PART I

Introduction

Cities and cultural exchange

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As human societies came to depend upon agriculture, so cities emerged as central institutions in their affairs. They were places where foodstuffs and other vital commodities could be stored, processed and distributed. This reduced the risks of starvation or conquest, but tightened social and political bonds of control. Cities provided that density of human contacts and skills necessary to develop complex manufactures, exchange and cultures. As places of refuge and as sites of authority they articulated systems of belief. In proportion to their size, wealth, power and ideological strength they dominated their immediate hinterlands and shaped wider landscapes and societies, encouraging agrarian specialisation, the extraction of raw materials and an infrastructure of communications that included market-places, roads and canals. By supporting institutions that sustained peace, they promoted complementary specialisation both between cities and their territories and between different city regions, as well as longer-distance trade. But the competing demands and ambitions of cities provoked warfare and alliances, a process which has profoundly influenced the shaping of territorial states. Driven sometimes by the interests of a single city, this can also involve a more complex negotiation between cities and regional or political identities shaped by geographical, ethnic and linguistic characteristics. Princely claims to lordship over a people or a territory add other elements to the equation. All these forms of interaction between cities and territories – whether commercial, political, religious or social – involve cultural transfer and exchange. Indeed, access to the exotic and the ability to manipulate signs of authority that allude to distant or dominant cultures have for long been attributes of successful rulers, who in such practices employ cities both

3

as sources of supply and as uniquely visible sites for expressions of their
power.

Cities absorb and transform many cultures – distinctive, but often
weakly bounded, patterns of human behaviour, belief and association,
that are often expressed and reinforced through material symbols and
the circulation of goods.[1] City cultures often incorporate those of
separate neighbourhoods and social groups, including foreigners or
'strangers' recognisable as having come from afar or being in some way
not fully admitted to the community of citizens. Likewise the surround-
ing countryside has cultures of its own, but the intercourse between
city and country is constant and cities commonly serve to articulate
the cultural identities of their regions. Those identities are expressed
in many ways, including boundary marks, monuments, iconography,
music, language, literature, historiography, gesture, dress, cuisine and
agrarian and industrial products. Religions, deities, saints and heroes
are invoked to reinforce them and are recognised by outsiders as cul-
tural markers. Through cities those signs become embedded in widely
shared cognitive maps of the world, in which metropolitan identities
tend to overshadow, but also sometimes to promote, those of subor-
dinate centres. This hegemony often operates through commercial
channels, with commodities serving as signs of contact with other cul-
tures. Throughout our period, for example, English woollen cloths
were traded widely throughout Europe and the Middle East, where
they were known as 'London cloths', not because they had been made
in the city but because they had been distributed from there. In London,
by contrast, the cloths were known by their English provincial places
of origin.[2] Such was the internal dominance of the London market

[1] For the utility and problems of 'culture' as a heuristic concept, see A. Kuper, *Culture:
the Anthropologist's Account* (Cambridge, MA, and London: Harvard University Press,
1999); the essays in V. E. Bonnell and L. Hunt (eds.), *Beyond the Cultural Turn: New
Directions in the Study of Society and Culture* (Berkeley and London: University of
California Press, 1999), especially W. H. Sewell, Jr., 'The concept(s) of culture',
pp. 35–61; M. Douglas and S. Ney, *Missing Persons: A Critique of the Social Sciences*
(Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998), especially pp. 53–4, 91–4, 101. Note
also the confrontations in *Social and Cultural History* 1 (2004), pp. 94–117, 201–24,
326–32.
[2] D. Keene, 'Material London in time and space', in L. C. Orlin (ed.), *Material London
ca. 1600* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2000), pp. 55–74, esp. p. 69.

that provincial centres emulated the metropolis by adopting its most famous street-names in pursuit of their cultural and political ambitions.[3] This demonstrates the close association between the traffic in goods and that in ideas: in many European cities streets and market-places have been prime sites for the reception of new information, commodities and practices, as well as for the proclamation of political and ideological norms.[4] At the same time, many of the more private encounters characteristic of city life have an important role in cultural exchange.[5]

