

Swarthmore College

Works

History Faculty Works

History

Fall 1975

Class And Class Consciousness In Western European Cities, 1400-1650

Robert S. DuPlessis

Swarthmore College, rduples1@swarthmore.edu

Follow this and additional works at: <https://works.swarthmore.edu/fac-history>



Part of the [History Commons](#)

[Let us know how access to these works benefits you](#)

Recommended Citation

Robert S. DuPlessis. (1975). "Class And Class Consciousness In Western European Cities, 1400-1650". *Radical History Review*. Volume 1975, Issue 9-10. 74-91. DOI: 10.1215/1636545-1975-9-10-74
<https://works.swarthmore.edu/fac-history/441>

This work is brought to you for free by Swarthmore College Libraries' Works. It has been accepted for inclusion in History Faculty Works by an authorized administrator of Works. For more information, please contact myworks@swarthmore.edu.

CLASS AND CLASS-CONSCIOUSNESS IN WESTERN
EUROPEAN CITIES, 1400-1650

Studies which focus on class and class-consciousness in modern capitalist society are few and inadequate, but they are virtually nonexistent in regard to precapitalist social formations. In this paper I examine the kinds of relationships found in Western European cities at the end of the Middle Ages and the opening of the modern period, in order to answer--or at least touch on--the following questions: How can classes be defined in the 15th, 16th, and 17th centuries? Was their nature changing across this period and if so, why and in what ways? What sorts of consciousness did social groups exhibit and how did they act? Before looking at the specific period, let me indicate the definitions and assumptions underlying my analysis.

A class is a group of people with a common relationship to the means of production (as expressed through property relationships), to the appropriation of the surplus value created in production, and to other social groups with different relation to the economic structure. In this sense, all societies have been class societies, and all relations are class relations. Historically, however, the development of productive forces has determined the general division of labor required to perform the material and other tasks deemed necessary at the time. But the specific organization of work and appropriation of surplus within a given mode of production depend on human struggles and creativity. The interaction of such human efforts and the productive forces produces the particular class system, a conflict-ridden equilibrium, embodied in various sets of relationships: economic, social and political (including juridical), each with its own ideology.

Economic relationships are often felt most concretely, not only in work experiences but also in access to consumption, and are internally stratified by these production and distribution disparities. Social relationships are less tangible but equally real; usually expressed by status or other forms of ranking, they show both the relativity of and the conflicts within the class structure. Political relationships, or the wielding of

power, are crucial for the dynamics of the class system, since the overall equilibrium of specific class relations is maintained or altered by political means. Put another way, politics translates the very general development of productive forces into a distinctive set of class relationships.

Hence a class structure is caused by and causes relationships. Any historical class is composed of a cluster of relationships, which in turn form a distinctive pattern of relationships for those people within it. Primary class relations are material, but specific class relations, those affecting real people, have social and political origins. As a result, why individual people get into a particular class and how they behave once they are there is due to the cultural-historical experiences of the individuals and their ancestors.

The set of relationships which constitutes a particular class also produces the characteristic life situation and interests of that class. Class-consciousness arises when through common experiences and actions people within a class perceive and express both their unity and also their consequent opposition to other people having different patterns of relationships. Since, however, experiences--the effects of specific patterns of relationships--vary, so class-consciousness is dissimilar in its manifestations and in its emergence. Moreover, within every class there are groups and strata arising from subsidiary configurations of relationships, subject to their own specific experiences, and conscious of their particular interests and unity. Thus a limiting factor to the growth of class-consciousness lies in the extent to which various other relationships reinforce common production relations, for this overlapping decides whether common experiences will be interpreted in terms of class situation (and thus stimulate class-consciousness) or in terms of smaller-group interests and actions.

