

## **Social groups and cultural practices**

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"One faith, one king, one law:" the lawyers' proverb circulated widely in sixteenth-century France, and expressed important aspirations. Men and women wanted to see their society as a community, bound together by a common history and shared loyalty to their kings. They understood themselves to differ from other Europeans, to whom they attached clichéd ideas of national character. Yet they knew also that they spent only part of their lives in a national culture. Much more of their time passed within smaller groupings, which they defined according to a series of overlapping criteria, distinguishing urbanite from peasant, noble from commoner, learned from ignorant, rich from poor, male from female. Within each of these categories, geography created further divisions. Residents of each region of France saw themselves as profoundly different from outsiders, whatever their apparent similarities of social position. They might even speak different languages.

This essay attempts to understand French society during the sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries by looking closely at these constituent groups. After briefly examining the ideologies and life experiences that most French men and women shared, it considers in turn the society's most significant categories: first the villagers who made up about 90 percent of the population, then city dwellers, civil servants and magistrates, and the military nobility. (Two

equally important groups, the clergy and women, are discussed elsewhere in this book.) Each of these groups changed dramatically over the sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries, and one task of this essay is to make sense of the changes. Late medieval France was a relatively open, even egalitarian society-- paradoxically, in that medieval ideologies stressed the value and naturalness of inequality. In the countryside, land was plentiful and wages were high, while the cities offered a variety of new opportunities. By the early seventeenth century, society had become far more rigid, and the distance between its haves and have-nots had widened. To some extent, these changes resulted from basic conditions of early modern life; backward technology, rising population, warfare, and other material circumstances all contributed. But (as historians have increasingly recognized in recent years) cultural changes contributed just as much to the shifting character of sixteenth- and early seventeenth-century life. New cultural ideals and institutions created new barriers between some groups and new connections between others. Understanding the social groups of the sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries requires understanding their ideas and assumptions, as well as the material constraints on them.

## 1.

In the early sixteenth century, official ideology coped with the diversity of French society by emphasizing the fundamental divisions within it. The most important were the three great orders of medieval tradition: the clerics who prayed, the nobles who fought and governed, the commoners who worked. Together, so people were told, the three orders constituted a social whole founded on interlocking functions. Each group contributed its share to the others' well-being, despite differences in numbers and ways of life. Social harmony, so ran the theory,

could co-exist with inequality, indeed required it: if one group interfered with another's duties or rights, the result as in any family could only be confusion, anger, and disfunction. Hence the enthusiasm of governments for having this vision of difference and mutuality acted out in public events, as a living lesson in the benefits of cooperation. At moments of national crisis, political gatherings divided according to order, with clerics, nobles, and commoners meeting separately to work out their views and present them to the king. When kings or other great persons visited cities, the population marched to greet them according to these divisions. Such events illustrated as well the finer divisions within society, for each order was made up of many smaller corporations, based on professions or other working units. The doctrine of the three orders appealed to lived experience as well as to hope.

Already in the early sixteenth century, though, there was available a different kind of social theory, and over the next century its influence expanded. This was an image of society that questioned cooperation between groups and stressed instead their differences of property and opportunity. It spoke not of functions and contributions, but of possessions and abilities. To some extent this vision derived from social criticisms that had developed in the late Middle Ages, years especially fertile in attacks on clerics and nobles. By 1500 savage anti-clericalism marked even the highest social levels: in the 1540s, Marguerite de Navarre, the sister of one king and the grandmother of another, satirized the clergy as not merely corrupt and unhelpful, but actually dangerous to society. The nobility's image had dimmed because of its humiliating military failures during the Hundred Years War. When villagers rebelled against their lords in the mid-fourteenth century, a contemporary explained, it was because they had lost faith in the

nobles' readiness to protect them. Such critics rejected as fraudulent claims that clerics and nobles contributed to everyone else's welfare. Only money and power distinguished the first two orders from the rest.

But this rethinking of social categories was not the work of angry commoners only. Renaissance revivals of ancient thought also encouraged educated men and women to think about their society in new ways, by broadening ideas of what social leadership meant and by suggesting more fluid visions of how society functioned. Claude de Seyssel, an early sixteenth-century cleric and noble, divided society into three classes that had nothing to do with the three orders of feudalism. Instead, he proposed a division according to wealth, and he encouraged the ambitious to think of moving up this social hierarchy. Families might need more than one generation to accomplish such advancement, but he saw it as normal and desirable. Other writers contributed to this current of thought by stressing the breadth of accomplishments that true gentlemen and ladies ought to command. For these writers warfare was only one of several activities suited to a nobleman, and individuals had to equip themselves for these other roles. Such stress on self-cultivation implied that ultimately noble birth might matter less than individual achievement, and that in some cases an educated commoner might count for more than a boorish nobleman.

By the seventeenth century, ideas like these circulated very widely through French society. They appeared not only in the works of isolated individuals, but also in mass-market publications. The political crises of the era-- the League, the regency of Marie de Medicis, and the Fronde-- gave them particular relevance, as pamphleteers sought to sway the urban public. Even some villagers produced manifestos that stressed the inadequacies of nobles' behavior and

suggested their essentially parasitic role in society.

## 2.

In 1500, French society was just emerging from the terrible experiences of the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries. Like the rest of Europe, it had suffered from the plague, which arrived in 1348. The next three years, those of the Black Death, brought population losses of about one-third, and visitations of plague recurred thereafter. But France also experienced other disasters in these years, which set it apart from other countries. The Hundred Years War brought significant destruction from its beginning in 1337; after 1415, when English invasion opened a new and more destructive phase of fighting, the losses became much more dramatic. In Normandy, population in 1460 was at 30 percent of its thirteenth-century level, and one-half of what it had been in 1413.

Well into the eighteenth century, French men and women continued to suffer tragedies of this kind. Plague remained endemic, striking every generation or so through the 1660s; its last great appearance came at Marseilles in 1719-1720. There were other diseases, less terrifying but very dangerous, especially for children; infant mortality remained well above 20 percent, and childhood mortality was about the same. Warfare too continued to threaten ordinary people, mainly because it disrupted a delicately balanced, technologically backward economic system. Soldiers took food and livestock for themselves, and destroyed crops to prevent the enemy from supplying himself. During the Fronde, the maneuverings of even small armies around Paris sufficiently disrupted farms and markets that widespread starvation ensued; village death rates increased at least three-fold in 1652, the worst year of the fighting. In frontier regions like

Picardy and Burgundy, the sites of repeated confrontation between French and Habsburg troops, war could have still worse effects. Even in peacetime French armies were a menace to ordinary people, since there were no barracks to house them; they lodged in villagers' homes, a demanding, occasionally violent presence. Such experiences gave a distinctive imprint to all social life in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Most people had witnessed first-hand the effects of war and disease, and had also witnessed periods of food shortage, some of which brought starvation. They had seen the deaths of loved ones and knew that their own deaths might come with little warning. Insecurity and fear were the normal backdrop to sixteenth- and seventeenth-century life, affecting relations with neighbors, spouses, and children, and shaping economic decisions as well.

However destructive and frightening, none of these later experiences matched the scale and intensity of France's late medieval disasters, nor were their sociological effects comparable. Because of them, for about a century after the Hundred Years War ended, in 1453, French society remained unusually open, affording numerous chances for social and economic advancement. In the countryside, land was cheap to own or rent, since so much of it had fallen out of cultivation during the war years. Agricultural laborers earned good wages, and food was cheap. As throughout Europe, after 1500 commerce revived in the cities, and they experienced also a spectacular growth in the legal professions. Even the army offered opportunities, as successive French kings led their troops over the Alps, to enforce claims on the wealthy regions around Naples and Milan. Early sixteenth-century France had the feel of a society in reconstruction, led by kings with grand ambitions and a willingness to innovate and spend. The able and fortunate

profited, at every social level, in both city and country.