Cities and networks of cities are deeply rooted organisms. They facilitate the continuity of social systems and are often more enduring than the territorial polities of which they form part. European cities between 1400 and 1700 were no exception. South and west of the Rhine and the Danube the system of cities owed much to the Roman inheritance, which still shaped the physical form of many towns. This was true even in England, where there was a hiatus in urban life during the fifth and sixth centuries. During subsequent episodes of commercial and urban revival, especially from about AD 1000 onwards, the urban system was reshaped: some cities did not revive, while others were established anew, most notably in territories beyond the former imperial frontiers.[6] But even entirely new towns owed something to Roman ideas, whether derived from the western tradition and its successive reinventions or from the cultural sphere of the eastern capital, as in the case of Kiev or Venice. Those ideas were expressed in town plans, in monumental building and in the vocabulary and discourse of urban institutions (senators, consuls and codified customs). Of the major towns in Europe and the Mediterranean region in 1500, as represented by the main centres of population mapped in Fig. 1, over 60 per cent had been significant urban centres eleven hundred years before, with

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[3] D. Keene, 'Metropolitan comparisons: London as a city-state', *Historical Research* 77 (2004), pp. 459–80, esp. pp. 473–4.

[4] See below, Chapter 13.   [5] See below, pp. 150–3 and Chapter 16.

