Winberg, 1975: 300; Lindström, 2008: 53). When the children grew up, this often made the employment of servants redundant. One after another the adolescent children would leave their parental home, and when the married couple reached their late fifties or early sixties the household would frequently consist only of husband and wife and one or two grown-up children or servants. While the size of the adult labour force was relatively constant, the number of individuals in each household changed over time. In the early eighteenth century, on a middle-sized Danish farm the average household size was 5.5–6 individuals with a peak of 7–8, and a low of 4–5 individuals (Johansen, 2002: 48–49; Frandsen 1988: 83–84).

The households of eighteenth-century 'cottagers' and other unlanded people were different from those of peasant farmers. There were no servants and rarely any relatives from the older generation. While peasant farms were, as a rule, large enough to occupy one or more of the growing children for long periods, in crofter and cottager families the manpower of the married couple most often sufficed to till their home plot of land. Adolescent children of the rural poor, therefore, went to work on estate demesnes or on peasant farms at an early age and the number of children living in the parental home was smaller in unlanded than in peasant-farmer families.³ Unlanded households included, therefore, on average only four persons (Frandsen 1988: 45; Johansen, 2002: 48; Winberg 1975: 199).

The class of landlords was relatively small in all the Scandinavian countries. In Denmark the nobility in 1550 amounted to 240 families and some 2,200 members, and in 1720, 180 families with about 1,100 members, which was 0.3 and 0.2 per cent of the total population respectively. The number of large-scale landowners had not decreased, however: roughly a quarter of Denmark's c.5,000 privately-owned estates belonged by 1720 to rich burghers and state officials. The Swedish nobility in 1750 comprised about 9,000 individuals or 0.5 per cent of the population (Dombernowsky, 1988: 213; Jutikkala, 1979: 29–31), although far from all of these were members of landowning families. From the late middle ages the Norwegian nobility was tiny in size.

The households of the landlords, especially the Danish, were very large – increasing with the size of the land, especially demesnes, which belonged to the estate. Better food and the use of wet nurses contributed to shorter spacing between children and more surviving children per couple. A landlord's household would contain more children, and the servants were numerous, ranging from clerks and children's tutors to valets,

³ We use "unlanded" as a generic term for the landless and the semi-landless, i.e. cottagers, crofters etc.

coachmen and gamekeepers. The households on the largest estates resembled royal courts *en miniature*.

Life in the countryside in the early modern period was, for most people, divided into three or four stages: staying at home as a child, being a live-in servant, living married in one's own household, and, for a widow or widower, a period of living with relatives or on one's own.

Children were expected to work from an early age. The age of leaving home was, for peasant farmers' children, normally after confirmation at the age of 14–16. The normal course of events would then be to become live-in servants on other farms. Because of the high age of marriage the period of such 'life-cycle' service frequently lasted about 10 years, for Danish men, often 15 years. An agreement was made between the farmer and the servant for a service term of one year (in Denmark often half a year), but this could of course be prolonged. It was normal for a servant to have worked on several farms before he or she got married (Gadd, 2000: 79–80; Frandsen, 1988: 45).

It was considered a precondition for marriage that the new family could set up an independent household by taking over a farm or a croft or, sometimes, by establishing a new one. This was part of the Northwestern European marriage pattern and the obvious immediate explanation for the high age at first marriage. In a society in which only two or three children in each marriage survived till adulthood, it was natural to expect that a son, or a son-in-law, would take over as owner or tenant, but such transfers in most cases presupposed the death of one of the spouses in the parental generation. Only if the parents grew very old would they give up the farm while both were still alive. If one of the spouses died while the other was still relatively young, the survivor would, as a rule, remarry, often with a younger man or woman, a tradition which often made it more difficult for the younger generation to take over. In Sweden, however, where marriage did not entitle one to inheritance in land (see below), an individual who had married a widow or widower of a freehold would often find him- or herself in an awkward position later on, when the offspring of the previous marriage had come of age and were ready to take over the farm.

A widow or widower who did not remarry would remain on the farm, sometimes in a separate house. A contract was frequently made with the new occupant of the farm about the conditions. On tenant farms the landowner could include the support of a widowed individual in the conditions for the new tenant. Among the crofters and cottagers such arrangements were less frequent. A poor widow or widower who lacked the economic support of younger family members might live as a cottager or as a lodger without family connections.

The life course of individuals from landlord families was different from that of the peasantry. The children were given a formal education by tutors living on the estate and the sons would often get further education in a town, followed by military training before they got married, whereas the majority of daughters would spend most of their time before marriage on the estate. Because of the larger number of children not all could expect to become estate owners themselves and several sons entered a career as civil servants, military officers or clergymen.

11.2 The family and its members

Slavery was common in Scandinavia until the twelfth and thirteenth centuries. The oldest provincial laws, dating from about 1200, say that slaves could be bought, sold, maltreated and killed at their owner's will (Myrdal, 1999: 96). There are several regulations in the provincial codes of law from all the Scandinavian kingdoms indicating that slaves, or thralls (Sw. *träl*), were numerous and commonly used as labourers on peasant farms. In the laws of Norwegian Trøndelag, it was assumed that on a 'normal' peasant farm there were twelve cows, two horses and three slaves. From this it has been estimated that slaves would have amounted to between one third and half of the population, while other estimates indicate one fourth at the highest (Øye, 2004: 105). One of the King's sagas says that on one farm belonging to a mighty chieftain there were 30 slaves at the beginning of the eleventh century. This was, however, regarded as an exceptionally high number.

While slavery was known in the earliest law codes, it was not mentioned in the later codes for the entire realms dating from 1274 (Norway) and c.1350 (Sweden). There was no such medieval nationwide law in Denmark, but in the most recent Danish provincial law, the Law of Jutland (*Jyske Lov*) from 1241, there is only slight information about slavery.

A Swedish statute from 1335 says that no man or woman born of Christian parents should henceforward be a slave. This implies that the existing slaves were probably the last generation. The status of freed slaves was regulated in detail, especially in the Norwegian codes. It varied according to the number of generations that had passed since slavery and there must have been a considerable number of people in some kind of semi-freedom during the eleventh, twelfth and early thirteenth centuries. Especially during the twelfth and thirteenth centuries slaves were provided with land to cultivate. It has been assumed that land clearance and expansion of settlement was partly the result of declining slavery (Iversen, 1994: 395).

Although in the early fourteenth century remnants of slavery existed in the form of personal subordination that in many cases may have been similar to serfdom, such direct control of men disappeared in Scandinavia as a result of the late medieval population crisis (Porsmose 1988: 309–311; Myrdal 1999: 128). From the latter half of the fifteenth century the predominant types of household were farms headed by individually free peasants and large enough to permit the peasant farmer and his household to support themselves and pay taxes and dues, while the landless and semi-landless stratum was very small still around 1500.

Scandinavian peasant farmers were relatively well supplied with means of production in the form of land, farm buildings, implements and animals. Normally such a farmer had one or two ploughs or ards and the animals necessary for a plough team. By the middle of the eighteenth century farmers in the plains of south-west Skåne had, on average, 6 adult horses, 1 young horse, 1–2 oxen, 1–2 cows and 1 heifer, and conditions on the Danish Isles were similar. Further north in Sweden the number of large animals was likewise 10–12, but the relative number of draught animals was smaller and the number of cows and heifers larger (Gadd, 2000: 168–170; Dombernowsky,

1988: 233–236). Since most of the animals were stall-fed half the year, a great deal of stall- and storage-room was also necessary. Often an early eighteenth-century peasant farm consisted of six or seven separate buildings, including dwelling-house, storehouse, stable, cow-byre and hay-barn. In Denmark and Skåne the buildings of a farm would, as a rule, be joined into three or four rows.

Early modern Scandinavian peasant farmers had many and varied pursuits. The long winters and short period of vegetation contributed to this by making the differences between peak and low seasons in agriculture more pronounced. Important field work such as haymaking and harvesting were severely time-limited and demanded massive inputs of labour, while, on the other hand, long periods of the year were more or less free from agricultural work and could be dedicated to other tasks. There was a distinct division of labour between the sexes. Men were in general associated with outdoor labour in the fields. In broad terms, on an ordinary mid-eighteenth century central-Swedish farm, men may have devoted about half their working time to agricultural work *per se*, such as ploughing, harrowing, haymaking, harvesting, threshing and fencing, although this proportion was probably higher in Skåne and in Denmark where the amount of arable land per farm was larger and the seasons for agricultural work longer. To a great extent the remaining time was used for various tasks related to self-subsisting household production. It has been estimated that 85–90 per cent of the value of the moveable property of a typical eighteenth-century Scanian peasant farmer was produced on the farm or in the village. Construction, forestry and transporting timber and firewood from the forest were important off-season tasks, and journeys for selling and buying goods also took a lot of time. Much time was spent on woodwork and other handicrafts. The seventeenth- and eighteenth-century Swedish or Norwegian peasant farmer and his farmhand would usually produce simple wagons or carts, sleighs and barrels for their own needs, tan hides etc. Simple smith work was often done on the farm. In some regions almost every eighteenth-century farm had its own small smithy; in other regions the peasant farmers would use the smithy of the village. Road maintenance was another recurrent type of work, becoming more important with time (Hanssen, 1977: 17–22; Gadd, 2000: 54–55).

Female work included indoor duties but also the tending of cattle, sheep and poultry, milking and the work connected with the various products such as brewing, slaughtering, salting, smoking meat and the production of textiles from wool and linen. In rural Norway and Sweden spinning and weaving were, as a rule, female household activities, while in Denmark weaving was also a rural craft pursued by men (Henningsen, 1944: 49, 56). In harvest time the women worked in the fields, especially raking and sheaf binding.

To cut the home-produced textiles, skins and leather and sew them into clothes, itinerant tailors and shoemakers were called upon. More demanding blacksmithing such as the production of edged tools and wheel rims was also performed by professional, often itinerant blacksmiths, or as a form of proto-industrial production (Gadd, 1991; Gadd, 2000: 251).

According to medieval codes of law regional differences existed in inheritance systems. The practice among the rural population is, however, not very well documented.

From about 1300 most Scandinavian laws granted the right to daughters to inherit, although only half as much as their brothers. This may in many cases have been an improvement of their lot (Øye, 2004: 88; Iuul, 1956). The rule that daughters inherited half a 'brother's share' remained in operation in rural areas in all three countries up to the nineteenth century. The sections on inheritance in the Danish and Norwegian law codes, issued in the 1680s, decreed that at the death of a spouse the net value of the estate of the couple was to be evaluated. Half the value belonged to the surviving spouse whereas the other half was inherited by the children or, if the couple were childless, by the closest relatives of the deceased.

In Sweden inheritance rules differed between moveable property and inherited land. The children, not the widowed spouse, inherited all land that the deceased parent had himself or herself inherited. This rule ensured that landed property would be continued within the line of descent (Winberg, 1981: 279).

Swedish law laid down the principle of equal inheritance among siblings of the same sex. In reality, however, customs existed that reduced the farm-dividing effect of the equal-inheritance principle. While division of farms was often economically feasible in the forest and transitional areas – where two farms could be created out of one through land-clearance and increasing the production of charcoal or other saleable items – it was less often feasible on the more highly cultivated plains. Subdivision going too far and leading to economically unviable farm-sizes was avoided primarily through allowing one heir to buy out his siblings, as a rule at a price lower than what would be demanded from a non-kin buyer (Gadd, 2000: 73).

In Denmark from the late middle ages onwards, the relatively small group of freeholders was prohibited by law from splitting up their holdings. One individual would inherit the land while co-inheritors would be given rent from the heir that succeeded to the farm (Ulsig, 2005). Similar laws had existed in Norway since the thirteenth century and became particularly important there in view of the large proportion of freehold land. The Norwegian system of paying rents to co-inheritors developed into a complicated 'rent-ownership system' (*skylddeie*) according to which a large proportion of peasant farmers rented land from other peasants. A Norwegian peasant farmer was often owner of one part and tenant of another part of the farm he tilled (Myking, 2005; Jutikkala, 1979: 17).

In Sweden and Norway the landowner's family and kinsmen had strong pre-emptive rights. If the farm was nevertheless sold outside the family, relatives had a redemption right even after several decades. This made buying land from non-family risky and acted as a restraint on the land market. Relatively severe limitations on redemption rights were enacted in Sweden in 1723 in order to facilitate land trade, while similar rules put in force in Norway in 1771 were less radical (Winberg, 1985: 51–53; Lunden, 2002: 298).

In Denmark and Sweden, the transfer from one tenant to the next required the consent of the landowner, or, on tenant farms owned by the Crown (Myking and Porskrog Rasmussen, 2010), of a state official. Such consent was not given automatically, but depended on the bailiff's opinion of the qualities of the prospective new tenant. If the old tenant had a suitable son or son-in-law, there was a good chance that he could take over the tenancy after having paid a fee at the start of his lease. Farm division

between heirs was rare among tenants. The owners of manors and the officials in charge of Crown land preferred a farm size large enough to ensure both the full maintenance of a household and its rent-paying capacity. As a rule, trade in tenancies between peasants did not take place in Denmark and Sweden, since the appointment of a tenant was reserved entirely for the landlord. In Norway, on the other hand, tenants could sell or transfer rights of tenure, and the rights of the landowner (often a peasant farmer himself) to select a tenant was thus much reduced (Myking, 2005).

Considerable economic demands were made on Danish tenants at inter-generational transfers. The landowner had the right to ensure that the farm remained in good condition and could demand from the estate of the deceased what was needed for that purpose. In this way, Danish landlords, who furthermore appointed the official who supervised the administration of the assets of the deceased individual, were in a position to lay hands on much peasant property (Frandsen, 1988: 194–195; Dombernowsky, 1988: 259–260). Similarly severe demands did not affect the tenants of the Swedish nobility, although a Swedish tenant was often required to pay for house repairs when leaving his tenure.

The medieval Scandinavian household was firmly patriarchal. The husband had the legal right to punish his wife corporeally as long as this did not result in open wounds. In the 1680s the Danish and Norwegian laws abolished the husband's right to punish his wife with 'stick or wand', and in the Swedish code of 1734 the husband's corporal-punishment rights over his wife were no longer mentioned. Such punishment could still be used for undutiful servants.

The early modern Scandinavian peasant farmer had full authority to act on behalf of his family, distribute the work among household members and punish those who did not obey his orders. Before and during marriage a woman had no formal right to take legal action, whereas a widow could do so through a male guardian. The Danish Law decreed that a suitor should ask the parents' permission – but also have the girl's 'yes and readiness'. In practice there is evidence of wives who had a considerable influence over family affairs, and also examples of young daughters going to court when fathers wanted to force them into a marriage they did not accept. In most cases the daughter won the case.

11.3 The family and income

As indicated above, the relative importance of arable farming, as part of the Scandinavian early modern peasant farmer's economy, differed between regions. In order to produce goods or money to pay taxes and rents, but also for buying iron, timber and other things not produced on the farm, the peasant farmers on the plains produced a surplus of grain. Those in the woodlands often had to buy part of their grain, but, on the other hand, had larger resources of meadow, pasture and forest. The result of these regional differences was a multifarious economy where the peasant farmers on the Danish islands and the Swedish plains founded their economy on grain production; those living on Jutland's heaths and grasslands or the Swedish transitory

regions between plain and woodland produced a surplus of animal produce and the woodland peasant farmer often sold both animal produce and handicraft articles, timber, tar, charcoal or other produce to which the forest contributed raw material in one way or another.

In Norway and Sweden only about 5 per cent of the population lived in towns around 1500. This proportion increased to about 7–8 per cent in Norway and 10 per cent in Sweden around 1700. Denmark was more urbanised with about 20 per cent town population in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. While the two capitals of Copenhagen and Stockholm had a population of 55–60,000 around 1700, the average number of inhabitants per provincial town was as small as about 1,000 in Sweden and Denmark and 1,800 in Norway. Many seventeenth and eighteenth-century Scandinavian towns had as few as 300–400 inhabitants, and differed from the very largest agricultural villages not so much in population size as by their urban functions defined in terms of town privileges, town tolls and the typically urban professions of their burghers. Nevertheless, small-town burghers often held a share in the intensively cultivated fields that surrounded most towns, and worked there in addition to their primary occupations (Gadd, 2000: 189; Johansen, 2002: 47; Helle, 2006: 147).

In Denmark, Sweden and to some extent Norway, laws were passed in the late middle ages that banned or restricted rural crafts and commerce and ordered non-urban pursuers of such trades to move into towns (Gadd, 1991: 230–253; Porsmose, 1988: 377; Helle, 2006: 128–129). These legislative efforts were resumed in the seventeenth century, especially in Sweden where they were accompanied by the founding of a large number of new towns. A strong contributory cause of this policy was that the taxation of trade and crafts was facilitated when such industries were confined to towns. However, southern and central parts of Sweden (Götaland and Svealand) had about the same number of towns as Denmark, but over an area four times as large, and in the Scandinavian peninsula taken as a whole the sparseness of towns was even more striking. The long distances between towns in Sweden and Norway made it difficult to bring about the division of activities between town and country that the central authorities were aiming at. In both Denmark and Sweden exceptions to the restriction to towns had been made for crafts viewed as vital to the rural population and especially in Sweden these exceptions went further in practice than what the laws stipulated. That crafts and commerce were carried on in the countryside was something the Swedish authorities had to accept, in some cases by giving special concessions, in other cases by simply turning a blind eye (Gadd, 1991).

What the peasants produced for their own use and maintenance often led to craft specialisations pursued during parts of the year. Sometimes the produce was intended for local markets, but, especially when pursued in the woodlands, often for distant markets (Gadd, 1991). In Norway, with forest resources favourably situated from an international-market point of view, forestry became an important winter activity as early as the sixteenth century, and in the coastal regions fishing was an important source of income from the middle ages on (Lunden, 2004: 155, 200–204). The expansion of Swedish and Norwegian settlement in the woodlands was highly dependent on trade exchange. The new fields brought under cultivation seldom sufficed for the needs of

the settlers, who had to produce commodities which they were able to exchange for food items, especially grain.

It has been observed that in Europe proto-industries often developed in areas that had comparatively poor conditions for agriculture and were situated close to regions producing an agricultural surplus (Pollard, 1986: 4–6). In the areas less well suited for agriculture it was more advantageous to increase handicraft production in order to obtain additional food through purchase or barter, rather than to increase agricultural production.

In certain Swedish forest areas the conditions just described obtained: infertile soils and proximity to agricultural-surplus areas. Even in the middle ages handicraft products were made in these woodlands which were destined for extra-regional markets. In the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries products from southern Västergötland, especially textiles, found their way into most regions of the Scandinavian peninsula. During the course of the centuries the proto-industrial areas grew in size and by the middle of the eighteenth century included most of the land between southern Västergötland and northern Skåne, including western and central Småland, as well as regions north of the Central-Swedish lowlands, i.e. southern Norrland and parts of Dalarna (Gadd, 2007: 104–105).

Within the proto-industrial regions there existed a sort of intra-regional specialization. In relatively small areas, often the size of a parish, the population would specialize in a certain type of handicraft such as smithery, basket-making or wheel-making. Important reasons for this spatial differentiation were the development and maintenance of specialized skills that were handed down between generations, and that the concentration of producers of the same type of goods to limited areas facilitated the operations of buyers. Trade in the finished products was likewise a regional specialization. Peasant farmers from certain parishes acted as intermediary buyers of the produce and transported it to the consumers. In other words, this was a *kauf-system*, but one in which townspeople had no major role (Gadd, 2007). Most of the proto-industrial production of the seventeenth and early eighteenth century was pursued by people who belonged socially to the *bonde* or ‘peasant-farmer’ stratum (Hanssen, 1977: 190–192).

The same possibilities for expansion in the outlands as in Norway and Sweden were not present in Denmark with its already high proportion of cultivated land and different natural conditions. There are scattered examples of rural proto-industrialisation in some Danish regions (especially in textiles and pottery), but this was of secondary importance. Agriculture remained the dominant occupation in all Danish rural areas.

Most of the produce of an early modern Scandinavian peasant farm was consumed within the peasant farmer’s household. The consumption of the peasant household was limited by the necessity to pay rents, taxes or tithes to landlords, the Crown and the Church. Peasant farmers in Skåne paid 30–35 per cent of gross grain produce as tax or rent in the 1660s, and about 25 per cent around 1750, while west-Swedish freeholders and Crown tenants paid some 20 per cent in the 1720s, and 14 per cent in the 1770s (Olsson, 2005: 173; Gadd, 2000: 196). The downward trend in taxes and rents of the eighteenth century (treated more fully below) allowed many peasant farmers

to accumulate a small surplus whereof a part was often invested in silver and copper objects. These metals had the double function of being ostensibly prestigious objects and at the same time an economic asset easily convertible to cash. Other objects displayed by successful peasants were fine textiles, especially feather beds. An average peasant farmer in a west-Swedish, comparatively rich area had, c.1750, invested the value of five hectolitres of rye (about one year's cereal consumption for an adult) in objects of silver and copper, and in feather beds (Porsmose, 1988: 398; Gadd, 2000: 64).

Even if self-sufficiency was dominant, and would continue to be so well into the nineteenth century, there had been a strong element of market exchange in the peasant economy since the middle ages. For west Sweden it has been shown that the commutation of rents in kind into cash had taken place in some instances in the late fifteenth century and this development had progressed further up to the early eighteenth century, when tenants of the nobility on west-Swedish estates paid all their rents in cash (Winberg, 1985: 156–158; Herlitz, 1974: 73–75). In the East-Swedish plains, where grain was more important as a rent item, and where the grain-importing mining area was situated nearby, the landlords continued to demand rents in kind in the seventeenth century in order to resell them personally. The picture of Denmark also varies regionally. Around 1700 grain was, to a large extent, demanded in kind by the landlords. Nevertheless, many items of rent had been commuted into cash equivalents, and this applied not least to the taxes due to the Danish Crown (Dombernowsky, 1988: 280–286).

