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CITY ORIGINS

An interesting question is whether or not cities existed in the midst of that essentially agricultural civilization into which Western Europe had developed in the course of the ninth century. The answer depends on the meaning given to the word "city". If by it is meant a locality the population of which, instead of living by cultivating the soil, devotes itself to commercial activity, the answer will also be in the negative if we understand by "city" a community endowed with legal entity and possessing laws and institutions peculiar to itself. On the other hand, if we think of a city as a center of administration and as a fortress, it is clear that the Carolingian period knew nearly as many cities as the centuries which followed it must have known. That is merely another way of saying that the cities which were then to be found were without two of the fundamental attributes of the cities of the Middle Ages and of modern times - a middle - class population and a communal organization.

Primitive though it may be, every stable society feels the need of providing its members with centers of assembly, or meeting places. Observance of religious rites, maintenance of markets, and political and judicial gatherings necessarily bring about the designation of localities intended for the assembly of those who wish to or who must participate therein.

Military needs have a still more positive effect. Populations have to prepare refuges where will be found momentary protection from the enemy in case of invasion. War is as old as humanity, and the construction of fortresses almost as old as

war. The first buildings erected by man seem, indeed, to have been protecting walls. Even today, there is hardly a barbaric race among whom this tendency is not found and, as far back as we may go in the past, the situation remains the same. The acropolises of the Greeks, the oppida of the Etruscans, the Latins, and the Gauls, the burgen of the Germans, the gorods of the Slavs, like the kraals of the Negroes of South Africa, were in the beginning no more than places of assembly and, especially of protection. Their plan and their construction depended naturally upon the conformation of the terrain and upon the building materials at hand. But the general arrangement of them was everywhere the same. It consisted of a space, square or circular in shape, surrounded by ramparts made of trunks of trees, or mud or blocks of stone, protected by a moat and entered by gates. In short, it was an enclosure. And it is an interesting fact that the words which in modern English and in modern Russian (town and gorod) designate a city, originally designated an enclosure.

In ordinary times, these enclosures remained empty. The people resorted to them only on the occasion of religious or civic ceremonies, or when war constrained them to seek refuge there with their herds. But, little by little with the march of civilization, their intermittent animation became a continuous animation. Temples arose; magistrates or chieftains established their residence; merchants and artisans came to settle. What first had been only an occasional center of assembly became a city, the administrative, religious, political and economic center of all the territory of the tribe whose name it customarily took.

This explains why, in many societies and particularly in -

classic antiquity, the political life of the cities was not restricted to the circumference of their walls. The city, indeed, had been built for the tribe, and every man in it, whether dwelling within or without the walls, was equally a citizen thereof. Neither Greece nor Rome knew anything analogous to the strictly local and particularly bourgeoisie of the Middle Ages. The life of the city was blended with the national life. The law of the city was, like the religion itself of the city, common to all the people whose capital it was and who constituted with it a single autonomous republic.

The municipal system, then, was identified in antiquity with the constitutional system. An when Rome extended her dominion over all the Mediterranean world, she made it the basis of the administrative system of her Empire. This system withstood, in Western Europe, the Germanic invasions. Vestigial but thoroughly definite relics of it were still to be found in Gaul, in Spain, in Africa, and in Italy, long after the fifth century. Little by little, however, the increasing weakness of social organization did away with most of its characteristic features. By the eighth century, neither the decuriones, nor the gesta municipalia, nor the defensor civitatis were longer in existence. At the same time the thrust of Islam in the Mediterranean, in making impossible the commerce which up to now had still sustained a certain activity in the cities, condemned them to an inevitable decline. But it did not condemn them to death. Curtailed and weakened though they were, they survived. Their social function did not altogether disappear. In the agricultural social order of the time, they retained in spite of everything a fundamental importance. It is necessary to take full count of the role they

played, in order to understand what was to befall them later.

As has been stated above, the Church had based its diocesan boundaries on the boundaries of the Roman cities. Held in respect by the barbarians, it therefore continued to maintain, after their occupation of the provinces of the Empire, the municipal system upon which it had been based. The dying out of trade and the exodus of the foreign merchants had no influence on the ecclesiastical organization. The cities where the bishops resided became poorer and less populous without the bishops themselves feeling the effects. On the contrary, the more that general prosperity declined, the more their power and their influence had a chance to assert itself. Endowed with a prestige which was the greater because the State had disappeared, sustained by donations from their congregations, and partners with the Carolingians in the governing of society, they were in a commanding position by virtue of, at one and the same time, their moral authority, their economic power, and their political activity.

When the Empire of Charlemagne foundered, their status, far from being adversely affected, was made still more secure. The feudal princes, who had destroyed the power of the monarchy, did not touch that of the Church, for its divine origin protected it from their attacks. They feared the bishops who could fling at them the terrible weapon of excommunication. They revered them as the supernatural guardians of order and justice. In the midst of the anarchy of the tenth and eleventh centuries the ascendancy of the Church remained, therefore, unimpaired, and it appeared to merit that good fortune. To combat the plague of the private wars which the Crown was now incapable of repressing, the bishops organized in their dioceses

the institutions of the "Truce of God".

