

Small towns in early modern Europe

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1 Introduction

Peter Clark

Throughout the medieval and early modern period the small town, with a few hundred or thousand people, often clustered behind stone or earthen ramparts, with farms and orchards in its midst, and a handful of public buildings around the marketplace, was a constant and quintessential feature of the European landscape. In the high Middle Ages small towns with fewer than 2,000 inhabitants may have comprised over 90 per cent of all urban communities in northern Europe, housing more than half the urban population. By the seventeenth century England had more than 700 small towns; France over 2,000 and the Holy Roman Empire over 3,000; further east Poland had above 800 small towns.¹ Across Europe, there were five or more times as many small towns as all other kinds of urban community put together. The density of settlements was particularly high in southern and western Germany with one small town for every 6 or 7 square kilometres; in England the average was nearer one for every 110 square kilometres, though with much higher densities in the south; in central and eastern Europe the pattern was more diffuse with a settlement for every 322 square kilometres in Lithuania.² Despite the growth of bigger commercial and metropolitan centres small towns frequently dominated regional hierarchies, particularly where there were few middle-rank or larger centres. In France Gerseise Gascony was said to be 'a country of very small towns with narrow hori-

Preliminary ideas for this survey were presented at the Leicester conference in July 1990 and I am grateful to the participants for their comments. I am also indebted to Bernard Lepetit, Jonathan Barry, Penelope Corfield and Nicholas Davidson for their suggestions on an early draft.

¹ P. Hohenberg and L. Lees, *The Making of Urban Europe 1000–1950* (1985), p. 53; P. Clark and J. Hosking, *Population Estimates of English Small Towns 1550–1851: Revised Edition* (Leicester, 1993); ex information Prof. J-P. Poussou; see below, p. 186; M. Bogucka, 'The network and functions of small towns in Poland in early modern times', in A. Maczak and C. Smout, eds, *Gründung und Bedeutung kleinerer Städte im nördlichen Europa der frühen Neuzeit* (Wiesbaden, 1991), pp. 222–3, 229.

² M. Terao, 'Rural small towns and market-towns of Sachsen, Central Germany at the beginning of the modern age', *Keio Economic Studies*, vol. 2 (1964), 51; A. Everitt, 'The market towns', in P. Clark, ed., *The Early Modern Town* (1976), pp. 191–4; A. Wyrobisz, 'Townships in the Grand Duchy of Lithuania during the agrarian and urban reform . . .', in Maczak and Smout, eds, *Gründung*, p. 195.

zons'; and the same was true of several other provinces of France.³ In peripheral regions of Europe such as Scandinavia, there were hardly any centres above the level of small towns. In early modern Spain, as Juan Gelabert shows (chapter 13), the urban system saw a marked shift away from bigger cities towards new smaller communities. In Germany about 1500, 14 per cent of the national population may have lived in towns with fewer than 2,000 inhabitants; in England there was a similar figure in 1700 for towns with under 5,000 people; in France by the end of our period 4 per cent of the national population resided in smaller towns, but this represented 29 per cent of the urban population; in the United Provinces in 1795, 18 per cent of townspeople lived in towns under 5,000, maybe 8 per cent of the total population.⁴ Whether or not they lived there, for most Europeans the small town was their most direct and important contact with the urban world.

At the same time, the role and significance of small towns varied widely across Europe. Taking Europe as a whole, one needs to recognise the division between the northern periphery – Scandinavia, central and eastern Europe, and the British Isles (at least until the eighteenth century), where localised small towns played a major role; and the more developed, core regions of western Europe, especially the Low Countries and northern Italy, where in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries small towns were more closely integrated (and subordinated) within national and regional hierarchies of towns.⁵ But regional differences were also marked. In the British Isles there were marked differences in the pattern and structures of small communities between England, Scotland and Ireland; and, as we see in chapter 5, regionality became accentuated in England during the eighteenth century.⁶ Across Europe regional differences were shaped by geophysical factors, along with the antiquity (or otherwise) of the urban system. In Germany the eastern areas had fewer and bigger small towns, mainly under seigneurial control; in the west and south not only was the density higher,