By the seventeenth century the Danish peasant farmers were already involved in many lending and borrowing transactions. To hold some fifty promissory notes was not unusual for a substantial peasant farmer. A law was passed in Denmark in 1639 decreeing that all debts be entered into the books of the district courts. This also applied to debts lacking landed security, while in Sweden in the late seventeenth and early eighteenth century only mortgages in real property were recorded at the district courts (Frandsen, 1988: 163; Ågren, 1992). One of the reasons for the many credit relations was the relative scarcity of money. In many cases people became debtors, not because of insufficient economic resources, but for want of means of exchange.

The largest mortgages in agriculture were given to the estates and in Denmark were granted by merchants in the towns, other estate owners or wealthy people from other trades against security in property and with a privilege in relation to other creditors. The Bank of Sweden extended loans to ironworks and estate owners from the 1730s onwards (Heckscher, 1949: 503, 775).

The rudiments of a labour market were found on late medieval estates. Slaves were made free or semi-free and became dependent cultivators (often termed *gårdsæder* or *inquilini*). In the fourteenth century such cultivators often had minor farmsteads or cottages and performed labour services on demesnes or on big farms headed by wealthier freedmen called *bryder*. As a legacy from slavery these crofter-like cultivators worked the land of the demesne or big farms with implements and animals belonging to their master (Porsmose, 1988: 264, 311–312).

Another type of estate was composed of a comparatively small manor farm surrounded by tenant holdings run by relatively substantial tenants termed *landbor*

(or *eqvs.*). In the thirteenth century the *landbor* were as a rule personally free and had a purely economic relationship with their landlord (Porsmose, 1988: 261–262). Broadly speaking, there are two suggestions – probably complementary – about the origins of this category of tenants. On the one hand, slaves were freed and given land in exchange for rent; on the other hand, freeholders under pressure from royal taxation sold their land (or otherwise gave up ownership) to members of the aristocracy or to ecclesiastical institutions and remained on the farm as free tenants.

The smallholdings or cottages of the *gårdsæder* disappeared in the crisis of the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries when the *landbo* system, i.e. larger tenant farms became predominant. With regard to acreage, number of animals etc. such farms were similar to nearby freeholds. In other words, from the late fifteenth century on a structure appears consisting of peasant farms, some freehold, some tenant farms, but having in common that the peasant farmer owned the implements, the seed, the draught and other farm animals necessary for subsistence for him and his household. When doing his labour services the tenant brought his own implements and draught animals, a system that relieved the manor farms of investments. But this also implied that each farm whose tenant had to provide labour service had to be of sufficient size to maintain the animals and the labour force necessary to fulfil these obligations.

To this should be added that even though part of the agricultural work on the demesne was performed as labour service from tenant farms, each estate would also have a team of agricultural labourers living on or close to the manor farm. In the sixteenth century these were as a rule unmarried men, but, as indicated, a system using married cottagers or *husmand* developed on the big estates in Denmark from the sixteenth century on. Although the *husmand* stratum originally developed to meet the labour demands on the demesnes, in the first half of the seventeenth century they were already often employed periodically on peasant farms (Frandsen, 1988: 43–45). The number of unmarried hands was reduced on Danish manor farms in the seventeenth century while the requirement of labour services from tenant farmers and cottagers increased. While the cottagers often did 1–3 days work a week, peasant-farmer tenants would do 3–4, although varying both with the size of the farm and the time of the year, and they often employed a farmhand especially for that purpose (Ulsig, 2005: 29).

Families supporting themselves by wage labour only were rare in rural Scandinavia around 1500. Yet in Denmark we encounter by the middle of the seventeenth century some *husmand* or ‘cottagers’ of working age and with families who had no land to till for themselves (Gadd, 2000: 90; Lunden, 2002: 138–140; Frandsen, 1988: 43–45).

While the Danish *husmand* families thus included both those with some land to till on their own, and those with practically no land at all, Swedish *torpare* or ‘crofters’ as a rule had some land to till.⁴ On Swedish estates the number of *torpare* started

⁴ The use of the word ‘cottager’ does not tally between English-language texts about the three Scandinavian countries. In texts about Danish agricultural history the word ‘cottager’ usually refers to *husmand*, and thus includes both smallholding and entirely landless households. In texts on Sweden the word ‘cottager’ (or ‘cottar’) usually refers to *backstugusittare*,

to increase in the seventeenth century. Different from the tenants proper (i.e. those belonging to the peasant-farmer, *bonde*, category) the Danish ‘cottagers’ and Swedish ‘crofters’, as a rule, brought no draught animals or implements when doing their day-work. Also different from the tenant farmers, who did their labour services mainly in the agricultural peak seasons, the crofters worked a fixed number of days per week the year round. Since the requirements of labour in agriculture varied considerably during the year, the crofters of the nobility often worked outside agriculture during its low seasons, on such things as construction and repair work (Gadd, 2000: 86, 108). The *husmænd* and crofters often did paid day-work in addition to the labour services they provided in exchange for the holding of their crofts.

In contrast with Sweden and Denmark, the development of the *husman* or ‘crofter’ stratum in Norway began on peasant land around 1680. In order to evade the restrictions on farm division both landowning peasants and tenants leased some of their land to crofters, the latter becoming a sort of sub-tenant (Lunden, 2004: 164). In Sweden a similar trend on freehold was checked by laws that were passed in the 1680s. The Swedish Crown wanted to make this sort of smallholding more difficult to establish, in order to ensure the supply of people ready to enter service on the large estates and farms held by people of rank. This policy proved counter-productive, however, since it hampered family formation and thus the increase in population and labour power. As the shortage of wage labour became more marked during the eighteenth century, the croft-checking laws were abolished by the middle of the century (Rantanen, 1997; Gadd, 2000: 86–88).

On the other hand, a new group of part-time wage-labourers had been created in Sweden in the 1680s when conscription was replaced by permanent soldiers who, during the periods of peace, lived with their families in rural areas. The peasant farmers were organized into permanent groups which supported a soldier with elementary provisions and a croft with some land to till. Except for a few weeks per year devoted to military drill the soldier was free in peacetime to improve his position by performing wage work or crafts (Gadd, 2000: 47, 91; Lindström, 2008: 57).

For every 10 peasant farmers or *bönder* in Denmark, there were, by 1650, about five and by 1770 about 10 cottagers or *husmænd* (including both smallholding and totally landless households). In Norway there were, by 1770, 3–4 ‘crofters’ and in Sweden slightly fewer than 2 ‘crofters’ for every 10 peasant farmers (Frandsen, 1988: 44; Dombernowsky, 1988: 360; Lunden, 2004: 164 (interpolated); Gadd, 2000: 89, 223). In Sweden, however, the additional number of ‘allotted’ soldiers was about as great as the number of crofters proper. A small number (about 1 for every 10 peasant farmers) of totally landless ‘cottagers’ did exist in Sweden and Norway around 1750, but most of them were elderly poor people without a family able to support them.

and thus concerns only the entirely landless stratum, while the word ‘crofter’ usually used for translating *torpare* who, as a rule, had some land to till and thus correspond roughly to the ‘upper’, smallholding echelon of the Danish *husmænd*. Norwegian *husman* is often translated as ‘crofter’.

11.4 The family, the local community and the state

Rural people were also members of larger groups than the household, chiefly villages and hamlets. The Scandinavian village system originated in the period from the tenth to the early thirteenth century, when agglomerated settlements replaced older, less stationary farms with less intensive agricultural production. The village structure provided a more efficient way to use resources in a society where grain production was becoming more important. The cooperative fencing of open fields entailed much lower costs (Myrdal, 1999: 102).

In the large area covered by the Scandinavian countries the settlement structure varied widely. In early modern Denmark, including Skåne, most of the rural population lived in villages of different sizes. On the Scanian plains, most villages contained 10–20 farms, although some with 40–50 farms existed, and probably conditions in Denmark were similar. By 1750 the number of cottager households in Danish villages would be about equal to the number of peasant-farmer households, resulting in a population of about 150 people in a village of fifteen farms and fifteen cottages or *hus*. North of Skåne such comparatively large villages were mostly found in parts of the plains of Västergötland between the lakes Vänern and Vättern and to some extent along the Norrland coast. In the southern forest areas single farms and hamlets predominated and on the plains of east-central Sweden settlements were, as a rule, concentrated in hamlets, usually consisting of 2–8 farms. In Norway single farms predominated, although in some parts of the country many farms gradually developed into small hamlets through the division of farmsteads (Gadd, 2000: 27, 67–71; Lunden, 2004: 212).

The village or hamlet maintained internal law and order collectively. In Denmark and the plainsland regions of Sweden open-field systems, fully developed with regulated fallow, existed by about 1200 and, in the latter country, spread further into transitional areas between plain and forest in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. The open-field system made it necessary for the inhabitants of each village or hamlet to take collective decisions about the most important production issues. Cooperation between village peasants was referred to and partly regulated in the medieval, particularly Swedish laws. Each village had its own customs and set of rules. In Denmark bylaws were codified from around 1500, but mostly in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, and in Sweden north of Skåne seldom before the eighteenth century (Porsmose, 1988: 364; Gadd, 2000: 267–269). Decisions were taken at meetings at which all peasant farmers (*bönder*) in the village were present and had both the right and the obligation to vote, whereas crofters and cottagers had no formal influence on the decisions (Frandsen, 1988: 29; Gadd, 2000: 208).

If a villager refused to follow village customs and the decisions of the village meeting, he could be fined by the community. Through this, and by means of more informal social control, the village was an important framework for the daily life of its inhabitants. Many sections of the bylaws concerned the organization and maintenance of fences and other joint measures to protect standing crops from grazing animals, but the village community was also engaged in several other matters regulating daily life, e.g. inspection of fireplaces in order to avoid fires.

From the middle ages parishes also played an important role in regulating relations connected with production. Especially in parts of Sweden where single farms and hamlets predominated, the parish meeting was important for organizing cooperation among peasant farmers. Another important institution for the regulation of internal agrarian relations and conflicts was the medieval *thing* assembly of which there was as a rule one per *härads* or hundred. The *things* developed during the early modern era into district courts, summoned several times a year, becoming the most vital arena for interaction between the local communities and the state.

Poor relief seems in the pre-Christian and early Christian era to have been mainly a task for the relatives. After Christianization – around the year 1000 in Denmark, during the eleventh and twelfth centuries in Sweden and Norway – the more narrow definition of kinship (Vogt, 2005; Paludan, 1996) introduced by the Church made many people vulnerable. The Church assumed responsibility for those who lacked other support and some of the tithes were reserved for the poor. After the Reformation, the main responsibility for poor relief remained with the parishes. In the sixteenth century laws were enacted in Denmark stating that those who could not work due to illness or old age had the right to support themselves as itinerant beggars in their home parish, and similar rules existed in Sweden. Such poor were allowed to move from farm to farm for food and shelter, perhaps a week per farm. There were, however, bans on sheltering beggars from other parishes. In the Swedish Church Law of 1686 it was decreed that the parish vicar should see to it that beggars and those without housing should be provided for and that poorhouses should be erected in each parish. The implementation of the law was not without difficulties however, and by 1750 poorhouses had been built mainly in parishes dominated by noble landowners (Frandsen, 1988: 42–43; 132–135).

In the period 1000–1300 a society with basically feudal features developed in the three Scandinavian countries (Lindkvist and Ågren, 1985; Myrdal, 1999). An important feature of this process was the introduction in the thirteenth century of permanent taxes to the Crown from which the church, the nascent nobility and their tenant farms became exempt. Consequently, the freeholders became the main taxable subjects, and in Sweden freehold land became known as ‘taxed land’ (*skattejord*) and freeholders as ‘taxed peasants’ (*skattebönder*). Instead of paying taxes to the Crown, tenants on exempt land paid rent to their landlords. In this way, below the emerging class of lords, a class of peasants was formed.

The introduction of Christianity involved the creation of new communities, the parishes, and a new kind of tribute, e.g. tithes. The Church acquired land through gifts from parishes, magnates and kings and by purchase. In the three countries, the landed properties amassed by clerical institutions became relatively largest in Norway and smallest in Sweden.

In the late middle ages the Scandinavian Crowns’ taxation of the freeholders preserved archaic features. The peasants of large districts (often called *härader* or hundreds) were jointly responsible for parts of the tax while for the payment of other taxes the peasantry was divided into smaller groups of four or six farmers. This system of ‘collective’ payments was easy to administer and resulted in a comparatively strong position for the freeholders (Lindkvist and Ågren, 1985: 25, 35; Myrdal, 1999: 323–324;

Ulsig, 2005: 33). By 1300 freehold peasants were an important social group in all three Scandinavian countries. For its genesis and survival, this group was mutually dependent on the emerging Crowns who needed the freeholders for military reasons and later, especially in the Swedish case, as a tax base. Thus the predominance of freehold or 'taxed land' found in the late middle ages in parts of central Sweden seems to have developed symbiotically with the emerging institution of kingship (Lindkvist and Ågren, 1988: 131; for Denmark: Porsmose, 1988: 259–260; Ulsig, 2005: 32). Around 1250–1300 the number of freeholders varied as a proportion of the total peasantry in the three countries. In Denmark the proportion of freeholders has been estimated at c.25 per cent of the peasant farmers by about 1240. In Norway freehold made up about 33 per cent of taxable land value by 1300. For Sweden the earliest comprehensive data indicate that as much as 50 per cent of cadastral homesteads were freehold by 1520 (Porsmose, 1988: 259; Ulsig, 2005: 31; Øye, 2004: 84; Lindkvist and Ågren, 1985: 30). The further development of the freeholder stratum in and after the late middle ages was heterogeneous in the three countries. In both Denmark and Sweden laws were passed in the late middle ages against freehold land being sold or given to the nobility, but the Swedish central authorities, having relatively less Crown land under their domain, seem to have been more vigilant in seeing to it that these laws were respected (Ulsig 2005: 31; Herlitz, 1982: 265; Porsmose 1988: 260, 311, 343–344). The royal confiscation of church land during the Reformation in the early sixteenth century increased further the difference in proportions of the Crown domains between the two kingdoms since the Church disposed of relatively more land in Denmark and Norway than in Sweden. The extent of post-Reformation Crown land in Denmark-Norway (more than 50 per cent of all cultivated land) helped to maintain a type of State in which substantial amounts of the Crown's revenue derived from royal domains, while the large, nobility-owned estates that covered most of the rest of the land were taxed only lightly. The Danish Crown land was concentrated in a number of royal estates usually organized around demesnes in a manner similar to private estates, although the exaction of labour services by the Crown was lower than among private landlords.

In Sweden, with its larger proportion of freehold already around 1300, and its less favourable conditions for large-scale agriculture, a path similar to the Danish was not possible, either for the Crown (which held 23 per cent of cultivated land as Crown domain after the Reformation, or, proportionally, less than half of what the Danish-Norwegian Crown held) or the nobility. Instead, the Swedish aristocracy, not least the members of the council of the realm, became dependent on royal offices through which they could get their share of the agricultural surplus that was levied via the Crown's tax administration system. In other words, a 'Tax State' was introduced much earlier in Sweden than in Denmark-Norway (Poulsen, 1995; Emilsson, 2005: 124–213).

Around 1540 the 'collective' system of tax levy was discontinued in Sweden when each farm or homestead (Sw. *hemman*) was taxed individually, a system that emulated the rent collection of private estates. Simultaneously, the state tax system and administration was expanded and refined. The relation between freeholder and Crown became similar, economically if not legally, to that of tenant and lord (Myrdal, 1999: 323–324; Gadd, 2000: 43, 64–66). The taxation of the Swedish peasantry increased

rapidly, especially during the first half of the seventeenth century, when the peasants were consequently forced to pay part of the costs of Swedish territorial expansion. Private landowners demanded rent increases corresponding to those of the taxes on freeholds. Large alienations in the form of gifts and sales of land and rights to tax freeholds were granted by the Crown to the high nobility, between 1580–1650, but both land and taxes were brought back into the Crown's possession through the *reduktion* in 1680. In contrast to Denmark, the peasant farms on Crown land were as a rule not organized in estates, but the tenants paid rents in kind and money in a manner similar to the tax payments of the freeholders.

In Denmark a virtual State bankruptcy in 1660 put an end to the Danish 'Domain State'. This began a massive sale of Crown land which further increased the proportion of land belonging to privately-owned large estates, and in 1750 about three quarters of all land was owned by private landlords, while freehold land (still 6 per cent of the land in 1651) had practically disappeared (Jutikkala, 1979: 11). The Danish estate system, which now reached its culmination, had a long history of interaction between state and nobility.

When the population decline following the Black Death strengthened the position of Danish tenants versus the lords, efforts were made during the late middle ages to counteract legally the power of the peasants by tying them to the land. Such bonds were prescribed for Sjælland and adjacent islands in 1495 (*vornedskab*). From the early sixteenth century Danish tenants, as a rule, held their tenancies for life (Porsmose, 1988: 350, 352; Frandsen, 1988: 96). These life-time tenancies were introduced at the beginning of an era of heavier rent burdens on the Danish peasants, which may not have been entirely coincidental. In Skåne and Halland the 'Danish' system of life-time tenancies was continued after the Swedish seizure c.1660 while in the 'old' Swedish provinces tenancies usually ran for six-year periods (although as a rule prolonged after each period). In times of increasing rent burdens the tenants in previously Danish areas enjoying life-time tenancies seem to have been less inclined to 'argue with their feet' and quit since they had more to lose if they left the estate (Gadd, 2000: 105–106; Thoré, 2001: 59–60).

While the period 1500–1660 in Denmark was an era of increasing rent, including rent in the form of labour services, the following period, 1660–1720, was an era of increasing state taxation. By the end of the seventeenth century the burden of state taxes was about as heavy as that of private rents on the Danish tenants (Myking and Porskrog Rasmussen, 2010).

In Denmark, tenants became very dependent on the estate on which they lived. Not only did the landlord decide who was going to be a tenant and the conditions for the tenancy, he also had important legal powers. It was the duty of the Danish landlords to collect the Crown's taxes from their tenants for transfer to the state and after 1700 they were also responsible for the administration of the conscription of men for military service – in fact a means of bringing pressure to bear on the tenants, since conscription was dreaded (Dombernowsky, 1988: 259; Jutikkala, 1979: 22). Although the *vornedskab* was abolished in 1702 new restrictions on mobility were instituted in 1733 (the *stavsnbånd*) when men aged 14–36 were compelled by law to remain on the

estate where they were born. With this institutional framework the relations of the Danish tenants to the state were experienced mostly with the estate organizations as intermediaries.

Earlier, the high percentage of cultivated land and ecological difficulties have been mentioned as conducive to the slow increase in production and population in early modern Denmark. A third contributory cause was probably the predominance of large-scale estate ownership and tenancy. In Sweden, with her more mixed types of landholding, production increase was more rapid on freehold than on nobility-owned land in the eighteenth century, which is believed to have been caused by the insecure conditions of land possession among the nobility's tenants (Herlitz, 1974; Fridlitzius, 1979). Furthermore, the rent to large-scale landowners was, in practice, negotiable to some extent in the sense that arrears were often written off. This may have made the tenant less inclined to increase his production since he knew this might give the landlord occasion to demand the arrears to be paid first of all (Gadd, 2000: 77–78).

By the middle of the eighteenth century, the economic situation of the Danish peasant farmers showed clear signs of improvement, however, since after 1720 inflation gradually decreased the real value of taxes and cash rents. By 1750 the value of state taxes converted into grain was about 70–75 per cent of their value in 1720. The process of gradual reduction of the real tax burden would continue up to the early nineteenth century (Dombernowsky, 1988: 281; Kjærgaard, 1994: 177–178).

In Norway a period of sharp tax increases took place between 1620 and 1680 and taxation levels seem to have remained high in the eighteenth century. As in Denmark, after 1660 large areas of Norwegian land changed hands from Crown to private landlords. Evidently the position of absentee landlord was less profitable in Norway than in Denmark, and in the late seventeenth and early eighteenth century much of this land was resold to the previous tenants, and by 1750 about the same proportion of land was owned by peasant farmers in Norway as in Sweden (Lunden, 2004: 196–200).

The Swedish reversal of land alienations, the *reduktion* of the 1680s, paved the way for the 'allotment' system (*indelningsverk*) that was made the economic framework for the army and the civil administration in the late seventeenth century. Civil servants and military officers were each granted the rents, mainly stated in kind (although eventually more often paid in cash), from specified peasant farms and, as we have seen, ordinary soldiers were supported according to a similar system. The *indelningsverk* aimed at stability and made it necessary for the Swedish state to ensure the productive capacity of each peasant farm. Impoverishment of the peasantry through excessive taxation had to be avoided. The 'allotted' tax and rent receivers were strictly forbidden to increase the tax above the level laid down in the cadastre. In Sweden taxes and rents on land increased only slightly in the eighteenth century, in spite of increasing agricultural production. In other words, taxes decreased as a share of total agricultural produce, a process that gradually transferred a large proportion of the agrarian surplus product from officials and officers to peasant farmers (Herlitz, 1974). Contributing to the stagnation in tax pressure was the fact that the peasants were represented in the diet, where they offered vigorous resistance to tax increases. The stronger economic position of the Swedish freeholders and Crown's peasants was reciprocally dependent

on their legal and political advance, which would be more evident in the second half of the eighteenth century.