The predominance of class-consciousness over strata or other group consciousness is therefore neither usual nor automatic. For it to occur, members of a class must perceive that their identity of interests arises rather from the production relations which define their general class situation than from the particular relationships which put them into a specific situation. In other words, their experiences must lead them to look beyond particular

168 Vinnich hove

Rembrandt
1669



relationships (family, gild, town) to see what unites them with other people whose specific life experiences may differ but who stand in the same general relation to the economic structure. Why should this change of focus or concern take place? Basically, I believe, for either of two reasons, depending on the nature of the group. First, in the case of cross-class groups (say, gilds) because important experiences would no longer affect all members of the group in like ways, but would affect members of the class similarly; or second, in the case of mono-class small groups (say, journeymen) because such experiences uniformly touched not only the one small group but also other small groups with analogous production relations. Of course, such changes in experience and how it is perceived might well happen simultaneously for both kinds of groups, thereby opening the way for yet stronger class-consciousness.

Keeping these general definitions in mind, I would like to look at the social formations to be found in early modern European cities.

* * *



By the late Middle Ages, the societies of the larger and more advanced cities of Western Europe were characterized by three broad classes. The structural similarities of handicraft or petty commodity production had engendered similar divisions of labor in widely divergent areas. At the top was a composite elite consisting of merchants, professionals, rentiers and a small number of entrepreneurs, the precise anatomy contingent upon the history and present economic vocation of the city in question. Members of the elite had wealth, power and status which differed in degree from that possessed by everyone else in society. For the most part, they also had a significantly different relation to production. Individuals at the top did not derive their position or their livelihood from the personal performance of physical labor. Nor did they usually own the means of production: even entrepreneurs acted as coordinators of the work of dispersed employees rather than as proprietors of fixed productive property. Instead, no matter what their specific occupation, members of the dominant class acquired their economic importance from the possession of various components of liquid capital which was largely invested in the profitable fields of commerce, banking

or government bonds. Analysis of elite assets reveals a concentration of property and wealth, while other studies demonstrate that the elite formed the effective political class dominating municipal government.

This is not to say that the top of urban society was always united. The particular economic roles of the disparate strata within the elite gave rise to conflict, while political factions often formed around new men who were unable to break into existing oligarchies, such divisions commonly being reinforced during the 16th century by religious differences. Of all classes, however, the elites had both the widest nonlocal contacts and also the firmest sense of their distinctive needs. This was particularly true of the merchants, who in fact formed the vanguard of the elite. The economic activities of merchants, which involved them in emerging national and international markets, promoted the common experiences (threats as well as opportunities) and relationships necessary for the birth of class-consciousness. Thus from an early date one finds examples of interurban commercial organizations, **called** Hansas, leagues formed to protect and foster common mercantile interests. Urban elites usually had a clear idea of the political and economic structures which gave rise to their condition and a willingness to maintain them. Thus, for example, the merchants who controlled the government in the textile and commercial city of Lille during the 16th century upheld the autonomy of weaving masters, in order both to avoid dangerous social polarization and to preclude the rise of a capitalist class which could jeopardize the current distribution of power. A more dramatic expression of class-consciousness on the part of an elite was the controlled revolution carried out by the mercantile oligarchies of the northern Low Countries.

It must be emphasized, however, that the urban elite was by no means always so united or so conscious of its common interests as in the foregoing instances. Just as usual was discord, especially in crisis situations. To take a Mediterranean example, the troubled history of Genoa during the later 15th century was due to attempts by competing factions of wealthy merchants to capture control of local government. In this case, social relationships proved more compelling than economic ones.