By 1550, however, conditions had already changed, and thereafter social mobility became more difficult and less common. Population rose throughout the sixteenth century, and very quickly competition for places intensified. Farms left vacant by the Hundred Years War were now occupied, and numerous peasants competed for any new land that came on the market; rural wages also fell as population rose. Other changes had their origins in political and institutional developments. The civil wars of the later sixteenth century damaged commerce; and the creation of government offices slowed as well. Some expansion continued through 1600, but already by mid-century the principal new institutions of state power had been established and staffed. Ambitious individuals could hope eventually to replace those already in place, but the age of dramatic growth was over. The century after 1550 would be one of dynasties rather than newcomers, according inheritance a larger role in social organization than it had ever played during the Middle Ages.

### 3.

In 1650 as in 1500, France remained a rural society; only about one Frenchman in twenty lived in a city of at least 10,000, and probably 90 percent lived in communities of a few hundred. These villages varied widely in the ways they organized space and activity. They tended to be most elaborately structured near the Mediterranean, where houses grouped near one another in large, well regulated villages. In western France, in the provinces of Brittany and lower Normandy, villages tended to divide into a series of isolated hamlets and individual farms, and often spread over very large territories. Upper Normandy and the Paris basin offered yet a third

model, villages whose houses straggled for two or three kilometers along their principal streets, with farmland spreading behind them. However different their geography, though, French villages shared a relatively loose political organization. In contrast to other regions of Europe, no formal rules limited residence within them or rights to village resources. Anyone with a house in the village counted as an inhabitant and could participate in the local assembly that ran village affairs. In fact most inhabitants seem not to have bothered with these gatherings, leaving decisions to a minority of leading residents.

Most villages were very old, some dating to the Gallo-Roman era, others to the great wave of land clearance and new settlement of the twelfth and thirteenth centuries. Common village names like La Neuville, Villeneuve, and Villefranche (New Town, Free Town) testified to these recent origins and to the attractive terms that medieval lords had used to lure peasant settlers. Like so much else in French society, this ancient village structure underwent severe strains in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries. Some villages disappeared altogether, others had only a few inhabitants by the time peace returned. But complete abandonment was very rare, and nearly all were resettled during the years of reconstruction. Villagers' determination to reestablish their communities expressed the strength of their ties to familiar territories and modes of life; in this regard, the process of reconstruction after 1453 was a deeply conservative one.

Such local attachments were among the several forces that made the village community a powerful reality in sixteenth-century life. Religious ritual also contributed, for the Catholic parish defined the village's boundaries, and the parish church was its main public space; every year many parish priests led their parishioners around these boundaries, reenacting the

superposition of communal feeling and religious practice. Other facts of daily life had the same effect. The village's small scale required some forms of cooperation among its residents, and also allowed little space for privacy. Living so near, neighbors followed all the intimate details of one another's lives. The limited space and darkness of most village houses ensured that many daily acts would take place outdoors, in contact with others. Economic arrangements also contributed to the strength of communal attachments. Especially in the south, many villages had public lands, whose use all residents shared and which they had a strong interest in defending against outsiders. In most regions residents had collective rights also over private lands that had been harvested; they could glean grain that had fallen during harvesting and then pasture animals on the stubble that remained. Agriculture continued to be carried on in pursuit of individual and familial gain, but personal and communal interests meshed tightly.

The social conditions of the early sixteenth century shaped the functioning of these communal bonds in complex ways. The abundant opportunities that the age presented-- to take up abandoned farms, to earn higher wages in another village-- encouraged movement and probably loosened traditional feelings about home and territory. Villages were never entirely static places, and turn-over was especially apparent in the late fifteenth and early sixteenth century. In the villages of lower Normandy, near Caen, about half of village surnames disappeared between 1431 and 1500, with new family names taking the place of those that disappeared. Possibly this mobility diminished over the sixteenth century, as rural opportunities narrowed, but in early seventeenth-century Brittany about 5 percent of the population still left their villages every year. If early sixteenth-century opportunities weakened village bonds by encouraging movement,

however, they also favored solidarity by reducing social differences. With land cheap and large landowners eager for tenants, a substantial middle class of farmers dominated most villages. These families had the livestock and other capital needed to manage substantial farms. Most villages also had significant numbers of day laborers, who owned little more than their homes and survived by working for others, but in the early sixteenth century their numbers were limited. In upper Normandy, nearly half the villagers owned at least 6 hectares of land, close to the minimum needed for self-sufficiency. In any case the high wages that laborers enjoyed reduced tensions with their employers, the village farmers.

During the century after 1550, this relative social equilibrium broke down, and in its place there developed an entirely different class dynamic, which would continue to shape French rural society through 1789. The change was most dramatic in northern France, the richest part of the country and the region most exposed to economic changes, but in lesser degrees it was visible everywhere. The middling class of farmers shrank fast after 1550, the victim of multiple pressures. Regional law codes mainly favored equality of inheritance, so that in this period of population growth families tended to have fewer resources with each generation. Rising taxation hit farmers harder than any other social group and made them more vulnerable to short-term economic shocks; however bad the harvest, taxes had to be paid. Urban and rural elites were both buying up land in these years, making it much more difficult for villagers to establish themselves as independent landowners. Marketing systems across Europe were slowly improving, so that farmers faced more competition in selling their produce. All of these pressures encouraged the

creation by around 1600 of a new kind of village elite, a small group of very wealthy farmers. They dominated local economic life far more completely than the mid-century farmers had done, and during the harvest season the majority of village residents worked for them. Increasingly, their attachments were regional rather than merely local. Having few equals within their own villages, they intermarried with similar families elsewhere; and they marketed their produce over considerable distances. Their daily experiences also set them farther apart from their neighbors than their early-sixteenth-century ancestors had been. Wealth allowed them to marry younger, and they had more and healthier children; infant mortality rates were lower in farmers families than in those of typical villagers. Their houses began to acquire new forms of comfort, more elaborate furniture and utensils, books. Able outsiders had little hope of rising into this group, since leasing a large farm required heavy investment long before any return could be hoped for. Few families had had the reserves and connections that could see them through the unstable economic conditions of the seventeenth century; and even within this village elite farms tended to fall into fewer hands as the century progressed.

The mass of village day laborers grew accordingly, and by the mid-seventeenth century it included about nine-tenths of the population in most villages. Usually these men and women owned their houses and small amounts of land. They rented additional plots, both from their neighbors and from large landowners; because individuals plots were often scattered throughout the village, laborers were typically both landlords and tenants, since this allowed them to group parcels together for maximum efficiency. Yet ultimately they depended on wage labor for the bulk of their incomes, and for most finding enough work represented a difficult challenge. The

large farmers usually employed two or three farm servants throughout the year. During the harvest months of July and August their labor needs expanded, allowing everyone to find work; but most villagers survived the rest of the year in a condition of under-employment, making ends meet from any work that presented itself. By 1600 a number of urban entrepreneurs had recognized the potential profits that these circumstances offered. They could confide some manufacturing processes to village laborers, since villagers would work for lower wages than urban artisans. The textile trades suited this situation especially well, and in the years around 1600 numerous villagers began spinning thread and weaving cloth. Urban merchants provided the commercial substructure for this activity, selling raw materials to the villagers, buying back the finished products to sell in distant markets. By 1650, many villages were as dependent on these manufacturing activities as on agriculture itself.

All of this meant significant degrees of change, instability, and tension in the villages of the later sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries. For both rich and poor, monetary relations and calculations had become unavoidable facts of life. The large farmers paid high taxes and rents, with little long-term security; their leases usually lasted only nine years. They could scarcely avoid seeking maximum profits if they were to meet their obligations, and their colleagues' occasional bankruptcies demonstrated the dire consequences of lax management. Village laborers found themselves almost as tightly bound to the marketplace, since they needed to buy much of their food and work for wages. Neither group could afford to allow tradition to dictate economic choices, nor could they place the community's interests ahead of their families'. Though villagers relied on one another in some circumstances, they lived in a competitive and unforgiving

environment, and they faced one another as much more than neighbors. They were also one another's landlords, employers, and food suppliers, playing each of these roles under economic circumstances that allowed small margin for error.

