Individuals, Families, and Communities in Europe, 1200–1800

The Urban Foundations of Western Society

In this new interpretation of European family and society, Katherine A. Lynch examines the family at the center of the life of "civil society." Using a variety of evidence from European towns and cities, she explores how women and men created voluntary associations outside the family – communities, broadly defined – to complement or even substitute for solidarities based on kinship. She shows how demographic, economic, religious, and political features of European urban society encouraged the need for collective organizations for mutual protection, and how men and women acted to fulfill this need. She also suggests the central place that family issues played in the creation of larger communities, from the "confessional" communities of the Reformation to the national "imagined" community of the French Revolution. Based on a wide range of research, this is an ambitious integration of the history of the family into the history of public life.

KATHERINE A. LYNCH is Professor of History at Carnegie Mellon University, Pennsylvania. Her previous publications include *Family, Class, and Ideology in Early Industrial France: Social Policy and the Working-Class Family, 1825–1848* (1988) and (with J. Dennis Willigan) *Sources and Methods of Historical Demography* (1982) as well as articles in the fields of family history and historical demography.

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The Urban Foundations of Western Society

Katherine A. Lynch

Carnegie Mellon University

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The Urban Foundations of Western Society
Katherine A. Lynch
Frontmatter
More information

For my mother, Gladys Berlin Lynch, and to the memory
of my father, Donald Charles Lynch

Epigraph

"What, else, I ask you, is a city than a great monastery?"

Erasmus, quoted in Lee Palmer Wandel,
Always among Us (Cambridge, 1990), 14

"How beautiful a day when the king announces his wish to command a free people and create one vast lodge out of his superb empire in which all *good* Frenchmen will truly be brothers."

Speech before the Masonic Lodge,
"The Perfect Union," Rennes,
France, 23 July 1789, quoted in Marcel David,
Fraternité et Révolution française,
1789–1799 (Paris, 1987), 88

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Preface and acknowledgments

This study represents the convergence of research interests I have pursued since graduate school in the fields of family history and historical demography. It was during research for my doctoral dissertation on nineteenth-century France that I first came across the Société de Saint Vincent de Paul, a voluntary association of young men in France who assisted the poor in their homes. From that research, I learned that this charitable association had roots in the seventeenth-century Catholic Reformation, and was intrigued that men of the nineteenth century were attempting to reinvent a kind of organization that had thrived centuries previously. Although I pursued other research, my interest in precedents for the nineteenth-century organizations I had studied remained.

My work in historical demography also prepared me to write the present book, not through any special quantitative focus that this study has, but rather through the habits of thinking that the study of demographic questions often imparts. In particular, my work in this field has taught me that demographic regimes usually change only very slowly. The study of historical demography thus led me almost inexorably to think in terms of the "*longue durée*," and to believe that studying continuities in human societies is just as interesting as studying changes.

A summer grant from the National Endowment for the Humanities permitted me to work on the French Revolution portion of the present work. During research on the family during the Revolution I encountered striking similarities between problems of working-class family poverty during the Old Regime and those I had studied for nineteenth-century France. Additional reading on the comparative history of poor relief in the European past finally convinced me to change what I had originally intended to be a monograph on the family during the French Revolution into a comparative, interpretive work about European family and society over the long term.

I was also encouraged to write this book by Peter Laslett's enthusiasm for a paper I gave at a conference on the "History of the Family" organized by Rod Phillips at Carleton University in Spring 1992. Since that time, I have had the pleasure of presenting my work in a number of forums in the United States and abroad including: the "State and Society" Group of the Pittsburgh Center for

Social History, Brock University, the Economic History Workshop at Indiana University, the International Institute for Social History (IISG), the University of Nijmegen, the Economic History Seminar at the University of Munich, and the Amsterdam School for Social Science Research. A month spent at the Ecole des Hautes Etudes en Sciences Sociales allowed me to present my work in seminars there and at the University of Paris – IV (Sorbonne). For invitations to present my ideas in these stimulating venues, I thank Stephan Curtis, John Sainsbury, Elyce Rotella, George Alter, Lex Heerma van Voss, Paul Klep, John Komlos, Jan Breman, Jean-Pierre Bardet, and Patrice Bourdelais.

I also had the opportunity to discuss my work in the context of two conferences on "Social Control in Early Modern Europe," held at the Villa Vigoni and in Amsterdam, sponsored by the Volkswagen Foundation. I thank Pieter Spierenburg for including me in this interesting forum, and for welcoming me for a semester as an invited researcher at the N.W. Posthumus Institute, which allowed me time to write. During my semester in Amsterdam, the International Institute for Social History provided an office away from home and a congenial setting for writing. My thanks go to its executive director, Lex Heerma van Voss and staff for their cordial reception.

Special thanks go to the staff at Hunt Library, Carnegie Mellon University who contributed their skills to helping me with this project, including Sue Collins, Geri Kruglak, and the staff at the Inter-Library Loan department. Mary Catharine Johnsen and Mo Dawley helped early on in my search for illustrations. I also thank Elaine Engst, Director, and the staff of the Division of Rare and Manuscript Collections, Carl A. Kroch Library, Cornell University, who expedited my requests for illustrations. Gil Shapiro helped with the interpretation of findings from his and John Markoff's study of the French *cahiers de doléances*. I wish to acknowledge the University of Chicago and Barbara B. Diefendorf for permission to reproduce an extract from Barbara B. Diefendorf, "Give us Back our Children: Patriarchal Authority and Parental Consent to Religious Vocations in Early Counter-Reformation France," *Journal of Modern History* 68 (June 1996): 265–6.

Other debts are longer term. Over the years, my life and work as a family historian and historical demographer have been enriched by the friendship and collegiality of Jean-Pierre Bardet, Anders Brandström, Lars-Göran Tedebrand, Patrice Bourdelais, Jean-Noël Biraben, and Jacques Dupâquier.

For research assistance at various stages of this project, I thank Steve Beaudoin, Sabine Marx, and most notably Darrell Meadows. His contributions went well beyond those of research assistance to include excellent advice, both scholarly and editorial, for improving the manuscript. For their help in reading and commenting upon parts or all of earlier versions of this book, I thank Tom Adams, Mary Lindemann, Hal Parker, Nicholas Terpstra, Richard M. Smith, Leslie Moch, Joel Harrington, Phil Gavitt, Carter Lindberg, John Gillis, and

Daniel Scott Smith. The book has been much improved by their thoughtful suggestions, most of which I have tried to incorporate. The responsibility for remaining errors is my own.

The members of my own family – Cynthia, Joel, Rob, Toby, and Sarah – have been a source of joy and support to me during the years I have spent working on this study. I dedicate this book to my mother, and to the memory of my father, for providing examples of how to live out obligations to both family and community.