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978-0-521-29208-5 - The Economy of Later Renaissance Europe, 1460-1600

Harry A. Miskimin

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HARRY A. MISKIMIN

Professor of History, Yale University

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FOR ALICE S. MISKIMIN
A Fine Renaissance Scholar

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Preface

The reader may find himself somewhat disconcerted to discover that a book devoted to the economic history of early modern Europe begins with a rather extended discussion of law and late medieval scholasticism, but I plead for his patience. The soubriquet “age of expansion” accurately describes the period, yet that expansion was more than geographical. Cultural, intellectual, legal, scientific, dynastic, artistic, philosophical, and economic matters were all in flux, and all shared in the “expansion” of the era. Each interacted with the others shattering accepted norms and destroying continuities. In a very real sense, flux and discontinuity were the common denominators, while the universal effort to confront, comprehend, and deal with the dissolution of received norms constituted the one cohesive and ordering element of the period. If I have been successful, the subsequent chapters will justify the first by building organically on that beginning.

The reader’s patience and generosity are also solicited with regard to the endeavor as a whole. To compress and to attempt to structure so large and complex a period inevitably alters the tone, if not the facts, of history, and forces choices of both omission and inclusion. I am deeply aware that my priorities will often diverge from those of the reader and can do no more than ask his indulgence when he finds that my emphasis does not accord with his own. Equally, almost every sentence reflects a judgment among alternative interpretations of the past, but without trebling its bulk, the book could not do justice to the multifaceted and controversial secondary literature on which it often depends. Even if complete absolution proves impossible, I seek the reader’s understanding in this sin. Though, if complete, it would

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Preface

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dwarf the book, the bibliography offered at the end should guide the reader to the salient materials.

Finally, I should like to thank my wife, Alice S. Miskimin, for her remarkable strength and continuing support and for her invaluable suggestions and criticism. The errors, of course, are my own.

H. Miskimin

May, 1977