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978-0-521-42322-9 - Poverty and Deviance in Early Modern Europe

Robert Jütte

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This study provides an accessible and authoritative account of poverty and deviance during the early modern period, informed by those new perspectives on the role of the poor themselves in the provision of welfare services characteristic of much recent social history. In this introductory text Robert Jütte looks at how the poor shaped their own world, and how the notions of poverty and social deviance that preoccupied much contemporary thought saw their ultimate fruition in the systematic programmes for social welfare that emerged during the nineteenth century. Contrary to the once-traditional historical emphasis on the ameliorative role of individual reformers, Professor Jütte's account looks much more closely at the poor themselves, and the complex network of social and communal relationships they inhabited. He examines the lives not only of poor relief recipients but of the vast number of destitute individuals who had to find other means to stay alive, and how these people formed their own patterns of survival within given communities. Attractively illustrated with contemporary engravings, the work includes numerous features to aid the student reader, including a chronology, brief biographies of key individuals and extensive notes on further reading.

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NEW APPROACHES TO EUROPEAN HISTORY

*Poverty and Deviance
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Poverty and Deviance in Early Modern Europe

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Stuttgart*



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Let not ambition mock their useful toil,
Their homely joys, and destiny obscure;
Nor grandeur hear with a disdainful smile
The short and simple annals of the poor.

Thomas Gray (1716–71),
Elegy Written in a Country Churchyard

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In memory of my grandfather
Bernhard Volpert (1878–1973)
who initiated me into the
'economy of makeshifts'.

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Preface

This book has been written in the belief that the problem of poverty and deviance in early modern Europe is of interest to a modern readership. The fact that the lives of the poor that are here chronicled ended more than two hundred years ago does not diminish their significance. In addition, the vicissitudes marking the lives of the poor in the past should be relevant to our own attitudes and actions because the foundations of our welfare state are built on their experience.

Parts of this work are written directly from my own research, and much depends on others, because the aim of a textbook is to offer an overview of a whole period. My debts to published works will be appreciated from the select bibliography. I cannot acknowledge all my obligations personally as a high proportion of my conversations with dozens of friends, fellow researchers and collaborators, colleagues and students over the past fifteen years has contributed to my understanding of the subject. Nonetheless, it would be indecent, if not dishonest, to fail to express my gratitude to some of them.

Archives and libraries are the laboratories of historical research, and the scholar depends very much on the knowledge and helpfulness of the staff. I wish to thank especially Dipl. Bibl. Beate Schleh of the Institute for the History of Medicine of the Robert Bosch Foundation in Stuttgart for her aid in providing books and articles by inter-library loan. I hope that those archivists and librarians acknowledged in my previous books for the debt which I still owe them will accept this time a more general assurance.

Many anonymous readers commented on the first three outlines of this study or on particular chapters. I hope that they will be pleased to recognize that they have strengthened it with their criticism and suggestions. Special thanks must go to Dr Martin Dinges, Stuttgart, who carefully read and criticized my work, pointing out several previously unnoted difficulties at an early stage. I wish to express my gratitude also to other members of the staff at the Institute for the History of Medicine of the Robert Bosch Foundation. During the gestation of this project,

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they showed patient support and unquenchable spirit. Their good humour and excellent work in the face of a director who had for two years become engrossed in writing this book are a testimony to their professionalism.

Many thanks go to the editors of this series, who have entrusted me with the task of writing this book. They provided sympathetic encouragement as well as guidance throughout the project. Finally, I wish to express my gratitude to Richard Fisher, editor in the Social Sciences Division at Cambridge University Press, and to Frances Brown, subeditor. Their careful editing and patience in waiting for me to produce such a general survey became absolute prerequisites for the successful completion of this textbook.

Authors usually thank their families for tolerance at being neglected during the writing of a book. In my case the neglect is chronic; whatever subject I wrote on in the past, my wife and my son found themselves drawn into the work.