This prestige of the bishops naturally lent to their places of residence - that is to say, to the old Roman cities, - considerable importance. It is highly probable that this was what saved them. In the economy of the ninth century they no longer had any excuse for existence. In ceasing to be commercial centers they must have lost, quite evidently, the greatest part of their population. The merchants who once frequented them, or dwelt there, disappeared and with them disappeared the urban character which they had still preserved during the Merovingian era. Lay society no longer had the least use for them. Round about them the great demesnes lived their own life. There is no evidence that the State, itself constituted on a purely agrarian basis, had any cause to be interested in their fate. It is quite characteristic, and quite illuminating, that the palaces (palatia) of the Carolingian princes were not located in the towns. They were, without exception, in the country, in the demesnes of the dynasty: at Herstal, at Jupille, at Meerssen in the valley of the Meuse; at Ingelheim in that of the Rhine; at Attigny in that of the Seine; and so on.

The fame of Aix-la-Chapelle should not lead to any illusion as to the character of that locality. The resplendency in which it temporarily gloried under Charlemagne was due only to its fortune in being the favorite residence of the emperor. After the reign of Louis the Pious, it fell back into insignificance. It was to become a real city only four centuries later.

The State, on its part, in exercising administrative powers could contribute in no way to the continued existence of the Roman cities. The counties which formed the political districts

of the Empire were without their chief-towns, just as the Empire itself was without a capital. The counts, to whom the supervision of them was entrusted, did not settle down in any fixed spot. They were constantly travelling about their districts in order to preside over judicial assemblies, to levy taxes, and to raise troops. The centers of their administrations were not their places of residence but their persons. It was therefore of little importance whether they had or not have their domicile in a town. Recruited from among the great proprietors of the region, they were, after all, most accustomed to live on their estates. Their chateaux, like the palaces of the emperors, were customarily in the country.

On the contrary, the immobility which ecclesiastical discipline enforced upon a bishop permanently held him to the city where was established the see of his particular diocese. Though they had lost their function in civil administration, the cities therefore continued to serve as the key points in religious administration. Each diocese comprised the territory about the city which contained its cathedral, and kept in constant touch with it. The change in meaning of the word *civitas* from the beginning of the ninth century throws interesting light on this point. It became synonymous with the bishopric and episcopal city. The phrase *civitas Parisiensis* was used to designate the diocese of Paris as well as the city of Paris itself, where the bishop had his residence. Thus under this double connotation was preserved the memory of the ancient municipal system adopted by the Church for her own ends.

In short, what happened in the impoverished and depopulated Carolingian towns is a striking parallel of what, in a rather more important theater, happened at Rome itself when, in the

course of the fourth century, the Eternal City had ceased to be the capital of the world. In leaving it for Ravenna and then for Constantinople, the emperors abandoned it to the Pope. What it no longer was in the government of the State, it continued to be in the government of the Church.

The imperial city became the pontifical city. Its historical prestige enhanced that of the successor of St. Peter. Isolated, he seemed the greater, and he became at the same time more powerful. Men now saw only him; in the absence of the old rulers, men now obeyed only him. By continuing to dwell in Rome, he made it his Rome, just as each bishop made the city where he dwelt his city.

During the last days of the Lower Empire, and still more during the Merovingian era, the power of the bishops over the city populace consistently increased. They had profited by the growing disorganization of civil society to accept, or to arrogate to themselves, an authority which the inhabitants did not take pains to dispute with them, and which the State had no interest in and, moreover, no means of denying them. The privileges which the clergy began to enjoy after the fourth century, in the matters of jurisdiction and taxes, enhanced still further their status. It became more conspicuous through the granting of charters of immunity which the Frankish kings issued in their favor. By virtue of these the bishops were freed from the interference of the counts in their ecclesiastical demesnes. They were invested from that time on - the eighth century - with a complete suzerainty over their people and their lands. To the ecclesiastical jurisdiction over the clergy which they already had was added lay jurisdiction, entrusted to a tribunal, created by them, whose principal seat

was fixed, naturally, in the town where they had their residence.

When the disappearance of trade, in the ninth century, annihilated the last vestiges of city life and put an end to what still remained of a municipal population, the influence of the bishops, already so extensive, became unrivalled. Henceforward the towns were entirely under their control. In them were to be found, in fact, practically only inhabitants dependent more or less directly upon the Church.

Though no precise information is available, it is, nevertheless, possible to conjecture as to the nature of this population. It was composed of the clerics of the cathedral church and of the other churches grouped nearby; of the monks of the monasteries which, especially after the ninth century, came to be established, sometimes in great numbers, in the see of the diocese; of the teachers and the students of the ecclesiastical schools; and finally, of servitors and artisans, free or serf, who were indispensable to the needs of the religious group and to the daily existence of the clerical agglomeration.

Almost always there was to be found in the town a weekly market wither the peasants from roundabout brought their produce. Sometimes, even, an annual fair was held there. At the gates a market-toll was levied on everything that came in or went out. A mint was in operation within the walls. There were also to be found there a number of keeps occupied by vassals of the bishop, by his advocate or by his castellan. To all of this must be added, finally, the granaries and the storehouses where were stored the harvests from the monastical demesnes brought in, at stated periods, by the tenantfarmers. At the great yearly festivals the congregation of the diocese poured

into the town and gave it, for several days, the animation of unaccustomed bustle and stir.

All this little world accepted the bishop as both its spiritual and temporal head. Religious and secular authority were united or, to put it better, were belended in his person. Aided by a Council formed of priests and canons, he administered the city and the diocese in conformity with the precepts of Christian morality. His ecclesiastical tribunal, presided over by the archdeacon, had singularly enlarged its sphere, thanks to the impotency, and still more to the favor, of the State. Not only were all the clerics subject to it in every particular, but to it also pertained jurisdiction over a number of matters affecting the laity; matters of marriage, of wills, of civil position, etc. The province of the lay court, which was presided over either by the castellan or the advocate, had profited by a similar increase in scope. After the reign of Louis the Pious its jurisdiction had been enlarged by gradual infringements which the more and more flagrant disorders of the public administration explain and justify. Those affected by the charters of immunity were not the only ones subject thereto.

