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Historical Demography and the Reinterpretation of Early Modern French History:

A Research Review One of the most fruitful of the historical techniques developed since World War II has been in the field of historical demography. Although demographic history had been practiced before 1945, a dramatically different approach appeared in the post-war period. The French have been among the leaders of this new branch of the discipline, and it is to their contribution that this article will be devoted.

The origins of this new approach are difficult to trace. Traditional historians had ceased to dominate the field after 1929, when a group of non-traditional historians led by Marc Bloch and Lucien Febvre formed the small *Ecole des Annales*. But the innovators paid little attention to demography. One historian who was quite close to the *Annales* group, Henri Sée, even wrote an article asserting the impossibility of discovering the size of the French population in the seventeenth century.¹

The demographic revolution in French history proved to be the child of two distinct groups—a few historians who became interested in demography in 1944,² and a number of statisticians and demographers who became interested in history two or three years later.³ The two groups eventually merged, and now the *Société de Démographie Historique* has more than two hundred members. If we examine the concerns of the two original groups, we can see how they transformed

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1 Henri Sée, "Peut-on évaluer la population de l'ancienne France?" *Revue d'Economie Politique*, XXXVIII (1924), 647ff.

2 Jean Meuvret, "Les mouvements des prix de 1661 à 1715 et leurs répercussions," *Journal de la société de statistique de Paris*, LXXV (1944), 109–119; Claude Ernest Labrousse, *La crise de l'économie française à la fin de l'Ancien Régime et au début de la Révolution* (Paris, 1944), 183ff.

3 The first issue of *Population* appeared in January 1946; the names Alfred Sauvy, Jean Bourgeois, Jean Daric, Alain Girard, Jean Stoetzel, Jean Sutter, and Paul Vincent, all statisticians, were among the first to appear in the journal.

our knowledge of early modern French history, and how the more recent generation (which will be discussed below) has built on their work.

The first group consisted of a handful of historians who specialized in economic and social history. The three principal figures, Ernest Labrousse, Jean Meuvret, and Marcel Reinhard, all began to publish at the same time. Today these three men are all approximately seventy years old. Their primary and almost identical purposes can be summarized as follows:

1. By linking economic problems with demographic problems, they hoped to explain economic growth (in the eighteenth century) or economic stagnation (in the seventeenth) by reference to demographic circumstances. This topic has now become a sort of “Tarte à la Crème.”⁴ The difficulty with such an approach is that frequently we do not know the exact percentages of economic growth and population growth.

2. Their second purpose was to point out the many differences between seventeenth- and eighteenth-century French demography. As they have shown, national population growth during the seventeenth century was halted by frequent demographic crises—notably in 1630, 1650, 1662, and 1710. During the eighteenth century, the crises became less and less frequent, and less and less severe—as a result, the population began to grow: from about 20 to 26 million in the course of the century.⁵

3. One member of the group, Jean Meuvret, sought to reveal the nature of a demographic crisis during the Ancien Régime.⁶ It was a real crisis—very short in time (one or two years), but very powerful in effect: the number of deaths multiplying by two, three, four, or more times; the number of marriages reduced to very few; the number of births divided by two, three, or four; and an increase of beggars and

4 It has occupied primarily English-speaking historians. In France two works have served as the point of departure: François Simiand, *Le salaire, l'évolution sociale et la monnaie* (Paris, 1932); and Claude Ernest Labrousse, *Esquisse du mouvement des prix et des revenus en France au XVIII^e siècle* (Paris, 1933). The current state of the question is presented by Fernand Braudel and Claude Ernest Labrousse, *Histoire économique et sociale de la France, Vol. II: 1660–1789* (Paris, 1970).

5 An example of the chronology of the crises can be found in Pierre Goubert, *Beauvais et le Beauvaisis de 1600 à 1730* (Paris, 1960); and a total overview in Marcel Reinhard, André Armengaud, and Jacques Dupaquier, *Histoire générale de la population mondiale* (Paris, 1968; 3rd ed.), 146–270.

