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The Early Modern European City: A Demographic Puzzle

In the Middle Ages, Europe's cities had a good name. *Stadtluft macht frei*, it was then said, "city air makes [one] free."¹ Countryfolk could escape their conditions of servitude and aspire to a better life by moving to a city, a city whose political autonomy from rural lords offered those who reached it both protection and opportunity. By the early modern era, this expression had become an anachronism in most of Europe and modern historians, looking back, have been more inclined to say of its cities: *Stadtluft macht tod*. Even the cities that had retained their jurisdictional autonomy appeared to be both unwelcoming and dangerously insalubrious: exclusionary in their treatment of newcomers and "urban graveyards" for their residents.

And yet, despite these dangers and obstacles, Europe's early modern cities – especially the larger cities – grew. Plague and illness swept through them, but they recovered; war and siege crippled them, but they sprang back; and Europe became steadily more urban.² By the eighteenth century – *before* the onset of modern industrialization – Europe as a whole had become the most urbanized part of the world, overtaking the earlier leaders, the Middle East and East Asia.³

¹ The full expression was: *Stadtluft macht frei nach Jahr und Tag* / City air makes one free after a year and a day. It referred to town laws that prevented the owners of serfs from reclaiming their departed subjects after the latter's year-long residence in the city. Long after such ordinances ceased to be common, the shorter expression remained in circulation as an expression of appreciation for the absence of servile relations within urban jurisdictions.

² Europe's urban population in cities of at least 5,000 (Europe defined here with an eastern boundary running roughly from St. Petersburg to Trieste) rose from 9.6 percent in 1500 to 12.4 percent in 1700, and 15.0 percent by 1800. For urbanization estimates, see: de Vries, *European Urbanization*; Paul Bairoch, Jean Baou, and Pierre Chevre, *La population des villes Européennes de 800 à 1850* (Geneva, Droz, 1988).

³ See: Maarten Bosker, Eltjo Buringh, and Jan Luiten van Zanden, "From Baghdad to London, Unraveling Urban Development in Europe, North Africa and the Middle East, 800–1800." *The Review of Economics and Statistics*, 95 (2013), 1418–1437; Anne Winter, "Population and Migration: European and Chinese Experience Compared," in Peter Clark, ed., *The Oxford Handbook of Cities in World History* (Oxford, Oxford University

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How cities grew in population and how Europe urbanized in the early modern era remains dimly understood. It is especially the demographic processes by which the town populations reproduced themselves, or not, and the social processes by which migrants to the towns were integrated, or not, that continue to present historians with many unanswered questions.

It is true, of course, that historians have come to know a great deal about preindustrial Europe's family structures and demographic reproduction. The methodological innovations that revolutionized the field of historical demography, beginning in the 1950s, provided the basis for a fundamentally new understanding of marriage behavior, family formation, and mortality. But early modern Europe was a predominantly agrarian society and, for that as well as for practical reasons, the path-breaking studies of historical demography focused almost exclusively on rural communities. Since these communities consisted primarily of families engaged in agricultural and related pursuits, the research approach of these studies focused on achieving aggregate-level reconstructions of population, fertility, and mortality trends.⁴ The small amount of research

Press, 2013), 403–420; G. William Skinner, ed. *The City in Late Imperial China* (Stanford, Stanford University Press, 1977). There was one notable exception: Japanese urbanization in the Tokugawa era was at least the equal of Europe's. See, Gilbert Rozman, *Urban Networks in Ch'ing China and Tokugawa Japan* (Princeton, Princeton University Press, 1974); Thomas C. Smith, *The Agrarian Origins of Modern Japan* (Stanford, Stanford University Press, 1959).