³ F. Beriac, 'Petites villes ou bourgs? Le cas du Gers', in J-P. Poussou and P. Loupès, eds, *Les petites villes du Moyen Age à nos jours* (Paris, 1987), p. 39; R. Favier, 'Les petites villes dauphinoises face à leur environnement rural au XVIIIe siècle', in Poussou and Loupès, eds, *Petites villes*, p. 323; C. Nières, 'Les villes en Bretagne: 12, 40 ou 80', *Revue du Nord*, vol. 70 (1988), 681; M. Gresset, 'Les institutions municipales des petites villes comtoises au XVIIIe siècle' (Mamers Conference on Small Towns, Sept. 1991).

⁴ See below, pp. 90, 186, 271–93; J. Meyer, *Etudes sur les villes en Europe occidentale*, vol. I (Paris, 1983), pp. 122–3; J-P. Poussou et al., *Etudes sur les villes en Europe occidentale*, vol. II (Paris, 1983), pp. 328–9.

⁵ For integration in the southern Netherlands see below, pp. 213, 215; for a good study of the subordination of a small Northern Italian town to a major city see Judith C. Brown, *In the Shadow of Florence: Provincial Society in Renaissance Pescaia* (Oxford, 1982).

⁶ See below, chapters 5, 7; for Scottish small towns see I. D. Whyte, 'The function and social structure of Scottish burghs of barony in the 17th and 18th centuries', in Maczák and Smout, eds, *Gründung*, pp. 11–30; see below, pp. 102–18.

but the towns were smaller and more of them were organic centres, developing out of the needs of the rural economy. No less important, each German territorial state developed its own complex mosaic of communities. In south-west France the proportion of the population living in small towns ranged from 12 to 31 per cent according to province. Finally there were differences between individual towns encouraged by local rivalries and a strong sense of urban particularism. In England the bigger and more successful small towns tended to be those established in the Anglo-Saxon period.⁷

Until recent times the number, importance and complexity of European small towns have been largely ignored by urban historians. Thus small towns have been striking by their absence from the survey literature. This is evident in one of the most important studies of European urbanisation during the early modern period by Jan de Vries (1984). De Vries looks primarily at the demographic trend of cities of more than 10,000 inhabitants to argue that while the sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries saw a sustained and fairly general urban growth across Europe, the next hundred years witnessed a concentration of growth in the biggest cities – particularly capital cities and Atlantic ports; in turn the late eighteenth century saw a deceleration of growth among the leading centres and the expansion of middle-rank cities, linked with industrialisation and population renewal. Unfortunately, de Vries' parameters exclude not only smaller towns but virtually all the towns of 'peripheral' Europe. How far were the trends he describes for the seventeenth century true for smaller places as well as the middle-rank losers? Or were there balancing flows of population into the market towns as well as the capital cities? And to what extent did small towns participate in and sustain the general urban revival of the late eighteenth century? Paul Bairoch's *La population des villes européennes* (1988) employs a lower urban threshold (5,000), but one still too high to catch more than a tiny minority of Europe's smaller centres. Paul Hohenberg and Lyn Lees in their valuable survey *The Making of Urban Europe* (1985) recognise the importance of small towns as part of a central place system of traditional towns closely identified with regional hinterlands and rural economies – in contrast to the outward-looking international trade network of major cities. But there is little detailed discussion of small-town developments and small centres are generally perceived as dependents of larger cities in the urban hierarchy.⁸ There is insufficient awareness of the

⁷ See below, pp. 187–8; Terao, 'Rural small towns', pp. 51–9; J-P. Poussou, *Bordeaux et le Sud-Ouest au XVIIIe siècle* (Paris, 1983), p. 211; A. Everitt, 'The Banburys of England', *Urban History Yearbook 1974* (Leicester, 1974), pp. 28–38.