6 Jean Meuvret, “Les crises de subsistances et de la démographie de la France d’Ancien Régime,” *Population*, I (1946), 643–650.

vagrants. Meuvret also demonstrated that demographic crises were frequently connected with crises in the price of cereals, and perhaps caused by them. He proved, too, that the worst crises, with serious starvation, diminished after 1710, and still further after 1740.

The second group of scholars in this generation, consisting of demographers, appeared quite suddenly with the foundation of the Institut National d'Etudes Démographiques (I.N.E.D.) in 1945—an organization which soon started to publish a journal, *Population*. It is the Institut's good fortune to have as its director Alfred Sauvy, whose skills in this field are unsurpassed in France. But the scholar who has done and is now doing the most essential work in the subject is Louis Henry, who began to publish papers and organize research after 1950.⁷

The first purpose of the Henry group was to calculate correctly the demographic characteristics of pre-Malthusian populations, especially between 1680 and 1790. To do this, they have devised the highly original and powerful method known as family reconstitution. This method is made possible by the exceptional quality and number of French Catholic parish registers, which provide basic information about births, marriages, and deaths. Using these materials, Henry and his group have been able to calculate birth, marriage, and death rates with great accuracy, and to study fertility rates with the same precision. Their first analysis dealt with Crulai, a village in Normandy, whose name is now known by every seventeenth- and eighteenth-century demographic historian.⁸ Since then, a number of other monographs have been published.⁹ The method has now been accepted, practiced, and imitated in every country, including the United States, where the archives make such research possible.

Such were the beginnings of scientific demographic history in France. Today, twenty years later, what can one say about its condition, its conclusions, and its prospects?

7 The first article by Louis Henry dealing with historical demography was "Une richesse démographique en friche; les registres paroissiaux," *Population*, VIII (1953), 281–290; soon thereafter came the first edition of the famous little manual, *Des registres paroissiaux à l'histoire de la population: manuel de dépouillement et d'exploitation de l'état-civil ancien*, by Michel Fleury and Louis Henry (Paris, 1956).

8 Etienne Gautier and Louis Henry, *La population de Crulai, paroisse normande* (Paris, 1958).

9 Among the best works, all of which appeared among the *cahiers* of the Institut National d'Etudes Démographiques, are: J. Henripin, *La population canadienne au début du XVIII^e siècle* (Paris, 1954); Jean Ganiage, *Trois villages d'Ile-de-France au 18^e siècle* (Paris, 1963); and Jean Valmary, *Familles paysannes au 18^e siècle en Bas-Quercy* (Paris, 1965).

During these years, a large quantity of books and articles has been published. Fortunately, they can be surveyed with the aid of general reviews and journals, especially *Population Index* (Princeton), *Population Studies* (London), *Population* (Paris), and, since 1964, *Annales de Démographie Historique* (Paris).

The best papers have dealt with subjects at the parish or regional level, because these rest on the surest foundations. General books and general topics are often hypothetical and hazardous, especially those that must rely upon the crude demographic data available for the years before 1700. To indicate the achievements of the field more clearly, I might discuss two distinct areas: the present state of old questions and the appearance of new problems. I have chosen three “old” problems: demographic crisis; characteristic pre-Malthusian demographic rates; and population growth and economic growth.

DEMOGRAPHIC CRISIS Two qualifications have been added to Meuvret’s conception of a demographic crisis: First, that demographic crises did not occur in large parts of Europe—if they really occurred anywhere. Second, that if they did take place, these crises were caused *not* by the high price of food, nor by any kind of dearth or starvation, but by epidemics.¹⁰

It should be noted that political and religious prejudices have affected these discussions.¹¹ Nonetheless, I think that the most reasonable and satisfactory conclusions can be summarized as follows:

1. Genuine short and violent demographic crises occurred in large parts of Europe up to the early eighteenth century.¹²
2. Some crises were substantially the result of the high price of cereals (in Northern and Central France, 1662); others of epidemics

10 There is a good summary of these points of view in *Problèmes de mortalité: Actes du Colloque international de démographie historique* (Liège, 1963), 85–89 and 93–97. An example of a sharp attack on the “black” view of demographic crises can be found in Pierre Chaunu, *La civilisation de l’Europe classique* (Paris, 1966), 233–237.