About a third of the Swedish peasant farmers were tenants of the nobility, but, on the whole, the Swedish noble estates lacked the legal, fiscal and military functions of their Danish counterparts. Disputes between landlord and tenants were settled by the district courts in the first instance.

11.5 Conclusions

Slavery survived much longer in the Scandinavian countries than in other parts of western Europe, but disappeared during the twelfth and thirteenth centuries. The labour shortage during the late medieval population crisis contributed to consolidating the position of the peasantry, and by 1500 a rural social structure was in place in which the peasant farmers (*bönder*) were personally free and in most cases held enough land, seed, implements and animals necessary for subsistence. The number of cottagers and other unlanded individuals was small. The Danish peasant farmers were mainly tenants on large estates, while freeholders paying taxes to the Crown held a large proportion of the land in Norway and, especially, Sweden.

Denmark was the most densely populated part of Scandinavia. Here, the already high proportion of arable land and the restrictive effects of the estate system held back land clearance and production increase, and the number of farms remained largely stagnant. On the other hand, after c.1550 there was a strong increase in the number of cottagers (*husmend*) who were about as many in number as the peasant farmers by 1750. In Sweden and Norway the better opportunities for land clearance in combination with mining, forestry and proto-industrial activities improved opportunities to support new families. In both countries the number of peasant farmers more than doubled between 1550 and 1750, while the 'crofters' and cottagers were still much fewer in number than the peasant farmers in 1750.

In all three countries the Northwestern European marriage pattern seems to have emerged in the late middle ages. Denmark was the most obvious example of this pattern, showing high marriage ages and a slow population increase, while in Norway and Sweden marriage ages were lower than in Denmark, and population growth much more rapid. Obviously, the better opportunities for forming new peasant-farmer households in Norway and Sweden were conducive to population increase, while the rise in the number of cottager households in Denmark combined to raise further marriage ages and to decrease the number of children per household.

In spite of the widely diverging social structures in the three countries in the early eighteenth century, some important similarities were found. Perhaps most importantly the pressure of taxation and rents on peasant farmers declined after c.1720 both in Denmark and Sweden. This would gradually improve the peasant farmers' capacity for improvement and investment in agriculture, important for the future agricultural development of Scandinavia.

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Crofter-soldier and his wife in Uppland, c.1900 (Upplandsmuseet, Uppsala)

12 Scandinavia, 1750–2000

Carl-Johan GADD and Hans Chr. JOHANSEN

In the middle of the eighteenth century Denmark and Norway still maintained the political union that had been created in the late middle ages. In 1814, Norway was ceded by Denmark to Sweden, the latter country having lost Finland to Russia a few years earlier. The Swedish-Norwegian union was relatively loose, each of the two countries having its own administration and domestic legislation, and was dissolved in 1905.

On the whole, mid-eighteenth-century Scandinavia was a sparsely populated area. Within their present-day borders Denmark and Norway had 0.7 million inhabitants each, Sweden 1.8. Denmark had 16 inhabitants per square kilometre, which put her on a level with the average for Europe, but this was significantly lower than the average for Britain and continental Western Europe. Sweden and Norway, covering much larger areas than Denmark, could count 4 and 2 inhabitants per square kilometres respectively. The very great regional differences within the two latter countries should be noted, however (see chapter 11).

By the middle of the eighteenth century agrarian regimes differed widely, both between and within the three countries. In Denmark the manorial system predominated, while in Sweden and Norway most of the land was held by peasant freeholders or Crown tenants who paid their taxes and dues in money or in kind. Despite the differences, important similarities in social structure existed between the countries. One was the legal, social and economic dividing-line that cut through the agrarian population, dividing it into the land-holding *bönder* on the one hand and the landless and semi-landless on the other. The Scandinavian word *bonde* (plural *bönder*) is often translated as 'peasant' and vice versa, but this tends to hide a conceptual difference between English and the Scandinavian languages. The English word 'peasant' covers a wider social spectrum than Scandinavian *bonde*. In Scandinavia there existed a clear economic, social and legal difference between the *bönder* and the semi-landless and landless groups, the most important of the latter being the *husmænd*, *husmenn* (cottagers and crofters) in Denmark and Norway, *torpare* (crofters) and *backstugusittare* (landless cottagers) in Sweden.¹ A *bonde* held, either as freeholder or as tenant, a fiscally defined and registered farm which was, as a rule, large enough for the support of the holder and his family. Even if many of the *husmænd* and almost all *torpare* did lease some land (which would in many cases make them pass for 'peasants' as this word is normally used in English), this land was seldom sufficient to live from. To support themselves and their families they had to work as day labourers in addition to the labour services many of them provided in exchange for the crofts or cottages they held. The legal differences between the *bönder* and the lower strata remained in force until the latter part of the nineteenth century. In this article the *bönder* will be designated

¹ On the lack of concordance between English texts in the use of words like 'cottager' and 'crofter' as translations for Scandinavian phenomena, see chapter 11, footnote 3.

MAP 12.1 Scandinavia, 1750-2000



as ‘peasant farmers’ and the *husmænd*, *torpare*, *backstugusittare* and other landless and semi-landless strata will be generalised as ‘the unlanded’ (Gadd, 2011).

About 70 per cent of Danish, 8 per cent of Swedish and less than 3 per cent of Norwegian territory has ever been arable (Pedersen, 1988: 14–15; Morell, Gadd and Myrdal, 2011: 290), and as a result of the differences in natural endowment the relative importance of agriculture differs widely among the three economies.² Denmark has been a net exporter of agricultural products for many centuries and earned 90 per cent of her export income from agriculture c.1900 (Dieckmann Rasmussen, 1988: 347). Norway, on the other hand, has remained a constant importer of corn, meeting 60 per cent of her grain consumption through imports in 1914 (Gjerdåker, 2002: 222). Sweden was an importer of grain from the seventeenth century onwards, and when her arable imports culminated in the 1780s, they made up 10 per cent of domestic human grain consumption. About 1840 Sweden began a half-century long era as a net exporter of agricultural products – before 1880 mainly oats – but again became a net importer of agricultural products c.1900 (Gadd, 2011: 144; *Historisk statistik*, Vol. 3: 196–217).

In the 200 years between 1750 and 1950 the three Scandinavian countries went from the raw-material producing periphery of Europe to being included in Europe’s economic core of industrialised countries. The gradually increasing exports of more processed products and services played a crucial part in this development. This also applied to Denmark, whose high-quality agrarian export was the result of an ‘industrialisation’ of agriculture (Senghaas, 1985: 83).

12.1 The family and demography

Whereas population growth in Denmark had been much slower than that of her two northern neighbours between c.1300–1750, Denmark experienced the most rapid population growth of the three countries in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, especially between 1850 and 1950 (table 12.1).

Sweden lagged behind after 1850, and the difference in growth rates was at its greatest in the first half of the twentieth century, when Sweden had an annual increase of 0.6 per cent, Norway had 0.9 and Denmark 1.2 per cent. The growth rate of Denmark and Norway during the entire period 1750–2000 was much above, and that of Sweden close to the European average.

By 1750, the West European marriage pattern had been established in Scandinavia for centuries. People married when a farm or perhaps a croft or a cottage was available, which led to relatively high ages at marriage. In all three countries there was an increase in the number of peasant-farmer households between 1750 and 1900, but the

² The percentages refer to historical maximums for recorded arable, which in Denmark and Sweden occurred in the period 1920–1940, in Norway before 1920.

Table 12.1: Population in Denmark, Norway and Sweden, 1750-2000 (millions)

	1750	1800	1850	1900	1950	2000
Denmark	0.71	0.90	1.35	2.32	4.28	5.33
Norway	0.64	0.88	1.41	2.22	3.25	4.48
Sweden	1.78	2.35	3.48	5.14	7.04	8.88
3 countries	3.13	4.13	6.24	9.68	14.57	18.69

Sources: Johansen, 2002; *Statistisk årbog* (Denmark), 2000: table 34; Statistics Norway website, Historical statistics: table 3.1; *Statistisk årbok* (Norway), 2000: table 49; Hofsten, 1986; *Statistisk årsbok* (Sweden), 2002: table 44.

Table 12.2: Birth and death rates per thousand in Denmark, Norway and Sweden, 1750-2000

	Denmark		Norway		Sweden	
	birth rate	death rate	birth rate	death rate	birth rate	death rate
1751–1800	32.7	29.8	31.5	24.6	33.6	27.4
1801–1850	30.9	22.3	30.4	20.8	32.2	23.9
1851–1900	31.3	19.2	31.1	17.1	30.0	18.5
1901–1950	22.6	11.8	21.4	11.9	19.4	12.5
1951–2000	14.2	10.4	15.3	9.8	13.2	10.4

Sources: Johansen, 2002; Statistics Denmark website, Statbank Denmark, Population, summaries of vital statistics 1901-2010; Statistics Norway website, Statistics by subject, 02 Population, vital statistics and migration, 0583; *Historisk statistik* I, 1969: 89; *Befolkningsutvecklingen under 250 år*, 1999: 58.

rise was greater in Norway³ (c.80 per cent) than in Denmark⁴ and Sweden⁵ (c.35 and 40 per cent respectively). After 1750, the number of unlanded households in Norway

³ We have estimated the number of Norwegian peasant farmers at c.70,000 by 1750, from the figures for 1723 and 1801 (Lunden, 2002: 128), while their numbers were c.124,000 in 1900 (Gjerdåker, 2002: 166).

⁴ Figures showing the exact number of peasant farms in Denmark by 1750 are not available. Since the number was 58,000 in 1688 (Frandsen, 1988: 193) and 55,000 in 1805 (Bjørn, 1988: 28), the number of peasant farms is estimated at 56–57,000 in 1750. By 1905 there were 77,000 peasant farms, *husmænd* not included (Dieckmann Rasmussen, 1988: 223).

⁵ For the number of peasant farmers and unlanded in Sweden, see Morell, Gadd and Myrdal, 2011: 287.

increased by c.400 per cent to a high point c.1855 and by 380 per cent in Sweden to a high point c.1870.⁶ In both countries the unlanded, before they began to decrease in number, were about as many in number as the peasant-farmer households. In Denmark the increase in the number of unlanded (*husmaend*) was slower but started from a higher proportion of the population (see chapter 11) and continued for a much longer time. In 1750 the Danish *husmaend* were almost as many in all as the peasant farmers (*bönder*); in 1860 the *husmaend* together with other landless categories were twice, in 1905 almost three times as numerous as the peasant farmers.⁷

Marriage age was important, since it influenced the number of children per marriage (see chapter 11). The average age at first marriage in Denmark, c.1750, was about 31 years for men and 29 years for women, while it was three years lower in Sweden, or 27 for men and 25 for women. In both countries average age at first marriage seems to have increased by one year up to c.1800, after which it decreased by almost as much in the years 1800–1825, then increased again. In Sweden, in the period 1860–80, it was 29 years for men, 27 for women, and a sample of rural parishes on the Danish island of Fyn sets the average age at marriage at 30 for men and 28 for women in 1878–82 (Johansen, 2002: 70, 112; 154; Lundh, 1995; Lundh, 1997; Palm, 2000: 57–58).

In all three countries, age-specific mortality rates were already comparatively low by 1750 which manifested itself in a relatively high life expectancy at birth: 35–36 years in Sweden and Denmark, and in Norway probably some years higher (Guteland, 1975: 46, Johansen, 2002: 60; Milward and Saul, 1973: 132–136). In Denmark a sustained decline in general mortality began in the 1770s, in Norway and Sweden around 1810. Particularly important was the drop in infant mortality that began in all three countries in the 1810s (Bengtsson, 1992: 20–22; Johansen, 2002: 104–106), which was early in comparison with the rest of Europe. The cause behind the rising survival rates among Scandinavian infants is not entirely clear. Several factors, probably operating simultaneously, have been put forward: smallpox inoculation and the appearance of less lethal strains of smallpox virus, better food supply resulting from the increase in the cultivation of potatoes c.1800, and the increase in real wages taking place after c.1805 (Johansen, 2002: 86–87; Johansen, 2007; Gadd 2000: 345–348; for real wages, Jörberg, 1972, II: 337).

Average adult mortality changed less than child and infant mortality before 1850. Life expectancy at birth (average for both sexes) for Swedes increased from 35.9 to 43.3 years between 1750 and 1850, a 20 per cent increase. The remaining life expectancy for a 15-year old had increased from 43.3 to 44.5 in the same period, or a ‘mere’ 2 per cent. These aggregate figures conceal interesting changes in age-specific mortalities, however. Mortality had decreased by c.13 per cent among men and c.18 per cent among women in the age-span 15–44 but by much less among those in the span 45–64, and

⁶ The number of *husmenn* in Norway is ‘guesstimated’ at roughly 22,000 in 1750, which is based on an interpolation between the figures for 1723 and 1801 (Lunden, 2002: 138); the number of *husmenn* and day labourers in 1855 was 116,000 (Skappel, 1922: 170).

⁷ For *husmaend* in Denmark c.1750, see the previous chapter; for peasant farmers and *husmaend* in 1860 and 1905, see Dickmann Rasmussen, 1988: 223–225.

had in fact increased by c.10 per cent among men and c.4 per cent for women for those aged 65 and over (Hofsten 1986: 35–36). Furthermore, the differences between social strata had increased. A study of Skåne shows that differences in mortality between peasant farmers and unlanded were relatively small in the period 1766–1815 but were much larger in the period 1815–1865. In the latter period the mortality among peasant farmers was no longer affected by crop failures and other types of short-time economic stress, while the landless and semi-landless often succumbed to diseases for which the outcome is dependent on nutrition (Bengtsson, 2004; Johansen, 2002: 152–153).

Between 1750 and 1850 mortality among peasant farmers below the age of 60 had decreased sufficiently to fundamentally influence family structures since the proportion of peasant-farmer marriages decreased in which one of the spouses died at an economically active age. Gross mortality rates continued to decline rapidly after 1850 and now affected all age-spans. The life expectancy for a new-born child in Sweden was 56 years in 1900 and 65 in 1930, and the two other Scandinavian countries were, on the whole, at the same level (Guteland, 1975: 46, 70, 102, 111; Johansen, 2002: 183).

While general birth rates in the three countries remained at a level slightly above 30 per thousand for the first seven decades of the nineteenth century, they began to decline in Sweden around 1870, and in Norway and Denmark two decades later, or c.1890. The immediate cause for the decrease was a drop in marital fertility (Bengtsson, 1992: 22–26). In all three countries, annual population increase was around 1 per cent during the period 1820–1880, but while it dropped thereafter in Sweden, it remained almost unchanged in Denmark and Norway during the four decades 1880–1920. In these two countries the excess of births over deaths remained larger than in Sweden during the entire twentieth century.

Probably the most important explanation for the relatively early fall in birth rates in Sweden was her earlier industrialisation in comparison with her two western neighbours, Swedish industry often being pursued in rural areas and small population centres (on Swedish industrialisation, see Schön, 2000: 138). In contrast with the agricultural population, among which children could often make a productive contribution from their early years, for industrial workers children involved lower incomes and increased costs of living. Working-class women were often employed outside their homes, and the conflict between earnings and childbearing is shown by a negative correlation between women's wages and birth rates, women often postponing childbearing during periods of high wages (Guteland, 1975: 117; Bengtsson and Ohlsson, 1993: 129; Sogner, 1984: 86).

By 1750, 20 per cent of the Danish and 8–10 per cent of the Norwegian and Swedish populations lived in towns (chartered towns and capitals). By 1850 the Danish urban population had increased to 22 and the Norwegian to 13 per cent while the Swedish remained at 10 per cent of total population. Thereafter the urbanisation process was quicker, especially in Sweden. In 1970, 52 and 55 per cent of the population in Sweden and Denmark and 42 per cent of the population in Norway lived in towns proper (Johansen, 2005). However, the rate of urbanisation increased faster than did the population of chartered towns. Unchartered population centres started to grow rapidly after the middle of the nineteenth century. By 1970, chartered towns, capitals and other population centres together comprised c.80 per cent of the Danish and Swedish,

and 66 per cent of the Norwegian populations. By 2000 these figures had increased to 83–85 per cent for Sweden and Denmark and 76 per cent for Norway. It should be noted, however, that the criterion for an area to be classified as a population centre is very low in Scandinavia, or a minimum of 200 people (Johansen, 2005; *Småorter och tätorter*, 2005: 4; Elberling and Sundbärg, 1906; *Statistisk årbog* (Denmark), 2000: table 35; Statistics Norway website, 02 Population, Statbank: table 05805).

As we have seen, the rural population – population outside towns and other densely populated areas – was still almost 80 per cent in Denmark and around 90 per cent in Norway and Sweden by 1850. Not all members of the rural populations belonged to the agricultural population, however. The difference between rural and agricultural populations was greatest in Denmark, whose statistics indicate a decrease in the proportion of the agricultural population from 58 to 52 per cent between 1835 and 1870 (*Statistisk årbog*, 2000: table 131). For Norway and Sweden, official nineteenth-century occupation statistics are somewhat difficult to interpret. In Norway, according to censuses the proportion of the agricultural population fell from 80 per cent in 1801 to c.70 per cent by 1855 and 60 per cent by 1865 (Dyrvik, 1979: 133, *Folketellingen i Norge*, 1866: 113). The drastic decrease of 10 percentage points in the 10 years between 1855 and 1865 gives rise to the suspicion that rules of classification may have been changed.⁸ According to other observations, by the middle of the nineteenth century about 80 per cent of the Norwegian population earned parts or all of their income from agriculture (Gjerdåker, 2004: 241).

Swedish statistics show small decreases in the proportion of the population classified as ‘agricultural’ until after 1870, in which year it comprised 72 per cent of the total (*Historisk statistik I*, 1969: 82). This may seem to contradict what was said above about an earlier process of industrialisation in Sweden than in her two neighbours, but it is known that Swedish population statistics were organised in a way that tended to overstate the agricultural character of the population (see section 12.3).

After c.1870 the relative decrease of the agricultural populations accelerated in all three countries. Between 1870 and 1930 the Danish and Norwegian agricultural populations decreased by almost two fifths, to 32 and 37 per cent respectively (*Folketellingen i Norge*, 1930: 2), while the Swedish decreased by no fewer than 33 percentage points to 39 per cent. As a result of the strong overall population growth in Denmark the agricultural population, while declining relatively, rose by some 20 per cent in absolute size, or from 0.93 to 1.13 million between 1870 and 1930. Thereafter began a decrease in absolute numbers, but in 1950 the Danish agricultural population was still 10 per cent larger than it had been in 1870 (*Statistisk årbog*, 2000: 142). In Sweden the period between 1870 and 1930 involved not only a relative, but also a 20 per cent absolute decrease in the agricultural population, from 3.0 to 2.4 million. In Norway the absolute number of agriculturally employed remained almost unchanged in the same period (*Historisk statistik I*, 1967: table 23; Statistics Norway website).

⁸ The fact is, that the compilers of the Norwegian census of 1866 complained about the serious classification problems that were caused by many rural Norwegians having several, more or less equally important sources of income (*Folketellingen i Norge*, 1866: VII, 113)

By 1950, agriculture comprised 24–25 per cent of the total population in Denmark and Sweden (after a continued rapid decline in Sweden 1930–50), and 21 per cent of the economically active in Norway. In 2000 only 4 per cent of those economically active in Denmark and about 2 per cent of those in Norway and Sweden were still employed in agriculture.

Norway and Sweden were among the four countries in Europe that had the largest emigration per capita between 1821 and 1930 (the other two were Ireland and the UK). Scandinavian emigration started comparatively late. It became widespread in the 1860s, culminated in the 1880s and petered out in the inter-war period. In Norway, second only to Ireland in emigration ratio, emigration absorbed more than half of the natural increase in population during some decades in the late nineteenth century. While earlier research has often conceived of emigration as an escape from mass poverty, recent research has called attention to the fact that the period of mass emigration, c.1865–1914, was a period of long-term rise in the standard of living. Relatively few of the Swedish emigrants belonged to the most proletarianised groups. Most of them were the sons and daughters of small- and medium-scale peasant farmers or of crofters. Emigration was unevenly distributed geographically. In Sweden regions with high population growth before 1860 and a low degree of urbanisation took the lead (Carlsson, 1976; Gjerdåker, 2002: 160–163; Morell, 2001: 76–79). In many respects, emigration appears to have been an alternative to moving to town and the incapacity of towns to absorb the population surplus from agriculture in poorly urbanised Norway and Sweden seems to be an important contributory cause behind emigration.

In eighteenth-century rural society the greater part of production, consumption and social welfare was organised within the household. The nuclear family was the core of the household, but the latter often included members of an older generation, servants and sometimes lodgers. Single-person households were rare. Household size varied between social classes or strata. The largest households were found among people of rank (Sw. *ståndspersoner*), i.e. estate owners, members of the clergy, military and civil officials, etc. In the country district (*härad*) of Åsunda, consisting of four parishes about 80 kilometres north-east of Stockholm, the households of people of rank in 1790 had 9.5, and in 1890 7.8 members. Among peasant farmers the households were larger than among the unlanded, mainly due to the presence in farmer households of live-in servants and to the larger number of children above the age of 15. By 1790, in Åsunda, where the peasant farmers were mainly tenants of the nobility, their households had an average of 5.1, and unlanded households of 3.3 members. In the west-Swedish rural district (*pastorat*) of Dala (three parishes) where freeholders and tenants of the Crown predominated, average household size among peasant farmers in 1780 was 5.4, and among unlanded 2.9 (for crofters only 3.9). Arable acreage per farm was larger in Denmark and the Scanian plains than in Sweden north of Skåne, which was reflected in the larger size of peasant-farmer households. According to a sample of Danish parishes, average household size in the 1780s was 6.9 among peasant farmers and 3.9 among the unlanded (*husmænd*), and in four Scanian parishes, 1829–1867, peasant-farmer households had 8.9 members. The immediate explanation for the larger households among Danish and Scanian compared with other Swedish peasant farmers

is the higher number of live-in servants, which was 1.7 in the Danish sample, 3.1 in the Scanian, and 0.7–0.9 in Åsunda and Dala. Furthermore, in Dala, among whose freeholders and Crown tenants there are clear indications of family planning, the number of children under 15 was 1.5 while it was around 2 in the Danish parishes and Åsunda. Within each of the main social strata household size seems to have changed little over time between the late eighteenth and the late nineteenth centuries. In west-Swedish Dala, east-Swedish Åsunda and the Danish samples household sizes among peasant farmers and unlanded remained virtually unchanged between 1780 and the middle or latter part of the nineteenth century, although the number of live-in servants had increased further in the Danish sample (Winberg, 1975: 300; Eriksson and Rogers, 1978: 149, 151, 157; Lundh, 1995; Johanssen, 2000: 83, 128; Dribe and Lundh, 2002).