It seems quite certain that, at least within the actual limits of the town, everybody came under its jurisdiction and that it had been substituted, in fact, for the jurisdiction which the count still possessed, in theory, over the freemen. In addition the bishop enjoyed very loosely defined police powers, under which he supervised the markets, regulated the levying of tolls, took care of the bridges and the ramparts. In short, there was no longer any field in the administration of the town wherein, whether by law or by prerogative, he did not intervene as the guardian of the order, peace, and the common weal. A theocra-

tic form of government had completely replaced the municipal regimen of antiquity. The populace was governed by its bishop and no longer asked to have even the least share in that government. True, it sometimes happened that a disturbance broke out in town. Bishops were assailed in their palaces and sometimes even obliged to flee. But it is stretching a point to find in these events the least trace of a municipal spirit. They are rather to be explained by intrigues or personal rivalries.

It would be thoroughly fallacious to consider then the precursors of the communal movement of the eleventh and twelfth centuries. Moreover, they were very rare. Everything indicates that the episcopal administration was in general beneficent and popular.

This administration, as pointed out above, was not confined to the limits of the town. It extended throughout the bishopric. The town was its center, but the diocese was its sphere. Under it the urban population enjoyed in no particular a privileged status. The regimen under which it lived was the regimen of the common law. The knights, the serfs, and the freemen whom it contained were distinguished from their congeners outside only by being grouped in one locality. Of the special laws and the autonomy which the bourgeoisie of the Middle Ages was to enjoy, there was not yet a single trace to be discovered. The word *civis* (citizen) by which contemporary texts designated the inhabitant of the town was only a simple topographical appellation; it did not yet have legal significance.

These towns were fortresses as well as episcopal residence. In the last days of the Roman Empire they had been enclosed by walls as a protection against the barbarians. These

walls were still in existence almost everywhere and the bishops busied themselves with keeping them up or with restoring them with the greater zeal in that the incursions of the Saracens and the Norsemen had given increasingly impressive proof, during the ninth century, of the need of protection. The old Roman enclosures continued, therefore, to protect the towns against new perils.

Their form remained, under Charlemagne, what it had been under Constantine. As a general rule, it took the shape of a rectangle surrounded by ramparts flanked by towers and communicating with the outside by gates, customarily to the number of four. The space so enclosed was very restricted and the length of its sides rarely exceeded four to five hundred yards. Moreover, it was far from being entirely built up; between the houses cultivated fields and gardens were to be found. The outskirts (suburbium), which in the Merovingian era still extended beyond the walls, had disappeared. Thanks to their defenses the towns could almost always victoriously oppose the assaults of the invaders from the north and the south. It will suffice here to recall the famous siege of Paris by the Norsemen in 885.

The episcopal cities naturally served as a refuge for the populations of their neighborhood upon the approach of the barbarians. There monks came, even from very far away, to seek an asylum, as did, for example, those from St. Vaast in 887 at Beauvais and those from St. Quentin at Laon.

In the midst of the insecurity and the disorders which imparted so lugubrious a character to the second half of the ninth century, it therefore fell to the towns to fulfill a true mission of protection. They were, in every sense of the word, the ramparts of a society invaded, under tribute, and terrorized. Soon, from another cause, they were not to be alone in filling

that role.

It is obvious that the anarchy of the ninth century hastened the inevitable decomposition of the Frankish State. The counts, who were the biggest proprietors of their districts, profited by existing conditions to arrogate to themselves a complete autonomy, to make their office an hereditary estate to combine in their hands, with the private powers they exercised over their own demesnes, the public powers which were delegated to them, and finally to amalgamate under their domination, in a single principality, all the counts they could lay hold of. The Carolingian Empire was thus parcelled out, after the middle of the ninth century, into a number of territories subject to as many local dynasties and attached to the Crown only by the fragile bond of feudal homage. The State was too feeble to resist this dis-integration. It was accomplished, unquestionably, by means of violence and abominable perfidies. Nevertheless it was, on the whole, beneficial for society. In seizing power, the princes forthwith accepted the obligations it imposed. Their most evident interest was to defend and protect the lands and the people who had become their lands and their people. They did not fail in a task which a purely selfish concern for personal power had imposed upon them. As their power grew and was consolidated, they became more and more preoccupied with giving their principalities an organization capable of guaranteeing public order and peace.

The first need which was manifest was that of defense, as much against the Saracens or the Norsemen as against the neighboring princes. Fortresses, therefore, sprang up everywhere at the beginning of the ninth century. Contemporary texts give them the most diverse names: castellum, castrum, oppidum,

urbs, municipium; the most usual and in any case the most technical of these appellations is that of burgus, a word borrowed from the German by the Latin of the Lower Empire and which is preserved in all the modern languages: burg, borough, bourg, borgo.