Yet communal attachments held firm in the seventeenth century, and in some respects actually became stronger. The arrival of manufacturing employment in the village played an important role in this regard, for it helped villagers manage their transition to a highly concentrated, market-oriented organization of agricultural production. They could maintain traditional modes of life even as property and employment patterns radically changed. As important, villages acquired new structures of communal organization in these years. Village taverns became more numerous, and villagers spent a good deal of time in them. They became centers of village talk, conversations that were in some ways the essence of village life. Parish churches also became more important center of village life, another point at which villagers encountered one another. In theory they had always performed this function, but through the sixteenth century they rarely did so. Priests were poorly trained and little interested by their functions; many stayed away from their parishes for long periods, and church attendance was low. After 1600, though, the parish became a more effective framework of village life. Priests insisted that their flocks attend mass regularly, and supplied more content to that experience. Preaching became a normal priestly duty, and priests increasingly occupied themselves with other forms of local improvement: many worked hard to educate their parishioners, and they monitored village morals.

In these efforts, many of the most conscientious parish priests saw themselves as engaged

in something of a cultural war with their parishioners. Frightened of storms, harvest failures, human and animal diseases, so many priests claimed to discover, villagers turned to a variety of magical, impious remedies. They called on village healers and sorcerers, and they held strange ideas about the protective powers of rituals and sacred objects. Often they sought these protections because they assumed human agency behind many of the natural disasters that they suffered. They often believed that neighbors had caused the deaths of livestock or persons, and more intimate troubles as well: by a simple ritual (it was thought) any ill-wisher could render a newly-wed husband impotent, and only counter-magic could cure him. To many reforming priests, the villagers' vision of the world that was at once excessively and insufficiently spiritual: excessively, in that villagers attached so many occurrences to invisible forces, and in that they turned so readily to magic to defend against practical troubles; insufficiently, in that they resisted interpreting their troubles in specifically Christian terms, and in that they treated prayer and ritual as mere tools for material protection in an insecure world.

To some extent the events of village life confirmed the priests' vision of it, and demonstrated how very tense relations among villagers might be. Sorcery complaints, in which they accused one another of using supernatural means to do harm, expressed these tensions in the clearest terms; and the greatest number of sorcery accusations came between 1580 and 1630, just as rural social relations were changing fastest. In these years of land sales and diminishing economic independence, villagers had excellent reasons for viewing their communities as tensely balanced, competitive places, in which neighbors might use all possible means against one

another. At the same time, village fear was not a purely local phenomenon. Much of it came from outside, the product not of local antipathies but of larger cultural forces. Reforming priests often believed that their flocks lacked sufficient moral sensitivity, and that they had to be made more aware of evil's presence in the world and of their own failings. For these purposes, their preachings stressed the devil's power and the fearsomeness of divine judgment, which might come at any moment. Royal judges seconded these preachings, giving some of them the force of law. Under the joint guidance of priests and judges, sorcery accusations tended to acquire a new seriousness in the later sixteenth century. Villagers had viewed the practice as mere malice against a neighbor, different from other malice only in its supernatural means. Learned theorists in the sixteenth century redefined it as a deliberate renunciation of God and alliance with the devil, a form of treason that was far more serious than the mere infliction of harm. As such it called for the deployment of the full apparatus of state power. Accused witches were now tortured by royal judges to confess their own doings and the involvement of others. By the mid-seventeenth century leading Parisian judges had begun to question these procedures, and some had even relinquished belief in sorcery altogether; but to the end of the century their provincial colleagues sternly resisted any suggestions that punishments be lightened or investigations abandoned. If the seventeenth-century village was an anxious place, this to some extent reflected the authorities' efforts to make it so.

Even with those efforts, moreover, most villagers had rather limited experience of sorcery investigations and the anxieties that accompanied them. For the entire period 1565-1640, there were about 1,100 such accusations in the immense jurisdiction of the Parlement of Paris, which

covered nearly half the country-- fifteen cases in an average year, in a region that counted several million inhabitants and well over 10,000 villages. Furthermore, the clerics and lawyers brought important sources of confidence to the village, along with pressures and fears. Parish priests wanted an educated laity, who could understand the essentials of their faith, and their efforts substantially improved rural literacy, at least in the northern half of the country. There, by the end of the seventeenth century about one-third of all men and well over 10 percent of all women could read; the prosperous elite of farmers were mainly literate and had begun buying books, now widely available in the countryside thanks to an increasingly active publishing industry. Rural lawyers might have a similar cultural impact, connecting villagers to a wider world and giving them greater confidence in dealing with it. Legal representation at this level was cheap in the seventeenth century, and villagers were very ready to make use of it. In doing so, they could hear their own circumstances redescribed in the language of legal rights, and they could find support for their position beyond the realm of the village itself; appeals to higher jurisdictions became easier and more common.

#### 4.

Despite villagers' growing familiarity with the world beyond their communities, the divide between city and country remained in the sixteenth century as sharp as at any point in French history. The contrast was immediately apparent to any traveler, for cities had carefully-guarded walls, many of them recently strengthened to withstand new technologies of siege warfare. This had not always been the case. In the relative peace of the high Middle Ages, many cities had been left unfortified, one reason for the ease of English conquest after 1337. Sixteenth-century

walls, on the other hand, both symbolized the potential violence of early modern society and marked out the city as an island within it of relative security. They also marked the city as a domain of special political rights. City-dwellers paid relatively low taxes, an important privilege in an era of rising fiscal pressure. Government authorities oversaw urban food supplies, motivated by a well-founded belief that urban shortages might lead to rioting, and in some of the largest cities they established effective systems of poor relief. Not all comparisons favored the cities. Disease spread more quickly and occasioned more fear in sixteenth-century cities than in the countryside: Lyon suffered five epidemics of plague between 1564 and 1586. Rich and poor alike found these experiences terrifying, leaving their cities when they could and lashing out at scapegoats. In the middle years of the century the well-educated city fathers of Geneva (outside the French state, but definitely within the French cultural orbit) executed about eighty men and women for deliberately spreading the plague, demonstrating that waves of panic were no rustic monopoly. But overall the cities enjoyed protections and governmental attentions lacking elsewhere.

Contemporaries recognized about 200 places in France as cities, most of them small, their urban status defined more by their privileges and the administrative powers exercised within them than by population. At the start of the sixteenth century, only thirty-two had populations of at least 10,000, a number that rose slowly to forty-three in 1650. The larger cities grew more dramatically. In 1500 only a dozen had at least 20,000 inhabitants, and only three had 40,000; by 1650 there were twenty cities in the former group, seven in the latter. Like the pattern of

French villages, this array of cities had ancient origins. Most had flourished in Gallo-Roman times, and had grown up as centers of church administration; only one new city was founded in the sixteenth century, the Norman port of Le Havre. Yet the French urban network had changed significantly since the Middle Ages, probably more than the system of villages. Cities in 1550 were more evenly distributed geographically than in 1300, when they had been concentrated either in the north or along the Mediterranean. More even spatial distribution reflected their expanding administrative and cultural functions. They were the focal points of sixteenth-century government, from which the crown's agents controlled the surrounding countryside, and they grew as government became stronger, even in regions whose economic activity might not seem to justify much urban life. This was one reason that sixteenth-century cities had more impact on French society than population numbers alone would suggest. Villagers needed to visit them for administrative and judicial matters, as well as for marketing their produce. Another reality of urban life had the same effect: early modern cities needed immigration to sustain stable levels of population, since urban birth rates were lower than those in the countryside and death rates higher. In 1597, at least 59 percent of Lyon's population had been born elsewhere. A stream of migrants flowed through the cities, maintaining some contact with their rural families and in some cases returning to them; cities had substantial rates of out-migration as well. Urban influences continually reached the countryside.

Among the growing cities of the sixteenth century, of course, was Paris itself. Already in 1500 it was the largest city of northern Europe, with about 100,000 people; by 1650 it had more than quadrupled in population, and was now the largest city anywhere in Europe. As the first

European city of modern dimensions, Paris concentrated enormous wealth and influence within its walls, and it required vast economic networks to assure its daily needs. Political change played the central role in this explosive growth. The city had been a site of rebellion during the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, and monarchs tended to stay away long after the peace of 1453. Charles VII settled with his followers at Bourges, Louis XI at Tours, Louis XII at Blois. Francis I, however, spent more time in the capital, and in 1527 he formally announced his intention of making it his principal residence. His successors continued this pattern, making Paris the nearly exclusive center of national life; even Louis XIV's move to Versailles after 1670 can be seen as part of this process, since it permanently established the court near the city, much closer than the palaces of the Loire valley. The kings' residence in the city meant that leading nobles also spent more time there; French nobles had seldom resided in the cities during the Middle Ages, but in the sixteenth century anyone who hoped for government office or favor had at least to visit the city frequently. The expansion of government brought other elites to the city as well. Sixteenth-century Paris swarmed with judges, lawyers, and lesser legal practitioners.