[6] For recent surveys, see A. Verhulst, *The Rise of Cities in North-West Europe* (Cambridge University Press, 1999); M. McCormick, *The Origins of the European Economy: Communications and Commerce, A.D. 300–900* (Cambridge University Press, 2001); D. Keene, 'Towns and the growth of trade', in D. Luscombe and J. Riley-Smith (eds.), *The New Cambridge Medieval History*, vol. IV, *c. 1024–c. 1198*, Part I (Cambridge University Press, 2004), pp. 47–85 and 758–76.
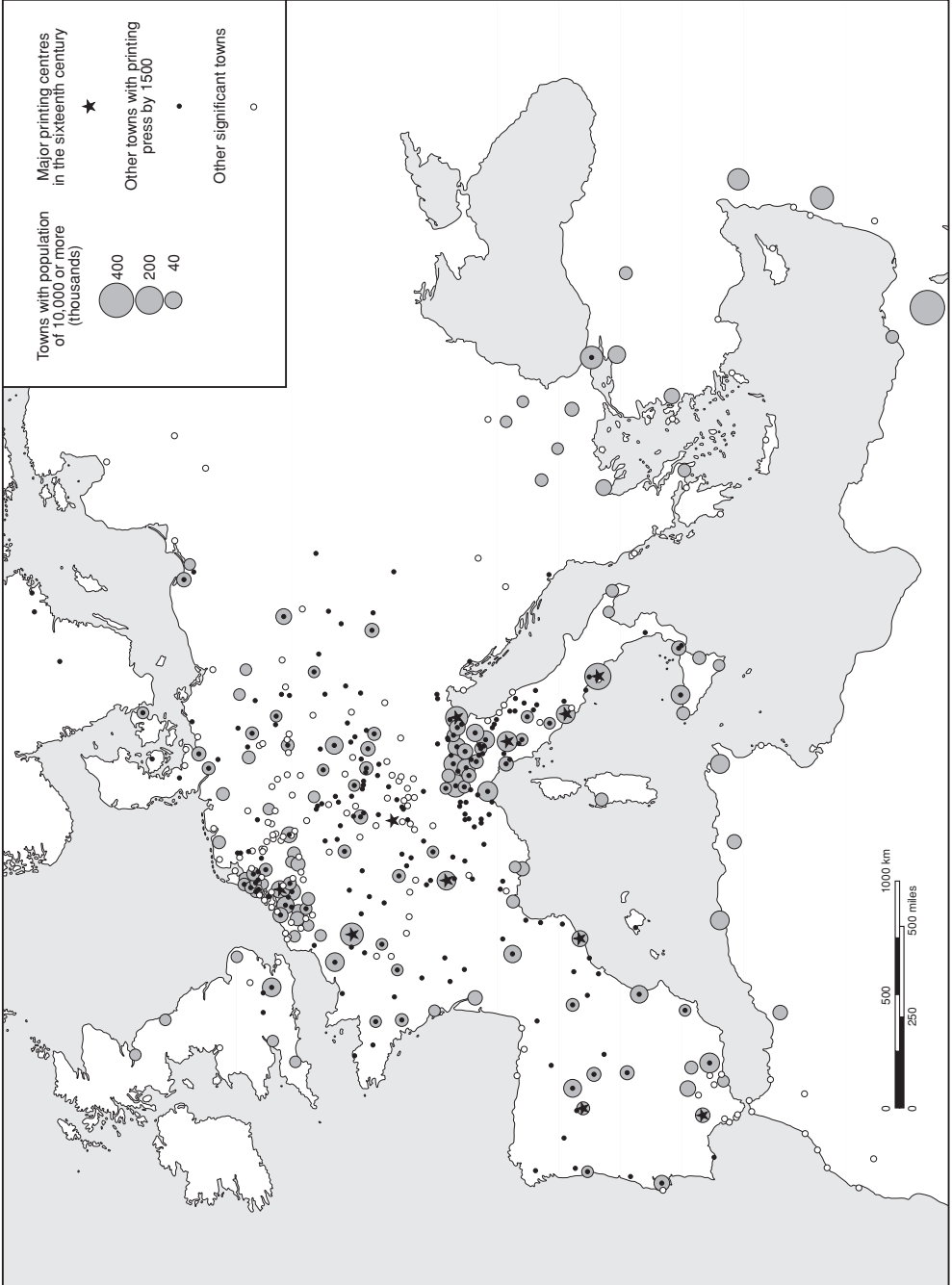
Fig. 1. Cities and cultural exchange in Europe and the Mediterranean region, *c.* 1500.
Population totals are based on J. de Vries, *European Urbanization, 1500–1800* (London: Methuen, 1984), pp. 270–8 and H. Inalcik and D. Quataert (eds.), *An Economic and Social History of the Ottoman Empire, 1300–1914* (Cambridge University Press, 1994), *passim*. For towns with printing presses by 1500, see C. Clair, *A History of European Printing* (London: Academic Press, 1976), Appendix II. Major printing centres are identified on the basis of Peter Burke's calculations in J. Van der Stock (ed.), *Antwerp: Story of a Metropolis, 16th–17th Century* (Gent: Snoeck-Ducaju & Zoon, 1993), pp. 54–5. 'Other significant towns' have been identified primarily by their occurrence in Books 1 to 4 of G. Braun and F. Hogenberg, *Civitates Orbis Terrarum* (Cologne: various publishers, 1572–88). The coverage of this atlas is uneven and was influenced by princely and other patronage, influences which became much stronger in the composition of Books 5 and 6. This in part explains the density of places in Switzerland, Germany and the Low Counties. Nevertheless, the atlas and its predecessors (including H. Schedel, *Liber Chronicarum* (Nuremberg, 1493) and S. Münster, *Cosmographia* (Basel, 1550)) conveyed to contemporaries a powerful impression of urban Europe. Antique or rural sites portrayed in the atlas, and those which served primarily as fortifications, have not been shown. Several North African and Levantine towns have been included in the category of 'significant places' because they probably had populations of more than 10,000. However, there are likely to have been many more towns of around 10,000 inhabitants both in those areas and in the Balkans. (Prepared by Olwen Myhill and Derek Keene, Centre for Metropolitan History, Institute of Historical Research, University of London.)

comparable proportions of 91 per cent for Italy and 75 per cent for France and Spain.