⁸ J. de Vries, *European Urbanisation 1500–1800* (1984), esp. pp. 95–101; de Vries has a brief discussion of smaller towns on pp. 58–66; P. Bairoch, *La population des villes européennes* (Geneva, 1988); Hohenberg and Lees, *Making of Urban Europe*, pp. 51, 101, 106.

distinctive role of small towns interfacing between the urban system and rural Europe, forging demographic, industrial, commercial and cultural linkages. National surveys of urbanisation in the Low Countries have been equally reticent about the large numbers of small towns in those areas.⁹

Part of the problem until the past few years has been the general absence of detailed research. The study of urban society in early modern Europe has made big strides since the 1960s. A great amount of important work has been published on the larger and middle-rank cities – the Antwerps and Amsterdams, the Leicesters and Lilles. By contrast small towns, for various reasons (some related to academic politics) have failed to attract the attention they deserved. This picture is changing rapidly, however, and the aim of this volume is to bring together some of the new wave of research to shed systematic light on the subject from a comparative perspective. In the following chapters we shall be looking at urban structures, functions and trends across a wide spectrum of European countries. The studies deploy a range of different approaches and examine a variety of demographic, economic, cultural and political issues.

A serious obstacle to understanding and comparing European small towns stems from problems of definition. How can we distinguish such centres, small in size and often highly ruralised, from the villages of their hinterland? And when this becomes somewhat clearer in the eighteenth century, how are we to draw a meaningful functional distinction with the bigger towns? This is not just a historiographical conundrum. Contemporaries were almost equally bemused at the status and actual role of pre-industrial small towns. An early official attempt at clarification for the Pontifical territories of northern Italy, the *Constitutiones Aegidianae* of about 1357, combined recognition of urban functional reality with an ideal order for each level of community.¹⁰ Elsewhere terminological confusion ran riot. In eighteenth-century Denmark one hears how in this world of small towns, ‘the peasant becomes a burgher and the burgher a peasant’. As late as the 1790s the Duke of Rutland could dismiss Saltash in Cornwall as ‘a little village’, though another writer shortly after spoke of it as ‘a market town with a market house and above an assembly room’. The inferiority complex of some small towns may have contributed to the uncertainty, as when the officials of a Burgundian community apologised for the ‘pettiness of a town which people nowadays barely deign to look at’.¹¹

⁹ H. Klomp maker, ‘Les villes Néerlandaises au XVIIe siècle’, *Recueils de la Société Jean Bodin*, vol. 7 (1955), 577–601; Poussou *et al.*, *Etudes sur les villes*, vol. II, pp. 227–230.

¹⁰ P. Jansen, ‘Qu’est-ce qu’une petite ville en Italie à l’époque médiévale?’ in Poussou and Loupès, eds, *Petites villes*, pp. 15–28.

¹¹ J. M. Bizière, ‘Petites villes et micro-ports, l’exemple du Danemark’, in Poussou and Loupès, eds, *Petites villes*, p. 423; I. Moreau, ‘Les petites villes du sud de l’Angleterre à travers les récits de voyage’ (Mamers Conference, 1991); C. Lamarre-Tainturier, ‘Admin-

Early on there seems to have been very little direct comment about small towns as such except in so far as they had civic privileges. By the eighteenth century, however, growing demographic interest (along with the increasing activity of the state) led to a new awareness of small towns as a category of urban population. Such categorisation, however, was not always in accord with their ancient political status. Medieval municipalities, as in Brittany, sometimes had tiny populations by the close of the *ancien régime*.¹² Population size, moreover, was no infallible proxy for economic activity. In France in particular definition was complicated by the need to distinguish between towns, bourgs (market centres), and villages. As Bernard Lepetit demonstrates (chapter 8), any attempt at simple demographic (or economic) classification founders in a morass of regional and local exceptions. In areas of southern Italy and eastern Hungary there were populous agro-towns with only minimal urban economic functions.¹³

Political definition hardly works any better. In a few countries such as England all but a minority of small towns lacked royal charters; by the eighteenth century some of these unincorporated towns, especially in the industrialising districts of the West Midlands and southern Lancashire, were increasingly dynamic and expansive.¹⁴ Elsewhere, as we have noted, civic privileges were much more important for urban status and ranking. The loss of administrative privilege could be disastrous. But towns differed enormously in their confection of rights and the precise permutation of privilege was vital in establishing contemporary perceptions of ranking. Molinier has written of France: 'there exist no two towns having the same privileges in the whole kingdom'.¹⁵ In this context civic rights were an index not to urban ranking but to communal particularism.