This presence of national elites changed the city's character and even its geography. Kings wanted comfort and grandeur, and in pursuit of these they undertook important building projects, starting with their own residence in the city, the Louvre. The royal family, great nobles, and leading administrators imitated these projects on a smaller scale; from the mid-sixteenth century on, a series of great palaces appeared in the city, offering nobles suitably visible accommodation and giving an aristocratic imprint to city life. Somewhat less assertive were the new neighborhoods that appeared around 1600, under the monarchy's direct encouragement.

Henry IV sponsored two such developments, both designed for aristocratic residents but both marked by restrained, geometrical architecture. They consisted not of palaces but of elegant townhouses, on a scale that a broad elite might aspire to, and later seventeenth-century developments followed this model. Even the city's streets were marked by this aristocratic presence, for in the late sixteenth century carriages became a common symbol of status. So large that they required six horses, forcing pedestrians out of their path, carriages made clear to everyone that aristocrats dominated city life.

Most lesser French cities replicated the essentials of Parisian urbanization, without Paris's dynamism. They were regional capitals, housing growing numbers of administrators, more dependent on these functions than on commerce. There were of course a few great exceptions. Lyon had only a small administrative class, but it became the most vigorous provincial city of the sixteenth century, by 1550 the country's most populous city after Paris. Its vitality rested on trade, manufacturing, and banking, and these derived from its geographical setting: Lyon came to serve as the intermediary between northern Europe and Italy, and in the sixteenth century numerous Italian mercantile families established branches there. The great Mediterranean port of Marseilles also exercised few administrative functions, but its population more than doubled between 1550 and 1650, also because of trade; despite the development of the Atlantic, the Mediterranean remained an important focus of seventeenth-century commerce. But the Atlantic's growing importance also affected French urban patterns: the Atlantic port city of Nantes tripled in population between 1500 and 1650, largely on the basis of this trade. More characteristic were regional capitals like Bordeaux and Rouen, which combined several urban

functions. Both were active ports and commercial centers, but both also had large numbers of officials and clerics. Thus equipped, they grew quickly over the period, though more slowly than their rivals. Cities that lacked commercial functions had more difficulty maintaining their rank. Dijon and Toulouse, for instance, were both administrative centers but stood farther from the commercial currents of the century, and suffered as a result: between 1500 and 1650, Toulouse grew by only 20 percent, Dijon by 50 percent.

Numerous influences encouraged cohesion in sixteenth-century cities. Even modest citizens had some rights to participate in civic affairs. At Dijon most male residents could vote for municipal officers, though actual participation was more sporadic, and everywhere large numbers performed militia service, guarding their cities against assault from outside and crime from within. Militia service assembled diverse classes, and it defined municipal identity in terms of vigilance against the outside world. City governments did their best to reinforce these messages with ritual and propaganda. They encouraged writing and speech about their cities' history and excellence, and sponsored elaborate parades at moments of public importance. Local patriotism permeated urban rhetoric, encouraging a vision of the city as an autonomous community, in which all residents had a significant stake.

These institutional efforts worked partly because they fitted with basic realities of urban experience. Sixteenth-century urbanites, like villagers, lived close to one another, and could scarcely avoid frequent interchange with their neighbors. Urban geography ensured that this propinquity brought together members of different social classes. Crowded within their protective walls, numbering only a few thousand inhabitants, most cities scarcely had room for

residential segregation. Instead, rich and poor tended to live together in the same neighborhoods, sometimes in the same houses: between 5 and 10 percent of the population in most cities consisted of domestic servants (in some cities, such as early seventeenth-century Lyon, the percentage was even higher); others were apprentices and journeymen workers, who at least shared their meals with their employers. Ritual moments displayed the real closeness that might develop from such patterns. Rich and poor might serve as god-parents of one another's children, a relationship that was taken very seriously in the early modern period: in mid-seventeenth-century Toulouse, as many as one-fourth of artisans' children had god-parents drawn from the city's elite of officials, lawyers, and merchants. Partly because of such contacts, city dwellers absorbed one another's fashions, knowledge, and values.

All of these systems of urban integration functioned less well after 1550, partly because the demands on them increased so dramatically. The demands had always been high, even in the early sixteenth century. Masters and servants had notoriously touchy relations, and servants changed jobs often. With large numbers of immigrants, many of them young men without local attachments, cities always had high rates of violent crime. One historian has estimated that about half the young men in fifteenth-century Dijon had participated in a gang rape, so natural did this kind of violence seem. Bloodshed, on the other hand, was unusual in these years; only about one case of homicide a year was reported in seventeenth-century Lyon. The authorities thus worried more about collective than individual violence, and they had steadily more reason to do so over the century. Food prices rose, in response to rising population, and occasionally led to violent urban protests. Already in 1529 there was the Grande Rebevine of Lyon, several days of rioting

during which crowds seized grain from the houses of leading citizens and from convents. Taxes and forced loans rose, even in the privileged cities, and manufacturing jobs were beginning to migrate to the countryside, in response to the growing differential between urban and rural wages. Changing residential relations contributed as well to making the city more atomized than it had been in the past, because the new, more elegant neighborhoods of the early seventeenth century allowed less contact between rich and poor. A new civic rhetoric showed the effects of these changes. After 1550, urban authorities increasingly expressed their fear of the very poor and sought to regulate them closely; beggars were driven out or, in some of the largest cities, confined to prison-like workhouses.

This combination of circumstances made the cities rather explosive places after 1550. Religious divisions encouraged urban violence, producing massacres of Protestants in 1572 and militancy in the 1590s, when numerous cities withstood sieges in order to prevent the accession of a Protestant king. But the cities remained just as explosive in the early seventeenth century, when religious exaltation had ebbed. Every year from the 1580s on witnessed some form of urban disturbance, and from the 1620s through the 1640s there were large-scale uprisings in many of the most important cities, typically directed against tax collectors. Such violence could not be dismissed as the work of only the poorest segments within the community. Respectable men and women participated in vandalizing tax offices and threatening their occupants, in some instances killing them.

## 5.

Sustaining a unified urban community became more complicated in these years for an

additional reason: in the sixteenth century ruling elites in most cities underwent a fundamental change, which set them at a greater distance from ordinary residents. Merchants and artisans had dominated medieval cities, but in the sixteenth century leadership passed to royal officials and lawyers-- with whom it would remain until the end of the old regime. The change directly translated changes in royal government itself. Kings had few civil servants in the fourteenth and early fifteenth centuries, and many of them were clerics. A very small group supervised royal finances, partly because taxation was low before the fifteenth century. A single appellate court, the Parlement of Paris, heard cases from throughout the country, assisted only by the delegation of magistrates to Toulouse, in the southwestern corner of the kingdom, and more occasional visits elsewhere. All of this began to change in the mid-fifteenth century. In 1443 Toulouse received its own parlement, and six others followed by 1553, in Grenoble, Bordeaux, Dijon, Rouen, Aix-en-Provence, Rennes. Their placement indicated the political functions these institutions were to fill. The crown established them in outlying provinces that had recently come under direct royal control, because it wanted the newly-installed judges to ensure closer relations with potentially rebellious regions. Territorial expansion in the early seventeenth century had similar results, with new parlements in Pau, Metz, and Artois; later in the century, Louis XIV's conquests led to parlements for Besançon, Lille, and other newly-annexed towns. Lesser courts, tax collection boards, and fiscal courts all expanded as well. By the mid-sixteenth century about ninety-seven cities had bailliage courts, each with a growing number of judges and lawyers, and nearly as many had elections, the primary tax boards for most of the country.