11 The defenders of the old monarchy, still a large group in the French historical tradition, cannot admit that there were famines when the “Grand Roi” reigned. Moreover, many Catholics and Protestants “of the right” regard the mortality crises as God’s punishments for human sins, and not as phenomena that resulted from economic, social, or political organization. These prejudices are more often implicit than explicit.

12 See, for example, Reinhard, Armengaud, and Dupaquier, *Population mondiale*, 115 (for the sixteenth century), 217 (for the eighteenth century in Norway), and 261 (for the eighteenth century in western France).

(plague in London, Catalonia, Italy, and Marseille in 1720); and others of both high prices and epidemics (1630).¹³

3. The richest and most important trading countries (England, The Netherlands) did not have real demographic crises (except plagues). Coastal areas, and the Southern and Mediterranean countries, were equally fortunate.¹⁴

4. An accurate study of a demographic crisis is an excellent way to investigate social structures, because social groups behaved differently during crises. The best-known example is the flight of the rich from misfortune, sickness, and the dangers of contagion. Even clergy and doctors left, the only exceptions being the especially charitable and the particularly well paid (known as "epidemic doctors"). The crisis always struck hardest in the poorest sections, in the poorest families. Epidemics crossed social barriers only when the rich did not flee soon enough.¹⁵

In sum, demographic crises were one of the characteristics of pre-Malthusian populations. Let us now turn to other characteristics.

CHARACTERISTIC DEMOGRAPHIC RATES Twenty years ago, demographers thought that the basic demographic characteristics of the whole of France were similar to those of Crulai (the first village studied by Louis Henry): that is, a high marriage rate, late marriages, one birth every second year, an infant mortality rate of less than 20 per cent, an absolute growth in population after 1680, and some emigration from villages to towns or other provinces. More recent family reconstitutions have made it necessary to modify these older conclusions.

13 A crisis of subsistence without an epidemic took place in 1662—see Pierre Goubert, *L'avènement du Roi-Soleil* (Paris, 1967), 281–296. For major mortality crises caused by epidemics of plague, see, for Catalonia and the Mediterranean, Jorge Nadal, *La Población española, siglos XVI a XX* (Barcelona, n.d. but 1966), 53–62. For the famous plague of 1720, see Charles Carrière, M. Courdurié, and F. Rebuffat, *Marseille, ville morte: La peste de 1720* (Marseille, 1968). The mixed crisis of 1630 (scarcity and epidemics) has been studied only in the localities (see, for example, Goubert, *Beauvais, passim.*, and Pierre Deyon, *Amiens, capitale provinciale: Etude sur la Société urbaine au XVII siècle* [Paris, 1967], *passim.*, but especially the first section).

14 The case of England is well known—see, for example, the various works of H. Habbakuk and the precise study by J. D. Chambers, "The Vale of Trent," *Economic History Review*, X (1957), supplement. The favored situation of coastal areas is revealed by Pierre Gouhier, "Port-en-Bessin, 1597–1792," *Cahier des Annales de Normandie* (Caen), I (1962). For the Mediterranean regions see René Bachrel, *Une croissance, la Basse-Provence rurale, fin XVI siècle-1789* (Paris, 1961); and Emmanuel Le Roy Ladurie, *Les Paysans de Languedoc* (Paris, 1966), 2v.

15 See René Bachrel, "La haine de classe en temps d'épidémie," *Annales, Economies, Sociétés, Civilisations*, VII (July–September, 1952), 35ff.; and Carrière, Courdurié, and Rebuffat, *Marseille*, 87.