These problems of definition underline the uncertainty and ambiguity at the heart of the economic and social world of small towns in pre-industrial Europe. For much of our period small towns lacked a secure, defined

istrations et petites villes en Bourgogne à la fin du XVIIIe siècle', in Poussou et Loupès, eds, *Petites villes*, p. 321.

¹² See below, pp. 173–4; also F. de Dainville, 'Grandeur et population des villes au XVIIIe siècle', *Population*, vol. 13 (1958), 459–78; Nières, 'Villes en Bretagne', pp. 679–83.

¹³ See below, pp. 167, 170–3; also P. Benedict, ed., *Cities and Social Change in Early Modern France* (1989), p. 10; R. King and A. Strachan, 'Sicilian agro-towns', *Erdkunde*, vol. 32 (1978), 110–22; T. Hofer, 'Agro-town regions of peripheral Europe: the case of the Great Hungarian Plain', *Ethnologia Europaea*, vol. 17 (1987), 69–95; see also below, p. 86.

¹⁴ M. B. Rowlands, *Masters and Men in the West Midland Metalware Trades before the Industrial Revolution* (Manchester, 1975); L. Weatherill, *The Pottery Trade and North Staffordshire 1660–1760* (Manchester, 1971), chapters 8–9; J. Langton, *Geographical Change and Industrial Revolution: Coalmining in South West Lancashire 1590–1799* (Cambridge 1979), pp. 95–110.

¹⁵ R. Piessix, 'Les petites villes de l'Anjou, du Maine et du Perche', in Poussou and Loupès, eds, *Petites villes*, p. 127; A. Molinier, 'Villes languedociennes (XVe–XVIe siècles)' in Poussou and Loupès, eds, *Petites villes*, p. 149.

position in the European urban system. They were frequently manufactured by landowners or rulers in bouts of speculation. Thus 270 new baronial burghs were founded in Scotland after 1500, mostly during the sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries, to try and profit from the expansion of internal trade. In Lithuania in the late sixteenth century 394 seigneurial towns were created to exploit agricultural commercialisation; there was a similar development in Poland.¹⁶ In Sweden the central government tried to extend its control over inland areas of economic importance by granting 30 new charters between 1580 and 1680. In seventeenth-century Ireland, as Raymond Gillespie indicates (chapter 7), new chartered towns were part of the game plan of English colonisation and commercialisation. In Spain a host of new centres were created about this time to bail out the royal treasury.¹⁷

New seigneurial or royal towns established from the late Middle Ages were frequently superimposed on an existing network of urban centres. As Raymond van Uytven has shown, Northern Brabant saw a spate of new towns inserted during the late Middle Ages into a web of established centres. In Germany new seigneurial centres were matched by an upsurge of organic towns. The result in many areas was an excess of urban settlements, with far too many towns chasing too little business. Across much of Europe the problems created by the relatively high numbers of small towns were considerable, even if muted by the fragmentation of space. Where specialisation among towns was limited, competition was intense. In early modern Norway, according to one authority, 'the history of the towns . . . [was] characterised by struggle', towns fighting with ports of shipment to stifle their development as new urban centres. The picture was similar elsewhere in Europe, with the challenge coming not only from other small towns but also from bigger cities.¹⁸ Quite often newly founded towns never achieved urban take-off. In seventeenth-century Cumbria, for instance, a number of new market towns like Ambleside and Shap ended in failure. In Scotland

¹⁶ Whyte, 'Scottish burghs', pp. 13–14; Wyrobisz, 'Townships in Lithuania', p. 196; Bogucka, 'Small towns in Poland', p. 229.