Below the elite was a middle of small craftsmen and

petty shopkeepers. Like the elite, the urban middle possessed enough capital assets to be independent and in fact shared legally-defined citizenship which symbolized the political and economic independence of its recipients by bestowing de jure equality upon them. But the unity created by citizenship concealed a multitude of more important class disparities within the juridical estate of burghers. First, the urban middle differed in both the amount and the form of its capital possessions. For whereas the elite had relatively liquid capital, used for commerce and investment, the artisans and shopkeepers of the middle had their capital in the form of fixed productive assets, and had few if any other capital resources. Indeed, I take it to be one of the distinctive features of early modern precapitalist urban society and economy that the mass of the means of production was in different hands from the mass of liquid capital and, as a result, that the productive and distributive apparatuses were also under separate control. That is, the crucial distinction between the elite and the middle originated in the structure of the preindustrial economy. In the precapitalist craft system, ownership of highly profitable commerce and banking on the one hand, and of less lucrative but equally indispensable production and local sales on the other hand, did not reside in members of the same class. On the contrary, these two economic functions remained separate, with the urban middle owning the means of production and the elite monopolizing commerce and finance. Even if he employed an apprentice, journeyman or other assistant, the petty master obtained the essential part of his livelihood by personally applying his own physical labor to his own capital, as well as supplying what minimal amount of management was requisite. And precisely because they had to engage in daily labor to support themselves, due to their small individual units resulting in limited output and meager capital formation, craftsmen and traders were unable to get involved in profitable long-distance commerce. Regardless of final disposition, their commodities had to be sold immediately in order to replenish working capital. Thus the urban middle had its origins in, was defined by, and owed its continued existence to the divided possession of productive and of major commercial and financial facilities.

A function of guilds was to ensure that masters

retained control of the means of production and thereby of the capital assets which would give at least a modest independence. To carry out this task, guilds enforced quality controls which gained acceptance for artisanal products on the market, sought local monopolies against nearby competitors, and tried to restrain overproduction which would lower prices and ruin marginal masters. In addition, corporate organizations institutionalized and defended a job hierarchy, central to which was the independent master.

Since it was the dual separation of productive and liquid capital which gave birth to and maintained the existence of the urban middle, any change in this condition--any merger of the separate economic activities--could only mean trouble for the middle. Pressures resulting from the vicissitudes of business affected all craftsmen, although specific economic conditions had disparate effects on different trades and individuals. Yet some professions were also endangered in ways which were structural and inherent rather than circumstantial or accidental to the nature of the handicraft mode of production. Two strata of petty producers can be discerned, the first of which embraced those working for and selling in the local market. Their limited numbers and output assured them of steady demand and quick sale of necessary traditional goods. Since they made the entire finished commodity in ways requiring no division of labor, an investor could hope for little additional gain by reorganizing and rationalizing their work. Furthermore, the usual source of high profit--exploitation of the physical and temporal separation between producer and consumer--did not obtain. As they did not labor for the export market, such artisans and traders encountered no quantitative stimulus for qualitative change in productive forces for greater efficiencies and higher profitability. Nor did they have in their midst significant numbers of artisans with large amounts of capital, who were eager to reinvest in the same line of business. What few there were found it much more lucrative to enter long-distance commerce. In short, not only would an entrepreneur find it difficult to get a foothold among these small artisans and traders, but it would not prove a particularly advantageous proposition even if he did. It is not surprising, therefore, that the marginal masters in such crafts ex-

cited more interest on the part of the userer than on the part of the would-be capitalist.

Much more vulnerable were artisans producing for export, meaning, in our period, especially the various crafts involved in textiles. The widening of the market meant that capital was rapidly accumulating in the hands of merchants and prospective entrepreneurs. And whereas the petty producers required working capital to carry on as independent businessmen, the possessors of liquid wealth could use it to take away artisanal autonomy. Furthermore, because fabrics were made by a number of specialized operations, each the preserve of different craftsmen, an organizer who could both gain control of raw materials and means of production and also coordinate the productive processes could realize important economies which would allow him to lower prices and capture more business. Thus the urban middle, united through its relations to the means of production, was potentially riven by the threats facing it.

The dangers to textilemakers' independence underline the fact that the possible protections which these artisans could seek were not economic--there, everything favored potential capitalists--but had to be political. Obviously, guilds sought help from town governments to reinforce their protective regulations. By means of laws and sanctions, enforced by local governments when necessary, guilds hoped to prevent nonmasters from procuring control of either the processes or the means of production. With such aid, guildsmen could continue directly to realize the product of their own labor. As a result of such aid, however, the economic independence of weavers--their persistence as members of the middle--implied an increasing dependence on the political structure--on the elites--which ultimately upheld the corporate framework. As I have indicated, such assistance might or might not be forthcoming. When it was, as in Lille, the middle stood firmly by the local elite. Failure to provide necessary assistance could, however, lead to considerable difficulties for city governments, as happened extensively during the Netherlands Revolution.