Of these burgs of the late Middle Ages no trace remains in our day. The sources of information, however, fortunately make it possible to form a fairly accurate picture of them. They were walled enclosures of somewhat restricted perimeter, customarily circular in form and surrounded by a moat. In the center was to be found a strong-tower and a keep, the last redoubt of defense in case of attack. A permanent garrison of knights (milites castrenses) was kept stationed there. This was placed under the orders of a castellan (castellanus). The prince had a home (domus) in each of the burgs of his territory where he stayed with his retinue in the course of the continual changes of residence which war or administrative duties forced upon him. Very often a chapel, or a church flanked by the buildings necessary to house the clergy, raised its belfry above the battlements of the rampart. Sometimes there were also to be found by the side of its quarters intended for the judicial assemblies whose members came, at fixed periods, from outside to assemble in the burg. Finally, what was never lacking were a granary and cellars where was kept, to supply the necessities of a siege should the case arise and to furnish subsistence to the prince during his stays, the produce of the neighboring demesnes which he held. Prestations in kind levied on the peasants of the district assured the subsistence of the garrison, on its part. The upkeep of the walls devolved upon these same peasants who were compelled to do the work by

statute labor.

Although from country to country the picture, which has just been drawn, naturally differed in details, the same essential traits were to be found everywhere. The similarity between the bourgs of Flanders and the boroughs of Anglo-Saxon England is a striking one. And this similarity unquestionably proves that the same needs brought in their train like results everywhere.

As can be easily be seen, the burgs were, above all, military establishments. But to this original function was early added that of being administrative centers. The castellan ceased to be solely the commandant of the knights of the castral garrison. The prince delegated to him financial and juridical authority over a more or less extensive district round about the walls of the burg and which took, by the tenth century, the name of castellany. The castellany was related to the burg as the bishopric was related to the town. In case of war, its inhabitants found there a refuge; in time of peace, there they repaired to take part in the assemblies of justice or to pay off the prestations to which they were subject. Nevertheless the burg did not show the slightest urban character. Its population comprised, aside from the knights and the clerics who made up its essential part, only men employed in their service and whose number was certainly of very little importance. It was a fortress population; it was not a city population. Neither commerce nor industry was possible or even conceivable in such an environment. It produced nothing of itself, lived by revenues from the surrounding country, and had no other economic role than that of a simple consumer.

It is therefore a safe conclusion that the period which opened with the Carolingian era knew cities neither in the social sense, nor in the economic sense, nor in the legal sense of that word. The towns and the burgs were merely fortified places and headquarters of administration. Their inhabitants enjoyed neither special laws nor institutions of their own, and their manner of living did not distinguish them in any way from the rest of society.

Commercial and industrial activity were completely foreign to them. In no respect were they out of key with the agricultural civilization of their times. The groups they formed were after all, of trifling importance. It is not possible, in the lack of reliable information, to give an exact figure, but everything indicates that the population of the burgs never consisted of more than a few hundred men and that that of the towns probably did not pass the figure of two to three thousand souls.

The towns and the burgs played, however, an essential role in the history of cities. They were, so to speak, the stepping-stones thereto. Round about their walls cities were to take shape after the economic renaissance, whose first symptoms appeared in the course of the tenth century, had made itself manifest.

CITIES
AND
EUROPEAN
CIVILIZATION

The birth of cities marked the beginning of a new era in the internal history of Western Europe. Until then, society had recognized only two active orders: the clergy and the nobility. In taking its place beside them, the middle class rounded the social order out or, rather, gave the finishing touch thereto. Thenceforth its composition was not to change; it had all its constituent elements, and the modifications which it was to undergo in the course of centuries were, strictly speaking nothing more than different combinations in the alloy.

Like the clergy and like the nobility, the middle class was itself a privilege order. It formed a distinct legal group and the special law it enjoyed isolated it from the mass of the rural inhabitants which continued to make up the immense majority of the population. Indeed, as has already been seen, it was obliged to preserve intact its exceptional status and to reserve to itself the benefits arising therefrom. Freedom, as the middle class conceived it, was a monopoly. Nothing was less liberal than the caste idea which was the cause of its strength until it became, at the end of the Middle Ages, a cause of weakness. Nevertheless to that middle class was reserved the mission of spreading the idea of liberty far and wide and of becoming, without having consciously desired to be, the means of the gradual enfranchisement of the rural classes. The sole fact of its existence was due, indeed, to have an immediate effect upon these latter and, little by little, to attenuate the contrast which at the start separated them from it. In vain it strove to keep them under its influence, to refuse them a share in its privileges, to exclude them from engaging in trade and industry. It had not the power to arrest an evolution of which it was the cause and which it could not suppress save by itself vanishing.

For the formation of the city groups disturbed at once the economic organization of the country districts. Production, as it was there carried on, had served until then merely to support the life of the peasant and supply the prestations due to his seigneur. Upon the suspension of commerce, nothing impelled him to ask of the soil a surplus which it would have been impossible for him to get rid of, since he no longer had outside markets to call upon. He was content to provide for his daily bread, certain of the morrow and longing for no amelioration of his lot, since he could not conceive the possibility of it. The small markets of the towns and the burgs were too insignificant and their demand was too regular to rouse him enough to get out of his rut and intensify his labor. But suddenly these markets sprang into new life. The number of buyers was multiplied, and all at once he had the assurance of being able to sell the produce he brought them. It was only natural for him to have profited from an opportunity as favorable as this. It depended on himself alone to sell, if he produced enough, and forthwith he began to till the lands which hitherto he had let lie fallow. His work took on a new significance; it brought him profits, the chance of thrift and of an existence which became more comfortable as it became more active. The situation was still more favorable in that the surplus revenues from the soil belonged to him in his own right. The claims of the seigneur were fixed by demesnial custom at an immutable rate, so that the increase in the income from the land benefited only the tenant.