By 1400, major changes were in train. The loss of population through pestilence and other natural disasters restructured labour markets and promoted a redistribution of resources in favour of those segments of society whose wealth was not derived primarily from the control of land. In many parts of Europe standards of living for the majority improved dramatically, with more spacious living accommodation and more varied diet, clothing, personal adornments, domestic furnishings and utensils. These changes are indicated by data on prices, incomes and urban population densities, but also by descriptions of houses and their contents, the evidence of archaeology and artefacts, and visual representations. They were accompanied by new practices and expectations concerning consumption, possessions and the expression of personal identity – all fundamental aspects of the culture of the individual or group. At the same time in many areas of Europe urbanisation – as indicated by the proportion of the population living in towns – increased.[7] There were parallel developments affecting the terms of trade, in which towns played a central role. From the seventh century onwards it is possible to identify how towns articulated systems of exchange that brought the sparsely populated fringes of Europe into closer relations with core areas, with notable phases of acceleration from 1000 and then from 1400 onwards. Between the thirteenth and the seventeenth century, for example, there was a marked fall in the rates of interest on debts. This improvement in business conditions, associated with institutional and infrastructural evolution, facilitated contacts between towns and promoted economic integration and new forms of regional identity. A corresponding increase in the flow of information and ideas contributed to cultural exchange across the

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[7] Recent, but not entirely reliable, surveys include D. Nicholas, *The Later Medieval City, 1300–1500* (London and New York: Longman, 1997) and C. R. Friedrichs, *The Early Modern City, 1450–1750* (London and New York: Longman, 1995). D. Gaimster, *German Stoneware, 1200–1900: Archaeology and Cultural History* (London: British Museum Press, 1997) is a notable example of the light thrown on these changes by material evidence.

whole of Europe. At the same time states found new opportunities to strengthen and extend their control.[8]

Many of these changes can be characterised as part of a process of 'catching up'. After 1200 the commercial cities of northern Italy caught up with the commercial practices and lifestyles of the cities in the southern and eastern Mediterranean regions with which they traded, a phase that involved a good deal of cultural transfer.[9] In the fifteenth century the southern Netherlands were not far behind the most intensively commercial areas of Italy and displayed almost equal cultural dynamism. Further economic growth in the Netherlands during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries contributed to a major shift in the focus of western European commercial and cultural life, benefiting outliers such as London. Yet by 1700 even London, then probably the largest city in Christian Europe and benefiting from its new role in the expanding Atlantic economy, was only just catching up, in terms of commercial or cultural sophistication, with its Low Countries and Italian counterparts. Some measure of these disparities is provided by estimates that England's gross national product per head in the middle of the fifteenth century was only just over half that of Tuscany, but a century later had risen to just over three-quarters, while over the same period Tuscan wealth had fallen well behind that of more vigorous Italian regions.[10] Individuals across most of Europe thus came to be exposed to, and in varying degrees assimilated, a greater variety of products, technologies, ideas and practices from distant regions

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[8] S. R. Epstein, *Freedom and Growth: The Rise of States and Markets in Europe, 1300–1750* (London: Routledge and LSE, 2000), *passim*, especially pp. 17–29, 61–8, 73–82, 89–105, 169–74.

[9] For aspects of this in Venice, see E. J. Grube (ed.), *Arte Veneziana e arte islamica. Atti del Primo simposio internazionale sull'arte veneziana e l'arte islamica* (Venice: L'Altra Riva, 1989); E. Crouzet-Pavan, 'Venise entre Jérusalem, Rome et Byzance: stratégies d'appropriation d'images', in C. Nicolet, R. Ilbert and J.-C. Depaule (eds.), *Mégalopoles méditerranéennes: Géographie urbaine rétrospective* (Rome and Paris: Collection de l'Ecole Française de Rome 261, 2000), pp. 546–64; D. Howard, *Venice and the East: The Impact of the Islamic World on Venetian Architecture, 1100–1500* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2000); see also below, Chapter 16.