¹⁷ B. Ericsson, 'The foundation and function of small towns in Sweden in the early modern period', in Maczak and Smout, eds, *Gründung*, p. 103; see below, pp. 270ff.

¹⁸ R. van Uytven, 'Les moyennes et petites villes dans le Brabant Septentrional avant 1400', in *Les petites villes en Lotharingie: Die Kleinen Städte in Lotharingien* (publications de la Section Historique de l'Institut G.-D. de Luxembourg, vol. CVIII, 1992), p. 80; Terao, 'Rural small towns', pp. 54–7, 87; Meyer, *Etudes sur les villes*, vol. I, pp. 35–6; R. Fladby, 'The urbanisation of Norway in the early modern period', in Maczak and Smout, eds, *Gründung*, p. 130; K. Markalf *et al.*, 'Town and countryside in early modern Hungary – the case of Sopron c. 1500–1800' (Conference on Town and Countryside, Leuven University, April 1991); J. J. Chevalier, 'Permanences et mutations dans l'appareil productif d'une petite ville des Manges, Chemillé' (Mamers Conference, 1991); see also in Northern Italy, below pp. 255–8.

about three quarters of new baronial burghs after 1500 were unsuccessful. In Norway several newly chartered towns became 'shadow towns'. Even where they passed the urban threshold, many small towns limped along, enjoying a precarious existence. In more central or core regions where the network of small towns was more entrenched and integrated, such as parts of the Low Countries and Italy, there may have been greater stability, aided by economic specialisation.¹⁹ But across much of the continent the instability of the small town was striking.

For many small centres a serious weakness was the absence of a viable urban infrastructure. This was most evident in England where the great majority of small towns lacked walls or gates and before the eighteenth century had no more than a market house or cross to consecrate their urbanity. Continental small towns were often better equipped, but even so the investment in physical plant, in local roads and bridges, paved streets and civic buildings was well behind that of major towns. Infrastructure was part of the urban patrimony and heritage, along with civic myths, ceremonies and pageants. There are indications that these too were less developed in European small towns, undermining a coherent sense of urban identity.²⁰ Vital here was finance: the promotion of the cultural and physical image of the town was expensive and, as we shall see, most small towns were poor.

Another factor contributing to the urban fragility of small towns was their over-dependence on their hinterlands and the local market system. The founding aim of most European small towns was to serve as a marketing outlet for the agricultural surplus of the adjoining countryside, selling in exchange a limited variety of goods and services. The umbilical link with the countryside was emphasised by the residence in many towns of substantial numbers of farmers and people following agricultural-linked trades – in some French centres over 60 per cent of the inhabitants, rising to 70 per cent in Poland.²¹ Towns of this type met a strong demand in the rural economy. In Denmark attempts by the government to suppress smaller centres provoked a peasant outcry for their maintenance or restoration. However traditional hinterland trade was generally unsophisticated and unspecialised. Given the crowded urban network, marketing centres found them-

¹⁹ R. Millward, 'The Cumbrian town between 1600 and 1800', in C. Chalklin and M. A. Havinden, eds, *Rural Change and Urban Growth 1500–1800* (1974), pp. 210–15; Whyte, 'Scottish burghs', p. 18; see below, pp. 31ff; Brown, *In the Shadow of Florence*, esp. ch. 3.

²⁰ O. Degn, 'Small towns in Denmark in the 16th and 17th centuries', in Maczak and Smout, eds, *Gründung*, p. 157.

²¹ M. Couturier, *Recherches sur les structures sociales de Châteaudun* (Paris, 1969), p. 121; M. Vovelle *De la Cave à Grenier* (Quebec, 1980), pp. 34–5; M. Bogucka, 'Le réseau urbain et les campagnes en Pologne (1500–1800)', *Storia della Città*, vol. 36 (1986), 78.