But the seigneur himself had a chance to profit from the new situation wherein the development of the cities placed the country districts. He had enormous reserves of uncultivated land, woods, heaths, marshes and fens. Nothing could be simpler than to put them under cultivation and through them to profit from these new outlets which were becoming more and more exigent and remunerative as the towns grew in size and multiplied in number. The increase in population would furnish the ne-

cessary hands for the work of clearing and draining. It was enough to call for men; they would not fail to show up.

By the end of the eleventh century the movement was already manifest in its full force. Monasteries and local princes thenceforth were busy transforming the idle parts of their demesnes into revenue-producing land. The area of cultivated ground which, since the end of the Roman Empire, had not been increased, kept growing continually greater. Forests were cleared. The Cistercian Order, founded in 1098, followed this new path from its very origin. Instead of adopting for its land the old demesne organization, it intelligently adapted itself to the new order of things. It adopted the principle of farming on a big scale and, depending upon the region, gave itself over to the most remunerative form of production. In Flanders, where the needs of the towns were greater since they themselves were richer, it engaged in raising cattle. In England, it devoted itself particularly to the sale of wool, which the same cities of Flanders consumed in greater and greater quantity.

Meanwhile, on all sides, the seigneurs, both lay and ecclesiastic, were founding "new" towns. So was called a village established on virgin soil, the occupants of which received plots of land in return for an annual rental. But these new towns, the number of which continued to grow in the course of the twelfth century, were at the same time free towns. For in order to attract the farmers the seigneur promised them exemption from the taxes which bore down upon the serfs. In general, he reserved to himself only jurisdiction over them; he abolished in their favor the old claims which still existed in the demesne organization. The charter of Lorris (1155) in the Gatinais, that of Beaumont in Champagne (1182), that of Priches in the Hainault (1158) present particularly interesting types of charters of the new towns, which were also to be found everywhere in neighboring countries. That of Breteuil in Normandy, which was taken over in the course of the twelfth century by a

number of localities in England, Wales, and even Ireland, was of the same nature.

Thus a new type of peasant appeared, quite different from the old. The latter had serfdom as a characteristic; the former enjoyed freedom. And this freedom, the cause of which was the economic disturbance communicated by the towns to the organization of the country districts, was itself copied after that of the cities. The inhabitants of the new towns were, strictly speaking, rural burghers. They even bore, in a good number of charters, the name of burgenses. They received a legal constitution and a local autonomy which was manifestly borrowed from city institutions so much that it may be said that the latter went beyond the circumference of their walls in order to reach the country districts and acquaint them with the liberty.

And this new freedom, as it progressed, was not long in making headway even in the old demesnes, whose archaic constitution could not be maintained in the midst of a reorganized social order. Either by voluntary emancipation, or by prescription or usurpation, the seigneurs permitted it to be gradually substituted for the serfdom which had so long been the normal condition of their tenants. The form of governments of the people was there changed at the same time as the form of government of the land, since both were consequences of an economic situation on the way to disappear. Commerce now supplied all the necessities which the demesnes had hitherto been obliged to obtain by their own efforts. It was no longer essential for each of them to produce all the commodities for which it had use. It sufficed to go get them at some nearby city. The abbays of the Netherlands, which had been endowed by their benefactors with vineyards situated either in France or on the banks of the Rhine and the Moselle where they produced the wine needed for their consumption, began, at about the start of the thirteenth century, to seel these properties which had now be-

come useless and whose working and upkeep henceforth cost more than they brought in.

No example better illustrates the inevitable disappearance of the old demesial system in an era transformed by commerce and the new city economy. Trade, which was becoming more and more active, necessarily favored agricultural production, broke down the limits which had hitherto bounded it, drew it towards the towns, modernized it, and at the same time set it free. Man was enthralled, and free labor was substituted more and more generally for serf labor. It was only in regions remote from commercial highways that there was still perpetuated in its primitive rigor the old personal serfdom and therewith the old forms of demesial property. Everywhere else it disappeared, the more rapidly especially where towns were more numerous. In Flanders, for example, it hardly existed at all after the beginning of the thirteenth century, although, to be sure, a few traces were still preserved.

Up to the end of the old order there were still to be found, here and there, men bound by the law of mortemain or subject to forced labor, and lands encumbered by various seignerial rights. But these survivals of the past were almost always simple taxes and he who paid them had, for all that, full personal liberty.

The emancipation of the rural classes was only one of the consequences provoked by the economic revival of which the towns were both the result and the instrument. It coincided with the increasing importance of liquid capital. During the demesial era of the Middle Ages, there was no other form of wealth than that which lay in real estate. It ensured to the holder both personal liberty and social prestige. It was the guarantee of the privileged status of the clergy and the nobility. Exclusive holders of the land, they lived by the labor of their tenants whom they protected and whom they ruled. The serfdom of the masses was the necessary consequence of such a social organization.

There was no alternative save to own the land and be a lord, or to till it for another and be a serf.

But with the origin of the middle class there took its place in the sun a class of men whose existence was in flagrant contradiction to this traditional order of things. The land upon which they settled they not only did not cultivate but did not even own. They demonstrated and made increasingly clear the possibility of living and growing rich by the sole act of selling, or producing exchange values.

Landed capital had been everything, and now by the side of it was made plain the power of liquid capital. Heretofore money had been sterile. The great lay or ecclesiastic proprietors in whose hands was concentrated the very scant stock of currency in circulation, by means of either the land taxes which they levied upon their tenants or the alms which the congregations brought to the churches, normally had no way of making it bear fruit. To be sure, it was often the case that monasteries, in time of famine, would agree to usurious loans to nobles in distress who would offer their lands as security. But these transactions, forbidden otherwise by canonical law, were only temporary expedients. As a general rule cash was hoarded by its possessors and most often changed into vessels or ornaments for the church, which might be melted down in case of need.