⁴ The modern historical demography of preindustrial European societies began with the 1956 publication by Louis Henry and Michel Fleury of a technical manual that laid out a methodology, called “family reconstitution,” that allowed for precise and accurate measurement of the demographic behavior of families in past time. M. Fleury and L. Henry, *Des registres paroissiaux à l'histoire de la population. Manuel de dépouillement et d'exploitation de l'état civil ancien* (Paris, Institut National d'Études Démographiques, 1956). Wherever parish registers of marriages, baptisms, and burials – what could be thought of as forming a proto-system of civil registration – were maintained and preserved, this methodology could be applied to uncover nearly all aspects of fertility behavior and many aspects of mortality risk.

Research that began in France spread across Western and Central Europe and, in short order, many score of community studies were completed. The focus of the vast majority was squarely on village communities and the generalizations produced by this work applied almost entirely to rural society. The family reconstitution method is labor intensive, which recommends the study of small communities. Moreover, the heart of the methodology involves “nominal data linkage,” connecting the birth, marriage, and death of individuals via their names. The larger the community, the more challenging it is to make such linkages accurately. Consequently, this breakthrough methodology was rarely applied to urban communities of any size. European village-level reconstitution studies multiplied, and by the 1980s they numbered in the hundreds, and could form the foundations for important national syntheses for England, Germany, and France. E. A. Wrigley and R. S. Schofield, *The Population History of England, 1541–1871: A Reconstruction* (London, Arnold, 1981); E. A. Wrigley, R. S. Davies, J. E. Oeppen,

that focused on the demography of preindustrial urban communities only sufficed to raise questions and encourage speculation concerning how urban and rural populations differed and why. Consequently, a satisfactory synthesis of urban demographic patterns and of the demographic interactions of urban and rural populations remains to be developed.

Also standing in the way of such a synthesis is the aggregate-level approach of most historical reconstitutions. They revealed the demographic behavior of communities rather than of socio-economic or cultural groups or individuals.⁵ While this limitation may be a minor one in a rural community, it is severe when studying cities. Urban populations are more varied – economically, socially, and often religiously – than those of most rural communities; many city residents are migrants from distant places; many enter a city only to depart again; they interact and intermarry in ways that differ from agrarian communities; they face different mortality risks. It is these very differences that make urban communities more challenging to study than rural populations, or, rather, the stable, persisting portions of village populations that have always been the focus of the family reconstitution methodology.⁶

This book proposes to reopen the discussion on these themes by providing a detailed case study of a single city – the German city of Würzburg in the period 1696–1711 – and by situating its findings in

and R. S. Schofield, *English Population History from Family Reconstitution, 1580–1837* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1997); John Knodel, *Demographic Behavior in the Past: A Study of Fourteen German Village Populations in the Eighteenth and Nineteenth Centuries* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1988); Jacques Dupâquier, ed., *Histoire de la population française*. 3 vols. (Paris, Presses Universitaires de France, 1998).

⁵ In the 1980s and 1990s, historical demographers shifted their attention from aggregate-level studies to a greater focus on socio-economic differentials, gender and age differences, and life-course developments. But this shift in emphasis came with a shift in the documentary evidence used and in the time periods studied. The basis for research now became civil registration data maintained by government agencies beginning in the course of the nineteenth century and newly available to scholars in machine readable form. These and other methodological developments in the field are well described in George Alter, “The Evolution of Models in Historical Demography,” *Journal of Interdisciplinary History* 50 (2020), 325–362.

⁶ Family reconstitution studies usually excluded over half of the families resident in a parish on the grounds that the husband and/or wife were neither baptized nor buried there. In 14 English studies, about 75 percent of all attempts at family reconstitution lacked a link to a baptism of husband and/or wife and 55 percent lacked a link to their burials. The assumption that the population rooted in place – which was studied – had a similar demographic experience to the migratory population – which was set aside – seems hard to sustain because the two groups were likely to differ in birth order (and, hence, inheritance prospects), in economic status, and in marriage age – among other things. Alter, “Evolution of Models,” 338; Steven Ruggles, “Migration, Marriage, and Mortality: Correcting Sources of Bias in English Family Reconstitutions,” *Population Studies* 46 (1992), 507–522, 510.