selves under pressure from neighbouring towns and unable to grow.²² The alternative was to try and develop a niche economic role, linking the town into a regional and maybe national network of more specialist urban centres. There was a constant need to add new economic strings to the urban bow: as more specialist industrial centres, as service towns attracting local gentry, as administrative or religious foci. In the Low Countries and other more advanced regions, specialisation was achieved earlier, though it was often difficult to sustain. But before the eighteenth century many small communities tended to acquire only a random scattering of minor or half-developed economic activities. This lack of functional coherence was one of the obvious aspects of traditional small-town economies.²³

For small towns, then, the bread and butter of local trade originated in the countryside. The latter was also usually the operational base of those landowners who founded, protected and patronised small towns. But the relationship with rural society was highly complex, often shaped by the nature of the agrarian economy. In the less densely populated, pastoral areas of Europe, small towns were often less numerous but may have had a stronger economic position as the centre of most local trade. By contrast, in more populous arable regions one finds a wider range of commercial outlets for agricultural sales – not all of them located in town.

Dependence on the hinterland was certainly no bowl of cherries. It carried many potential challenges to small-town communities. Bad harvests might not only curb local demand for urban goods and services, but open the floodgates to a torrent of poorer villagers seeking food and work in local towns. Rural industry was a continuing threat to urban artisans through most of the period. Local landowners frequently encouraged rival industries on their own estates, or tried to set up new markets to divert trade away from established centres.²⁴ With their limited resources small towns were especially vulnerable to disaster such as fire, and the worst of man-made afflictions – war. In the Dauphiné small communities like Saint-Antoine were overwhelmed during the French Wars of Religion by ‘terribles afflictions de famine, peste et guerre’. Military conflict also had a devastating

²² Degn, ‘Small towns in Denmark’, p. 157; A-L. Head, ‘Contrastes ruraux et urbains en Suisse de 1600 au début du XIXe siècle,’ in L. Mottu-Weber and D. Zumkeller, eds, *Mélanges d’histoire économique offerts au Professeur A-M. Piuz* (Geneva, 1989), p. 130.

²³ Cf. J. P. Jourdan, ‘Petites villes et bourgs des Basses Pyrénées au milieu du XIXe siècle’, in Poussou et Loupès, eds, *Petites villes*, pp. 228–34.

²⁴ C. Dyer, ‘The consumer and the market in the later Middle Ages’, *Economic History Review*, 2nd series, vol. 42 (1989), 323–4; J. Jorgensen, ‘The economic condition of Zealand provincial towns in the 18th century’, *Scandinavian Economic History Review*, vol. 19 (1971), 2–5.

effect on the smaller towns of the southern Netherlands and Germany in the late sixteenth and seventeenth centuries.²⁵

This concatenation of pressures and uncertainties meant that the failure rate among small towns was relatively high. In late medieval England several hundred small towns declined to villages. In seventeenth-century Poland many small towns went the same way. Even where the system proved more stable, small towns sometimes experienced general de-urbanisation as the rural population grew, eroding distinctions of status.²⁶ Larger urban communities waxed and waned according to their economic and political fortunes but they rarely fell out of the urban system: they had permanency. The propensity to disappear – to become villages – seems to have been a special feature of European small towns, particularly the lesser ones.

The identification of the role and functioning of small towns in pre-industrial Europe is clearly a complex and difficult exercise. Bernard Lepetit goes as far as suggesting that the problems are so great in France that the pursuit of the small town as a separate category may be impossible.²⁷ His stimulating approach exposes the danger of trying to impose a standardised and over-rigid concept on the immensely varied reality of small towns on the ground. Single definitional criteria are clearly useless. On the other hand, if we assemble a flexible matrix of demographic, economic, social, political and other attributes we start to get an idea of the profile of the great multitude of small communities.