Trade, naturally, released this captive money and restored its proper function. Thanks to this, it became again the instrument of exchange and the measure of values, and since the towns were the centers of trade it necessarily flowed towards them. In circulating, its power was multiplied by the number of transactions in which it served. Its use, at the same time, became more general; payments in kind gave way more and more to payments in money.

A new notion of wealth made its appearance: that of mercantile wealth, consisting no longer in land but in money or commodities of trade measurable in money. During the course of the eleventh century, true capi-

talists already existed in number of cities; several examples have been cited above, to which it is unnecessary to refer again here. These city capitalists soon formed the habit of putting a part of their profits into land. They devoted a part of their gains to the purchase of real estate, first of all in the same town where they dwelt and later in the country. But they changed themselves, especially, into money-lenders. The economic crisis provoked by the irruption of trade into the life of society had caused the ruin of, or at least trouble to, the landed proprietors who had not been able to adapt themselves to it. For in speeding up the circulation of money a natural result was the decreasing of its value and by that very fact the raising of all prices. The period contemporary with the formation of the cities was a period of high cost of living, as favorable to the business men and artisans of the middle class as it was painful to the holders of the land who did not succeed in increasing their revenue. By the end of the eleventh century many of them were obliged to have recourse to the capital of the merchants in order to keep going. In 1127 the charter of St. Omer mentioned, as a current practice, the loans contracted among the burghers of the town by the knights of the neighborhood.

But more important operations were already current at this era. There was not lack of merchants rich enough to agree to loans of considerable amount. About 1082 some merchants of Liege lent money to the abbot of St. Hubert to permit him to buy the territory of Chavigny and a few years later advanced to Bishop Othbert the sums necessary to acquire from Duke Godfrey, on the point of departing for the Crusades, his chateau of Bouillon. The kings themselves had recourse, in the course of the twelfth century, to the good services of the city financiers. William Cade was the moneylender to the King of England. In Flanders, at the beginning of the reign of Philip Augustus, Arras had become pre-eminently a city of bankers. William the Breton describes it as full of

riches, avid of lucre and glutted with usurers:

Atrabatum ... potens urbs ... plena
Divitiis, inhians lucris et foenore gaudens.

The cities of Lombardy and following their example, those of Tuscany and Provence, went much further in carrying on that commerce which the Church vainly sought to oppose. By the beginning of the thirteenth century, Italian bankers had already extended their operations north of the Alps and their progress there was so rapid that a half century later, thanks to the abundance of their capital and the more advanced technique of their procedure, they had everywhere taken the place of the local lenders.

The power of liquid capital, concentrated in the cities, not only gave them an economic ascendancy but contributed also towards making them take part in political life. For as long as society had known no other power than that which derived from the possession of the land, the clergy and the nobility alone had had a share in the government. The feudal hierarchy was made up entirely on the basis of landed property. The fief in reality, was only a tenure and the relations which it created between the vassal and his liege lord were only a particular modality of the relations which existed between a proprietor and a tenant. The only difference was that the services due from the first to the second, in place of being of an economic nature, were of a military and political nature, just as each local prince required the help and counsel of his vassals so, being himself a vassal of the king, was he held on his part to similar obligations. Thus only those who held land entered into the direction of public affairs. They entered into them, moreover, only in paying through their own person; that is to say, using the appropriate expression, *consilio et auxilio* - by their counsel and help. Of a pecuniary contribution towards the needs of their sovereign there could be no question at an epoch when capital, in the form of real estate

alone, served merely for the maintenance of its possessors. Perhaps the most striking character of the feudal State was its almost absolute lack of finances. In it, money played no role. The demesne revenues of the prince replenished only his privy purse. It was impossible for him to increase his resources by taxes, and his financial indigence prevented him from taking into his service revocable and salaried agents. Instead of functionaries, he had only hereditary vassals, and his authority over them was limited to the oath of fidelity they gave him.

But as soon the economic revival enabled him to augment his revenues, and cash, thanks to it, began to flow to his coffers, he took immediate advantage of circumstances. The appearance of bailiffs, in the course of the thirteenth century, was the first symptom of the political progress which was going to make it possible for a prince to develop a true public administration and to change his suzerainty little by little into sovereignty. For the bailiff was, in every sense of the term, a functionary. With these revocable officeholders, remunerated not by grants of land but by stewardships, there was evinced a new type of government? The bailiff, indeed, had a place outside the feudal hierarchy. His nature was quite different from that of the old justices, mayors, or castellans who carried on their functions under an hereditary title. Between them and him there was the same difference that there was between the old serfholds and the new freeholds. Identical economic causes had changed simultaneously the organization of the land and the governing of the people. Just as they enabled the peasants to free themselves, and the proprietors to substitute the quit-rent for the demesne man-sus, so they enabled the princes, thanks to their salaried agents, to lay hold of the direct government of their territories. This political innovation, like the social innovations with which it was contemporary, implied the diffusion of ready cash and the circulation of money. This is quite clearly shown to be the case by the fact that Flanders, where

commercial life and city life were developed sooner than in the other regions of the Netherlands, knew considerably in advance of these latter the institution of bailiffs.