Socially and economically, the urban middle was conservative, as it had to be, since its existence relied on the preservation or restoration of the traditional economic structure of small craft production. But to

attain this goal, to assure its continued independence, this class acted as a political swing group, behaving in a revolutionary or conservative way according to the requirements of the local situation. Showing an awareness of their fundamental social and economic interests, and of the threats to them, craftsmen and traders were willing to assure them in any expedient manner. If that defense involved political conformity, it was forthcoming; if revolt seemed more appropriate, then guildsmen resorted to it. Potentially a valuable ally against external and internal opponents to the municipal regime, the urban middle could just as well disrupt the stability of the status quo if given sufficient cause. During the early modern era, therefore, there was a struggle fought out in the political arena over how and by whom craft production was to be organized. The continuation of existing class relations was at stake and both the elite and especially the middle showed they were conscious of this fact.

At the bottom of society was a heterogeneous group, partly composed of proletarians and much more of the poor, those who had in one way or another been expropriated but without thereupon being reintegrated into the economic structure. Within this group were day laborers, unskilled employees, domestics, ruined artisans, and those apprentices and journeymen who for a multitude of reasons would never achieve mastership. Not possessing the means of production, people on the bottom were vulnerable to even the most short-term economic crisis. Economically exploited, they were also politically repressed, for they rarely enjoyed citizenship or guild membership. Needless to say, they lacked representation on government bodies or any form of privilege giving them a real or permanent stake in local society. At best, a fortunate few might accumulate sufficient skill and capital to overcome their condition of economic dependency and rise into the ranks of the masters, but for the vast majority insecurity remained the permanent distinguishing feature of their lives.

To overcome this problem, segments of the unprotected bottom strove whenever possible to obtain the protection enjoyed by its superiors, especially in the form of corporate organizations, thus demonstrating perception of their interests. In Italy, the "popolo minuto" tried unsuccessfully to get its own guilds, while in the Rhineland

journeymen illegally established associations open only to fellow journeymen. But in our period popular movements could at best hope for momentary success and then only if urban militias, dominated by the middle, stood aside or even joined with the bottom due to artisanal grievances. Such alliances always proved temporary because of the fundamentally clashing interests of employer and employee, of privileged and unprivileged. Imposed organizations like welfare, embodiments of the consciousness of the dominating class about the bottom, usually were all that the subordinate class was allowed. Its own arrangements, expressing its own sentiments, were forced underground if not destroyed.

So far I have stressed what created, made cohesive and gave at least some consciousness to the three classes described. Let us now look at the other side of the picture: the divisive aspects of early modern classes. Such features are of two kinds: first, those working across class lines; second, those isolating members of the same class in one city from their colleagues elsewhere.

A glance at the structure of craft production will show that common relationships to the means of production were not often reinforced by other relationships. Production was carried out in small workshops staffed by a master, a few journeymen and/or apprentices, and often members of his family. Segregation between labor force and household was not, in practice, strong: in many cases apprentices and journeymen lived and ate with the family and even were obligated to perform tasks around the house. Moreover, the ideal career expectation for subordinates was to rise through the hierarchy until they in turn became independent masters and full-fledged members of the guild in their own right. Hence possibilities for sustained structural opposition between masters and helpers were lessened, as was the development of consciousness based on such distinctions. The organization of production itself undercut a sense of class identity, for guilds heightened rivalries between people performing similar economic functions but producing different goods and services. The damaging results of interguild rivalries appeared glaringly in Ghent during the Netherlands Revolution. After guildsmen had overthrown the urban oligarchy, restricted and corporate interests prevailed. Agreement concerning general goals of restoring corporate sharing