The first discovery was the variability of death rates, especially those of children. In some places on Normandy's sea shore, the infant mortality rate was as low as 15 per cent; in swampy areas, such as Sologne or Bas-Languedoc, it was as high as 35 or 38 per cent; in the poor and dirty suburbs of industrial towns like Beauvais, Amiens, or Lyon, it was the same or higher. When children were put out to nurse, especially in big towns such as Paris and Lyon, their death-rate exceeded 50 per cent; and it reached 80 per cent among the abandoned children of Paris.¹⁶

In the last few years differences in female fertility have been emphasized. We used to think, following Henry, that women typically had babies every second year (French-Canadian women being exceptions, with more frequent births). We now know that women in Brittany and in French Flanders gave birth almost *every year*, while in the South-Western provinces, by contrast, it was almost every *third* year.¹⁷ Why? Possibly because of physiological factors, or the beginnings of primitive contraception in the South-West. A very recent thesis by Maurice Garden has demonstrated that in eighteenth-century Lyon women had a Canadian or Breton fertility (but they married late, and their children very often died at the wet nurses' cottages).¹⁸ In a large village near Paris, Argenteuil, my students have found some women with a Breton and others with a South-Western fertility rate.¹⁹ We still have much to learn about fertility.

There is also much to be found out about marriage. Girls generally came very late to marriage (when 25 to 26 years old), and 95 per cent were not pregnant (many more were pregnant in eighteenth-century England).²⁰ It is difficult to explain these characteristics. We can link them with custom (coming of age at 25), with economic and familial

16 For Beauvais, see Goubert, *Beauvais*; for Amiens, Deyon, *Amiens*; for Normandy, Gouhier, "Port-en-Bessin"; for Lyon, the thesis by Maurice Garden, "Lyon et les Lyonnais au XVIII^e siècle," which will be published in 1970 or 1971; for Paris, the direct work in the archives by two of my students, Charles Delaselle and Paul Galliano, on foundlings and on infants sent to wet-nurses by Parisian hospitals (to be published soon).

17 See, for example, Pierre Goubert, "Legitimate Fecundity and Infant Mortality in France During the Eighteenth Century: A Comparison," *Daedalus*, XCVII (1968), 593-603.

18 Garden, "Lyon."

19 Michel Tyvaert and Jean-Claude Giacchetti, "Argenteuil, 1740-1790: étude de démographie historique," *Annales de Démographie Historique* (Paris, 1969), 40-61.

20 For England, see P. E. H. Hair, "Bridal Pregnancy in Rural England in Earlier Centuries," *Population Studies*, XX (1966), 233-243; "Bridal Pregnancy in Earlier Rural England Further Examined," *ibid.*, XXIV (1970), 59-70. For France, we have the concordant results of the many monographs already cited, which are well summarized in Pierre Chaunu, *La Civilisation de l'Europe classique* (Paris, 1966), 196.

difficulties, with the austerity of the Counter-Reformation, or with the confessor's authority: official Church doctrine stipulated that only in marriage was full sexual activity permitted, and that sexual activity was allowed only in order to produce children. We are also beginning to learn that the average marriage age changed from country to country, and from one century to the next; in particular, we now know that these characteristics changed markedly by the late eighteenth century (more illegitimacy, more pregnant brides).²¹ Marriage is the main act of demographic significance that depends on the human will, and it must be considered as a most important historical fact, highly significant for the history of society and of social and religious (or irreligious) mentalities.

What we have learned, above all, is that if we are to reach conclusions about the demographic characteristics of pre-industrial populations, we must emphasize their great variety, and try to explain why the differences arose.

POPULATION GROWTH AND ECONOMIC GROWTH Here equally wide variations have become apparent. During the eighteenth century, some provinces in Western France did not experience a significant population growth—very likely because they were already fairly densely populated in the seventeenth century—while others (Alsace, Languedoc) grew very quickly and vigorously—very likely because they were sparsely populated before 1715.²² In some areas, the beginning of the century was marked by demographic difficulties; in others, the end of the century. In addition, the middle of the century was beset by hard times—nevertheless, the general conclusion (though I am a little skeptical) is that French population grew by 30 to 35 per cent between 1720 and 1790, and that this was not a very important growth among European nations.²³ What makes this problematical is that our young economic historians are now denying that there was an agricultural revolution, or indeed any real improvement in French pro-