This institutional activity produced an essentially new social class, which quickly

acquired a dominant position in most cities. In 1515, so one historian has estimated, France had one royal official for every 4,700 inhabitants; by 1665, there was one for every 380 inhabitants. In the cities, where courts and administrative offices clustered, their importance was even more obvious. Dijon in 1600 included about 600 royal officials, within a population of about 25,000. Together with their families, they represented about one-eighth of the city's population, and around them worked an even larger group of collaborators, the lawyers, clerks, bailiffs, and other practitioners who staffed the courts. Social customs added to their visibility within their cities. Judges were expected to wear their robes throughout the day, whenever they appeared in public, and they stressed their corporate identity in other ways. They heard almost all cases as large panels, and they often appeared as a group in other public settings, at religious events and civic processions. They played an increasingly important role in local governance as well, because they represented the king and held some portion of his powers. Especially in the parliamentary cities, they tended to make decisions in moments of crisis, infringing on the powers of elected city councils.

The upper levels of this legal world became conspicuously richer over the sixteenth century. Contemporaries agreed that judicial work should be profitable, though they might disagree about the extent of legitimate profits, and judges charged fees at each step in the cases they heard. Their rising power also encouraged wealthy families to seek them out for marriage alliances, bringing them powerful connections and large dowries. Lesser judges, established in smaller cities and hearing less important cases, could not hope to match the wealth of the parliamentary magistrates, but they too tended to establish solid fortunes. Financial offices had

less social status than judgeships, but they brought higher profits, since many officials received a share of all the monies that they collected. All of this new wealth, deriving ultimately from the exercise of public power, provided the basis for an increasingly aristocratic mode of living. Over the sixteenth century, the officials had more servants, larger houses in the cities where they practiced, and more properties in the countryside nearby.

Most European countries underwent a comparable expansion of officialdom during the sixteenth century. Ordinary people everywhere appreciated the security that stronger legal systems offered, and they turned eagerly to the lawcourts to settle their disputes; kings wanted greater resources to finance their international ambitions, and they wanted greater control over their societies. Yet the French experience of sixteenth-century government was nearly unique in one respect. Only in France and the Papal States did a public, systematic-- and extremely vigorous-- commerce in offices develop. Bribery and corruption existed everywhere, of course, and they may have been at the origins of the French practices, though French kings appear also to have been influenced by the already-functioning papal system. Francis I regularized these hidden practices in 1522, when he established a bureau to sell positions publicly, continuing piously to deplore such sales even as he did so. Individuals quickly followed the royal example, selling positions they held and bequeathing them to sons and nephews, with additional payments to the king to ensure his consent. Offices remained public positions, exercised in the king's name and at his formal nomination, but with few exceptions they also acquired characteristics of private property. Increasingly expensive property: judgeships in the Parlement of Rouen, for instance, remained relatively inexpensive through 1575, but then doubled in price by 1588 and doubled

again by 1604. In that year an additional royal measure, known as the Paulette, made the transmission of offices even easier by removing the delays that kings had previously required; in exchange for a small annual tax paid by the officials, sale or gift could now take place at any time. With this additional security, office prices quadrupled in the next thirty years. By this point an office of any significance cost as much as a large country estate.

The rise of venal office-holding cemented the dynastic and monied aspect of the new urban elite. Families needed to have large resources to place their sons in official careers, either their own cash or access to loans from relatives and friends. Few newcomers from even middle-class backgrounds could meet these requirements, as many had managed to do in the early sixteenth century, and families that already held offices enjoyed enormous advantages over even wealthy outsiders. These only increased as office prices rose. At Rouen, the percentage of parliamentary judges whose fathers had held comparable positions doubled between 1598 and 1638, to 60 percent of the total. With such large sums at stake, the officials tended to become even touchier about defending their corporate interests.

In significant ways the early seventeenth-century city had thus been hollowed out. It was losing manufacturing to the countryside, where wages were lower and workers' organizations weaker, and the commitment of its leading citizens to the urban community was weakening. Judges and royal officials could scarcely avoid looking beyond the city walls, to the monarchy that founded their power and determined their status. Increasingly over the sixteenth century, they also thought of themselves as part of a landed elite, with significant interests in the village properties they had purchased. The essayist Michel de Montaigne in some ways exemplified

this new urban elite. Montaigne had served as a councillor in the Parlement of Bordeaux and (briefly) as the city's mayor. Yet his extensive and personal writings described only his retired life as a country gentleman, viewing the world from the detachment of a tower on his estate, with scant reference to urban experiences of any kind. Those who led urban society now understood that they moved in national settings.

## 6.

The officials' prominence within sixteenth- and early seventeenth-century urban life gave new importance to the handful of cultural institutions with which they were especially involved. This meant above all educational institutions, for, though they bought or inherited their positions, the officials nonetheless needed extensive formal education before they could begin exercising them. They spent several years acquiring the preliminary arts degrees needed for advanced study, then three years in the law faculties for the baccalaureat and licence degrees in the law, required for legal practice and admission to judicial office. Their passage through these studies made the urban elites of sixteenth- and seventeenth-century France an unusually coherent group. They had attended many of the same institutions as their colleagues, studied the same texts, and absorbed the same ideals. Almost omnipresent within officialdom, this cultural background was scarcely known outside it, at least during the sixteenth century. Their educations separated the officials from all but a few nobles and a very few urban merchants. The dividing line ran through even their own homes: women had no access to universities, and very few learned Latin.

There were fourteen universities in sixteenth-century France, divided evenly between

medieval foundations (five dated from the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, one from the fourteenth) and those from the recent past; six were founded in the years 1432-1464 alone. The frequency of university creations during the dark years of the mid-fifteenth century, when recovery from the Hundred Years War had just begun, suggests the political role that these institutions were to fill: great aristocrats wanted them as a propaganda tool in their efforts to preserve regional autonomy against royal encroachments. Regional pride continued to count in the universities' lives after the defeat of these princely hopes. Cities now sustained their universities, and, in hopes of attracting both attention and free-spending students, they sought to hire the academic stars of the era. The professors responded predictably, quarreling with one another and moving about in response to enticing offers. Andreas Alciato taught four years at Avignon, returned there after two years of traveling, taught four years at Bourges, then returned to his native Italy, where he changed jobs four times in the next fourteen years; Jacques Cujas held positions at Toulouse, Cahors, Bourges, Valence, and Paris over the course of his career; François Hotman taught at Valence, Bourges, and Orléans during the decade after 1561. Students matched this professorial mobility. Their parents expected them to wander from one university to another, in search of famous professors and interesting experiences. With this geographical variety went a mixing of age groups and social classes, for most universities supplied several levels of training. Very young men, of thirteen and fourteen, acquired the rudiments of humanistic study there, notably competence in reading Latin texts. These teenagers studied alongside future professionals in law, medicine, and theology, who were often already in their twenties. Fees were burdensome, but not so high as to preclude ordinary people from sending

their sons, and many students made it through their university years living in deep poverty. For encouragement they had the example of Erasmus, illegitimate son of a Dutch priest, who nonetheless managed to put together enough resources for lengthy studies at Paris, and succeeded in making himself the leading scholar of his age.

As one consequence of this loose structuring of student careers, universities varied widely in size and quality. Some were mere degree mills, whose attraction lay in low fees and minimal requirements: candidates arrived days or hours before their examinations, paid off the local professors, and left with their degrees the next morning. Tales of such academic corruption and incompetence circulated widely in the sixteenth century and suited numerous interests. Educational reformers, humanists, novelists, Protestants-- all found the universities irresistible targets of complaint, because they seemed to exemplify a rigidly medieval culture. Critics complained about the bad Latin style that they taught, the squalor in which students lived, the obscurity of the issues that interested many professors and their reliance on Aristotle as an intellectual authority. Yet the principal universities remained large and vigorous, and their students showed considerable seriousness. The University of Paris may have had as many as 11,000 students around 1500, one-fifth of the city's male population, the more visible because they clustered in one district south of the Seine. Montpellier, as a great center of medical education, and Toulouse, as the greatest arts faculty in the south, displayed similar vitality. University instruction was entirely in Latin, and even the law students-- usually described as the least serious of the universities' clientele-- had to make their way through the texts and commentaries of Roman law. At the highest levels, likewise, the sixteenth-century universities

produced a string of great intellectuals.