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the context of our current state of historical demographic knowledge. The analysis will exploit the rich demographic detail made possible by the family reconstitution method and will combine it with other sources and methods in order to reveal the role of migrants, of socio-economic differences, of gender, and of the stages of the life-course on the demographic life of a pre-industrial city.

This study's mission is to improve our understanding of the historical demography of Europe's pre-industrial cities and to develop warranted generalizations concerning the dynamics of urban population change. I have emphasized that this is an understudied terrain, but I do not mean to imply that urban populations have been ignored altogether.⁷ Over the years a number of historians have tackled the daunting challenges of applying the new methods to urban populations, although many limited their study to a sample of a city's families or to a single social class. Important urban demographic studies were published for Geneva, in Switzerland, and the French cities of Caen and Rouen.⁸ More focused studies were made for Mainz, in Germany, York, in England, and Cuenca, in Spain. Additional studies investigated much smaller towns, such as Luzern, Meulan, and Giessen, in Switzerland, France, and Germany, respectively.⁹ In later years a number of studies, some focused on only certain aspects of the demographic experience, were completed for a number of small German cities: Nördlingen, Schwäbisch Hall,

⁷ From the outset demographic historians were aware of the importance of studying urban populations. Ironically, the very first application of the family reconstitution method was Louis Henry's *Anciennes familles genèvoises. Étude démographique, xvi^e – xx^e siècles* (Paris, Presses universitaires de France, 1956). This study made use of existing genealogies of the elite families of Geneva to show how the family reconstitution method could reveal their demographic behavior – including the onset of family limitation practices among this socio-economic slice of the city's population. But Henry's next application of the new methodology focused on the small French village of Crulai, and the flood of studies that followed used this – and not Geneva – as their guiding example. E. Gautier and L. Henry, *La Population de Crulai, paroisse Normande* (Paris, Presses Universitaires de France, 1958).

⁸ Alfred Perrenoud, *La population de Genève du seizième au début du dix-neuvième siècle: Etude démographique* (Geneva, Librairie A. Jullien, 1979); Jean-Claude Perrot, *Genèse d'une ville moderne. Caen au XVII^e siècle* (Paris, Mouton, 1975); Jean-Pierre Bardet, *Rouen au xvii^e et xviii^e siècles: les mutations d'un espace social*, 2 vols. (Paris, Société d'édition d'enseignement supérieur, 1983).

⁹ Walter Rödel, *Mainz und seine Bevölkerung im 17. und 18. Jahrhundert* (Stuttgart, Franz Steiner Verlag, 1985); Rudolf Burri, *Die Bevölkerung Luzerns im 18. und frühen 19. Jahrhundert* (Luzern, Rex-Verlag, 1975); Arthur Imhof, *Historische Demographie als Sozialgeschichte. Giessen und Umgebung vom 17. zum 19. Jahrhundert*, 2 vols. (Darmstadt, Historische Kommission für Hessen, 1975); Chris Galley, *The Demography of Early Modern Towns: York in the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries* (Liverpool, Liverpool University Press, 1998); David Reher, *Town and Country in Pre-industrial Spain: Cuenca, 1550–1870* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1990).

Koblenz, Bonn, Oppenheim, and Duisburg.¹⁰ These and other partial studies uncovered important differences between the demographic behavior of urban and rural populations, but they have not yet led to a synthesis of findings for urban Europe that might be set beside the impressive synthetic works produced earlier for Europe's rural populations.¹¹ In this book, the findings for Würzburg will be integrated with those for other European cities to advance a new synthesis for urban demographic history in the early modern era.

Four Questions

To gain a fuller understanding of the population dynamics of the cities of preindustrial Europe we seek answers to the chief outstanding questions of urban historical demography. These can be grouped under four headings.