Predictably small-town populations were relatively low. In France communities below the level of middle-rank towns usually had between 1,500 and 5,000 inhabitants. In peripheral regions the thresholds were considerably less. In Denmark the average size of a small town was about 1,200; in Poland 88 per cent of the towns had fewer than 2,000 inhabitants and nearly half 500–600; in Ireland 60 per cent of the small towns had fewer than 200 taxable persons. In the more advanced European regions, however, such as the southern Netherlands with higher levels of urbanisation and numbers of

²⁵ For the impact of fire on English country towns see D. Underdown, *Fire from Heaven: The Life of an English Town in the Seventeenth Century* (1992), pp. 2–5; and E. L. Jones *et al.*, *A Gazetteer of English Urban Fire Disasters 1500–1900* (Historical Geography Research Series, no. 13 1984); M. Greengrass, 'The later wars of religion in the French Midi', in P. Clark, ed., *The European Crisis of the 1590s* (1985), esp. pp. 106–14, quotation at p. 106; see below, pp. 196–7, 216–17; also C. Friedrichs, *Urban Society in an Age of War: Nördlingen 1580–1720* (Princeton, NJ, 1979).

²⁶ Everitt, 'Market towns', pp. 168–9; Bogucka, 'Small towns in Poland', p. 228; Head, 'Contrastes ruraux', pp. 134–6.

²⁷ See below, pp. 166–83.

large cities, the lesser towns were relatively bigger – with up to 10,000 inhabitants.²⁸

Yet population parameters *tout court* are of limited significance. They may indicate the differential between bigger and lesser centres, but they are far from reliable in distinguishing town and countryside, where some villages were often larger than their urban cousins. More interesting are the demographic dynamics. Mortality appears to have been greater often in small towns than the countryside, but small towns did not usually suffer the large demographic deficits of bigger cities and some even enjoyed surpluses. However, as Peter Stabel (chapter 10) suggests, industrial small towns in Flanders were more likely to have deficits than marketing centres; in England growing urban and economic integration caused higher levels of mortality in small towns.²⁹ Whatever the internal demographic balance, many small towns, like larger centres, had high levels of physical mobility. At Mamers in France 54 per cent of marriage partners between 1740 and 1789 were immigrants; at Meulan there was a similar figure, though in Provence the proportion was nearer 20 per cent. At Nyköping in Sweden in the early seventeenth century 53 per cent of inhabitants were newcomers. In Norway too we find very high levels of population turnover. But recruitment tended to be more localised than for the cities, exploiting and underpinning the essential link with a restricted hinterland. In Provence the small town of Cadenet had inflows of migrants from 75 different places with a fairly dense network of contact up to 30 kilometres. The picture of localised immigration was also apparent at Thonon in Savoy. At the small centres of Faversham and Maidstone in Kent newcomers had travelled less than half the distance of movers to the middle-rank city of Canterbury. The smaller the town the more localised the recruitment pattern. In Flanders half of the migrants to bigger small towns had come from less than 20 kilometres, but the proportion was between two thirds and three quarters for some of the smaller places.³⁰

²⁸ Favier, 'Les petites villes dauphinoises', p. 324; Bizière, 'Petites villes du Danemark', p. 422; Bogucka, 'Small towns in Poland', pp. 222–3; see below, p. 154; also for Sweden and Norway below, pp. 23, 25, 54. See below for the southern Netherlands, p. 207.

²⁹ R. Leboutte, 'A propos de la taille des villes . . . à l'aube du XIXe siècle', *Le réseau urbain en Belgique dans une perspective historique (1350–1850). Une approche statistique et dynamique* (Brussels, 1992), pp. 498–503; B. Ericsson, 'Town and hinterland ca. 1350–1800. Recent trends in Swedish urban history', *Storia della Città*, vol. 36 (1986), 14; Couturier, *Château-dun*, ch. 2; Friedrichs, *Nördlingen*, p. 46; see below, pp. 223–4; A. Wilson, 'Population developments of early modern English small towns; the parish register evidence for four regions' (paper at the European Small Towns Conference, Leicester, 1990).

³⁰ Plessix, 'Les petites villes de l'Anjou, du Maine et du Perche', pp. 119–20; M. Lachiver, *La population de Meulan du XVIIe au XIXe siècle* (Paris, 1969), p. 100; Vovelle, *De la Cave*, pp. 60–1, 63; Ericsson, 'Town and hinterland', p. 14; see below, p. 39; R. Tinthoin, 'Essai de géographie urbaine historique: une petite ville: Thonon dans la première moitié du