Hence the most serious criticisms of the universities concerned not intellectual but moral slackness. Critics worried that universities exercised too little control over their students, and that students' wanderings undermined their moral development. Such warnings could already be heard in the fifteenth century, but only in the later sixteenth century did they receive a persuasive solution, with the first appearance of Jesuit education in France. The order had originally intended its schools mainly to train new members, but popular demand almost immediately dictated otherwise: leading families wanted the benefits of this education for their sons, however unlikely they were to take religious vows, and cities begged the order to take over failing local schools. The order founded the Collège de Clermont in Paris within a decade of establishing its first college in Rome in 1551, and it immediately attracted enough students to anger the rival university. Expelled from most of France in 1595, on the grounds that its members preached regicide, the order returned in 1603 at Henry IV's invitation, and entered on its phase of greatest importance. Its Parisian college became still more popular, attracting sons of the magistracy, the Parisian bourgeoisie, and the high nobility; in the late seventeenth century, 3,500 young men studied there, 500 of them boarders, the rest mainly Parisians. In 1607 Henry IV established a second great center at La Flèche, near the heavily Protestant region of Poitou, and it too attracted students from the highest social classes. Just as important, by 1650 several dozen smaller colleges dotted the country, attracting students of all social classes, but especially drawing the sons of officials. The colleges appealed to such men for multiple reasons. Jesuit education was free, in contrast to the universities, but above all it was carefully structured. The

fathers divided students by age group, establishing for this purpose a system of classes, and they encouraged students to deepen their command of Latin culture, for instance by producing student dramas in Latin. At the same time, Jesuit teachers seemed more receptive to modern ideas than their university competition. As science became more important in the mid-seventeenth century, it too acquired a place in the Jesuits' curriculum, and they produced French-language as well as Latin dramas; to encourage elegant manners, some colleges hired dancing masters and taught other forms of physical activity. But they also watched closely over students' behavior outside the classroom. Parents needed no longer worry about the wanderings and promiscuity of student life. To the irritation of the universities, the Jesuit colleges dominated upper-class education in seventeenth-century France, leaving to their rivals mainly control over some forms of degree certification, still university monopolies, and advanced instruction in law, theology, and medicine.

The shift of academic leadership from the universities to the colleges almost certainly deepened the typical official's knowledge of Latin culture. Not all of them, of course, took this culture very seriously. Complaints about judicial ignorance and laziness already circulated in the early sixteenth century, and the developing commerce in offices added to the problem; young men who expected to inherit or buy a position had little need to study carefully. On average, though, the mid-seventeenth-century magistracy were an impressively cultivated group. Studies of book ownership demonstrate the vast superiority of their libraries to those of any other social group, even the wealthiest nobles, and they increasingly dominated the humanist discussion groups and academies that had formed in most seventeenth-century cities. The leading French writers on

history and ancient literature came from this milieu, and the evidence of book dedications suggests that the officials were the principal financial supporters of humanist writing as well.

This did not mean complete cultural isolation from their less educated fellow-citizens. The magistrates' world overlapped with that of lesser legal figures, the clerks, copyists, bailiffs, lesser lawyers, and attorneys. Many of them were poor, but most possessed some formal education. In most legal centers they had their own organization, the basoche, which defended its members professional interests and provided them a social anchor within the city. In seventeenth-century Paris, this combination of social club and professional association counted 6,000 members, a huge group, another indication of how much its legal functions meant for the city's economic life. Many had themselves been to the Jesuit schools and knew the Latin classics; government officials regularly complained that too many sons of the lower classes were being educated, and it was from these men that the lower levels of the legal profession were recruited. Given their background and limited prospects (excluded as they were by the system of venal office holding from any chance of distinguished careers), they made ideal cultural mediators. They shared the high officials' humanist education, yet they also had good reason to examine it critically. The basoches gave them public platforms for criticism, sponsoring satirical plays about urban society, and doubtless encouraging more informal discussions.

## 7.

Latin culture thus possessed great vitality in the sixteenth century, anchored as it was in the rising class of officials and in the larger, more heterogeneous milieu of the basoche. Yet by this point it had already begun to come under criticism, and thereafter it steadily lost ground to a

different model of culture. Against the Latinity of the officials, there developed a growing interest in the French language and in the culture that might be based on its specific qualities. Such interest had many sources. French writers had before them the example of Italian vernacular literature, which had already produced a string of recognized classics and with which they acquired considerable familiarity in the years around 1500: Frenchmen visited Italy in large numbers, as both cultural tourists and soldiers, and significant numbers of Italians were settling in France, some seeking business opportunities, others in the entourages of kings and queens. Writers also knew that national feeling was rising around them, enhancing the desirability of a specifically French culture. Even the Latinists might speak in these terms, stressing the need for scholars to study specifically French institutions and laws and advocating what they called a "French way" of understanding ancient texts, which would give more attention to the study of social and institutional contexts. The judges and officials in fact occupied a divided cultural terrain. Brought up on the Latin language and the study of Roman law (only in 1679 did the universities first offer instruction in French law), they also felt a deep professional commitment to advancing the French monarchy and nation.

Advancing the French language seemed an obvious element of that project. Hence the officials themselves were responsible for a critical move in the development of French-language culture: in 1539 the royal ordonnance of Villers Coterets required that all legal business be conducted in French rather than Latin. A decade later the poet Joachim Du Bellay published his Defense and Illustration of the French Language, an extended argument for the vernacular's

literary value, and for the possibility that French-language works could equal those of antiquity .

This was also the first French text to use the term patrie (fatherland), indicating clearly the link between literary debate and patriotic sentiment. Du Bellay was no lone voice, but rather a

leading member of a group of court poets, the Pléiade, committed to realizing this program, both in lyric poems that imitated the Italians and in more grandiose projects, modeled on Latin epics.

The following century witnessed conscious efforts to diminish this dependence on outside models, and to construct a French poetry that would reflect the specific nature of the language.

Early in the seventeenth century François de Malherbe, another nobleman and courtier, argued for a simplified poetic language and an end to the complicated allusions of the Pléiade poets; French

poetry did not need to model itself on Latin elaboration. Prose styles inspired similar discussion and underwent comparable changes, and in this domain also writers saw their principal task as

that of linguistic pruning and disciplining. To seventeenth-century readers, earlier writings seemed over-complicated in language, confusing in argument, and muddled in subject matter,

bringing together incompatible materials and views, and falling often into indelicacy. Hoping to

control this chaos, in the late 1620s a group of well-connected writers established themselves as a regular discussion group, a forum for debating literary tastes and French usage. In 1634

Cardinal Richelieu, the king's powerful minister, effectively absorbed the Academy into the

French state, by offering its members financial and political support. French writing had become an important facet of national identity, and in consequence it attracted state regulation. Partly

because of this alliance with state power, the Academy succeeded in its aims to an extraordinary degree. French prose style acquired more regularity and clarity, and writers sought to follow its

pronouncements about acceptable word choices.

The rise of French produced a new relationship between culture and social structure, for access to French was far wider than to Latin. Lack of university training posed no barrier to full participation in this culture, nor did gender; at least in the north, a majority of urban men could read, and after 1550 so could a majority of upper class women. At the highest social levels, literary learning became something of a fashion, and it was now assumed that elegant women would write letters and memoirs, if not for print, at least for wide circulation. By the mid-seventeenth century, a handful of women had become professional writers. Madeleine de Scudéry established herself as the preeminent novelist of her era, turning out a series of multi-volume romances that described, thinly-veiled, doings of the great aristocracy. They were enormously popular and allowed de Scudéry, who was from the poor nobility, to live by her writing. Yet she viewed this as a humiliating position, not really compatible with high social status, and most women of her circle limited themselves to amateur efforts. For them, the seventeenth century offered a new cultural institution, the salons, regular gatherings in private homes to discuss literature and ideas. Women held an ambiguous place in these, facilitating men's talk as much as offering their own, yet a number of seventeenth-century women were noted for their sharp opinions and readiness to express them. Probably more than their eighteenth-century successors (in which professional intellectuals played a more domineering role), seventeenth-century salons permitted women a central place.