Water Carrier

in government disappeared when it came time to implement them in specific ways. Prosperous boatmen, butchers, fishmongers and haberdashers wanted mostly to regain their customary place in municipal government and the prestige that went with it. Hurt only by short-term economic fluctuations and not threatened with permanent loss of independence, they wished to use the propitious circumstances of the Revolt merely to restore the ancien régime and then come to a moderate understanding with Philip II. Weavers, whose heavy cloth industry was in deep trouble, sought greater political changes and guarantees for their craft, rejecting all accommodation with the royal government. The different problems faced by the various trades provoked different, finally incompatible solutions, and these prevailed over initial unity. As a result, the moderate and affluent crafts remained Catholic and eventually went into open opposition to the radical and increasingly Protestant town government, and this lack of artisanal unity contributed significantly to the surrender of Ghent to the Prince of Parma, Spanish military commander in the Netherlands.

Common links across class lines deemphasized differences between gild masters and members of the elite. Perhaps the most common was the juridical status of citizenship. Through the possession of this status came certain privileges, such as theoretical eligibility for town government, legal protection, and membership in the town militia, which set off all burghers from every other municipal resident. In other words, privilege formed relationships which cut across economic class boundaries, forming common interests between members of the elite and members of the artisanal urban middle. The sorts of political aid which elites provided middles, as previously mentioned, similarly acted to reinforce nonclass solidarity.

Other relationships strengthened these cross-class links. Neighborhoods and parishes were strong loci of identification, as were the family, client-patron network and kinship group. Religion also normally overrode class stratification: even the Magisterial Reformation, after all, gained force from its ability to attract adherents from all social levels and thus form almost parallel or counter-societies. And, of course, the local political community commanded many loyalties, especially (but not only because it was also the important economic unit which provided both a market and protection against competition. Town celebrations, processions and other manifestations of popular culture emphasized municipal unity, often in opposition to other political units. In short, there were many forces working to undermine a sense of class identity based on the same relationship to the economic structure.

Besides cross-class ties within cities, people in similar class positions in different places were cut off from one another. Poor transport and communications, simple technology, small and divided markets, and a low rate of capital accumulation all made for little specialization of production. With its countryside, each city formed a relatively self-sufficient economic unit. The prosperity of the mass of the townspeople depended on protected monopolies and therefore outsiders were viewed as enemies. Furthermore, economic particularism meant that specific economic conditions often varied greatly from place to place, again undermining any sense of sol-

idity during a crisis. Another town's misfortune could easily be your city's gain. Localism made unlikely the development of class-consciousness over a wide area, even were it strong in any specific urban center. Economic localism, strengthened by political decentralization, rendered crucial events and struggles for power, prestige and wealth particularistic.

A striking instance of the effects of localism occurred in Douai during the Netherlands Revolution, where discontented craftsmen in locally-oriented business made no effort in 1566 to link up with iconoclastic weavers in the vicinity. In 1578, when they overthrew the local government, members of Douai's middle proved unwilling to cooperate with the Estates-General, viewing it rather as another outside danger to their town. Indeed, urban elites showed both the most class-conscious and the best ability to overcome localism. They united to defeat the insurgent middle by either a controlled revolution as in the North Netherlands, or reconciliation with Spain, as in the South.

The analysis given above emphasizes that class formation in Western European cities in the early modern period was both localistic and still rather hazy even there. Structural similarities over wide areas which we can see were for contemporaries usually overridden, at least in behavior, by particular concerns and by cross-class relationships. Class-consciousness was therefore sporadic even locally and extremely rare concerning more general relationships. Changes did, however, occur and it is with a glance at them that I will conclude.

First of all, in towns practicing both textile production and long-distance commerce, the independent masters of the cloth trades found themselves under pressure, which even an alliance with the local elite could not always withstand. Not surprisingly, therefore, the emergence of proletarian and capitalist classes occurred first in the textile cities of Flanders and Italy, although it must be noted that this development did not herald the general revolutionizing of the class structure, as is clear from the crisis which overcame much of Western Europe in the 17th century. Moreover, the conflict resulting from the alteration of class relations seldom overspilled local boundaries. Usually, as we have observed, demands voiced called for a return to the traditional, protected, local structures of earlier times.