21 It is difficult to determine age at marriage before 1670, because parish registers are very incomplete. Some information can be obtained from Marcel Lachiver, *La Population de Meulan du XVII au XIX siècle* (Paris, 1969), 138; and from P. Lions, "Un dénombrement de la population de Brueil-en-Vexin en 1625," *Annales de Démographie Historique* (1967), 521–531. For the special case of Touraine, where people married at a younger age, see Gilles Chassier, "Bléré au XVIII^e siècle: étude de démographie historique," *ibid.* (1969).

22 See Reinhard, Armengaud, and Dupaquier, *Population mondiale*, 250, fig. 44, and 252–253.

23 See the recent summary in Braudel and Labrousse, *Histoire économique*, II, 9–84.

duction, during the eighteenth century—or suggesting at most a small improvement of not more than 15 or 18 per cent in agricultural output (industrial production having very little effect).²⁴ If these historians are right, it becomes rather difficult to explain how six or seven million more Frenchmen could be fed, find work, and appear richer in 1780 than in 1710—but that is another question.

Not only have the old problems been more thoroughly explored, but new questions have been raised by the active demographic research of recent years. The most important is contraception, and I shall also discuss population mobility and the problems of the towns.

CONTRACEPTION To contraception, or “birth control,” a great many articles, speeches, discussions, and passions have been devoted. The major conclusion is that France was the only country to use contraception as early as the last years of the eighteenth century—fifty or one hundred years before any other country. The approximate general birth rate in France stood between 38 and 39 per 1,000 in the decade 1781–1790; it dropped to 35.3 in 1791–1800 and to 31.2 in 1811–1815, and fell to below 30 around 1832. It was below 25 in 1880. *No other country in the known world experienced so early and so rapid a decline.* The tables worked out by the Office of Population Research at Princeton University demonstrate how exceptional the French experience has been.²⁵ Now we are asking why? exactly when? exactly where? (“how?” is not a difficult question to answer—coitus interruptus).

Some historians have discussed one matter vehemently: did birth control exist as early as the *first* part of the eighteenth century? In some noble or bourgeois families, as among prostitutes, it certainly did. But was contraception practiced in the towns and country in general? Perhaps some form of contraception existed in a few provinces (for

24 There are two new and important articles on this subject: M. Morineau, “Y a-t-il eu une Révolution agricole en France au XVIII^e siècle?,” *Revue Historique*, XCII (1968), 299ff.; and Denis Richet, “Croissance et blocages en France du XV^e au XVIII^e siècle,” *Annales, Economies, Sociétés, Civilisations*, XXXIII (1968), 759ff.

25 The most conclusive local examples can be found in the articles and books already cited by Ganiage (*Trois villages*), Lachiver (*Meulan*), and Tyvaert and Giacchetti (“Argenteuil”), and in Raymond Deniel and Louis Henry, “La population d’un village du Nord de la France, Sainghin-en-Mélantois de 1665 à 1851,” *Population*, XX (1965), 563–602. There are good summaries in Reinhard, Armengaud, and Dupaquier, *Population mondiale*, 296 (birth rates, 1791–1815) and 262–267 (eighteenth century). The methods that were used, and some new ideas, are discussed in Jacques Dupaquier and M. Lachiver, “Sur les débuts de la contraception en France, ou les deux malthusianismes,” *Annales, Economies, Sociétés, Civilisations*, XXIV (1969), 1391–1406.

instance, in the South-West), but the evidence is not conclusive.²⁶ Perhaps this was also the case between 1750 and 1770—but it becomes certain that birth control was employed in a number of towns and villages only during the 1780s (around Paris and in the South-West). The practice was propagated from town to country, from South to North, at first very slowly, and then very quickly—except in Western provinces like Brittany.²⁷ I do not know if the “Révolution de 1789” was a “bourgeois revolution,” but I am sure it witnessed a demographic revolution in large areas of the nation.