1. *How did family demography differ by socio-economic class?* In preindustrial rural communities, there were usually insufficient members of non-agrarian occupational categories to allow for the investigation of intergroup differences.¹² Consequently, the settled rural community

¹⁰ Etienne François, *Koblenz im 18. Jahrhundert* (Veröffentlichungen des Max-Planck-Institut für Geschichte 72) (Göttingen, Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1982); Christian Schlöder, *Bonn im 18. Jahrhundert. Die Bevölkerung einer geistlichen Residenzstadt* (Köln, Böhlau Verlag, 2014); Peter Zschunke, *Konfession und Alltag in Oppenheim: Beiträge zur Geschichte von Bevölkerung und Gesellschaft einer gemischtkonfessionellen Kleinstadt in der frühen Neuzeit* (Wiesbaden, Steiner, 1984); Regine Jägers, *Duisburg im 18. Jahrhundert* (Köln, Böhlau Verlag, 2001); Christopher R. Friedrichs, *Urban Society in an Age of War: Nördlingen, 1580–1720* (Princeton, Princeton University Press, 1989); Terence McIntosh, *Urban Decline in Early Modern Germany: Schwäbisch Hall and Its Region, 1650–1750* (Chapel Hill, University of North Carolina Press, 1997).

¹¹ The titles of the following articles reveal the impasse in which this research topic has found itself: Robert Woods, "What Would One Need to Know to Solve the 'Natural Population Decrease Problem' in Early Modern Cities," in Richard Lawton, ed., *The Rise and Fall of Great Cities* (London, Bellhaven Press, 1989), pp. 80–93; Nigel Goose, "Urban Demography in Pre-industrial England: What Is to Be Done?," *Urban History* 21 (1994), 273–284; Robert Woods, "Urban–Rural Mortality Differentials: An Unresolved Debate," *Population and Development Review* 29 (2003), 29–46.

¹² There is one major exception to this claim. Several historians sought to uncover a hypothesized difference in the demographic behavior of rural households sustained by "proto-industrial" pursuits (rural industrial producers) relative to farming households. The hypothesis of high proletarian fertility, first formalized by Franklin Mendels, was based on the fact that rural proletarians faced incentives that encouraged early marriage which led to higher fertility than prevailed among property owning peasant farmers. Testing the hypothesis proved difficult, and the results were inconclusive. See: Franklin Mendels, "Agriculture and Peasant Industry in Eighteenth-Century Flanders," in W. N. Parker and E. L. Jones, eds., *European Peasants and Their Markets: Essays in Agrarian Economic History* (Princeton, Princeton University Press, 1975), 179–204; David Levine, "The Demographic Implications of Rural Industrialization: A Family Reconstitution

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generally was approached as a single social entity. Is it possible that major social class differences in demographic behavior also prevailed in earlier times? If so, these are most likely to have been important in urban communities. This study makes use of a database sufficiently large to identify and measure inter-class differences with statistical confidence.

2. *Did an “urban graveyard” – chronic high mortality in excess of fertility – prevail in the cities?* The simple totals of baptisms and burials available for many cities usually reveal substantial surpluses of deaths. Indeed, evidence of this sort attracted the concerned attention of the pioneer demographers writing in the early modern era itself.¹³ In addition, several early statistical inquiries, most dating from the mid-nineteenth century, revealed the horrifying scope of urban “disamenities” and the unique hazards to life faced by city dwellers.¹⁴ A demographer who had evidently enjoyed a good classical education described the nineteenth-century campaign to improve urban public health in dramatic terms. “We see that the cities of earlier times can be likened to the Minotaur, which gobbled up the children of the Greeks, and that hygiene was the Theseus which disarmed the monster. Athens, to stay with this image, was the countryside, which sent each year its hecatombs to the cities.”¹⁵

Thus, the special risks to health posed by urban life in the past have long been affirmed by novelists, social reformers, and proto-statisticians, but to the extent that studies of urban population have

Study of Shepsted, Leicestershire, 1600–1851,” *Social History* 1 (1976), 177–196; Peter Kriedte, Hans Medick, and Jürgen Schlumbohm, *Industrialization before Industrialization: Rural Industry in the Genesis of Capitalism* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1981); Sheilagh Ogilvie, *State Corporatism and Proto-industry: The Württemberg Black Forest, 1580–1797* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1997).