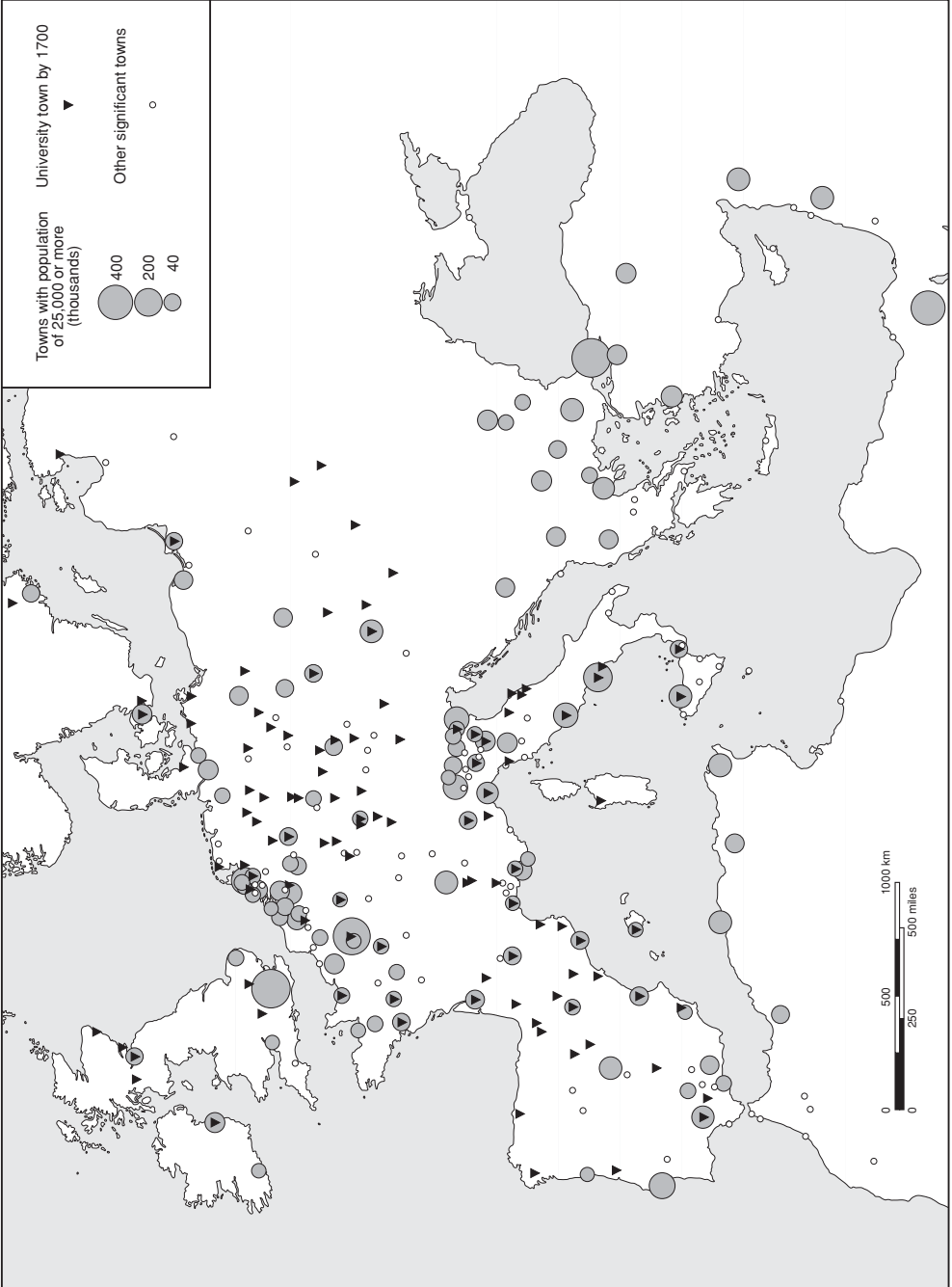[10] Epstein, *Freedom and Growth*, p. 10.

Fig. 2. The major towns of Europe and the Mediterranean region, *c.* 1700.
For populations and 'other significant towns', see the caption to Fig. 1. University towns in 1700 are identified from the list in H. de Ridder-Symoens (ed.), *A History of the University in Europe*, vol. II: *Universities in Early Modern Europe (1500–1800)* (Cambridge University Press, 1997), pp. 81–9, excluding those institutions whose status as universities is in dispute and those institutions that have never had a complete university structure. (Prepared by Olwen Myhill and Derek Keene, Centre for Metropolitan History, Institute of Historical Research, University of London.)