The connections which were necessarily established between the princes and the burghers also had political consequences of the greatest import. It was necessary to take heed of those cities whose increasing wealth gave them a steadily increasing importance and which could put on the field, in case of need, thousands of well equipped men. The feudal conservatives had at first only contempt for the presumption of the city militia. Otto of Freisingen was indignant when he saw the communes of Lombardy wearing the helmet and cuirass and permitting themselves to cope with the noble knights of Frederick Barbarossa. But the outstanding victory won by these clodhoppers at Legnano (1176) over the troops of the emperor soon demonstrated what they were capable of. In France, the kings did not neglect to have recourse to their services and to ally them to their own interests. They set themselves up as the protectors of the communes, as the guardians of their liberties, and made the cause of the Crown seem to them to be solidary with the city franchises. Philip Augustus must have garnered the fruits of such a skillful policy. The Battle of Bouvines (1214), which definitely established the sway of the monarchy in the interior of France and caused its prestige to radiate over all Europe, was due in great part to military contingents from the cities.

The influence of the cities was not less important in England at the same era, although it was manifest in a quite different way. Here, instead of supporting the monarchy, they rose against it by the side of the barons. They helped, likewise, in the creation of parliamentary government, the distant origins of which may be dated back to the Magna Charta (1215).

It was not only in England, furthermore, that the cities claimed and

obtained a more or less large share in the government. Their natural tendency led them to become municipal republics. There is but little doubt but that, if they had the power, they would have everywhere become States within the State. But they did not succeed in realizing this ideal save where the power of the State was impotent to counterbalance their efforts.

This was the case with Italy, in the twelfth century, and latter, after the definite decline of the imperial power, with Germany. Everywhere else they had not succeeded in throwing off the superior authority of the princes, whether, as in Germany and France, the monarchy was too powerful to have to capitulate before them, or whether, as in the Netherlands, their particularism kept them from combining their efforts in order to attain an independence which immediately put them at grips with one another. They remained as a general rule, then, subject to the territorial government.

But this latter did not treat them as mere subjects. It had too much need of them not to have regard for their interests. Its finances rested in great part upon them., and to the extent that they augmented the power of the State and therewith its expenses, it felt more and more frequently the need of going to the pocketbooks of the burghers. It has already been stated that in the twelfth century it borrowed their money. And this money the cities did not grant without security. They well knew that they ran great risks of never being reimbursed, and they exacted new franchises in return for the sums which they consented to loan. Feudal law permitted the suzerain to exact of his vassals only certain well defined dues which were restricted to particular cases always identical in character. It was therefore impossible for him to subject them arbitrarily to a polltax and to extort from them supplies, however badly needed. In this respect the charters of the cities granted them most solemn guaranties. It was, then, imperative to come to terms with them.

Little by little the princes formed the habit of calling the burghers into the councils of prelates and nobles with whom they conferred upon their affairs. The instances of such convocations were still rare in the twelfth century; they multiplied in the thirteenth and in the fourteenth century the custom was definitely legalized by the institution of the Estates in which the cities obtained after the clergy and the nobility, a place which soon became, although the third in the first in importance.

Although the middle classes, as we have just seen, had an influence of very vast import upon the social, economic and political changes which were manifest in Western Europe in the course of the twelfth century, it does not seem at first glance that they played much of a rôle in the intellectual movement. It was not, in fact, until the fourteenth century that a literature and an art was brought forth from the bosom of the middle classes, animated with their spirit. Until then, learning remained the exclusive monopoly of the clergy and employed no other tongue than the Latin. What literature was written in the vernacular had to do solely with the nobility, or at least expressed only the ideas and the sentiments which pertained to the nobility as a class. Architecture and sculpture produced their masterpieces only in the construction and ornamentation of the churches. The markets and belfries, of which the oldest specimens date back to the beginning of the thirteenth century- as for example the admirable Cloth Hall of Ypres, destroyed during the Great War - remained still faithful to the architectural style of the great religious edifices. Upon closer inspection, however, it does not take long to discover that city life really did make its own contribution to the moral capital of the Middle Ages. To be sure, its intellectual culture was dominated by practical considerations which, before the period of the Renaissance, kept it from putting forth any independent effort. But from the very first it showed that characteristic of being an exclusively lay culture. By the middle of the twelfth

century the municipal councils were busy founding schools for the children of the burghers, which were the first lay schools since the end of antiquity. By means of them, instruction ceased to be furnished exclusively for the benefit of the novices of the monasteries and the future parish priests. Knowledge of reading and writing, being indispensable to the practice of commerce, ceased to be reserved for the members of the clergy alone. The burgher was initiated into them long before the noble, because what was for the noble only an intellectual luxury was for him a daily need. Naturally the church immediately claimed supervision over the municipal schools, which gave rise to a number of conflicts between it and the city authorities. The question of religion was naturally completely foreign to these debates. They had no other cause than the desire of the cities to control the schools created by them and the direction of which they themselves intended to keep.