In west-Swedish Dala, in the period 1776–1805, 3.0 children per married woman reached the age of five among peasant farmers but only 2.3 children among the unlanded, who were mostly crofters. This was not due to higher infant and child mortality among crofters (in fact they were at the same level as among peasant farmers) but to higher marriage age among unlanded women. In the period 1806–1830 3.4 peasant-farmer children and 3.0 unlanded children reached the age of five. In the first period 1776–1805, the natural population increase among the unlanded was not sufficient to maintain levels, considering the subsequent mortality before reaching adulthood, and the growth of the landless and semi-landless stratum was caused partly by downward social mobility among the children of peasant farmers (see section 12.3, below). In the period 1806–1830, the birth and survival rates among the unlanded allowed not only for reproduction of the stratum but a slow increase, and the growth of the unlanded classes was amplified by an increasing downward social mobility among peasant farmers' children (Winberg, 1975: 215, 244–246; Dribe and Lundh, 2002). In Denmark before 1770 little more than two children per marriage survived to adulthood. In the period 1790–1829, 2.8 children per marriage survived which, combined with the legal and economic restraints on farm division led to downward social mobility from the peasant-farmer stratum (Johansen, 2007: 26, 43).

In Sweden, the number of individuals in the age group 15–19 increased by 50 per cent in the 15-year period 1825–1840. True, there was a long-term increase in the demand for waged labour in agriculture (in Sweden up to c.1870, in Denmark up to c.1930), but the labour demand did not match the huge increase in manpower supply. It became more difficult for young people to establish themselves and form a family. In Denmark nuptiality (marriages per 1000 inhabitants) was on average lower in the period 1800–1840 than it had been in 1775–1800. In Sweden, where the mortality decline came later than in Denmark, nuptiality started to decline by 1830, or about three decades after Denmark (Winberg, 1975: 30, 269; Hofsten, 1986: 61, 164–168; Johansen, 2002: 111, 115; Johansen, 2007).

Peasant-farmer families often consisted of three generations in the early phase of the family life cycle: the farmer and his wife, their children and one of the husband's or wife's parents. The decline in adult mortality among peasant farmers entailed that older people could be found more frequently as household members, and that an increasing proportion of peasant-farmer couples chose to retire while both spouses were still alive.

At least since the seventeenth century there had been cases of retired farmer couples establishing a household of their own in a small house at the farm and were paid a rent or maintenance in cash or kind by the new owner of the farm, and this practice became more pronounced in the nineteenth century following the decrease in adult mortality. Crofter households contained retired parents to a smaller degree than peasant-farmer households, and the entirely landless families almost never (Skrubbeltrang, 1978: 45; Lundh, 1995; Lundh and Olsson, 2002).

Peasant-farmer households often included unmarried live-in servants, especially in the early phase of the family life cycle (see chapter 11). In the eighteenth and early nineteenth century live-in servants were recruited from all rural social groups below the people of rank, and the majority of servants of peasant-farmer origin retained their peasant-farmer status after marriage (Gadd, 2000: 79–80). After c.1850 it became less common for a peasant farmer's children to take a position as live-in servant. An increasing proportion of servants originated from unlanded (crofter, cottager or *statare*) homes and consequently had a social background different from their masters. Especially in southern Scandinavia the social differences between the peasant-farmer family and their servants became more pronounced in everyday life. In Denmark and Skåne it became less common to let the servants sleep in the farmhouse. Instead, their sleeping-places were set up in special rooms in e.g. the stable building, and they would no longer eat in the same room as their masters. In Sweden north of the Scanian plains, on the other hand, the integration of the live-in servants into their masters' households survived into the early twentieth century (Dieckmann Rasmussen, 1988: 407; Morell, 2001: 45).

In the twentieth century, the mechanisation of agricultural production further reduced the importance of the servant system in the countryside. Concomitantly with the near-completion of the first wave of mechanisation (manifested e.g. by threshing-machines and reaping-machines) around 1920, the composition of peasant-farmer households changed profoundly. The proportion of wage labour in the agricultural workforce declined, while mechanisation compensated for the decrease in man-hours per acre. By 1870, half of all Swedish male waged agricultural labourers were live-in farmhands, in the period 1910–30 only about one sixth. The labour force of the farmers' own families thus increased in relative importance. After 1920, even relatively large farms were operated without permanently employed servants. Consequently, farmers' household sizes decreased. While in the late nineteenth century Swedish farmer households had, on average, 5–5.5 members (see above), in the 1940s the average household size among peasant farmers had decreased to c.4.5, the main cause of the decline being fewer live-in servants (Morell, 2001: 45, 48, 77). In Denmark the decrease in the number of farmhands was slower. As late as in 1940 farm labourers without their own households amounted to two thirds the number of independent farmers (including the smallholding *husmænd*), and a large-scale decrease in the number of unmarried farm labourers took place after 1950. Around 1990, 85 per cent of Danish farms had no permanently employed wage-earners. In Sweden in the 1990s, only 10 per cent of all farm work was performed by hired labourers (Pedersen, 1988: 19–20; Flygare and Isacson, 2003: 29).

The typical life course for a male individual in early nineteenth-century rural Scandinavia would be approximately as in the following sequence, based on a study of Skåne, southern Sweden: residence in the parental household until after confirmation at the age of 15 or 16, then, as a teenager, leaving for work as a live-in servant in another household and employed by the year, quite frequently moving between different masters (male servants moved on average eight times during the phase in life when to be in service was most common i.e. 15–30 years), marrying at the age of 25–30, thereby quitting service and establishing a household as a farmer, crofter or labourer until retirement or death. The female life course was similar. There were socio-economic differences, however. Children from unlanded households moved out of their parental homes earlier than children of peasant-farmer origin, and peasant farmers could bargain with an adult child for a retirement contract in exchange for the farm. The ideal life cycle of peasant farmers included retirement at the age of 55–60 (Dribe and Lundh, 2005c).

Many of those who left agriculture after about 1870 were crofters and other unlanded. In Sweden and Norway the crofter (Sw. *torpare*, No. *husman*) stratum was all but wiped out before 1945 (Morell, 2001: 31, 77–79; Gjerdåker, 2002: 166–169). However, part of the decline in the number of Norwegian and Swedish crofters was counterbalanced by the increase of the number of peasant-farmer freeholders with farms too small to live from. This was a result partly of the redemption of crofts, partly, as we will see, of the subdivision of farms. In Denmark, where the rural population reached its maximum size as late as c.1930, the number of *husmænd* seems to have continued its increase up to then. The Danish *husmand* of the early twentieth century was not entirely comparable to his predecessors some generations before, however. From the late nineteenth century it became more common that *husmænd* bought their smallholdings, partly with the assistance of government loans given from the 1890s on, and on relatively favourable conditions, and most *husmænd* in the 1930s were petty landowners. Also in Sweden and Norway loans were given in the early twentieth century by the government or by local societies to smallholders in order to make it possible for them to buy their holdings or create new ones. In Sweden and Norway the number of smallholdings started to decline rapidly after the second world war, while in Denmark a considerable decline in the number of *hus* (cottages) did not begin until after 1960 (Dieckmann Rasmussen, 1988: 226; Pedersen, 1988: 16–17, 256; Morell, 2001: 131–133; Almås, 2002: 76–78).

12.2 The family and its members

In pre-industrial rural society, tasks on a farm were divided according to gender, age, employment duration and skill. Typically, the husband and wife were the oldest and had the greatest skills in their respective spheres. The head of the household managed the farm, instructed the farmhands and carried out the most qualified tasks. On larger peasant farms in nineteenth-century Skåne and Denmark, however, the head of the household often did not take part in the physical work (Dribe and Lundh, 2005c). The farmer's wife would assume corresponding positions when it came to domestic duties.

The husband was the head of the household and represented it in dealings with other households and societal institutions and organisations.

The traditional men's and women's tasks have been mentioned in the previous chapter. As a general rule, the women did less outdoor work than the men. Smallholders' wives and young, unmarried women often had to do outdoor tasks, however, while the wives of farmers would do relatively more work indoors, tending the household. The larger the farm and the older the farmer's wife, the more she would focus on indoor chores (Morell, 2001: 58). When dairying became increasingly important after 1850, milking became an important waged work for unlanded women.

From the late nineteenth century on, women tended to leave agriculture to a higher extent than men, and this tendency continued in the twentieth century. The commercialisation and mechanisation of agriculture seem to have left women with less interesting and more pronouncedly subsidiary tasks, which speeded up their exodus. To take a job in town seemed more attractive (Morell, 2001: 313–319; Flygare and Isacson, 2003: 137). In the late nineteenth century, life as a small farmer's or crofter's wife seems to have become particularly unattractive. According to a study of a parish in east-central Sweden it was, in the period 1880–1930, more difficult to find a wife for those young men who inherited and took over a small farm, than it was for those farmer's sons who were bought off from the farm. To own a small farm had become a drawback in the marriage market (Holmlund, 2007: 171–172). Since 1950 the importance of women's labour in agriculture has declined further. Furthermore, domestic work has become less burdensome, a result of smaller households and fewer people to supply with board. Different kinds of household appliances have also contributed. In 1960, more than 90 per cent of Swedish rural households had electricity, 70 per cent had running water and 50 per cent had central heating (Hagberg, 1986). Today, most farmer's wives have a salaried job outside the home and farming has become a solitary, distinctly male occupation (Flygare and Isacson, 2003: 150–155, 307).

The basic principle of inheritance in Scandinavia was equal inheritance for siblings of the same sex; before the middle of the nineteenth century daughters inherited half as much as brothers. Not all inheritors to a freehold were permitted to inherit land, however. In all three countries the division of farms was more or less restricted by law; in Denmark laws of 1810 and 1820 forbade the carving out of more land from an existing farm than would allow it to remain above a legally defined minimum size. Nevertheless, in many cases it was legally possible to parcel out small amounts of land, and in early nineteenth-century Denmark selling small areas of farmland intended for the erection of a *hus* (cottage) became one of the ways of financing the redemption of previous tenant farms (Bjørn, 1988: 29–32; Johansen, 2007). In Norway there existed a legal right of the oldest male heir to take over the farm undivided, but this was often disregarded in the nineteenth century, and many Norwegian farms were divided, which created a larger number of small-scale peasant farms (Gjerdåker, 2002: 98, 116–117). In Sweden it was primarily the need to keep farms at an economically viable size that put a check on farm division. Up to 1881 law entitled one of the heirs to buy out the other heirs if the farm was judged too small to be divided. On small and medium-size farms as a rule only one of the children succeeded to the farm, while the others were bought off,

compensated with money or moveable property (Dribe and Lundh, 2005d; Winberg, 1981; Holmlund, 2007). The outcome, up to 1870, was similar to that in Denmark, *viz.* a relatively slow increase in the number of farms and a swelling stratum of unlanded (Winberg, 1975: 269; Gadd, 2000: 72–73).

Even if those co-inheritors who were bought out often had to accept redemption sums that were below the levels that were normal when selling to non-kin, the sums received were far from insignificant, which is indicated in the fortunes of the siblings that were bought out. By the middle of the nineteenth century, the children of Swedish freeholders less often experienced social downward mobility than the children of the nobility's tenants, the latter often ending up among the *statare* farm labourers and other entirely landless (Winberg, 1975: 259; Dribe and Svensson, 2008: 203).

The transmission of land between generations could be carried out either after the demise of the parents or while one or both of them were still alive. If the distribution between the heirs was settled after the death of the parents, the latter had little chance of influencing the choice of who was to take over the farm and who was going to be bought out. In Sweden during the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries it became more common among landed parents to designate a successor through retirement contracts. While both parents were still alive, or after the death of one of them, the family farm was handed over to one child in exchange for lifelong board and lodging. Before the middle of the nineteenth century transfers by retirement contracts had the form of gifts. Legally this was seen as inheritance in advance, which made it necessary to compensate other siblings. In the late nineteenth century it became more common to sidestep inheritance legislation through selling the farm to one of the children, although siblings were normally compensated (Dribe and Lund, 2005b; Holmlund, 2007: 129–144), and this remained the rule in the twentieth century.

From the eighteenth to the late twentieth century, studies indicate a strong tendency to favour sons, especially the oldest sons, at intergenerational land transmissions. It was, and is, most often the oldest son who is designated to buy out the other siblings, or is allowed to buy the farm from the parents. This order of things was not changed by the inauguration of equal inheritance between sons and daughters in the mid-nineteenth century, although after c.1900 it became more common that younger sons took over on the smaller farms. When agriculture became less important as a source of livelihood, many small-scale farmers' older sons chose other careers instead of waiting to come into possession of the parental farm. If the parents, for lack of sons, let a daughter take over, the condition is, as a rule, the presence of a farmer son-in-law (Holmlund, 2007: 88–89; Flygare and Isacson, 2003: 53).

The measures described above to avoid the division of farms were common among small- and medium-scale freeholders, but circumstances were different on the largest freeholds. In Sweden before c.1860, the latter category of holdings – often having been enlarged during the lifetime of the bequeather and actually often consisting of several smaller farms – was as a rule divided when passed over to the next generation, since peasant freeholders, as a rule, preferred to give a farm to as many children as possible, provided the new units were big enough to be economically viable. To give land to many, or all of the heirs – and thus have numerous offspring in or near the home

parish – was considered more prestigious than to hand over a large, undivided farm to a single heir. In other words, a rigorous observance of the partible-inheritance principle was an ideal that was followed when the size of the holding was sufficient (Winberg, 1981; Holmlund 2007; Lindström, 2008), a pattern of behaviour that prevented the emergence of a permanent stratum of large-scale peasant farmers. In the latter half of the nineteenth century inheritance customs among large-scale peasant farmers changed. In Sweden, after c.1860 large peasant farms were more often kept intact. According to the new pattern only one of the children took over the farm while the others, especially if they were males, were given an education or other assistance to start a life outside of agriculture (Holmlund, 2007: 112; Gadd, 2000: 206). On the other hand, after c.1870 the increased opportunities for rural people to combine an industrial job with side-line agriculture led the splitting-up of many medium-sized farms resulting in an increase in the number of small-scale freeholds, the legal restraints on the splitting-up of farms having been abolished in 1881 (Morell, 2001: 36–37; Holmlund, 2007).

According to Scandinavian law, no one could be forced into a marriage. However, there were institutions that put children under the influence of their parents. Unmarried women were legal minors and were placed under a guardian, normally the father, who acted on their daughters' behalf in marriage negotiations. In contemporary sources, mainly dealing with peasant-farmer customs, parental influence on children's marriages is emphasised (Lundh, 2003). Eighteenth- and nineteenth-century Scandinavian society was homogeneous as far as religion and ethnicity were concerned, but socially divided. One indication of parental power over marriage decisions would be a preference for marriage between social equals. Regarding choice of marriage partners there were pronounced differences between social groups. Men and women belonging to the peasant-farmer stratum were most inclined, crofters and *husmend* were least inclined, to marry a social equal. This pattern remained fairly constant during most of the nineteenth century despite considerable economic and social change. Marriage strategies seem to have been practised among peasant farmers in order to maintain and extend land holdings. A successful union between equals would pool the resources of two families and maintain the farm, thereby securing the circumstances in old age of the farmer couple and social continuity (Dribe and Lundh, 2005a; Dieckmann Rasmussen, 1988: 397; Winberg, 1975: 260–261). From the last decades of the nineteenth century on, inheritance of land became less important for marriage, land in general having become less important as a source of income. Smallholding peasant farmers now had little opportunity of being particular in their choice of marriage partner, and for peasant-farmer daughters in Estuna north of Stockholm land ownership was of little importance for marriageability during the period 1880–1930 (Holmlund, 2007: 189).

12.3 The family and income

In the middle of the eighteenth century the basic economic unit in Scandinavian agrarian society was the peasant family farm, which was characterised by the overlapping of three functional units: the production unit (the farm), the consumption

unit (the household) and the kinship unit (the family) (Djurfeldt, 1994: 24–26). The household often contained live-in servants who did not belong to the nuclear family but were treated as family members. Also, the workforce of the peasant-farmer household was enlarged more or less regularly by daywork performed by the inhabitants of cottages and crofts whose holdings were not large enough to absorb more than a fraction of the work capacity of the families living on them.

In the middle of the eighteenth century the manorial system was dominant in Denmark and on the third of Swedish land that was owned by the nobility. The land of the manor was divided into a demesne and peasant farms, whose number in Denmark and Skåne was often between 20 and 100, in other parts of Sweden between 5 and 50 (Gadd, 2000: 103; Morell and Olsson, 2010: 324). The demesne was a production unit whose labour consisted of labour service provided by peasant farmers and crofters living on the manor. In Denmark, and in Skåne (Danish before 1658) a relatively large proportion of rent from the tenants of the nobility was demanded in the form of labour services, while in the provinces that had always been Swedish the small average size of the demesnes (and the fact that many Swedish nobility-owned tenant farms were not even part of a manor that included a demesne) meant that most of the rents from nobility-owned tenant farms were demanded in cash or in kind.

Up to the middle of the eighteenth century the development of Danish agriculture had been relatively slow, which was reflected in the tardy growth of the Danish population (see chapter 11). In eighteenth-century Skåne, the population growth was slower in manorial regions than in areas where freehold predominated (Fridlitzius, 1979). Evidently, property relations on Scandinavian nobility-owned land did not easily generate investment: the individual who gained from an investment or improvement (the landlord) was not the one who bore the cost of it (the peasant). After the middle of the eighteenth century an era began of agricultural reform (see section 12.4 below) which was especially important in Denmark and which after a few generations made Scandinavia a fairly homogenous region where medium-scale freehold farms were the predominant form of landed property. The property structure that was created proved economically ‘efficient’ (North, 1990) in the respect that the individual who invested was, as a rule, the one who took the major part of the return on the investment.

After c.1830 international demand for grain increased, especially after England had set grain imports free in 1847. In Denmark, whose farmers reacted swiftly to the change, the period 1830–1875 is called the ‘Grain Sales period’ (*kornsalgsperioden*). In Sweden domestic grain was gradually substituted for imported during the period 1790–1820, and growing exports in the period 1840–1875 further contributed to growing farmer incomes. In both Denmark and Sweden animal production increased relatively after 1850, and this process gained further momentum after the fall in European grain prices in the 1870s. Denmark soon became a large-scale exporter of animal products and remained an agricultural net exporter, while Sweden’s animal exports were surpassed in value by her grain imports after c.1900. Norway remained a grain importer throughout the nineteenth century while the rising domestic demand for animal products after c.1850 was met by domestic production (Gjerdåker, 2004: 263). The Scandinavian farmer gradually became more dependent on the market, which was not only a matter

of finding outlets. To an increasing extent the operation of a farm involved the purchase of means of production and other input goods such as implements and machines; fodder and fertilisers. In 1860 purchases of input goods amounted to, at most, 10–15 per cent of the production value in Danish agriculture, while in 1914 they amounted to 35–40 per cent of the production value, which was now much larger (Dieckmann Rasmussen, 1988: 243).

Improvements in roads and vehicles taking place especially in the period 1770–1820 proved important for domestic trade and vital for the nascent grain export, since grain surplus areas, especially those in Sweden, were often situated far from the coast (Gadd, 2000: 262–266). The first railway in Denmark opened in 1847, and Norway and Sweden followed suit in the mid-1850s. After this comparatively late start the extension of the railway network increased rapidly, and in 1910, in all three countries, the length of track per capita was far above the European average. The railways entailed a revolution, not least in retail trade. The rise of rural retail trade in the form of ‘village shops’ was important, not least for the unlanded households which possessed neither the means to produce their own necessities nor the storage capacity of peasant farms.

Investments in implements and machines required the economic resources of relatively large farms. From the middle of the eighteenth century Swedish farms had been growing in terms of arable acreage since they were divided less often than before while the rapid land clearances (in which pastures and meadows were turned into arable) continued. Around 1780, peasant farms (the smallholdings of crofters and other unlanded not included) in the east-Swedish plains parish of Ekebyborna had on average 12 hectares of arable each, and by 1850, 21 hectares, half of which lay fallow each year at both points in time. In the west-Swedish plains rural district of Dala the arable per peasant farm was, in 1780, 6 hectares and in 1850 10 hectares, of which a third was fallow or, at the latter point in time, sown with fodder crops (calculated from Olai, 1983 and Winberg, 1975). On the plains of south-west Skåne an average peasant farm, c.1780, had about 18 hectares of arable of which some 40 per cent was fallow (Olsson and Svensson, 2010; Gadd, 2000: 123–25), and roughly the same arable per farm would probably apply to Denmark. In the latter country much land clearance was going on in the first half of the nineteenth century (Bjørn, 1988: 17–20, 82–86), and around 1860 an average Danish farm had, very roughly, 23 hectares of arable (estimated from Dieckmann Rasmussen, 1988: 223, 250).