The reasons for this are not evident, mainly because men (and women) did not write or speak about such behavior. Historical demographers are currently debating possible religious (or irreligious) causes, economic or legal causes (including legal changes in the *code civil*), and changes in the mentality of parents.²⁸ It seems to me that any interpretation will have to be complex and difficult. It would be useful to separate, on the one hand, the old predispositions toward contraception in certain places and among certain social groups, a practice which accelerated in the 1770s and 1780s, from, on the other hand, the enormous

26 Numerous examples are given in Hélène Bergues, and others, *La prévention des naissances dans la famille* (Paris, 1960). See, too, the various articles on “Histoire biologique et Société” in the special number of *Annales, Economies, Sociétés, Civilisations*, XXIV (1969). For France’s dukes and peers, see Louis Henry and Claude Lévy, “Ducs et Pairs sous l’Ancien Régime: caractéristiques démographiques d’une caste,” *Population*, XV (1960), 807–830. For the bourgeoisie, see Henry, *Anciennes familles genevoises* (Paris, 1956). For prostitutes, see the first two items cited in this footnote. For the south-west, see Valmary, *Bas-Quercy*, and Anne Zink, *Azerex: La vie d’une communauté rurale à la fin du XVIII^e siècle* (Paris, 1969), 82.

27 The directions in which the practice of contraception spread can be deduced from the many detailed studies, cited above, which have been completed. A number of new ones appeared in *Annales de Démographie Historique* in 1969.

28 The problem of causation has never been studied in depth. It is a most difficult problem, and some attempts to come to grips with it can be found in Reinhard, Armengaud, and Dupaquier, *Population mondiale*; in the works of Chaunu; and in Aries, Bergues, and others, *Prévention des naissances*. Pierre Aries takes his explanation from certain characteristics of family mentality (for example, a concern to do better in raising children); John T. Noonan, *Contraception* (Cambridge, Mass., 1966); Michel Vovelle (in studies of Provence that are soon to appear), J. Dupaquier, and I myself believe that the explanation lies in the decline of religious belief; Pierre Chaunu invokes the long-term consequences of a return to Jansenist asceticism—see, too, Jean-Claude Perrot, “La population du Calvados sous la Révolution et l’Empire,” *Contributions à l’histoire démographique de la Révolution et de l’Empire* (Commission d’histoire économique et sociale de la Révolution française, 1965), 115ff. Peasant contraception, especially in the south-west of France, seems to have resulted from the wish to avoid dividing the land, the “family domain,” among many children. All these indications emerge from discussions by historical demographers, and should be brought together in a work of synthesis.

(though not general) outbreak of the phenomenon that accompanied the tremendous liberation and social mobility of the French Revolution. Whatever the explanation, it is certain that France was the first birth-controlled nation in the world.

POPULATION MOBILITY Another problem now under discussion is the mobility of the population. Everybody knows that the French are men who do not move. In the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, brides and bridegrooms were generally born in the same parish, or in neighboring parishes. Perhaps ten per cent traveled ten miles to become engaged.²⁹

But this relative immobility did not last. One of the most impressive discoveries made by recent studies has been that, despite regional variations, during the second half of the eighteenth century, at the very time when contraception was beginning to spread, mobility was multiplying two- or three-fold. People were moving more often, and were traveling farther than before.³⁰ Once again, this period emerges as a decisive dividing point in demographic history.

Moreover, it is slowly becoming apparent that certain provinces, such as Flanders, Normandy, Dauphiné, and the mountain areas, had a large excess of population, with many more births than deaths. It is clear that their inhabitants were leaving. By contrast, many towns had large deficits (more deaths than births), especially if we add the deaths of foster children to the totals of town deaths. What this implies has been demonstrated by a number of scrupulous local studies, which have recently revealed substantial migration from country regions to a number of towns, particularly to Paris, Rouen, Nantes, Bordeaux, and Lyon.³¹ And this raises the demographic problems of town populations, a subject which is still too little understood.