Even where resisted, such transformations were accompanied by others having more permanent effects: the formation of national states and, albeit slowly, of national and even international economies. In national states, localistic classes had less leverage. The growth, for example, of a stronger central state in the Spanish Netherlands and the introduction of a national army took power from local militias and sharply reduced remaining artisanal political influence. Furthermore, the rise of the state weakened the autonomy and significance of local government where artisans had most influence and prompted local elites to look outside their own communities for the sources of their authority. To be sure, much of the old elite resisted transformation into a capitalist bourgeoisie for reasons of political power, social status and economic advantage. But larger economies made it increasingly difficult to maintain the old class structure. Merchants and wealthy masters accumulated capital more rapidly and could more readily bypass urban restrictions and organize putting-out or even more capitalistic arrangements in trades such as mining, glassmaking and printing, as well as in cloth.

Under such pressures, the guilds were unable to serve as instruments for the maintenance of harmony, but broke up along more stratified lines: on one side, a minority of masters who restricted access to their group in order to protect their wealth and status; on the other, a mass of journeymen and apprentices for whom the possibility of reaching mastership was fast receding. Declining social mobility therefore increased common experiences and class cohesiveness. Employment in an expanding trade--such as light clothmaking in the 16th century--might on occasion permit substantial upward mobility, but generally such expansion of output resulted in subjugation in one form or another. In addition, the development of oligarchies within the guilds went along with oligarchic government in the towns. Artisans might revolt against these changes, but aided by the central governments, the elites were soon able to reverse restored guild rule. Since guild leaders were now made responsible to the local rulers, not to the craftsmen, the political structure gained access to and a large measure of control over the economic organism of the middle. While the guild had traditionally championed the interests of its members, by the sixteenth century it had increasingly become a channel for imposing governmental policy and implementing elite control. The

spread of Anabaptism during the 16th century provides an indication of the growing estrangement between artisans and their superiors.

At the same time, the political and juridical unity of the urban citizenry declined. In Lille, for example, during the 15th century a noticeable--though always a minority--proportion of the town government was composed of craftsmen. By the 16th century, however, artisanal participation was minimal. Even in cities where guilds had previously enjoyed an institutionalized share of power, politics came to be the nearly exclusive preserve of the economic elite. At least in some cities of the Netherlands, this development was accompanied by increasing disinterest in the acquisition of citizenship except by those who had to or those who belonged to the mercantile, financial, entrepreneurial or legal strata of the dominant class and thereby might reasonably expect someday to enter government. In some instances, qualifications and fees for burgherdom were raised substantially, thus effectively excluding nonelite people from membership. Parallel to that closure of access to power went another: separate from the town militia staffed by all citizens were formed elite companies armed with the latest weapons (cannon, arquebuses), composed of men who could afford to arm themselves, get accepted, pay a steep entry fee, and take the time to practice. Even the maintenance of urban security was becoming segregated, a clear indication of the distrust and recognition of separateness coming to mark class relationships. A more positive sign of solidifying class identity can be found in marriage contracts. By the 16th century, people rarely married outside their socioeconomic class. While occupational barriers were consistently ignored, those between elite and middle or between middle and bottom were nearly always respected.

While community relationships thus broke down, wider and sharper horizontal stratifications began to materialize. Classes there might be. As yet, however, they were not capitalist classes, except in a few atypical cities. During the great crises of the 16th and 17th centuries, even where some initial large-scale class unity prevailed, local, corporatist and other interests almost always returned to the fore. It is clear that the formation of national states and the dawn of national economies had begun to give crucial events a wide significance and to arouse people in similar ways throughout much more ex-

tensive areas than before. Yet it is equally clear that these experiences were still largely perceived across local and particularistic relationships whose resilience demonstrates the incompleteness of economic and political integration.

Robert DuPlessis

Bukharin, Nicolai. Historical Materialism. A System of Sociology (repr. Ann Arbor, 1969; orig. publ. 1921).

Poulantzas, Nicos. Pouvoir politique et classes sociales (Paris, 1971). These two are particularly helpful for theoretical guidance, which is woefully lacking from almost all the rest.