Increasing arable per farm resulted in an increasing demand for labour which was met mainly by a growing number of crofters and cottagers. Many Danish cottagers were subordinated to peasant farms as a sort of sub-tenants, others were subordinated directly to the manor. In the early nineteenth century Danish cottagers often did 52 days work a year for the cottage alone, and more days work for any land that went with it. Many cottagers paid their rent in cash, however, especially those who earned their living as craftsmen (Skrubbetrang, 1978: 213; Banggaard, 2008: 291). In Sweden, the number of crofts that were subject to freeholds increased rapidly after 1750, and the rapid increase in Norway was based almost entirely on the labour demand from peasant farms. In Sweden the crofts that pertained to freehold farms were relatively small, often a tenth of the arable of a normal farm, which necessitated that the crofter did paid work or produced handicraft in order to survive.

In both Sweden and Denmark, the increase in the demand for wage labour also arose from old demesnes and other large-scale units. In Denmark the obligation of the peasant farmers to perform labour service on the demesnes ceased when farms were redeemed. The demesnes survived as large-scale farms, and their need for labour was now supplied mainly by a rapidly growing number of cottagers, *husmænd*. In Sweden a large proportion of the crofts (*torp*) were still to be found on manors by 1750 (see chapter 11). In contrast with Denmark, where the enlargement of demesnes through the eviction of tenants was prohibited by law, the expansion of demesnes through the incorporation of farms pertaining to them was common in Sweden after 1750 and especially in the period 1800–1860. The crofts on Swedish manors were as a rule larger than those pertaining to freeholds and had, as a rule, enough arable to yield what was necessary for the crofter families to survive (in exchange for such a relatively big croft often three days work a week was performed as labour service). From the 1780s and on, demesnes and other large units also employed an increasing number of married workers employed by the year (*statare*). A similar group in Denmark was called *tjenestehusmænd*. These completely landless farm labourers increased in numbers in both countries up to c. 1870, but while they decreased in Denmark thereafter, they reached their maximum number in Sweden by 1920, or about 50 years after the other unlanded strata had started to decrease in number. The *statare* were concentrated in east-central Sweden and Skåne, i.e. the regions with the highest concentration of large estates (Morell, Gadd and Myrdal, 2011: 286; Gadd, 2000: 226–227).

In contrast with tenants belonging to the peasant-farmer (*bonde*) stratum, who usually brought their own implements and draught animals when carrying out labour services, the crofters and other workers generally used equipment belonging to the manor when doing their daywork. Consequently, the stock of implements and working animals on the manor farms had to be enlarged. The extension of demesnes, the increasing use of wage labour on these and the increase in their capital stocks implied a development from principally feudal to capitalist forms of economic organisation of large estates. However, all three countries remained cultivated mainly by peasant farmers. In the early twentieth century large farms (100 hectares and over) made up 1 per cent of all farms, covering 12 per cent of the arable, in Sweden (Morell, 2001: 37).

Although the unlanded lived harsh and strenuous lives, the crofters and the *husmænd* with a smallholding were, as a rule, not completely destitute. Several examples show that these semi-landless groups were close to the peasant farmers with respect to mortality (Winberg, 1975: 242–243; Dribe and Lundh, 2002, 145–146; Johansen 2002: 152–153), while the completely landless groups were much more vulnerable. Up to c.1870 large-scale land clearance demanded a great deal of labour power, and as a rule able-bodied men and women could find enough jobs to support themselves and proletarianisation seldom led to complete ‘marginalisation’. No doubt the growing number of agrarian proletarians implied an increase in economic inequality but decreasing mortality and increasing average stature, especially after 1850, are signs of improved food consumption in the population as a whole. In the second half of the nineteenth century the demand from the landless for cheap factory-made products became essential economic prerequisites for industrialisation. In Sweden cotton was first used for everyday clothes by the poorer strata after 1850 (Gadd, 2000: 363).

A distinctive trait of northern European agriculture, especially before mechanisation, was its substantially seasonal pattern of work. While the population used all available work resources in peak-season activities such as mowing and harvesting, there were long low seasons in other periods of the year. This led to production bottlenecks which explains why implements and machines that increased productivity in peak-season activities were particularly important in Scandinavia (Gadd, 2011: 145–147, 158–159), making it possible to till and harvest much larger areas per worker, which, *inter alia*, could be used to reduce fallow. Since the yield per arable area also increased due to better tilling, manuring and fertilising, more cattle could be fed, more grain had to be threshed and transported, etc. This contributed to an increase in the workload in the previous low seasons and led to a levelling-out of the workload over the year. In Denmark the increase in animal production – which was more labour intensive than grain production – was large enough to lead to an increase in demand for labour and, as we have seen, a growth of the agricultural labour force in absolute terms up to the 1930s.

In Sweden – most parts of which do not share Denmark's comparative advantages in agriculture – mechanisation and a slowing-down of land clearance after about 1880 led to a decline in labour demand, and a rural exodus started. The process was speeded up by the fact that many previous handicraft 'sidelines' performed in the off-seasons of agriculture were gradually being driven out of the market by manufacturing industry, and that seasonal migrations ceased when industries were increasingly run on a full-year basis.

The breakthrough of tractors in Scandinavia after 1945 and the spread of electrically powered machines had a pronounced labour-saving effect (Seyler, 1983: 202; Morell 2001: 290–292; Pedersen 1988: 24–26) and, in combination with the long-run decrease in relative agricultural prices, involved a rapid increase in the optimum size of farms. Around 1950 a Swedish farm big enough to provide a farming family with an acceptable income was still estimated at 10–20 hectares of arable land – not much above the size of a normal peasant farm on the plains a hundred years earlier (although, it should be remembered, the farm of the 1950s demanded much less labour power and produced a larger marketable surplus). By about 1980 the minimum arable acreage to provide a Swedish or Danish farming family full support was c. 50 hectares. Around 2000, a 100 hectare farm was as a rule too small to provide full support for a family; often several hundred hectares of arable were necessary (Seyler, 1983: 257; Flygare 1999: 279–289; Flygare and Isacson, 2003: 230; Pedersen 1988: 17). In fact, few farms are that large and in consequence few farms are the sole income for a farming family; as a rule, at least one family member earns an income from outside the agricultural sector. Around 1950 mixed farming with cows, pigs and grain cultivation was still the norm, but thereafter specialisation has increased. Today, farmers specialise in either arable or some sort of animal production. The automation and computerisation of feeding has contributed to a large increase in the number of animals per farm among those who specialise in animal production. Around 2000 the average number of cows per stock was around 60, and 200 cows on a farm specialising in milk production was not unusual (Flygare and Isacson, 2003, 39).

In the first half of the nineteenth century, national statistics display a much larger rural non-agricultural population stratum in Denmark than in the two other countries. About 5 per cent of the Danish rural population in 1834 were registered as craftsmen, which was about the same proportion as in Western Germany, while less than 1 per cent of the rural population was categorised as craftsmen in Sweden in 1855 (Henningsen, 1944: 141; Gadd, 1991: 53, 113). However, the relative lack of craftsmen in the Swedish and Norwegian countryside was partly a statistical illusion. In Sweden and Norway it was common among the agricultural population to divide their time between agriculture and crafts production for sale, and there was, not least in Sweden, a strong tendency to label such individuals as belonging to the agrarian population with titles such as ‘crofter’, ‘cottager’ or ‘workman’. In Sweden even individuals who had left agriculture behind them more or less totally and had handicrafts as their main occupation while still living in the countryside often preferred to be registered as crofter, cottager, or with some other ‘agrarian’-sounding title, since registration as craftsmen would result in tax increases (Gadd, 1991: 216–217, 331f; Gadd, 1997).

After 1750, self-subsisting household production gradually declined on large- and medium-scale farms. The increase in the use of iron implements was partly behind this since they demanded the work of specialised blacksmiths (Valen-Sendstad, 1964; Gadd, 2000: 251–252). Another factor that accelerated the decline in self-subsistence, and thus promoted a more complex social division of labour, was that the large- and medium-scale peasant farmers became gradually more specialised in agriculture *per se*. New implements, new types of crops and new farming methods contributed to prolonging the periods of agricultural work, and the farmer evolved from being a self-subsistent producer of ‘everything’ to being a farmer focusing on agricultural production and buying other commodities in the market (Seyler, 1983: 29). Much of the craftwork for self-subsistence that had been pursued on farms was passed over either to skilled craftsmen or to the elderly and poor unlanded, who did less demanding craft jobs such as the making of wooden rake-teeth. The stratum of specialised craftsmen increased (Valen-Sendstad, 1964: 243; Gadd, 2000: 251–252), although, at least in Sweden, the actual number of such craftsmen was not fully visible in occupational statistics. The ‘jacks-of-all-trades’ by no means disappeared from the Swedish or Norwegian countryside but were, around the middle of the nineteenth century most often found among crofters, cottagers and small-scale farmers, not least in the woodlands. The existence of considerable ‘hidden’ craft skills among the Swedish rural population is illustrated by the relative ease with which crofters and others with seemingly agrarian titles were integrated into the engineering industry in Sweden and among emigrants to the USA in the latter half of the nineteenth century (Isacson and Magnusson, 1987; Carlsson, 1988: 42, 79).

The period between 1750 and 1850 was characterised by an expansion of proto-industry, especially in Sweden. In the unfertile wooded uplands ranging from the north of Skåne through Småland up to southern Västergötland, and in the provinces north of the central Swedish plains (parts of Dalarna and southern Norrland), different sorts of seasonal crafts had evolved since the middle ages. In southern Västergötland especially, a great many textiles were produced and itinerant peddlars from this part of

Sweden were a well-known sight all over the Scandinavian peninsula. After the arrival of cotton, c.1820, a putting-out or subcontracting system developed in textiles. Whereas 'putters out' in England and in continental Europe were usually town-dwellers, in Sweden putting out was taken up by the buying-and-trading peasants of the previous *kauf-system* (see chapter 11) – an interesting indication of the relative economic importance of Scandinavian rural areas (Gadd, 2007). The rapid electrification of Scandinavian rural areas around the First World War (50 per cent of rural households had electricity in 1920, more than 90 per cent in 1950; Hagberg, 1986: 34) gave new vigour to rural industry, providing a source of power ideally suited for small-scale, decentralised enterprises (Boqvist, 1978: 65; Morell, 2001: 290–291).

In other woodland areas, less well situated for proto-industry, seasonal labour migrations developed after c.1750. The main routes for these migrations were from Dalarna (Dalecarlia) to Stockholm and the east-central plains, from the interior areas of southern Sweden to the west coast during the period of large-scale herring fisheries 1750–1808, and from the woodlands to the plains for winter threshing. After 1830 exports grew rapidly of sawn-wood products from Sweden, and this industry – accounting for 45 per cent of Sweden's export value in the early 1870s – acquired a large proportion of its manpower in the form of seasonal labour. In population statistics these workers are as a rule registered in their home district, with notations such as 'crofter', 'farmhand' (*dräng*) or 'maid' (*piga*) which gives a distorted picture of occupational structure, since these people earned most of their income in industry (Cornell, 1982: 210–211; 241–242, 300–311). Similar circumstances existed within the iron industry (Karlsson, 2010: 234–241). Much of the industry that developed among Swedish peasant farmers and crofters in the Swedish countryside in the late nineteenth century retained a proto-industrial character, one example being the production of simple wooden furniture for the market (Jonsson, forthcoming).

In Denmark there are examples of regions, especially in Jutland, where many people were occupied in textile manufacturing, pottery making and production of footwear. Although these regions had relatively poor soils compared with the rest of Denmark, they as a rule remained self-sufficient in food and thus never developed the food import typical of fully developed proto-industrialisation (Hornby and Oxneboell, 1982).

In Norway, fishing and lumbering was usually done by peasant farmers or crofters who combined fishing and agriculture. These export-oriented activities kept large parts of the rural population occupied in the low seasons of agriculture, which, together with high wage and price levels, is one of the reasons for the relatively insignificant proto-industrial development in Norway. During the nineteenth century fishing took an increasing share of the total working hours of many inhabitants of the coastal areas, although agriculture was seldom given up entirely. 9 per cent of all Norwegians who reported that they worked in the primary sector (agriculture, forestry and fishing) in 1920 stated fishing as their main occupation, but many more reported fishing as a side-employment (Hovland, Nordvik and Tveite, 1982; Gjerdåker, 2002: 172–173). Fishing as a full-time job was a twentieth-century phenomenon.

12.4 The family, the local community and the state

Even by the middle of the eighteenth century the *stavnsbånd* ('adscription') bound the male Danish peasants to the estates where they were born, in a way that has sometimes been compared to east-Elbian servitude. Nevertheless, the economic and social position of Danish peasants was stronger than that of serfs in the proper sense of the word. The policy of the Danish Crown had strong elements of 'peasant protection' similar to west-Elbian *Bauernschutz*. From 1682 Danish manor owners were forbidden to extend their demesnes through evicting tenants and the closing-down of tenant farms (Jensen, 1936, vol. 1: 17; Kjærgaard, 1994: 174–175).

The prerequisites of the profound changes in Danish social structures were laid by the middle of the eighteenth century when the economic position of the Danish peasant farmers began to improve as inflation reduced the real value of taxes and money rents (Dombernowsky, 1988: 281; Kjærgaard, 1994: 173–178). A similar process took place in Sweden, where the taxes and rents per cadastral unit on freehold and Crown land stagnated from the early eighteenth century on. Since arable acreage per cadastral unit increased as a result of land clearance, the stagnancy of tax or rent entailed that tax and rent per produced unit, e.g. of grain, fell (Morell and Olsson, 2010). Even if falling taxes on land were counterbalanced to some degree by increasing taxes per capita, the tax burden on agricultural production was in fact eased during the eighteenth century, paving the way for investments in agriculture and for the landed peasantry as a political force (Herlitz, 1974; Gadd, 2000: 196, 249–252; 357–358).

Both the Danish and the Swedish Crowns experienced periods of financial difficulties during the eighteenth century. In spite of the differences in the political position of peasant farmers in the two countries, in neither of them did the Crown resort to the major increases in the taxation of the peasantry which had been the rule in similar situations in previous centuries. Instead, under the influence of mercantilist, physiocratic, humane 'peasant-protective' and with time also liberal ideas the governing classes began to look for ways and means to increase productivity in agriculture. Not least important was the growing awareness among the upper classes of the successful British agricultural developments (Jensen, 1936: 240–247; Gadd, 2011: 162). In Denmark this resulted in the agrarian-reform legislation of the last third of the century: the freehold (*selveje*) legislation of 1769; the enclosure ordinance of 1781; the founding of credit banks in 1786 in order to provide capital for the redemption of farms and finally the abolition in 1788 of the adscription (*stavnsbånd*).

The changes set in motion proceeded quickly. By 1810 the reform period of Danish agriculture was largely completed (Bjørn, 1988: 9, 14). The previous open-field-village tenant farms had been replaced by consolidated freeholds, although the consolidation of strips into coherent blocks of land (*udskiftning*, 'enclosure') had been carried out much more sweepingly than had the redemption of farms. In 1830 only 1 per cent of farm land was still open fields (Bjørn, 1988, 14), while in 1860 a fifth of the farms and roughly two fifths of the land value was still held by tenants (Dieckmann Rasmussen, 1988: 220).

Sweden also underwent radical strip-consolidation ('enclosure') reforms, in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, and Norway in the nineteenth (Morell and Olsson, 2010; Gadd, 2011). Paving the way for the reforms were long-run developments that reduced the role of village communities, especially the declining importance of village cooperation among peasant farmers following the growing supply of wage labour. Also, population growth and increasing market penetration required more sharply defined property rights, not least over the grazing lands and woods held in common. The collective, vaguely defined property rights over common land had increased the risk of over-exploitation when pressure upon natural resources increased (Gadd, 2000: 274–275, 283–285; Gadd, 2011: 149–150).

As a result of the strip-consolidation reforms villages ceased to exist as social units in the Scandinavian countryside. While in Sweden and Norway villages and hamlets were also wiped out as a form of settlement, when the countryside acquired its present single-farm structure, this was to a much lesser extent the case in Denmark where the villages in most cases survived as settlement units and relatively few farms were moved to new sites. The Scandinavian strip consolidations were inspired by the British enclosures, and their outcome was similar in terms of the spatial distribution of land – farms sited on coherent blocks of land – and the abolition of common rights. Only to a much lesser degree, however, did the Scandinavian reallotments of land involve the type of social changes that resulted from the British enclosures, such as the deprivation of small peasants of their land. On the whole, the number of peasant farms did not change as a direct result of the Danish *udskiftning*, the Swedish *skifte* and the Norwegian *jordskifte* reforms, although the increase in crofts and cottages was an indirect result when more unlanded households could earn a living as a result of the increased demand for labour when farmhouses and other buildings were moved to new sites, more land was cleared and new, more labour-intensive methods of cultivation were introduced. The strip-consolidation reforms facilitated the transition to new crop rotations in the nineteenth century, in which fodder crops rotated with grain crops. Such major changes had been hard to implement earlier since, in an open-field village, they demanded as a rule the unanimous approval of all the peasant farmers in the village (Gadd, 2000: 307–309).

When the tax burden on land took a declining share of the agricultural surplus, land prices increased. In a plains area of Västergötland that was investigated the price of a medium-sized farm, converted into grain, rose sevenfold (albeit from a very low value, or from 21 barrels of rye to 150) between the 1710s and the 1810s, while the arable per farm had increased, at an educated guess, by 70–80 per cent (estimates based on Herlitz, 1974: 191, 281–282 and Gadd, 1983: 248; about the great potential for land clearance in Sweden, see Gadd, 2011: 158–159). The rapid land clearances and the sharp price increase per farm went on in the nineteenth century, and in roughly the same area the price of a medium-sized farm increased by c.400 per cent in constant prices between 1832 and 1890 (rough calculation based on Martinius, 1970: 109–114). In Denmark a land market developed among peasant farmers after the beginning of the redemptions in the 1780s. Between 1830 and 1860 the price per *hartkorn* (a land evaluation unit) increased by c.350 per cent (Bjørn, 1988: 78–79).

After 1880, the period of increasing grain prices and rapid land clearance was over, which was also the case with rapidly increasing land prices at least for the following 40 or 50 years. The average real price per hectare of arable land in Sweden in the 1930s was 5 per cent higher than in the 1890s, in the 1950s 64 per cent higher, in the 1970s and 1990s 170–175 per cent higher than in the 1890s (Bohlin and Prado, 2011).⁹

In the early modern era and still around 1750, a relatively large part of Scandinavian state incomes derived from the taxation of land. This had the side-effect that landed property was carefully recorded in official cadastres, which, in the long run, paved the way for raising money on land, since landowners and their properties were easily identifiable. In Denmark government-financed credit banks (*kreditkasser*) were established in the 1780s in order to facilitate the redemption of tenant farms by peasant farmers. The credits granted contributed substantially to the wave of redemptions during the period of high grain prices, up to 1815 (Dombernowsky, 1988: 357–58). In the 1840s and 1850s savings banks (*sparekasser*) and credit associations (*kreditforeninger*) were formed on a cooperative basis (Bjørn, 1988: 80–81).

When new types of land taxation were introduced in Sweden in the early nineteenth century this led to the introduction of ratable values (*taxeringsvärde*) on land which facilitated further the evaluation of credit rating since knowledge about local conditions became of less importance. This even led to a limited number of peasant farmers being permitted to take loans in the Swedish Central Bank. Cooperative mortgage banks (*hypoteksföreningar*) were formed in Sweden (one or two in most of her 24 counties) during the 1840s and 1850s (Gadd, 2000: 327–328; Morell, 2001: 302).

It took a long time before loans from banks and other institutions exceeded private credit, however, since the supply of private credit increased during the times of prosperity in the decades before 1875. Around 1860 private lenders supplied at least 70–75 per cent of the credit in Danish agriculture, and by 1900, 45 per cent. In Sweden private creditors provided more than 50 per cent of loans to small- and medium-scale farmers in the 1920s. However, before World War I the majority of investments were made without resorting to any loans at all. In Denmark 1900–1914, an estimated 70 per cent of agricultural investments were financed by re-investment in the farms of the individual farmers' incomes (Bjørn, 1988: 81; Dieckmann Rasmussen, 1988: 238; Morell, 2001: 302).

After the World War II loans from credit institutions became more important, concurrently with the rapidly growing investment needs accompanying tractorisation. In Denmark in 1959 there was created, partly on government's initiative, *Dansk Landbrugs Realkreditfond*, a fund for loans on landed security which, in contrast

⁹ Obviously the price per hectare is conceptually different from the price per medium-sized farm or per tax-evaluation unit that was used for the period before 1880. However, since land clearance slowed down after 1875 and more or less came to an end after 1920 and the change in the number of peasant farms was of a limited size, the stagnancy in the price per hectare of arable also says something about the price per medium-sized farm.

with the credit and mortgage societies, did not demand joint responsibility from the borrowers. In Sweden from 1948, the government-sponsored county agricultural boards (*lantbruksnämnder*) gave loan guarantees for those farms deemed big enough to be economically sound (Pedersen, 1988: 232; Flygare and Isacson, 2003: 177–178).