- ¹³ Early studies that emphasized chronic excess urban mortality include: John Graunt, *Natural and Political Observations made upon the Bills of Mortality* [1662], reprinted in Peter Laslett, ed., *The Earliest Classics: John Graunt and Gregory King* (Farnborough, Gregg International, 1973); Charles Davenant, *Essay upon the Probable Methods of Making a People Gainers in the Balance of Trade* (London, printed for James Knapton, 1699); Johan Peter Süßmilch, *Die göttliche Ordnung in den Veränderungen des menschlichen Geschlechts aus der Geburt, dem Tode und der Fortpflanzung desselben erwiesen* (Berlin, Im Verlag des Buchlading der Realschule, 1741); Nicolaas Struijck, *Vervolg van de beschryving der staartsterren en nader ontdekkingen omtrent den staat van't menslijk geslacht* (Amsterdam, Isaak Tirion, 1753).

- ¹⁴ Adna Ferrin Weber, *The Growth of Cities in the Nineteenth Century. A Study in Statistics* (New York, Macmillan and Co., 1899). Jeffrey G. Williamson, *Coping with City Growth* (Cambridge, MA, Harvard University Press, 1990); John Knodel, “Town and Country in Nineteenth Century Germany: A Review of Urban–Rural Differentials in Demographic Behavior,” *Social Science History* 1 (1977), 356–382.

- ¹⁵ J. H. F. Kohlbrugge, “Over den invloed der steden op hare bewoners en op de bewoners van het land,” *De Economist* 56 (1907), 372–393, 374. My translation.

not moved beyond the simple counts of births and deaths, the underlying causes of urban mortality, and how it varied over time and by social class, have remained in the realm of speculation. This study aims to test the urban graveyard thesis with formal demographic measurements.

3. *Did pre-industrial urban life generate a distinctive urban fertility regime, or were urban–rural fertility differences of little account until the onset of the demographic transition?* From the pioneering work of Frédéric Le Play in the 1850s, through the founding fathers of sociology – Durkheim, Tönnies, Simmel, and Weber – and on to the Chicago School of Sociology in the 1920s, a central component of modernization theory held that life in industrial societies – that is to say, modern urban life – acted to alter family structures (from extended to nuclear family organization) and to lower fertility levels.¹⁶ In most western societies, the fertility transition began in the second half of the nineteenth century, just as urbanization was accelerating, so it was easy to assume that industrialization, urbanization, and the demographic transition were inter-related aspects of a broader process of modernization.¹⁷ The (unexplored) implication of this body of theory was that cities in premodern societies did not yet exhibit the distinctive characteristics – small nuclear families and low fertility – that they would reveal in the course of the demographic transition.

The findings of the new historical demography challenged several of the implicit assumptions of modernization theory. Were premodern household structures really so different from the simple, nuclear families of modern times? Laslett argues persuasively that this was untrue. Was premodern fertility uncontrolled, held in check only by mortality? Hajnal, Wrigley, Henry and many others demonstrated this to be untrue as a general rule.¹⁸ And, to come to our present concern,

¹⁶ An excellent summary of Le Play's contribution and its later development is found in: Paul Puschmann & Arne Solli, "Household and Family during Urbanization and Industrialization: Efforts to Shed New Light on an Old Debate," *The History of the Family* 19 (2014), 1–12.

¹⁷ The influential "European Fertility Project" took this approach. See: Ansley J. Coale and Susan Cotts Watkins, eds., *The Decline of Fertility in Europe* (Princeton, Princeton University Press, 1986).