Problèmes de stratification sociale, ed. Roland Mousnier (Paris, 1968). If you ignore Mousnier's obsession with an order-based society--which several of the articles explicitly reject--you can get a fair idea of work presently being done on early modern social structure.

Wittman, Tibor. Les Gueux dans les "Bonnes Villes" de Flandre (1577-1584) (Budapest, 1969). An excellent Marxist treatment of the Netherlands Revolution which also has much to say about urban class relations; unfortunately, the term "bourgeoisie" is vastly overused and underdefined.

Price, J. L. Culture and Society in the Dutch Republic During the 17th Century (New York, 1974). chapter 4. A stimulating attempt to account for the complexity of early modern Dutch urban societies.

Posthumus, N. W. De geschiedenis van de Leidsche lakenindustrie (The Hague, 1908-39), 3 volumes. A solid piece of work which suggests many jumping-off places for analysis of class structure.

Scholliers, E. Loonarbeid in Honger. De levensstandaard in de XV^e et XVI^e eeuw te Antwerpen (Antwerp, 1960). A pioneering attempt to understand the living conditions of the masses: quantitative data with a mind. It also has a fairly complete French summary at the end.

Walter, Mack. German Home Towns. Community, State, and General Estate 1648-1871. Especially interesting for lots of material concerning the lower middle and middle classes; theoretically, it leaves a lot to be desired.

Mauersberg, H. Wirtschafts- und Sozialgeschichte zentral-europäischer Städte in neuerer Zeit (Göttingen, 1960). Some comparative urban social and economic history.

Pike, Ruth. Aristocrats and Traders. Sevillian Society in the Sixteenth Century (Ithaca, 1972). There is little available in English on early modern Spanish society; this book does little to fill the gap, except for the sections on the elite.

Venturi, Angelo. Nobiltà e popolo nella società veneta del '400 e '500 (Bari, 1964). This ties together social structure and political change.

Coles, Paul. "The Crisis of Renaissance Society: Genoa 1488-1507," Past and Present, no. 11 (April 1957), pp. 17-47. A local study of social evolution and political conflict.

The following half-dozen are encyclopedia French theses. All include some analysis of early modern society; all eschew theory and comparisons.

Bennassar, Bartolomé. Valladolid au siècle d'or (Paris, 1967).

Coornaert, Emile. La Draperie-Sayetterie d'Hondschoote (XIV^e-XVIII^e siècles) (Paris, 1930).

Delumeau, Jean. Vie économique et social de Rome dans la seconde moitié du XVI^e siècle (Paris, 1957, 1959), 2 volumes.

Deyon, Pierre. Etude sur la société urbaine au 17^e siècle. Amiens, capitale provinciale (Paris, 1967).

Gascon, Richard. Grand commerce et vie urbaine au XVI^e siècle. Lyon et ses marchands (environs de 1520-environs de 1580) (Paris, 1971), 2 volumes.

Heers, Jacques. Gênes au XV^e siècle: activité économique et problèmes sociaux (Paris, 1961).

War, Alan. The City of Worcester in the sixteenth century (Leicester, 1973). A real dog. Look at it if you want to see what mindless empiricism can do when it really goes wild.

Almost every urban history contains information, but few try to make any coherent explanation of class or other social relations and almost none do so from a Marxist or marxisant perspective.

COMMENT

This paper focuses on the widespread failure of social and economic transformation in early modern Europe and therefore pays most attention to the 16th century and to typical cities in which the old elite and precapitalist middle managed to maintain themselves, even at the cost of economic stagnation. A longer time perspective and mention of atypical cities might well have led to even more stress being given to the breakdown of the city as an autonomous economic and political system and the collapse of the old ideology of community in the face of rising capitalist classes. Hence a typology of early modern urban class structures would be useful, recognizing that while in many cities the emergence of classes was slow and retarded by other forms of consciousness engendered by economic localism, in a few places capitalist social relations between an entrepreneurial bourgeoisie and an expropriated proletariat were in the process of formation.

J.W. Smit