The village as a form of cooperation between peasant farmers disappeared as a result of the strip-consolidation reforms, which was also the case with the estate as a social unit. The rural population acquired more direct contacts with the state with regard to tax payment, conscription into the army and the regulation of law and order. In Denmark, new laws established communes comprising one, two or three parishes and made them responsible for establishing schools and for poor relief, road construction and various other local affairs. More poor relief was now needed since the growing cottager class was much more vulnerable than the peasant farmers to declines in labour demand during economic recessions and the elderly poor needed assistance since their children were often incapable of taking care of their parents. During the nineteenth century, with the extension of voting rights, the peasant farmers gradually gained power in the commune or 'parish' councils and could decide over local taxation and over how much support should be given to people in need. In the twentieth century, however, the tendency has been to take decisions – and financing – away from the communes and introduce state financing and detailed rules for welfare benefits.

In Sweden the establishment of communes came about gradually when new duties were laid upon the parish meetings in the nineteenth century. As in Denmark, and for the same reasons, poor relief became an issue of rising importance. New communal laws, dividing between ecclesiastical parishes and secular communes were legislated in 1862. When village communities ceased to exist, part of their functions were taken over by a developing co-operative movement. A system of fire insurance for buildings was initiated by the Danish state in 1792, and by the middle of the nineteenth century practically all farm buildings in Denmark were insured. In the 1830s and 1840s a nation-wide system of associations for the insurance of personal property was created, and after 1850 credit associations increased the accessibility of credit (Bjørn, 1988: 134–136).

A breakthrough for dairy cooperatives took place in Norway in the 1870s, in Denmark in the 1880s and in Sweden in the 1890s. The dairy cooperatives turned out to have a competitive advantage over the privately owned dairies as they could more easily maintain supplier's loyalty and a high, even quality of the milk supplied as a raw product. The cooperatives quickly gained a dominant position among the dairy producers in all three countries. In 1940, 85 per cent of all milk supplied to the Swedish dairy industry was processed by cooperatives. The cooperative movement also played an important part in other branches such as the meat industry and in supplying the farmers with input goods such as fertilisers and concentrated fodder (Gjerdåker, 2002: 255–260; Bjørn, 1988: 370–374; Morell, 2001: 101–108).

In all three countries, the peasant farmers, *bönder*, attained a very strong political position in the latter part of the nineteenth century and became a major political force in each county's parliament. Considering their decrease in numbers, farmers have maintained a relatively strong political position in the twentieth century.

12.5 Conclusions

While the period 1000–1750 was an era of divergent developments in rural social structures in the three Scandinavian countries, the period 1750–2000 was an era of convergence. The position of peasant farmers improved economically, and the Danish reforms after 1780 created within two generations a countryside mainly consisting of peasant freeholds which was similar to the two other countries. In all three countries strip-consolidation reforms created a countryside consisting of dispersed farms on coherent blocks of land. An agricultural structure was formed in which the peasant farmers (*bönder*) had the power to invest and the will to produce for the market and could adapt quickly to changes in demand. Land clearance increased arable acreage per farm, especially in Sweden, and together with new, more labour-intensive methods provided employment for landless and semi-landless workers. In the three countries mortality, especially infant and child mortality, decreased significantly around 1810, and the number of surviving children in crofter and cottager families became large enough to contribute significantly to population growth as the number of these landless and semi-landless swelled. Nativity in all countries remained relatively high up to the last decades of the nineteenth century. Late nineteenth-century industrialisation was most rapid in Sweden, although often taking place in the countryside, which is the probable explanation for her comparatively early decrease in fertility.

The adaptability of Scandinavian agriculture displayed itself in the last decades of the nineteenth century when plummeting grain prices accelerated the ongoing changeover to animal production, while rapid mechanisation led to a decrease in labour costs relative to product value. In Denmark, with her exceptional natural preconditions, the ‘industrialisation’ of agriculture entailed a growth of the agricultural labour force in absolute numbers that went on until the 1930s, while in agriculturally less richly endowed Norway and Sweden the agricultural labour force stagnated or declined after 1860 or 1870, the decline before 1950 mostly affecting the landless and semi-landless strata.

Relatively well-functioning credit systems have accelerated the transformation of Scandinavian agriculture into a capital-intensive activity and after the Second World War ‘tractorisation’, computerisation and automation of feeding has contributed to rapidly increasing farm sizes, while the mixed farming that was the norm even in 1950 has been transformed into distinct specialised activities.

By the middle of the eighteenth century around 70 per cent of the Scandinavians belonged to the agricultural population. Today about 3 per cent of the gainfully employed are engaged in agriculture and supply the rest of the population with most of its food demand. This astounding development has not been caused only by an increase in agricultural productivity, but also by a more developed social division of labour. The eighteenth-century peasant farmer performed tasks that have now been taken over by the food industry and manufacturing, chemical and transport industry. Furthermore, the eighteenth-century peasant farmer and his family performed care, attention and vocational training, activities that are now performed under public regime. In fact the average member of the ‘agricultural’ population of Scandinavia in 1850 was engaged less in agriculture and more in ‘sidelines’ than most of his contemporary European colleagues, which is part of the explanation for the rapidity in the industrialisation process that took place thereafter.

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13 Conclusion: making a living in rural societies in the North Sea area, 500-2000

Thijs LAMBRECHT, Eric VANHAUTE, Isabelle DEVOS, Gérard BÉAUR, Georg FERTIG, Carl-Johan GADD, Erwin KAREL, Michael LIMBERGER, Richard PAPING and Phillipp SCHOFIELD

The central question we asked at the outset of this volume was: what happened to family forms in the rural societies around the coasts of the North Sea in the last one and a half millennium? How did resources become available to the rural family and to its members, and what strategies were employed to generate these resources? The approach of this book is based on an analysis of long-term changes in household formation and in the economic behaviour of its members within a social and regional context.

The North Sea area has a striking regional diversity, both in agricultural, social and institutional regimes. These regions have also a lot in common, above all, a broadly similar physical geography and a common history. They enjoy a moderate maritime climate and consist mostly of lowlands and some low mountain ranges. North-western Europe's climate is characterised by moist winters and dry and warm summers that support an agriculture based on growing dry cereals (wheat, barley, oats or rye) as well as fruit and vegetable crops. To produce food, the land must be heavily worked to be cleared and fertilised, using large numbers of farm animals, both for their work and their manure.

In this setting, the North Sea area developed during the second millennium as one of the most urbanised and commercialised in the world. The area encompassed a wide range of societies and agro-systems, some more market-oriented than others. A triangular zone including the western Low Countries, north-east France and south-east England was the core region, extending its influence throughout the North Sea area and well beyond. After the demise of the manorial systems, most of the inhabitants of the western European countryside owned or rented at least a small farm holding. In many regions, these small exploitations were often combined with temporary migratory or proto-industrial work. Rural communities were already organised at an early stage in the development of the western European countryside. They were responsible for intra-community litigation, poor relief, management of common land, collecting taxes, ensuring the public order, and so on. Except in the most peripheral regions, village societies were strongly oligarchic organised, with the power resting in the hands of a minority of property owners or their representatives who controlled the access to village resources (such as commons, employment and charity). This exercise of power in the village was strongly tied to the ownership of property and landholding. Wealthy householders had considerable power and control over the poor and landless. Possession and use of land were the cornerstone within the wide variety of rural survival strategies, although in the highly commercialised regions of the North Sea area the ties between the land and the rural household weakened during the period

under consideration. Credit and exchange networks forged and strengthened social relations within the village communities. After 1500, in more commercialised regions and more generally after 1800, these village networks came under pressure, when a growing number of households sought their income beyond the traditional agricultural sector. Rural society in this area gradually transformed.

The chapters in this book relate how households adapted, some more successfully than others, to these changes. In this concluding chapter we look at common and diverging features and trends of the western European rural family and income systems, set within the context of their social structural and regional transformations. Using a comparative lens we focus on some striking trends and differences. It is our ambition, shared with the teams of the other three volumes in this series, to develop a more general interpretative framework for our understanding of long-term changes in those rural societies around the coasts of the North Sea. In attempting this conclusion, we follow the thematic outline used in the other chapters of this volume.

13.1 The family and demography

Around 500, almost the entire population around the North Sea lived in the countryside. Today, the experience of the majority is urban: about 80 per cent of the population now live in settlements with more than 2000 inhabitants. Since the middle of the nineteenth century, a process of deruralisation has been evident in every region within the North Sea area. In some agricultural regions such as Brittany, Picardy and Normandy the proportion of urban population came to exceed that of rural population only by the middle years of the twentieth century, while in others, such as in industrialised Belgium, this was already the case at the start of the twentieth century. Deruralisation implies more than the depopulation of rural communities, and also refers to the strong decline of the proportion of agricultural workers in the active population and the detachment from the rural way of life. Today, less than 5 per cent of the active population in the North Sea area works in agriculture compared to more than 50 per cent around 1900.

The regions under study have displayed broadly similar patterns of population movement across the middle ages, the early modern and modern period. The timing and the nature of these movements, however, were marked by significant regional differences. In first instance, most regions within this part of north-western Europe underwent significant growth from the eleventh century through to at least the end of the thirteenth century. There are also earlier indications of population recovery and growth from the seventh and eighth centuries onwards. This period followed a long phase of demographic decline set in motion at the end of the third century, with record lows during the sixth century until the middle of the seventh century. The European economies of the early middle ages were able to experience moments of local intensification of the agrarian economy, leading to population growth and a strengthening of the links between town and countryside. In Flanders and the Paris region for example population density reached between 20 to 50 inhabitants per square kilometre. This early regional growth was small in comparison with the extended

growth of the rural population which started in the eleventh century. The start of the late medieval crisis, at which point population growth was replaced with stagnation and decline, appears to have varied somewhat, though how far this is a consequence of historical or representational differences is unclear. There is though plentiful evidence that, at least in some countries (Denmark, England, France) population growth had halted by the first half of the fourteenth century, and decades before the crisis of the Black Death, whether that was the case in other parts of north-western Europe remains unclear. In Norway and Sweden, for instance, it is suggested that population decline did not commence before the plagues of the mid-fourteenth century.

Unsurprisingly, rural dwellers in most countries, in so far as this can be observed, experienced severe mortality in the middle years of the fourteenth century. However, it seems that in the Low Countries the long term fall in population was less pronounced and the consequences of the general crisis were limited. While it is difficult to reconcile the apparently limited effects of such a virulent epidemic which ravaged populations elsewhere, with any endogenous developments such as the policies of lords or central government or the higher standard of living, the reasons for such an aberrant result remain elusive. Although the demographic consequences of plague and endemic mortality were muted in parts of the Low Countries, there is no doubt that they continued apace throughout the rest of the North Sea area. A general stagnation of population, at least surmised for certain countries including England, has given way to population recovery and growth by the decades either side of 1500. In most countries thereafter population growth continued, though not always in a consistent and upward trend, into the eighteenth century. Denmark for example, only regained its pre-plague population in the early nineteenth century.

In the North Sea area, the demographic variables which can be associated with these movements vary by place and period. Attempts to identify the relative impact of fertility and mortality offer no simple solutions. A relatively recent debate concerning the potential significance of fertility in later medieval England is also mirrored in other national contexts here. The general assumption is that both must have had an impact upon population movement. The relative force of either variable or the extent to which demographic regimes were high or low pressure remains hidden, at least for the middle ages. Mortality is identified as the significant determinant in population movements in the middle ages in most of the studies presented here, our sources tending to direct more to evidence of mortality than of fertility. Both crisis mortality, occasioned both by epidemics and warfare, and background mortality including undoubtedly a lack of appropriate nutrition, high levels of infant mortality and endemic diseases throughout the population, must have had a severe impact upon the population of medieval and early modern northern Europe, even if historical sources which permit close investigation of such issues are elusive. Such crises were more acute in some regions than in others, and the causes could differ. Some regions in northern France, for instance, were less affected because they were mostly spared from military action, and they were far less dependent on grain production. Similarly, in early-modern times, grain-surplus areas such as Denmark and Skåne in southern Sweden suffered less from hunger-related diseases than other parts of Scandinavia. By the same token,

there is some evidence of a fertility-driven demographic regime, or at least a regime influenced by changing fertility rates in the middle ages. Age at marriage, where it can be estimated, illustrates the lack of general consistency in terms of either place or period, but there is some sense that the mean age of marriage tended to increase in the middle ages, and the general trend was toward a north-west European household formation system of the kind described by Hajnal, with relatively late marriage for both partners (above age 24 for women and age 26 for men), life-cycle service and the presence of solitary households. In earlier centuries, surviving evidence suggests a household formation system more akin to that associated with southern Europe, with relatively early marriage for women (between age 15 and 20), if not for men (around age 30). We know, unfortunately, very little about other potentially significant elements capable of adjusting fertility rates, including the extent of the use of contraception and breastfeeding.

By the early modern period, fuller and more direct demographic data permit a more robust investigation of the causes for the population movements described. In some countries, such as France, a demographic, relatively high pressure regime of heightened mortality and fertility persisted into the early modern period. As is well known, fertility, rather than mortality, has been identified as a prime mover of the demographic pattern evident for early modern England. In rural England (female) ages at marriage increased resulting in a fall in fertility in times when real wages were low and job opportunities were limited. In early modern rural Norway and Sweden ages at marriage were relatively low when there were prospects to create new viable positions for households due to land reclamation and by-employments. Delayed marriage, which was also related to changing female employment patterns, has helped to explain changes in fertility patterns and in consequent population movements, such as in parts of the Low Countries by the seventeenth century.

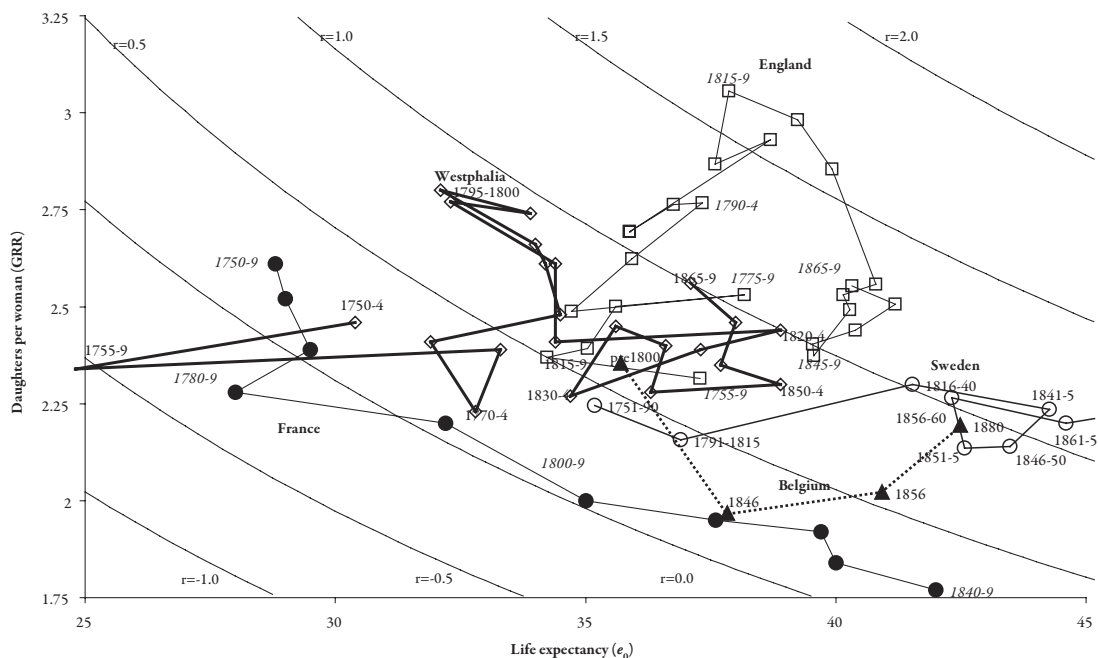
Changing employment and marketing structures were undoubtedly capable of affecting some of the demographic changes outlined above. An important variable was the extent to which a region developed or failed to develop a significant urban sector. In this respect the experience of the Low Countries stands out as exceptional. While almost the whole population of the Low Countries lived in the countryside at the end of the first millennium, a massive development in towns in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries led to a significant increase in the urban population. In central parts of the Low Countries such as Holland and Brabant, about 45 per cent of the population lived in towns by the early modern period, a proportion not matched in any other northern European country at that time. Population density in some of those areas reached between 75 and 100 inhabitants per square kilometre. Elsewhere, huge urban centres such as Paris (600,000 inhabitants around 1700) and London (1 million inhabitants around 1800) developed a broad hinterland with a highly intensified and commercialised agriculture. In other countries within the broad North Sea area, most especially Norway and Sweden, population density remained low (up to 15 inhabitants per square kilometre) and the degree of urbanisation remained limited. However, as is pointed out in the discussion on Scandinavian demography and family, the limited extent of urbanisation does not argue against the presence of economic activity

alternative to agriculture. The chapters in this volume point to the necessity to discuss demographic patterns within their agricultural and ecological context. Regional differences were considerable and manifested themselves in different agro-systems. Rural households in the southern Low Countries, for instance, used to be larger in the coastal marshlands where the soil was generally more fertile and the agricultural productivity higher, than in the inland areas. The market-oriented economy of the coastal areas resulted in a larger demand for agricultural labour, a predominantly young and male population and large households due to the presence of living-in servants. In the Paris Basin, the market oriented farms worked more with short-term and seasonal wage labour. Differences in agro-systems were thus reflected in the degree of migration, size and composition of rural households, but also in mortality and fertility levels. As such, mortality was chronically higher in the coastal marshlands. In the Low Countries, the lowlands of south-east England and the marshes of the river Weser in north-west Germany, it was linked to the incidence of malaria and the poor quality of the drinking water. In most regions, this high mortality was compensated by early marriage and high fertility levels. In others, such as the Oldenburg area in Germany, quite the opposite was true: the high degree of landless households led to very low birth rates.

Although subject to debate, household formation in the medieval and early modern countryside tends to be seen as a function of a 'peasant' or 'niche' model: households operated in a neolocal system whereby marriage was the moment at which households were formed and the opportunity to marry was a function of land availability. Instances of this system have been discussed in all national contexts, as for instance in Germany before 1750. Alongside such a household formation system, there also existed a 'proletarian' or 'real wage' household formation system, driven not by land acquisition but by the accumulation of capital through labour. In this system, marriage remained a significant moment in household formation but the opportunity to marry was generated differently and was not dependent upon the acquisition of land. Such developments in household formation were not confined to towns. As we see in a variety of contexts, the spread of various types of proto-industry into the countryside created considerable opportunities for the kinds of capital accumulation identified with a 'real wage' household formation system. In some areas in England and north-west Germany proto-industrial workers married earlier and had more children, but in others they married later and had fewer children. In Denmark and inland Flanders, the traditional family pattern with high marriage age survived well into the nineteenth century. The implications of these differing household formation systems are important; systems of the kinds described here reflected the economic and social context in which households were themselves formed. The prevailing system also tended to reinforce the same context, perpetuating the demographic regimes which were, themselves, responsible in part for defining the rural economies in which they operated.

Around 1750, the countries in north-western Europe entered a phase of economic and social change of unprecedented importance. For some of these regions, figure 13.1 assembles two important aspects of what is known about the demographic change after 1750: the long term development of fertility and mortality, expressed in terms of life expectancy at birth (e_0 on the horizontal axis) and the gross reproduction rate (on the

Figure 13.1: Trajectories of life expectancies and fertility, c.1750–c.1870



Sources: for Sweden, see Statistiska centralbyrån (1999): *Befolkningsutvecklingen under 250 år: Historisk statistik för Sverige*, Stockholm; for England and France, see E.A. Wrigley and R.S. Schofield (1981), *The population history of England 1541–1871: a reconstruction*, Cambridge, 246; for Belgium, Coale’s indicators from R. Lesthaeghe (1974), ‘Een demografisch model voor de Oostvlaamse landelijke populatie in de 18de eeuw’, *Belgisch Tijdschrift voor Nieuwste Geschiedenis*, 1-2, 93 and Princeton Population Center, data archive. These figures were transformed into TFR using a factor of 12.44 as suggested by J.-P. Sardon (1996), ‘Coale’s indices, comparative indices, mean generation, total fertility rate and components’, *Population*, 8, 252-257, and further into GRR using a factor of 0.5. Life expectancies from I. Devos (2006), *Allemaal beestjes. Mortaliteit en morbiditeit in Vlaanderen, 18de-20ste eeuw*, Gent, 40 (local data for 1750-1800) and from the mortality.org database. For Westphalia, we used a subset of the dataset analyzed for Germany in U. Pfister and G. Fertig (2010), *The population history of Germany: research strategy and preliminary results* (Max Planck Institute for Demographic Research Working Paper 35).

vertical axis: daughters per woman, a measure that varies not only with the frequency of births within marriage, but also with the frequencies of ages at marriage). Each data point describes the combination of fertility and mortality values in a specific period (mostly 5 years) for a specific region or country. The intrinsic growth rate of the population (r) results from the combination of these two variables; it reached values of about 1.7 per cent annually at the maximum (in the English case, in the years after 1815). For England, France (including the south) and Sweden, these data have long been known; they formed a central result of Wrigley and Schofield’s seminal *Population History of*

England. For parts of the Low Countries and of north-west Germany, they have been collected for the present discussion in order to get an impression of the entire North Sea area's demographic history between 1750 and 1850. Three features stand out. First, the countries we study were very different particularly in terms of mortality. Deadly pre-1800 Westphalia and France contrast with more healthy England, Belgium and Scandinavia. Second, fertility was not fixed at some 'natural' level, but highly variable. The English case has proven the old model of a demographic transition wrong, which assumed that fertility fell from a high 'natural' level only after a preceding mortality decline. We see that fertility was not 'natural' and invariable in pre-modern north-west European settings, and that the Swedish experience of a mortality decline on a fixed fertility level was not universal. The French example shows that both fertility and mortality could decline in a parallel fashion, and the English as well as the Westphalian examples demonstrate the importance in fertility upswings which did not lead to counterbalancing mortality crises. Third, as predicted by the old demographic transition model, there was a common trend in mortality, as opposed to fertility. Life expectancies rose everywhere, the least in England. An early mortality decline seems to have been the common demographic experience of the entire North Sea area.