29 All the monographs on villages and regions reveal this low mobility *before* 1750. See, for a start, Goubert, *Beauvais*, 66. The best recent study is Lachiver, *Meulan*, 91–122.

30 This is confirmed by all the local and regional studies cited in the previous footnotes.

31 For Paris, see Louis Henry and Claude Lévy, "Quelques données sur la région autour de Paris au XVIII^e siècle," *Population*, XVII (1962), 297–326. For Rouen, there are some indications in Chaunu, *Europe classique*, and his *Histoire de Normandie*, which will appear in 1970. For Nantes, see Alain Croix, "La démographie du pays nantais au XVI^e siècle," *Annales de Démographie Historique* (1967), 63–90, which should be compared with Blayo and Henry, "Données démographiques sur la Bretagne et l'Anjou de 1740 à 1829," *ibid.*, 91ff. For Bordeaux, see the contribution of Poussou to *Histoire de Bordeaux: Bordeaux au XVIII^e siècle* (1968), 325ff. For Lyon, see the forthcoming book by Garden, cited above.

THE TOWNS Following the early studies of villages, increasing attention is being given to France's towns. There are many difficulties: the large population that has to be dealt with; the problem of handling the many parishes into which towns are divided—anywhere from ten to forty—especially since their registers are not all equally well preserved; the fact that many infants, sent to wet-nurses, died outside the town; the presence of hospitals, where people both from the town and from the surrounding countryside went for treatment and died; and the very high mobility of the population. It is by no means certain that the sampling techniques worked out by the I.N.E.D. will produce viable results,

Nonetheless, there are young historians at work in many areas. Lyon, in particular, will soon be the most thoroughly studied city in France, when books by Richard Gascon, Natalie Davis, and Maurice Garden appear. Garden's model study of Lyon will soon be published, and he throws fresh light on the whole problem of urban historical demography. His conclusions are striking: more than half of the inhabitants of Lyon were born outside the city; they married very late; and their fertility was extremely high (very often one child a year, which is the highest rate ever observed). Half of the infants were sent away to wet-nurses, and more than half of these died while away. Illegitimacy, pregnant brides, and abortion were not rare—as they were in rural villages.

Cities like Lyon “devoured” the surrounding countryside and occasionally even more distant areas. They rapidly consumed excess populations, and they had to be fed afresh in each generation. But will the picture presented by Lyon hold true for all large cities? It is possible, but we must wait for other books to find out.³²

The most significant discovery to emerge from the varied studies of recent years is the vast transformation of the late eighteenth century. Some of the elements of that transformation have been mentioned: the spread of contraception and the rise in mobility. But other demographic phenomena also appeared for the first time in this period: an increase in

32 There is a good bibliography of the history of French towns: Philippe Dollinger and Philippe Wolff, *Bibliographie des villes de France* (Paris, 1967). The best town history is the multi-volume *Histoire de Bordeaux* (volumes IV [1966] and V [1968] cover the fifteenth to eighteenth centuries), being produced under the editorship of Charles Higounet. Chapters VIII and IX of Jean Delumeau, *La civilisation de la Renaissance* (Paris, 1967), are very good. Roger Mols, *Introduction à la démographie historique des villes d'Europe* (Gembloux, 1954–1956), 3v., is always useful, but it is already becoming out of date.

illegitimacy, a growth in the percentage of pregnant brides, the beginning of a decline in the infant death rate, and the end of serious demographic crises.³³ Taken together, these changes brought about a revolution in the patterns of French demography.

My conclusion will be optimistic. We have calculated a great many accurate demographic rates for some places and at some dates. We know the differences between one country and another—especially between England and France—and from province to province, from town to village. We can observe evolutions and changes over time. Demographic history is now linked with economic, social, religious, and psychological history. These are remarkable additions to historical knowledge; now we have to explain the rates, their differences and changes. Fortunately, a large group of young historians and demographers are at work. We can hope that they will succeed in explaining what we have detected, but still do not really understand.

33 These conclusions are drawn from the various articles and books that have been cited above, and they will be elaborated in the second volume of my book on the Ancien Régime, which is now in press.