At the same time, French-language cultural products increasingly drew the interest of ordinary people, most clearly in the city, to a lesser extent in the countryside, and publishers

oriented some of their wares to them. At the start of the seventeenth century, publishers in Troyes began producing brochures retelling medieval romances and offering practical wisdom; by 1611, forty-five authorized peddlars circulated through the country selling them, and competitors had begun publishing similar books in other provincial cities. News represented another cultural product with a mass market. From the opening phases of the Wars of Religion, in the 1560s, political crises stimulated pamphlet literature, and the quantities increased steadily in the seventeenth century. During the four years of the Fronde, Parisian presses turned out about 5,200 separate pamphlets, nearly all in print runs of at least 1,000 copies. By this point Parisians were also attending the theater in large numbers. In 1629 there were two Paris theaters, with resident companies putting on regular performances. In that year Pierre Corneille arrived in Paris, to write for one of these rival troops, and he brought a new seriousness to dramatic poetry, making the theater a matter of central cultural concern. The public discussion of his play The Cid, performed in 1636, involved even Richelieu himself, because it was seen to raise important issues about the nature of political morality. French-language culture had become both a big business and an aspect of the nation's political life.

Corneille exemplified a new social type produced by this business, the professional writer trying to earn fame, high social status, and a living by producing for public consumption. Like many of his colleagues and rivals, he came from the provinces-- in his case Rouen, where his father was a middling official and he himself a lawyer, and where his first plays were performed. By his time, the move to Paris had become essential to careers such as this, for only the capital offered the audiences and powerful patrons that a writer now needed. Even in the mid-

seventeenth century, the great commercial center Lyon had no permanent theater and made do with occasional visits from itinerant troops of actors. This centralization was new in the seventeenth century, reflecting the widening disparities between Paris and the provincial cities in population and in the wealth of its leading citizens. Numerous mid-sixteenth-century writers had pursued their careers mainly in the provinces. Etienne Dolet, Clément Marot, and François Rabelais had spent much of their time in Lyon itself, where a vigorous printing industry and wealthy church allowed them to piece together a living. Such careers made less sense in the seventeenth century. Like anyone else with high ambitions, writers now had to come to Paris.

When they did so, they encountered a world that awkwardly combined elements of a market economy with patronage and power. Publishers paid small fees for authors' work, or simply printed it without permission. Rather than royalties, writers depended on courtship of the great, and this included giving wealthy patrons direct or indirect control over their work. Great nobles employed stables of writers to glorify and justify their political choices; they offered their aesthetic opinions in informal discussion; and they took pleasure in seeing glamorous versions of themselves and their lives in published novels-- one reason that so many of the most striking characters in seventeenth-century plays, novels, and poetry were aristocratic warriors; . Yet would-be professional writers were not entirely bound by these feudal conventions. However dependent their material circumstances, mid-seventeenth-century writers already enjoyed a degree of prestige associated with the power of their words. Printing and the theater had given a new importance to their function, and writers had begun to speak of their professional standards and autonomy, which justified freedom from the opinions of even the

most aristocratic outsider. Contemporaries had a strong sense that French writing in their day surpassed that of their predecessors, and they believed that debate about literature was a serious matter, deserving both public attention and freedom of opinion. In keeping with these values, the founders of the French Academy decreed that their institution would have no regard for the social standing of its members. The critical evaluation of literature was to go on unencumbered by concerns for the participants' social background.

## 8.

Though mitigated by these ideas of literary independence, aristocratic influence on early seventeenth-century culture remained very powerful. That the nobles held so central a position within the cultural life of the later sixteenth and seventeenth centuries was in some respects surprising, for they confronted a difficult situation in the years around 1500, and some of their difficulties only worsened thereafter. Numerous early-sixteenth-century observers thought them interested only in military exploits and indifferent to all forms of learning. Their failures in the Hundred Years War had occasioned widespread criticism, and humanist writers like Erasmus mocked their ignorance and questioned even the value of their military successes. The rising prominence of the royal officials raised other questions about the nobles' position atop the social order. They were wealthier than many nobles, and every lawsuit demonstrated their power to affect the nobles' lives and properties. Probably most important, the nobles faced serious economic difficulties. The very circumstances that made the early sixteenth century a golden age for laborers and middling farmers meant difficulties for large landowners. If they managed their lands directly, they had to deal with low prices for agricultural products and high wages; if they

leased out their lands, they had to offer advantageous terms in order to attract tenant farmers.

Royal currency manipulations and a rising money supply added a further danger, inflation. Low by modern standards, it nonetheless represented a serious problem for landowning nobles, since much of their income came from permanently fixed rents. For even the richest nobles, the sixteenth century was a period of difficult adjustments.

Such problems were the more acute in that most nobles had few resources to deal with them. The large majority were relatively poor, with incomes that scarcely distinguished them from the villagers they lived among. Most in fact had peasant ancestors, who had risen to higher status by some form of military action, usually in the service of some better-established neighbor. Regarded by their neighbors as "living nobly," in the contemporary phrase, such men simply assumed noble status, with no further legal steps. Their descendants returned to social obscurity with as little formality. After three or four generations, it appears, most families of the lesser nobility either failed to produce male heirs or lacked sufficient resources to live as nobles-- to live, that is, without manual labor, regarded as incompatible with life as a nobleman. This steady movement into and out of the nobility was yet another aspect of the social mobility that characterized the early sixteenth century.

From the later sixteenth century on, though, monarchs sought to control social mobility more closely. Legislation prohibited claiming noble status without official titles, and the crown began enforcing these prohibitions-- at first sporadically, more effectively after 1660. Kings had practical interests in limiting ennoblement, because nobles enjoyed exemption from the most important royal taxes, a privilege that became more valuable as taxation rose over the sixteenth

century. But this was also an effort to establish their own control over the basic configuration of French society. They sought in other ways as well to shape the structure of the nobility.

Already in 1469 Louis XI had created the order of St. Michael the Archangel, the first great chivalric order in France. Its purpose was to bring together the country's most distinguished nobles into a single group, oriented to royal service. As this group expanded, new forms of distinction appeared. A second, more restrictive order was founded in 1578, and kings began to grant favored families the lofty status of "duke and peer;" eleven families had received the honor by 1588, in addition to members of the royal family itself and some ecclesiastics, thirty-eight by 1661.

Such efforts produced important changes in the nobility's structure. As the wealthiest nobles enjoyed more attention and more honorific distinctions, the poorest were subjected to increasing controls from the state, and had increasing difficulty maintaining themselves within the order. Another of the state's efforts accentuated this change. Over the sixteenth century, the royal court became an increasingly important institution. Kings had always lived surrounded by followers, officials, and servants, and some prestige had always attached to these roles. But after 1515, when the glamorous Francis I became king, the court took on a new importance in national life, becoming the point where new styles originated and social contacts were made. Francis and his successors added to its appeal with their building projects and by sponsoring increasingly elaborate entertainments. More important than its amusements, though, were the practical realities of court life. As royal taxation increased and kings had greater resources at their disposal, any family that wanted a share of this wealth had to spend some time near the king.

Those who did so could hope for both direct and indirect benefits. Kings gave their close followers appointments and pensions; tax farmers needed their assistance in securing contracts, and offered in exchange a share of their profits; and everyone needed their assistance in pursuing litigation. For noble families of any importance, this mix of fashion, money, and influence was irresistible. Through about 1550 many noble families had come to court reluctantly and had avoided staying very long; by 1600 prolonged residence had become normal.

The court's development thus constituted an important element in the higher nobility's economic recovery after 1550, but it was only one cause among several. The high nobility were also the leading beneficiaries of the reversal of economic circumstances that France underwent after 1550. Their farm revenues had suffered from the low agricultural prices and high wages of the early sixteenth century; a century later, they enjoyed the corresponding benefits of a now-overpopulated society, characterized by low wages, competition for farm rentals, and very high agricultural prices. A few nobles dabbled as well in urban real estate development, profitable for the same reasons, and many had forest properties that had become enormously valuable by 1600, in a society that desperately needed wood for fuel and construction.

As a result, the wealthier nobles dominated early seventeenth-century France to a striking degree. Their renewed economic vitality helps to account for their cultural role in these years, in that it gave them the financial means to educate themselves and to exercise cultural patronage. That they used their money in these particular ways, though, reflected other aspects of their situation. By the early seventeenth century, for instance, warfare was widely believed to require careful study: of mathematics, to make proper use of artillery and fortifications; and of ancient

military writers like Julius Caesar, since Roman infantry tactics were seen to have ongoing relevance to contemporary practice. Theorists likewise stressed the need for education on the part of those who advised the king. Nobles who wanted to play a role in public affairs, it was increasingly agreed, should have some acquaintance with history and some command of rhetorical technique. In their social encounters as well, nobles were expected to display verbal agility and some command of contemporary culture.