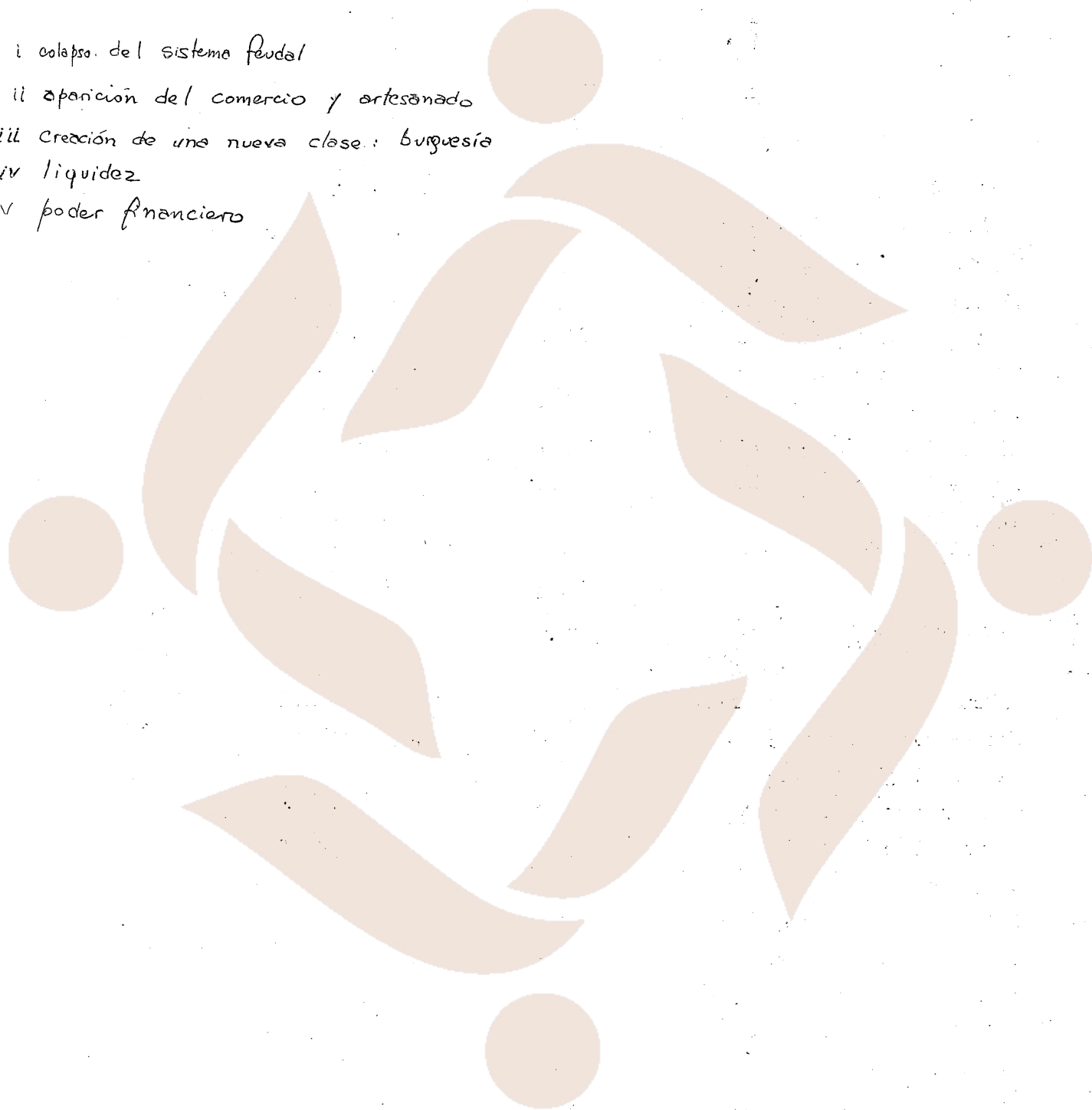
However, the teaching in these communal schools was limited, until the period of the renaissance, to elementary instruction. All who wished to have more were obliged to turn to clerical establishments. It was from these latter that came the "clerks" who, starting at the end of the twelfth century, were charged with the correspondence and the accounts of the city, as well as the publication of the manifold Acts necessitated by commercial life. All these "clerks" were, furthermore, laymen, the cities having never taken into their service, in contradistinction to the princes, members of the clergy who by virtue of the privileges they enjoyed would have escaped their jurisdiction. The language which the municipal scribes employed was naturally, at first, Latin. But after the first years of the thirteenth century they adopted more and more generally the use of national idioms. It was by the cities that the vulgar tongue was introduced for the first time into administrative usage. Thereby they showed an initiative which corresponded perfectly to that lay spirit of which they were the pre-emi-

ment representatives in the civilization of the Middle Ages.

This lay spirit, moreover, was allied with the most intense religious fervor. If the burghers were very frequently in conflict with the ecclesiastic authorities, if the bishops thundered fulsomely against them with sentences of excommunication, and if by way of counterattack, they sometimes gave way to decidedly pronounced anti-clerical tendencies, they were, for all of that, none the less animated by a profound and ardent faith. For proof of this is needed only the innumerable religious foundations with which cities abounded, the pious and charitable confraternities which were so numerous there. Their piety showed itself with a naiveté, a sincerity and a fearlessness which easily led it beyond the bounds of strict orthodoxy. At all times, they were distinguished above everything else by the exuberance of their mysticism. It was this which, in the eleventh century, led them to side passionately with the religious reformers who were fighting simony and the marriage of priests; which, in the twelfth century, spread the contemplative asceticism of the Beguines and the Beghards; which, in the thirteenth century, explained the enthusiastic reception which the Franciscans and the Dominicans received. But it was this also which assured the success of all the novelties, all the exaggerations and all the deformations of religious thought. After the twelfth century no heresy cropped out which did not immediately find some followers. It is enough to recall here the rapidity and the energy with which that of the Albigenses spread.

Both lay and mystic at the same time, the burghers of the Middle Ages were thus singularly well prepared for the role which they were to play in the two great future movements of ideas; the Renaissance, the child of the lay mind, and the Reformation, towards which religious mysticism was leading.

- i colapso del sistema feudal
- ii aparición del comercio y artesanado
- iii Creación de una nueva clase: burguesía
- iv liquidez
- v poder financiero



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