In the same period, more people started to live in towns and cities, a trend that continued throughout the twentieth century. Thanks to the establishment of national statistical institutes in the nineteenth century and the data they produced, these changes can be quantified with greater confidence than for pre-industrial times. Population figures in the countries around the North Sea more than doubled during the nineteenth century. The reactions to this rapid population increase, such as reduced nuptiality, increased migration or lower fertility, varied between countries. England where the population had grown faster, managed to escape a Malthusian crisis in which population outstripped the available resources, through a long term transformation of its economy. Industrialisation absorbed surplus population and facilitated early marriage and mass migration. Growth was essentially confined to the towns, and by 1850 England had replaced the Netherlands as the most urbanised country in western Europe. Most rural regions in continental Europe however only lost the pattern of relative high marriage ages and relative high celibacy rates well into the twentieth century. Rural migration reduced the demographic pressure in the countryside especially after the mid-nineteenth century. After the agricultural crisis of the 1840's and during the agricultural depression of the last quarter of the nineteenth century, some regions experienced an emigration wave to the America's. In comparison to countries such as England, Germany, Sweden and Norway, overseas migration in the rest of the North Sea area remained limited. More important was the rural outmigration towards expanding industrial regions such as the German *Ruhrgebiet*, the Belgian Walloon area and northern France.

In rural France, the main response involved a drastic modification of reproductive behaviour. North-western France, the region discussed in this volume, experienced an early demographic transition. It absorbed demographic pressure by excessively fragmenting land holdings and by adjusting the demographic system through systematic fertility control. By the second half of the eighteenth century birth rates started to fall. Although there are indications of family planning elsewhere (such as in parts in Scandinavia) from

the late eighteenth century onwards, extensive birth control became only common in the rest of the North Sea area by the end of the nineteenth century. Fertility continued to decline throughout the twentieth century, and after 1970 dropped below replacement level. As a result, a new demographic equilibrium of both low mortality and fertility has been reached. Today, population growth in the countries around the North Sea, as in other industrialised areas, is on the verge of a standstill. Rural depopulation, as in France, has been replaced by a new ‘rurbanisation’, transforming large parts of the rural world in suburbanised areas. The new demographic regime resulted in a new family life-cycle pattern whereby fewer children are born (today, on average less than 2 children per women compared to 4 to 6 around 1750) and more children live beyond childhood. While high mortality was one of the main deterrents to guarantee land tenure within the family in the middle ages and the early modern period, the drastic decline in mortality rates together with falling birth rates during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, went along with new difficulties in perpetuating family lineages on the farms. As a result and together with the rise in life expectancy, the average age of the farmer population increased significantly. Finding a spouse for young farmers became difficult and the age at marriage among farmers continued to be higher than in other rural strata throughout the twentieth century. The farmer household became restricted to the couple and its children, and their demographic behaviour coincided with that of urban families.

13.2 The family and its members

Family farms based on a married couple, its children and additional live-in workers, have been the main organisational form of agricultural production in the countryside in north-western Europe since the early middle ages. Other rural households, more numerous since the early modern period, provided labour or produced non-agricultural goods. These landless and (mostly) nearly landless households were also couple-centred and could include non-family workers as well. Today, the family farm is still dominant among the falling number of agricultural enterprises in the North Sea area. Non-family labour has been strongly reduced as a consequence of the mechanisation of labour on the farms.

To interpret the internal relations within the rural households, the institutional, legal and religious frameworks have to be taken into account. The three main types of social relations (parents/children, husbands/wives, masters/servants) were of course of fundamental significance as categories of association since antiquity. Notions on these three relations of generation, gender and politico-economic domination have been transferred through canon law and political philosophy. Nevertheless, institutions associated with the family farm, such as property rights to buildings, land, cattle and tools, could vary to a considerable degree, and there was also a very broad scope in the ways that internal relations might be organised. In the early middle ages, larger feudal units of production were common, and family farms gained weight and autonomy only in the high middle ages. In the medieval period, the rights enjoyed by young men and women in entering into marriage were extended by the church relative to those of their parents and elders as well as the larger kin group. The north-west European

nuclear household pattern is founded upon the fundamental theological innovation that marriage is a sacrament given by the couple to each other (*consensus facit nuptias*), and not by any societal institution. Although family farming had a very long genesis, the classical north-west European household formation pattern of a nuclear family, based upon a married couple and supported by immediate family members and servant and day labour and underpinned by relative late marriage, was only fully in place at the beginning of the early modern period. Despite the rise and decline of proto-industry and the nineteenth century legal changes, core elements of this pattern remained intact. Only in the twentieth century, mechanisation, scientification, and urbanisation changed the needs for and options of family labour. This fundamentally altered the roles and goals of farmers, servants, and children.

During the period of sharp population decrease in the fifth and sixth centuries, the villa system with large estates and many dependents in the regions formerly occupied by the Romans made way for peasant societies. Peasant families lived in settlements with a limited number of farmsteads, similar to the situation in north-western Europe outside the Roman empire. As a result the core of most of the rural households in the early middle ages consisted of a nuclear family, although some farm buildings also gave shelter to a few dependents (slaves, relatives). Couples and their children became the principal units of production, reproduction and consumption. This household structure fitted into the Christian model of conjugality as it spread across north-western Europe in the following centuries, a model that might have provoked a more narrow concept of kinship with less responsibilities for more distant relatives. This can be seen in Scandinavia in the eleventh and twelfth centuries, the last part of north-western Europe to Christianise. Small scale peasant farming was the prime means of existence of households, whether their members were freemen or serfs. Despite the importance of family farming, even the early medieval rural society was not egalitarian, as an elite of warriors dominated most of the rural peasantry turning them into tenants or serfs. In most places slavery changed into serfdom at the end of the millennium, except in Scandinavia and the British Isles. In the more affluent households, slaves were replaced by a large number of male and female servants (mostly life cycle servants). By the fifteenth century, serfdom had nearly completely dwindled away. It experienced a revival in central Europe in the early modern period, and some seigniorial rights remained in existence until the nineteenth century.

The prime household organisation unit was the 'manse', consisting of a farm, land, cattle and equipment enough to feed a 'family' in the broadest sense of the word. Although the manse could be a large household, data for north-western France in the ninth century show that about three quarters of the households consisted of a single nuclear family or a solitary person. The remaining quarter consisted partly of extended households. The same data suggest an average household size of 4.5 to 5.5, which is about the same level to be found in the next ten centuries. In England, for instance, average household sizes fluctuated between 3.7 and 5.2 in the middle ages and the early modern period. Extended and multiple households remained the exception all over north-western Europe in the second millennium.

Household structures changed considerably during the life cycle. After marriage most households only consisted of the man and his wife, often supplemented by non-nuclear

family members or servants. After the birth of the children, the household size started to increase. When children were able to work, non-nuclear members left the household. By the time grown-up children married and left the parental house, they again could be replaced by servants. Consequently household composition was heavily influenced by factors such as the number of surviving children or family members. The weight of the nuclear family differed strongly between regions. In some of them, the extension of the nuclear family with a survivor of the older generation or some unmarried brothers and sisters was a normal stage in the family life cycle, while elsewhere couples nearly always lived in a nuclear households (neolocality). However, all over north-western Europe a preference for male succession combined with high male ages at marriage limited the frequency of three-generation households already before 1500.

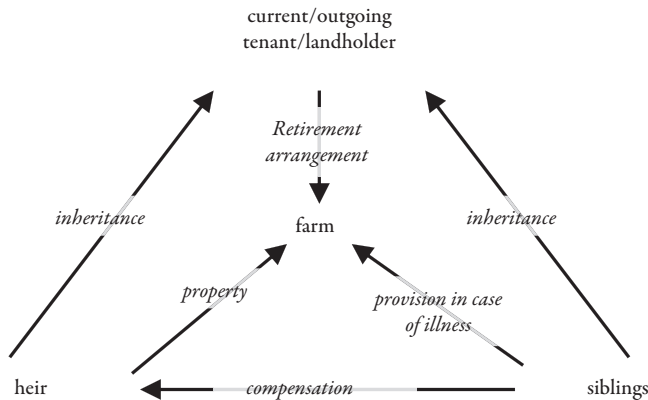
From the ninth century onwards perceived differences between free and unfree tenants had diminished and peasants are sometimes, and not always correctly, identified as a seemingly uniform social group. However, within the European peasantries there were in fact large social differences, mostly determined by the size and the property structure of land holdings. Rich rural households controlling large land holdings were considerably more populous than poor households with a limited access to land. This pattern survived in north-western Europe until well into the twentieth century. The differences in household size are related to the presence in the larger farmsteads of slaves and later on servants (comprising 10 to 15 per cent of the population), and to the absence of teenage and adult children on the smaller holdings. The incidence of non-nuclear household structures was strongly connected to the demand for labour and to the succession strategies of larger farmers. Despite the disappearance of serfdom and notwithstanding sharp regional variations, social differences within the peasantry in the countryside increased nearly everywhere in the course of the second millennium. Population pressure, agricultural specialisation, proto-industrialisation, concentration of land titles and proletarianisation all contributed to this process. This social differentiation was not a linear process. During the population crisis of the second half of the fourteenth and the fifteenth centuries the group of smallholders and landless labourers mostly shrank, to increase again from the sixteenth century onwards. In parts of England and France (for instance the Paris Basin and Picardy) and along the North Sea coasts of the Low Countries and Germany, processes of social polarisation probably started earlier and were stronger than elsewhere. Here the majority of the rural households in the early modern period had only tiny units of land at their disposal or were landless, making them heavily dependent on (proto-industrial) contract labour or wage labour. The growing social differences and especially the increased number of landless rural poor fuelled the life cycle servant system, which became a crucial part of the European rural societies until the nineteenth and sometimes twentieth centuries. The disappearance of this system caused a major convergence in household size between social groups. By the year 2000, the phase in the family life cycle (for instance, whether the head of household is newly-wed or old-aged) has become a far more important determinant of the size of the rural household.

Major variable in household formation are the practices of succession and inheritance. Succession is not the same thing as inheritance. One can succeed into a social

position: an office, a feudal relation, the role of leading a business (including the business of farming). One can inherit property: money, tools, land. Before the nineteenth century, peasants in most regions had no full property rights on land, so an absolute inheritance of land was out of the question. The standard case involved four types of actors who had to deal with each other's interests in the farm: the lord, the current tenant/landholder, their successor, and the successor's siblings. In the nineteenth century, lordship as a category largely disappeared in the rural societies studied here, although their role was in some regions replaced by land-owners. Where land was owned by the farmers, only three potential parties to transfer were left, the farm still being the central platform of their negotiations (see figure 13.2).

In the last two centuries, debates on inheritance and succession practises often revolved around the fear of politicians that subdivision would threaten the integrity of the holding, including its viability in terms of size and structure. Partibility, however, was not the only important aspect of the transfer of resources between generations. In some regions, the overall shares each child would receive were calculated and kept track of exactly, while in other regions parents were free to give as much as they pleased. Another factor is whether daughters were entitled to the same shares of inherited property as sons, as well as the question if they could own land. Gender relations were also dependent on marital property systems (joint property versus separate property), with deep consequences for the roles of widow, widowers, and their new spouses. Finally, the ways resource transfers were organised could be institutionalised through law, through case-by-case contracts between the old and new generations and the lords, or through testaments.

Figure 13.2: Parties and their claims in property transfers



Terms in standard type designate parties involved in property transfer, arrows and terms in *italics* refer to claims arising from the expectations of one party and directed towards another. Adapted from C. Fertig (2003), 'Hofübergabe im Westfalen des 19. Jahrhunderts: Wendepunkt des bäuerlichen Familienzyklus?', in C. Duhamelle and J. Schlumbohm (eds.), *Eheschließungen im Europa des 18. und 19. Jahrhunderts: Muster und Strategien*, Göttingen, 77 (Veröffentlichungen des Max-Planck-Instituts für Geschichte 197).

Early evidence for Saint-Remi near Rheims in the ninth century suggests a strong preference on the part at least of lords for the succession of the eldest son on the tenant farmsteads (primogeniture) to secure continuity and the reproduction of a qualified labour force. The rights of women (widows, daughters, sisters) on these hereditary manses were very weak. Presumably this model of primogeniture on larger farms remained dominant in the following centuries. The property rights of females on freehold land were slightly better. Since on average about 4 out of every 10 couples did not have surviving sons, this gave room for the transfer of farmsteads to married daughters and others. Free farmsteads often fragmented after inheritance. The selling of these inherited parts promoted the move from hereditary land tenure to a land market from the tenth century onwards. On the one hand this land market opened up possibilities for land accumulation of individual households, on the other hand more and more free land fell into the hands of the lords.

In northern France and the Low Countries inheritance was usually divided quite equally between surviving sons and daughters; however exceptions to this general rule, such as those pertaining in Normandy, the Paris Basin and the Frisian parts of the Low Countries, remained important. In England, unequal systems of succession prevailed from the late middle ages onwards. Under the system of primogeniture younger sons received some small pieces of land or were helped with an apprenticeship, while daughters were provided with dowries of moveable goods or money. The position of widows was relatively weak; they received usually only a third of their husband's land during their lifetime. Also here, regional diversity remained important, such as the system of equal division between all sons in Wales. One individual inherited the land while his co-inheritors were compensated with rents.

One of the factors defining inheritance practices was the difference between partible and impartible holdings. In Denmark and Norway, for example, freeholders were prohibited by law from dividing their holdings. In north-western Germany and large parts of the Low Countries and Scandinavia the farm holding was not divided between the children, but was taken over by just one heir, who compensated the others for their part of the inheritance. In some regions like north-western Germany this could result in a kind of primogeniture with the oldest son succeeding. Other systems were also possible like ultimogeniture with the youngest son or the youngest daughter taking over the family holding. This strong family-land bond, as for example in early modern Germany, promoted the continuation of the family farm and a preference for the succession of sons. Elsewhere, as in parts of the Low Countries and France, the continuation of family lineage seems to have been of less importance in the early modern period with numerous farms being passed to strangers. Family holdings were divided, with the exception of the large tenant farms, causing land ownership to become very scattered, with numerous freehold peasants owning several tiny plots of land. With each generation, these plots were redistributed among the heirs, exchanging, buying and selling these plots without much signs of attachment to the family land. After marriage a couple started a process of land accumulation, which was partly made possible by dowries and inheritances. After about the age of 55 the size of the land holdings of a household started to diminish again, freeing land for the next married

generation. In this way the size of the land holdings of a household remained more or less in accordance with the available labour supply in the household, which of course changed considerably over the family lifecycle.

The transfer of a farm to offspring was one of the main ambitions of the family in most rural households until the nineteenth century. This transfer was not automatic, hampered as it was by a preference for neolocality. In Scandinavia, for instance, a married child was normally only allowed to take over the farm holding after the death of at least one of the spouses of the older generation. Often, *intervivos* transfer contracts were concluded in order to guarantee members of the former generation the livelihood on the farm or in a separate house. Comparable retirement contracts can be found elsewhere in north-western Europe. In early modern Sweden and parts of Germany, a strong emphasis was placed upon preserving the family lineage on the farm, thus restricting the rights of newcomers who opportunities tended to be confined to remarriage of a widow or widower. In other North Sea regions the new (and often younger) spouse was able to keep control of the farm. Recurrent remarriages clearly complicated practices of succession and division. In rural England and in the coastal parts of the Low Countries, the concern for the continuity of the family farm seems to have been considerably less, partly due to the increasing number of landless or nearly landless rural households. Within these social groups household formation and the place of settlement were mainly related to the income opportunities of the new couple and less to the acquisition of parental resources upon marriage. In some parts of England, an extensive land market for tenures existed already in the thirteenth century opening up ways for more well-to-do households to acquire land in other ways than by (post-mortem) inheritances. In early modern England, France and the Low Countries this land market increased considerably, often resulting in the transfer of land and farms to non-family. In early modern Scandinavia and north-western Germany on the other hand the alienation of holdings happened less frequently.

In the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, many of the fundamental features of family farming persisted, despite the fast-changing environment. Much more than other social groups, farmers continued the old marriage and inheritance strategies. Both the viability of the farm and a fair distribution of property and resources to offspring remained important goals for the rural family. Since the late nineteenth century, succession strategies changed due to more income alternatives outside agriculture. One of them was to strengthen the non-successors' human capital through schooling instead of guaranteeing large marriage dowries. The mechanisation of farming implied the use of capital instead of labour, making it more difficult to give money to non-successors, while simultaneously reducing the need to keep them on the farm. The new problem farmers faced in the twentieth century was how to find a successor among their declining number of children. Not only had it become harder for a successor to compensate the siblings for their legal share in the increasingly more expensive family farm, the take-over had also become less attractive due to the rise of real earnings and improvements in the standard of living outside agriculture. For the same reasons young farmers frequently had difficulties finding a partner.

Pre-modern rural households were run by a working couple, with unequal legal rights but in practice with equal responsibilities. In legal terms, in medieval, early modern and, to a lesser degree, modern times rural households were strictly patriarchal, with the male head having full authority to act on behalf of his family, while the rights of his wife, children and other members of the household were limited. There is evidence that at the end of the middle ages improving property rights of widows and a diminution of the age differences at marriage strengthened the negotiation position for married women. In fact, the power division within the household was more equal than legal arrangements suggest, a situation that changed again in the late nineteenth century, with the development of a more unbalanced relationship between breadwinner and housewife.

There is ample evidence that in the high middle ages a clear gender division in agricultural labour existed, enforced by cultural norms. Men ploughed and worked in the fields and the forests, while women took care of the children, cleaned the house, kept the garden and cared for the animals near the house. Only in busy harvest times did both sexes work together in the fields. Part of these gender differences were related to gendered capacities, with men doing the physically heaviest tasks. This gendered division of labour restricted female family members mostly to the domain of the farmstead, while males dominated the public sphere. This division of farm work between the sexes remained by and large the same until the twentieth century. By then mechanisation changed the nature of the activities on the farms drastically, partly mixing up the gendered activities inasmuch as physical strength became less important to accomplish tasks. Because women had a very specific role in agriculture and in most proto-industrial activities, their presence was indispensable in most households. The gendered division of work made a certain balance between able-bodied males and females in the household necessary. Shortages in family labour supply were filled by hired labour. From the middle ages onwards an increasing number of households with small land holdings exchanged their labour surplus with larger farm holdings. Their grown-up children usually became life cycle servants. In this way, the local labour market and the life cycle servant system smoothed out discrepancies between supply of and demand for male and female labour inside the individual households.

In many rural regions, such as the southern Netherlands from the twelfth century, and the Scandinavian woodlands and the regions around Osnabruck (Germany) from the sixteenth century, the increasing number of smallholders was accompanied by the rising proto-industrial demand for both male and female work. Proto-industrial work also had a strong gendered character, but not in ways that were immutable. Weaving, for example, was mostly a male task, except in Sweden and Norway where it was predominantly done by women. Everywhere, women were employed as spinners in wool and cloth production. Rural industries flourished mostly in regions dominated by small mixed farms. The combination of small-scale farming and rural industry offered most household members extra security against harvest failures and trade fluctuations. Rural specialisation in economic activities partly directed to local markets (handicrafts, transport, trade) also gained in weight in early modern Europe.

This process of specialisation accelerated all over the north-western European countryside during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, alongside the retreat of

agriculture as the prime economic sector. The rise of income possibilities in large scale industry, trade and services transformed the former family economy into a family wage economy, and at the end of the twentieth century into a more 'individualistic' wage economy. As said this affected, in relation to more social provisions and a steep rise in welfare, the female position in the household economy. With the rise of the male bread-winner model, the work of married females was increasingly restricted to taking care of the home and the children, with only limited possibilities for (mostly less-rewarded) economic activities. The traditional central female function in the rural household economy faded away, alongside the rapid decline of independent family businesses (whether a farm, a shop or a trade). Since the 1960's, the female emancipation movement and a strong increase in female education levels, opened up better-paid jobs for women. At the start of the twenty-first century, however, male and female positions on the labour market remain unbalanced, since married females interrupt their professional career and still perform most of the tasks inside the house.

The position and the life cycle of children below the age of 12-14 in rural households radically changed during the second millennium. There seemed to be a slow increase in investment by the parents in their (broader) education, partly forced by external institutions. With the introduction of a village education system in the early modern period, children (more often boys than girls) aged 6 to 12 usually went to school during certain periods of the year (winter). It was common for young children to perform specific tasks on farms, especially during busy harvest times. In keeping with their physical strength, their role in household production increased between the age of 12 and 16. At those ages, juveniles from the lower social strata became live-in servants in more wealthier households. Everywhere in north-western Europe the role of children in the household economy diminished drastically during the twentieth century. The prime causes were the creation of a compulsory schooling system until the age of about 16, and the strong rise in opportunities for full-time education beyond the age of 16. This development implied a major shift in the position of children as active contributors to the household income, to investors in their own future.

13.3 The family and income

The most striking continuity in the household economy of the agricultural population between 500 and 2000 concerns the access to land. Although its legal status, its distribution and its value changed drastically over the course of fifteen centuries, land remained intimately connected to agricultural production. Fields however do not produce crops by themselves. Land, in combination with labour, enables the rural population to exploit natural resources. A bird's eye view of the changes taking place between 500 and 2000 indicates that rural societies around the North Sea have successfully managed, albeit in a slow and very uneven way, to release labour from agriculture. In terms of labour productivity, the track record of north-western Europe is impressive. The chapters in this book reveal that all rural regions experienced a gradual shift from an almost purely agrarian society to a more diversified rural economy in the long run.