Under these mixed pressures, some highly practical, others reflecting the changing demands of life in high society, later sixteenth-century nobles turned to the task of educating themselves. Very few of them sought educations that would match those of the officials. Most ended their studies in their teens, and few acquired real competence in Latin. Even in the mid-seventeenth century few owned substantial libraries. Noblemen began their military careers very young, and they did not want to delay these for the sake of an advanced education. But after 1550 a growing number of institutions met their specific needs. In Paris a few academies opened to teach the techniques needed at court and in the army-- riding, fencing, some mathematics. The growing number of Jesuit colleges offered the nobles an especially attractive educational package, given the Jesuits' concern to teach their students social graces as well as academic subjects, and their sensitivity to students' specific needs, including the needs of high social status. Those who remained through the full program could count on receiving an excellent humanist training, but those who left early-- as most noblemen did-- received a much better education than the universities provided.

The Jesuit schools embodied some of the larger paradoxes of French culture in the mid-seventeenth century, in that they were at once aristocratic and open. They charged no fees, and many ordinary families sent their sons to them. In class, these students mixed with nobles, and some lasting connections resulted. Yet the Jesuit fathers had no doubt that one of their principal tasks was to prepare the French governing elite for its role in society. They sought to attract students from the highest social levels, and to train them in the specific skills they would need. This concern led to a second tension, between the Jesuits' orientation to Latin humanism and the seriousness with which they took the French language. The schools became the training ground for both the closed Latin culture of future magistrates and an increasingly open French-language culture. French society as a whole could be described in similar terms. Gaps between rich and poor, noble and commoner, were much wider in 1650 than in 1500, yet the foundations of a national culture were already visible. This was a written culture that was increasingly accessible to previously excluded groups, and it permitted a degree of unity across class divisions. In the years after 1650, it would begin, hesitantly, to mitigate those divisions.

## **Suggestions for further reading**

Over the last fifty years, there has developed an immense and sophisticated historical literature dealing with French society and culture. What follows is a small sampling of this literature, with emphasis on works of synthesis available in English. Most studies of French rural life have been influenced by Marc Bloch's classic French Rural History: An Essay on Its Basic Characteristics, trans. Janet Sondheimer (Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1966; first published 1932). Among more recent studies, Emmanuel Le Roy Ladurie, The French Peasantry 1450-1660, trans. Alan Sheridan (Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1987) provides an excellent overview; see also his classic work The Peasants of Languedoc, trans. John Day (Urbana, 1974) and his collected essays, The Territory of the Historian, trans. Ben and Siân Reynolds (Chicago, 1979). A briefer survey of the subject, from a somewhat different perspective, is provided by Jonathan Dewald and Liana Vardi, "The Peasantries of France, 1400-1800," in Tom Scott, ed., The Peasantries of Europe From the Fourteenth to the Eighteenth Centuries (London, 1998). More specific studies include Guy Bois, The Crisis of Feudalism: Economy and Society in Eastern Normandy, c. 1300-1550. (Cambridge, 1984) and Jean-Marc Moriceau, Les fermiers de l'Ile de France, XVe-XVIIIe siècle (Paris, 1994). Among numerous studies dealing with village culture, Natalie Zemon Davis, Society and Culture in Early Modern France (Stanford, 1975), and Philip Hoffman, Church and Community in the Diocese of Lyon, 1500-1789 (New Haven, 1984); both include important material on urban cultures as well. For sorcery studies, Alfred Soman, Sorcellerie et justice criminelle: le Parlement de Paris, 16e-18e siècles (Hampshire, 1992); E. William Monter, Witchcraft in France and Switzerland: The Borderlands during the Reformation

(Ithaca and London, 1976); and Robin Briggs, Communities of Belief: Cultural and Social Tensions in Early Modern France (Oxford, 1989).

On cities, Bernard Chevalier, Les bonnes villes de France du XIVE au XVIe siècle (Paris, 1982) provides an outstanding overview, with wider relevance than the title suggests; for population statistics and causes of change, Jan de Vries, European Urbanization 1500-1800 (Cambridge, MA, 1984). William Beik, Urban Protest in Seventeenth-Century France: The Culture of Retribution (Cambridge, 1997) analyzes both urban violence and the larger background from which it emerged. Many fine studies have examined the character of life in individual cities in these years, among them are Philip Benedict, Rouen during the wars of religion (Cambridge, 1981); Robert Schneider, Public Life in Toulouse, 1463-1789: From Municipal Republic to Cosmopolitan City (Ithaca and London, 1989); Orest Ranum, Paris in the Age of Absolutism: An Essay (New York, 1968); and Natalie Zemon Davis, "The Sacred and the Body Social in Sixteenth-Century Lyon," Past and Present, 90 (February, 1981. Jacques Rossiaud, "Prostitution, Youth and Society in the Towns of Southwestern France in the Fifteenth Century," repr. in Robert Forster and Orest Ranum, eds., Deviants and the Abandoned in French Society: Selections from the Annales, Economies, Sociétés, Civilisations (Baltimore, 1978) is a classic study of urban violence.

Roland Mousnier, The Institutions of France under the Absolute Monarchy, 1598-1789, trans. Brian Pearce (Chicago, 1979) provides English-language access to the ideas of a preeminent historian of French officialdom during the early modern period. Jonathan Dewald, The Formation of a Provincial Nobility: The Parlement of Rouen, 1499-1610 (Princeton, 1980)

provides a somewhat different perspective. Other major works include Denis Richet, La France moderne: l'esprit des institutions (Paris, 1973) and Nancy Roelker, One King, One Faith: The Parlement of Paris and the Religious Reformations of the Sixteenth Century (Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1996). On the officials' culture, Donald Kelley's works are especially important, among them Foundations of Modern Historical Scholarship: Language, Law, and History in the French Renaissance (New York, 1970) and The Beginning of Ideology: Consciousness and Society in the French Reformation (Cambridge, 1981). On the universities, L. W. B. Brockliss, French Higher Education in the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries: A Cultural History (Oxford, 1987) and Roger Chartier et al., Les universités européennes du XVI au XVIII siècle: histoire sociale des populations étudiantes (Paris, 1986); on the Jesuit colleges, François de Dainville, L'éducation des Jésuites: XVIe-XVIIe siècles (Paris, 1978). The larger contexts of literacy, schooling, and popular culture are addressed in François Furet and Jacques Ozouf, Reading and Writing in France from Calvin to Jules Ferry (Cambridge, 1982) and in Roger Chartier, The Cultural Uses of Print in Early Modern France, trans. Lydia G. Cochrane (Princeton, 1987). A useful introduction to later French cultural development is provided by David Maland, Culture and Society in Seventeenth-Century France (New York, 1970); on women's place within this developing culture, Faith Beasley, Revising Memory: Women's Fiction and Memoirs in Seventeenth-Century France (New Brunswick and London, 1990). Though many of its interpretations have been superseded, Philippe Ariès, Centuries of Childhood: A Social History of Family Life, trans. Robert Baldick (New York, 1962) remains an important view of how ideals of education and moral development changed; see also Roger Chartier, ed., A History of Private Life, III: Passions of the

Renaissance, trans. Arthur Goldhammer (Cambridge, MA, 1989), which expands and updates many of Ariès's ideas. Studies of the nobility include Jonathan Dewald, Aristocratic Experience and the Origins of Modern Culture (Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1993); Mark Motley, Becoming a French Aristocrat: The Education of the Court Nobility, 1580-1715 (Princeton, 1990); Michel Nassiet, Noblesse et pauvreté: la petite noblesse en Bretagne, Xve-XVIIIe siècle (np, 1997); Jean-Pierre Labatut, Les ducs et pair de France au XVII siècle: étude sociale (Paris, 1972). George Huppert, Les Bourgeois Gentilshommes: An Essay on the Definition of Elites in Renaissance France (Chicago, 1977) explores anti-noble sentiment in the sixteenth century.