¹⁸ Peter Laslett, *Household and Family in Past Time* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1972); Peter Laslett, "Family and Households as Work Group and Kin Group: Areas of Traditional Europe Compared," in Richard Wall, ed., *Family Forms in Historical Europe* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983), pp. 513–563. Critics of Laslett's claims include Michael Mitterauer, "European Kinship Systems and Household Structures: Medieval Origins," in Patrick Heady & Hannes Grandits, eds., *Distinct Inheritances: Property, Family, and Community in a Changing Europe* (Münster, Max-Planck-Institut für ethnologische Forschung, 2003), pp. 35–52; K. Kaser, "Serfdom

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were pre-modern cities yet innocent of the reproductive behavior that sociological theory held to be the fertility-reducing characteristic of cities in modern times, and which made them the hearth of behavior patterns that Oswald Spengler termed “*Die Unfruchtbarkeit des zivilisierten Menschen*,” the sterility of civilized peoples?¹⁹

On this last question, historical demography has not provided a comprehensive answer, mainly because the empirical work on early modern cities has been sparse. But it *has* addressed one important aspect of this question. Indeed, the pioneering study of Henry of 1956 was already focused on the question of conscious family limitation practices, or “birth control.” The diffusion of family limitation practices was central to the fertility transition of the modern era. Did it also take place before then, and, if so, was it a specifically urban form of behavior? Henry’s study of Geneva’s bourgeois families was followed by several other studies of cities: some found evidence of family limitation practices beginning in the seventeenth century, while others – most others – did not.²⁰ Jacques Dupâquier and his collaborators summarized their review of the French evidence with the flat declaration that “L’hyperfécondité urbaine est patente” [the high fertility of the urban population is obvious].²¹ But other students of the matter disagreed. For example, Reher, studying early modern Spain, felt he was only stating the obvious in declaring “It is well

in Eastern Europe,” in D. Kertzer & M. Barbagli, eds., *The History of the European Family: Family Life in the Long Nineteenth Century (1789–1913)* (New Haven, Yale University Press, 2001), pp. 25–62. For evidence of early family limitation practices, the classic works are Gautier and Henry, *La population de Crulai*, and E. A. Wrigley, “Family Limitation in Pre-industrial England,” *Economic History Review* 19 (1966), 82–109.

¹⁹ Oswald Spengler, *Der Untergang des Abendlandes* (Munich, Oscar Beck, 1920).

²⁰ Ulrich Pfister’s study of the early diffusion of family limitation practices was based on an examination of 80 case studies available to him in 1985. Only nine of these were urban cases. Three of them (the pioneering studies of Geneva, Caen, and Rouen) showed that already by 1675 some degree of family limitation practice was in evidence. However, these remained the only examples until the second half of the eighteenth century. His much larger sample of rural studies shows that such practices were far less common, although in the countryside the pace of adoption quickened after the mid-eighteenth century. He also found a sharp difference between Protestant and Catholic populations. By 1800, family limitation practices were widespread among adherents of both confessions, but diffusion began among Protestants in the late seventeenth century while among Catholics it began a century later. Ulrich Pfister, *De Anfänge von Geburtenbeschränkung. Eine Fallstudie (ausgewählte Zürcher Familien im 17. und 18. Jahrhundert)*, (Bern, Peter Lang, 1985), p. 16.

²¹ Dupâquier, ed., *Histoire de la population Française*, II:370. They attributed high urban fertility to the high level of infant mortality in towns and the urban practice of wet nursing, *mise en nourrice*, both of which had the effect of shortening the length of time women were nonsusceptible to a new pregnancy.

known that marital fertility in towns tended to be considerably below levels holding in rural areas.”²² With new evidence and precise fertility measurements, we can hope to lead this debate toward a new understanding.

4. *What was the functional role of migration in the urban demographic regime?* Rural studies based on family reconstitution methods had focused of necessity on a community’s persisting resident population, but they revealed inadvertently – by the simple fact that most of their parish entries could not be linked to long-resident families – that even in the countryside migration was widespread. But if an exclusive focus on the non-migrant population imparts a bias to the demographic measures calculated for rural communities, the matter is far more serious for urban communities. Urban demography would be incomplete, seriously incomplete, without confronting the impact of rural to urban migration, and without considering whether migrants exhibited a distinctive demographic behavior that set them apart from the native families of a city.²³ While family reconstitution directed attention to migration through inadvertence, it did not supply a means by which the place of migration in an urban society could be studied. For this, new methods are needed, which this book intends to develop.