Between 500 and 2000 different cycles and chronologies can be observed in the relationship between agricultural production and labour organisation. Some forms of labour emerged during this period and then disappeared again. For example, agricultural day labourers were probably as scarce around 1000 as they are in present-day north-western Europe. Geographical differences within the North Sea area were also important. Whereas early modern England was marked by a clear tendency towards a growing number of landless labourers, the vast majority of the rural population in France did have access to property rights. Diverging forces and institutions profoundly influenced household labour and economies at the regional level too. In the Low Countries, for instance, differences can be observed between the coastal plains and the inland regions. In the former, farm engrossment from the sixteenth century onwards led to a greater number of wage dependent labourers compared to the hinterland where a small holding served as the most important source of income for the rural population. Nevertheless, it is possible to discern some significant trends that characterised the rural communities around the North Sea and how they used their local pool of labour.

The overviews in this volume indicate that the self-contained and risk-averse peasant household was at no stage, either geographical or chronological, the dominant form of rural production. The idealtype ‘Chayanovian’ peasant family and holding is an interesting analytical category, but proved to be rather absent in north-western Europe. Historically, one of the most important challenges for rural producers was the control over their own labour power. The rural population of north-west Europe gradually attained the right to dispose of their own labour. Although serfdom remained a legal reality in some regions (for instance, in England) until the sixteenth century, the late medieval period generally marked the end of serfdom in Europe. In Scandinavia for example, the late medieval population crisis accelerated this process. By the end of the middle ages, most of the rural population around the North Sea had managed to free themselves from the manorial economy and especially from the labour services imposed upon them by the lords. Coerced labour gradually disappeared and, as a result, enabled households to develop a labour strategy largely independent from the manor and its lord. Although peasant families and the manorial economy remained intricately linked for many centuries hereafter, labour was now fully rewarded and choices could be made more freely in terms of household labour allocation and mobility.

The late medieval and especially the early modern period were characterised by forms of labour organisation that were increasingly complex and varied. A market for labour gradually emerged and governed the decisions of the rural households from then onwards. The Black Death, and the labour shortages arising from the demographic decline, accelerated this emergence of a labour market. Almost everywhere in Europe the first attempts at introducing some form of labour legislation (mostly pertaining to the level of wages and mobility of the labour force) can be traced to the second half of the fourteenth century. This suggests that rural households made the most of the opportunities offered to them by scarcity of labour. The late medieval period was marked by a new configuration of labour that continued to spread in the following centuries. The Black Death had created the optimal demographic conditions that

enabled rural households to earn a living outside the boundaries of their own holding. Although England and the northern Netherlands displayed distinct trends towards a growing share of landless labourers by the early modern period, in most regions however, the bulk of the household incomes was still derived from their own holding. On these farms household members combined forces to produce a variety of foodstuffs that were used first and foremost for their own consumption.

One of the most significant changes concerned the nature and the sources of household income. Holdings gradually developed into production units that extended their reach beyond the typical agrarian activities. Production on agricultural holdings became increasingly diversified throughout the early modern period. The chapters in this volume illustrate that vast numbers of the rural population engaged in activities other than traditional agriculture. Proto-industrial production or rural industries flourished in north-western Europe during the early modern period. Populations in these regions were in particular active in textile production such as wool and linen. In Denmark and eastern Belgium rural household also engaged in the production of potteries and iron. In some regions it was not until the second half of the nineteenth century that these industrial bye-employments ceased to exist; in Sweden many rural industries thrived until well into the first half of the twentieth century. The nature of these bye-employments were strongly determined by local conditions. In the Low Countries for example, urban textile industries triggered the expansion of proto-industrial textile production in the surrounding countryside. In coastal communities it was not uncommon to combine agriculture with commercial fishing activities. During the early modern period many of the rural households in these regions ceased to be purely agricultural producers. In the economically most advanced parts of the Low Countries an important section of the population already relied on non-agricultural production as a vital part of their household economy since the late middle ages. The rural industries continued to flourish until production in centralised units such as factories proved to be less costly. But in hindsight, industrialisation started in the countryside.

To what extent these new forms of activities and sources of household income fundamentally changed the dynamics governing household decisions has been intensely debated by historians. Although in some regions rural industries had an impact on the size and composition of the household and interacted with the process of household formation, these influences were not a general rule. In some parts of England the spread of textile production in the countryside resulted in a lower age at first marriage. In Flanders, an opposite trend can be discerned: the age at first marriage rose and fewer adolescents set up a household in proto-industrial areas. Although different forms of proto-industrial activity can be observed in north-western Europe, no universal proto-industrial economic model has been identified. Most historians however agree that the combination of agricultural and industrial production did have an impact on the use of household labour. Directly or indirectly, the activities of one or more members of a household in non-agricultural activities produced some economic effects. One of these effects was the more efficient use of the work capacities of the household group. As a result of these industrial activities, more members of the household engaged in work and the number of work hours performed by all members of the household

probably increased. The rise in the number of activities concentrated on one holding was not necessarily restricted to small holdings. Large farms too were production sites that were characterised by a growth in the variety of activities performed. Although in some regions large farms tended to specialise in specific crops or cattle, in other regions the economic elite of the countryside also turned their activities to commercial textile production or brewing.

Around 1800 the nature of economic activities in the countryside was quite different from around 1000. Rural households engaged in a number of activities that were no longer agricultural. The occupational structure of rural communities had also changed fundamentally as a result of this growing diversification of rural production. The number of rural artisans, catering to the needs of both large and small farms, gradually increased. Next to the traditional blacksmith, also shopkeepers, shoemakers and carpenters made their appearance in rural communities. From an occupational viewpoint, there was a growing urbanisation of the countryside. This latter trend was only reversed in the second half of the twentieth century. Rural industries were important in the countryside and still continue to absorb some of the household labour in present-day Europe. The period stretching from the middle of the nineteenth to the third quarter of the twentieth century was characterised by a retreat from non-agricultural activities on farms. To a large extent the disappearance of rural industries also resulted in the gradual disappearance of the small farm. In Sweden and Norway, where industry took hold of the countryside, industrialisation seems to have been accompanied in the late nineteenth century by an increase in the number of small freehold farms, and a decrease in crofts and cottages.

A second feature, next to the growth of various types of bye-employments, that characterised rural households during this long period is the growing importance of agricultural labour performed outside the context of the individual household unit. In other words, agricultural labour was increasingly sold to other economic agents in the countryside. Households sold their excess labour power to farms that lacked intra-household labour. In most cases, household members of small farms worked on larger holdings during the peak moments in agriculture. Again, differences in scope and intensity can be observed within north-west Europe. For instance, around the middle of the eighteenth century c.60 per cent of the population in the German district of Belm had no access to land and were forced to earn a living through wage labour. In England and the northern Low Countries a similar social structure can be discerned. In most of northern France and the southern Low Countries however, there were few agricultural day labourers that were employed all year round by large farms. There was nonetheless an undeniable trend towards a greater reliance on wage labour as a complementary source of income. Population growth, the subdivision of holdings, farm engrossment, and so on, all contributed to the emergence of a labour market for agricultural labour. In most cases this labour market was local; small farms sold their labour to larger holdings in the same parish.

During the sixteenth century more complex forms of labour organisation emerged. The development of migrant labour is in fact an important episode in the rural history of north-west Europe. In the regions directly bordering the North Sea, migrant labourers can be encountered from the late sixteenth century. In most cases these

migrants were active in harvest labour, but also non-agricultural enterprises depended on migrant labour (constructing dikes, for example). Members of the rural household had to migrate beyond the borders of their own parish in order to secure a livelihood and part of the household income was generated at some physical distance. After 1750 these migration patterns became more intense and a substantial part of the labour performed during peak seasons in agriculture was not hired locally anymore. After 1850 migration continued to be a factor of importance for rural households, but employment patterns also changed at this time. Industry started to replace agriculture as a source of income for rural households. This does not mean that farms in the twentieth century no longer depended on income derived from non-agricultural labour. A large share of households active in agriculture had members employed as wage earners in different sectors. For the vast majority of the rural populations in north-west European, in past and present, agricultural production proved thus to be unsatisfactory in order to make ends meet. Rural industry (or non-agricultural by-employment) and wage labour were in fact two of the main characteristics of employment in the North Sea area. Historians disagree on the origins of this pattern. Whilst some have argued that changes in household production and labour organisation were primarily driven by economic necessity, others have advanced the theory that market opportunities explain these developments.

The chapters in this volume also reveal some other characteristics. Everywhere in Europe, common land and common rights gradually vanished. In Flanders, for example, common land had already disappeared by the late middle ages. In early modern northern Germany common land was steadily integrated in agricultural holdings. Common land, and access to communal resources, survived in England and France well into the nineteenth century but were almost extinct by the onset of World War I. For the households with access to common land and rights, the income that could be derived from them was not unimportant. Some historians have argued that the loss of common rights, such as the right to pasture cattle, collect firewood, etc. resulted in a net financial loss for the household economy that needed to be compensated for by other forms of household income. On the short and medium term the decline of the commons and the restricted access to common rights produced serious challenges to the household economy. The gradual disappearance of common land and rights as a source of household income indicates that rural households came to depend less on more communally governed means of production.

With regard to the household economy of the rural population, the overviews in this book also stress the importance of credit facilities and networks in the countryside. In fact, credit emerges as a factor of economic significance at a fairly early stage. Usury legislation and the frequent references to debt litigation in late medieval court rolls suggest that the rural families already greatly relied on credit. In the following centuries a vast number of sources testify to the importance of credit for rural households.

Although credit did take diverse forms across time and space, some elements are characteristic of north-west Europe. First, the use of credit was closely linked to the availability of coin and the money supply. Many of the credit transactions used in rural communities were the result of coin shortages. In other words, the value of all

goods and services produced and sold in the countryside vastly exceeded the money supply. Credit was a collective strategy to overcome the problem of scarcity of money. In these cases, loans and deferred payment were closely linked to the kin group and the local or village community. For large loans, peasantries frequently resorted to urban moneylenders. Second, the use of credit was clearly linked to events that were crucial in the life course of a household. Large loans contracted by the rural population were in many cases closely connected to the acquisition and the transfer of land. As a market in land accelerated, credit facilities and instruments were introduced that enabled rural households to finance these transactions. Third, credit was also extended by urban entrepreneurs and traders to peasants to optimise production. Especially in proto-industry, credit permitted rural households to acquire the necessary tools and materials to engage in production. This however does not mean that all credit was beneficial to the rural population in the long run. In France, for example, the expropriation of the peasantry in favour of urban citizens was preceded by an upsurge in debts contracted with the latter. There were certainly risks attached to the use of credit, but it is now also apparent that the widespread use of credit contributed to the market involvement of the rural population.

In the course of the nineteenth century credit facilities institutionalised. Banks and other credit institutions took over the role of the amalgam of credit relations that existed during the previous centuries. From that time onwards, credit was increasingly separated from the village communities and a more impersonal market emerged. Financial institutions, and no longer individuals, supplied the credit that rural producers needed.

13.4 The family, the local community and the state

The interactions of rural households with the larger social, religious and political forces within and beyond the community constitute the last topic in this volume. Again, the interactions were complex, and in some cases highly unique. This was the case in Denmark, for instance, where the old feudal order remained intact much longer than in the rest of the North Sea area. In most regions, discontinuity characterised the long term relationship of rural households with upper-level institutions such as the lord, the village council, the church and the state.

During the early middle ages the manor was not only the centre of economic activity in the village, it also monopolised political and social life. It can be considered the most important external force in the daily life of rural populations around the North Sea. In the following centuries this pattern drastically changed because the lord lost his monopoly of power. The roles once assumed by the lord and the manor were taken over by a number of new institutions in most of north-western Europe between the ninth and thirteenth centuries. Many of these also continued in existence until quite recently. Thus, in northern France and north-west Germany, village institutions developed during the eleventh and twelfth centuries. These institutions consisted mainly of associations of rural populations at the village or community level and ruled a variety

of local activities. Some associations were established in order to impose a structure upon economic life, whereas others also served a more spiritual goal. Already, from the seventh and early eighth centuries, certain forms of these organisation can be observed. However, it was not until the twelfth century that village councils, priests and poor relief institutions were regularly installed across north-western Europe. This process was related to the development of numerous villages, often with a church, as a result of the accelerating growth of population since the tenth and eleventh centuries.

As said, throughout the late medieval and early modern period the power of the lord declined, both in economic and political terms. Firstly, from the later middle ages, the lord no longer enjoyed a monopoly on surplus extraction. The emergence of the nation state and state taxation fundamentally changed this pattern. Surpluses produced in the countryside had to be shared with others. The conversion of many seigniorial rights from payments in kind into fixed payments in cash gradually eroded the income and economic power of the lords. Second, in terms of political power, the influence of the lord on village life also declined. For example, litigation in the countryside was no longer restricted to the manorial court. Cities, but also the central state, assumed some of the political and legal roles that had been traditionally reserved to lords. They did however retain a powerful position as landowners. Extensive property rights ensured that they continued to be important political and economic agents within rural communities. Lords also continued indirectly to exert their influence. In some associations such as the village council, the representatives of the lord (in many cases his tenant farmers) continued to safeguard his interests as landowner. As such, lords did not disappear completely from the countryside. Their power however clearly dwindled throughout the early modern period. The French revolution witnessed the abolition of feudalism and lordship in most north-western European regions. In regions unaffected by revolutionary legislation, lords continued to be a factor of importance. In Prussia, for example, lords and nobility enjoyed the right, until the middle of the nineteenth century, to reclaim land when peasants passed away without heirs. Lords, then, did not disappear from the countryside, but their influence was gradually restricted.

Contrary to the experience of the manor and the lord, the village council was an institution that grew in importance during the late middle ages and the early modern period. The role of these different types of village councils was twofold. They played an important part in regulating and organizing intra-community economic life and also acted as an intermediary between the state and the rural household. As such they constituted an important factor for the rural population. The village councils were not democratically composed, and the decision-making process was strongly influenced by the representatives of the lord and the most important landowners. Both freeholders and tenants took part in the decisions, whilst the landless were usually excluded. It was not until the nineteenth century that measures were taken to democratise the composition of the village councils. As said, the councils regulated many aspects of economic life: they set the dates for the start of the harvest, decided upon communal crop rotation schemes and maintained local infrastructure such as roads and waterways. In some cases they also administered common land and rights. In Britain and in continental western Europe, village councils also interacted with the state, whilst

in Scandinavia this interaction usually took place via district courts. The village council, or, in Scandinavia, the district court, were the institutions through which national legislation was enacted and applied at a local level. As such they constituted an important link in the process of state formation during the early modern period. In some regions village councils were responsible for distributing the burden of taxation and collecting state taxes. From the nineteenth century on, the power of these village councils gradually eroded. The political decision-making process shifted to higher political echelons, first to the national state, and in the second half of the twentieth century to Europe. At present the European Union is the most relevant level in terms of rural and agricultural policies.

In short, the role and impact of the village community, or some such entity, changed profoundly during the last millennium. During the late medieval and early modern period, its power and influence, both internal and external, expanded, but during the last two centuries village communities and their like have experienced a steady erosion of their political power. As a result, farmers and agricultural producers have largely retreated from political life at the local level. This withdrawal is not only caused by the decreasing number of farmers in the village, but also because their contribution to the local economy has become less important after the Second World War. Farmers' unions are today of far greater importance in terms of political organisation than are local governments.

At the local level, the church was equally a factor of importance for many centuries. It is however difficult to isolate the church as a separate influence from other actors such as the state and the lords before the middle ages. The church, embodied by the presence of one or more priests in the village, interacted with rural households in a number of ways. Next to its spiritual functions, organising rituals and administering sacraments, the church was deeply involved in the economic and social life of rural families.

Firstly, the church was directly involved in agricultural life. Church taxes, and especially tithes, were quite common throughout north-western Europe. The church continued to benefit from the proceeds of local rural production through tithes until the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Like many other medieval forms of surplus extraction, the importance of tithes gradually declined during the early modern period. In all regions studied in this book, tithes had disappeared by the second half of the nineteenth century. Secondly, the church also governed daily life in rural communities. Like village councils, they mediated the relations between their parishioners and higher administrative echelons. More importantly however, the church also intervened in the household decision-making process. Especially with regard to the process of household formation, some regions displayed examples of significant influence on the timing of marriage and reproduction. The church, for example, justified the pattern of late marriage and sometimes discouraged second marriages. Interference in the context of household fertility, in particular the discouragement of birth control, had also been established long before the onset of the twentieth century. The ability of a household to deploy its productive potentials, especially labour, was thus highly influenced by religion. That said, during the nineteenth century the impact of the

church in the countryside, both economically and ethically, declined significantly. Finally, the church also played an important role in the distribution of welfare in the countryside, and retained this role until well into the twentieth century. Originally, one third of the proceeds of ecclesiastical tithes were distributed to the poor. During the late middle ages and sixteenth century the church however lost the monopoly on rural poor relief and had to share the responsibility with lay welfare associations. Most village communities financed welfare expenditure through charitable donations. These contributions were aimed first and foremost at the deserving poor of the local community. In the lists of recipients, the non-active population was dominant: orphan children, widows, the elderly and disabled people. In most regions discussed in this volume, poor relief in the countryside continued to be financed through charitable donations until the nineteenth century.

At that time, there was a clear shift in the nature of welfare provision. The state intervened more actively in these matters and also forced village communities to raise taxes for the poor. Such taxes for poor relief had already been introduced in England around 1600. As a result, the interference of the poor law supervisors in the household economy of the labouring poor became far stronger. As English parishioners were now forced to share the financial burden of poor co-parishioners collectively, they were also more inclined to supervise the activities of the poor. The chapters in this volume indicate that, with the exception of England, welfare payments were irregular and marginal until the nineteenth century. In areas where proto-industrial activities became dominant, the pressure to reorganise poor relief was often high. Industrialisation pushed poor relief from a local concern to a national problem. For the vast majority of the rural population, poor relief did not constitute an important factor of the household economy. By the twentieth century, this had changed dramatically. Welfare revenue, in various forms, is now an integral part of the household economies and strategies of the rural population.

Throughout the previous sections, the role of the state has been scantily touched upon. However, between 500 and 2000 the rise of the state is undoubtedly the most important change in terms of external influences on the household economy in the North Sea area. At present, the state and supra-state institutions are the single most important external factors influencing the decision-making process in agricultural households. The restrictions faced by present-day farmers in organising their production are set by either national governments or the European Union. The enormous impact of the state on agricultural producers is the result of a long historical process. Especially since the sixteenth century, state structures have increasingly organised surplus extraction and raised the tax burden. Rural households have been greatly affected by these developments. In Flanders, for example, increasing state taxation during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries has been linked to the growth of rural industries. The state organisation also affected rural household economies through different forms of legislation. Law enforcement, in the domains of labour markets, land markets, credit markets, common land and so on, has shaped the household economies of the rural producers increasingly since the fourteenth century.

13.5 Final remarks

During the second millennium the gradual integration of large rural areas in regional and, later, globalizing market economies subjugated and transformed peasantries. It put increasing pressure on the access to their essential means of production: land, labour and capital. One of the main conclusions of this book is that within this slow but structural transformation, rural families over time and place followed different trajectories and developed diverging repertoires of adaptation and resistance. The rich and varied pictures drawn in the regional chapters in this volume show that there is not one master-narrative of gradual deruralisation. This implies that trajectories of rural transformation only can be understood within their regional and social context, at least until the late nineteenth century. The chapters reveal in fact two important periods of change for the rural populations around the North Sea.

The transition from the medieval to early modern period was a first and major historical watershed. At the end of the middle ages most of the rural population in this area had managed to free themselves from the manorial economy and especially from the labour services imposed upon them by the lords. Labour organisation became increasingly complex and choices could be made more freely in terms of household labour allocation. These processes generated a strong regional and social differentiation. Regions with capitalist agriculture, dominated by commercial farms and wage labour, developed in the area around the North Sea. These regions were bound by two other types of peasant societies. The first combined small-scale family farming with an expanding proto-industry, thus creating a commercial subsistence economy. More distant, but still integrated in the regional division of labour, there was a more autarchic rural society with a significant labour surplus. The commodification of labour and surpluses instigated internal social differences. Production on agricultural holdings became increasingly diversified throughout the early modern period. Vast numbers of the rural population engaged in activities other than traditional agriculture. A growing part of rural income came from commodified labour, either through proto-industrial work or as hired labour outside the farm and the village. Village communities and institutions also replicated these patterns, with their inbuilt economic, social and political inequalities. Along with a gradual decline of the commons, property rights became more individualistic.

A second major turn can be discerned in the last quarter of the nineteenth century. As agricultural trade globalized, large-scale grain and food imports provoked a fall in market prices. The number of farmers started to decline in almost every region, though the timing and speed of decline differed. Surviving family farms had to reorganise themselves in order to produce commercial crops and livestock. In these farming households, family labour was more and more restricted to the nuclear household, gradually excluding all forms of labour exchange with other family and non-family relations. Non-agricultural alternatives, such as sub-contracting production, new industrial activities and opportunities for urban workers to commute from the countryside relieved the growing tension between labour and income. Expelled surplus labour could largely be absorbed by urban and rural industrialisation and by the new service sectors.

Rural society separated into a smaller fraction of market-oriented, specialised family farmers and a growing portion of households with an income outside agriculture and outside the local economy. Villages in these regions suburbanised and became part of larger systems of employment, transport and trade. Regional differences were gradually fading away in favour of a much more uniform 'subrural-suburban' society.