The Sharlin Thesis: Subverting the Prevailing Paradigm

A major contribution to our subject, dating from 1978, sought to link all these questions, but especially the final three, into a single interpretation of the demographic dynamics of the early modern European city. It has ever since stood as an open question awaiting testing.

Allan Sharlin’s thesis, in a nutshell, holds that the early modern city was not so much a death trap, a place of chronically high mortality, as it

²² Reher, *Town and Country*, p. 91.

²³ Jan de Vries, “Urbanization and Migration,” in Maarten Prak and Patrick Lantschner, eds., *Cambridge Urban History of Europe*, Vol. 2 (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2026), 511–533; Steve Hochstadt, “Migration in Preindustrial German,” *Central European History* 16 (1983), 195–224; Anne Winter, *Migration and Urban Change: Newcomers to Antwerp, 1760–1860* (London, Pickering and Chatto, 2009); Étienne François, “Immigration et société urbain en Allemagne à l’époque moderne (XVIIe–XVIIIe siècle),” in M. Garden and Y. Lewuin, eds., *Habiter la ville, XVe–Xxe siècles* (Lyon, Presses Universitaires de Lyon, 1984), 37–54; Hans Christian Johansen, “Migration into and out of the Danish City of Odense,” in Ad van der Woude, Jan de Vries, and Akira Hayami, eds., *Urbanization in History* (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1990), 152–164; Jean-Luc Pinol, *Les mobilités de la grande ville* (Paris, Presses de la Fondation Nationale des Sciences Politiques, 1991).

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was a place of chronically low fertility.²⁴ Low urban fertility, he went on to argue, was not a characteristic shared by the settled, married population as a whole (as sociologists had argued would become characteristic of modern cities), but resulted from town policies that excluded from marriage (and, hence, from reproduction) a large portion of its population, especially migrants. Thus, he speculated that a “permanent” population, consisting primarily of the native-born and endowed with burgher rights and guild memberships, exhibited “normal” fertility and mortality rates that usually were adequate for reproduction. But this population lived side by side with a “temporary” population, made up of migrants to the city who were excluded from the urban community’s lucrative and stable economic sectors and denied access to the urban marriage market. Members of this group were exposed, of course, to the mortality rates of the urban community in which they resided but, since they were mostly denied access to marriage, their fertility was abnormally low—vanishingly low.

In effect, Sharlin proposed to reverse the direction of causation for rural–urban migration. It was not high urban mortality that drove migration (to make up for the resulting human deficit in the cities), but migration (primarily of servants, apprentices, casual laborers, and the like who could seldom marry in the city) that suppressed fertility, thereby creating the excess of deaths over births – and the illusion of an “urban graveyard.” As he put it:²⁵

Given the high mortality conditions of the times, they [the migrants] contributed their due share of deaths to the vital registers of the cities, but as illegitimate fertility was substantially lower than legitimate, deaths outnumbered births [attributable to migrants] by a very large amount.

In Sharlin’s view, the prevailing understanding of urban historical demography was wrong – misled by a compositional effect. Urban populations had two major components: a settled, chiefly native-born, population that did not need migrants to sustain its numbers and a migrant, primarily temporary, population that was unable to reproduce because of social practice and political policy. Migrants to the city may have been important to the economic wellbeing of native-born residents, but they were not a demographic necessity for the perpetuation of the city’s population. The so-called urban graveyard was the product of policy and social behavior, not of an endemic urban health crisis.

²⁴ Allan Sharlin, “Natural Decrease in Early Modern Cities: A Reconsideration,” *Past and Present* 79 (1978), 126–138.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 127.