

## Chapter 4. Medieval France: the Capetian Cycle (1150–1450)

### 4.1 Overview of the Cycle

The official start of the Capetian dynasty is dated to the accession of Hugh Capet to the French throne in 987. However, before 1200 the Capetian kings of France directly controlled a rather insignificant extent of territory, overshadowed by other North French polities, most importantly, the Normans and the Angevins. The integrative trend set in gradually during the twelfth century. The important landmarks were the consolidation of the Royal lands under Louis IV the Fat (1108–37) and the activities of Suger, abbot of St. Denis, between 1122 and 1151. For this reason, we date the beginning of the high medieval cycle in France to 1150.

The century between 1150 and 1250 was the expansion phase, which saw a rapid growth of the population densities, and also an enormous expansion of the territory controlled by the French kings. The stagflation phase set in after the mid-thirteenth century, when population growth slowed down and gradually ceased altogether. The onset of crisis was signalled by the famines of 1315–17 and reached culmination in the arrival of the Black Death, followed by military defeats, peasant uprisings, and the first civil war. A temporary stabilization was achieved during the 1360s, but it proved to be a very fragile one. The depression phase, characterized by high socio-political instability and the absence of sustained population growth lasted until the mid-fifteenth century. It was around 1450 when the new integrative trend became obvious, so we take this date as the end of the medieval cycle and the beginning of the early modern one.

We remind the reader, however, that all our dates for the cycles and phases within cycles are (1) tentative, and will likely be corrected as additional evidence is accumulated, and (2) “fuzzy” – thus, the date of 1450 really means 1440–60, or even 1430–70. Our division of a continuous cycle into discrete stages is just a device for organizing the presentation; it is not our intension to imply that the transition between two phases is associated with any abrupt change.

Furthermore, when we deal with such a large and spatially heterogenous polity as the kingdom of France, we need to keep in mind that its different regions could, and occasionally did, move out of synchrony with each other. Thus, the chronology that follows is primarily relevant to the territorial core of the French state – the region inhabited by the speakers of Langue d’Oil.

#### *Population and Economy*

There were perhaps 6 million people in France around 1100, and close to 20 million in 1328 (Braudel 1988:137). Such a tripling of population during the twelfth and thirteenth century (with fastest growth concentrated in the century around 1200) was quite typical of western European countries (Abel 1980). During the century after the Black Death the French population declined to the level of c.10 mln people (Figure 4.1a).

The numbers cited above refer to the population within modern French borders. The peak population within the area controlled by the Capetians was smaller, perhaps around 16 million (Sumption 1991:10). In 1328 the officials of the royal treasury counted nearly 2,470,000 households (the great fiefs and princely appanges, not taxed by the King, were excluded).

**Figure 4.1** Demographic, economic, and territorial dynamics of France, 1150–1850. (a) Population with the modern borders of France (note the logarithmic scale). (b) Wheat price in g of silver per 100 kg (data from Abel 1980). (c) Territory of the French state, in Mm<sup>2</sup> (millions of square kilometers).

The dynamics of food prices, when expressed in silver equivalents, exhibited a very similar pattern to population dynamics: a thirteenth century increase, followed by a decline reaching a minimum towards the mid-fifteenth century (Figure 4.1b). There are also shorter-term oscillations (of about 50 years in period) superimposed on top of the secular cycles.

### *Social Structure*

At the top of the power hierarchy of France stood the great territorial magnates—lay lords (the king, dukes, counts, and barons) and prelates (abbots, bishops, and archbishops). Below them were the middle and lower rank elites, from the more substantial knights to relatively poor country squires (Tuchman 1978). A view of the typical incomes of various elite substrata is provided by Edouard Perroy's (1962) study of the nobility of the County of Forez (south-central France) in the late thirteenth century. At the top of the local hierarchy stood the Count of Forez with 12,000 livres of annual income. Below him were two or three barons with incomes of between 1000 and 2000 livres per year. Twenty or so substantial knights, each with a castle, enjoyed incomes between 100 and 500 livres. The holders of fortified houses were worse off, with incomes of 50–100 livres per year. At the bottom of the noble hierarchy were about one hundred lesser gentry whose income varied between 25 and 50 livres per year. To put this income in perspective, the basic minimum on which a single person could live in modest comfort at the time was 5 livres (this was, the typical allowance provided to a young nobleman attending university, or a pension to a widow of the lesser gentry). In other words, 25 livres per year was enough to maintain a family of four or five, but left no surplus for status-seeking. A sum of 25 livres at that time was equivalent to £5; thus, the minimum incomes of the lesser gentry in France and England were essentially the same. The substantial knight in Forez with a minimum income of 100 livres had his counterpart in an English knight or esquire with £20 per annum.

The elite numbers changed dramatically during the cycle. Around 1300 the proportion of noble households in the population varied between 1 and 4 percent, depending on the region (Contamine 1997:50-52). The average is 2.4 percent, which Philippe Contamine, however, cautiously lowers to 1.8 (Contamine 1997:53). Assuming a population of 20 million and five persons per household yields an estimate of 70,000 noble families in 1300. A century and a half later, Contamine (1997:56) estimates that the proportion of nobles to the total population declined to 1.5 percent. Assuming a population near 10 million mark in the middle of the fifteenth century, this results in an estimate of 30,000 noble families at the end of the cycle.

### *Political dynamics*

The early Capetian kings ruled a tiny area centered on Paris and Orléans in northern France. The situation changed dramatically during the twelfth century (when the Norman state experienced protracted civil war and change of dynasty). Under Philip II Augustus (1180-1223) the territory directly controlled by the French state expanded enormously, so that in 1223 it was ten times as large as the territory controlled by Hugh Capet (Figure 4.1c). During most of the twelfth century, thus, France was at war with England under first the Norman and then the Angevin dynasties, a period of conflict sometimes called “the first Hundred Years’ War”. “Pillage, murder, banditry, and insecurity were part of everyday life” (Braudel 1988:133).

This period of instability, associated with the Capetian conquest of France (which included such violent episodes as the Albigensian Crusades), is clearly reflected in the temporal distribution of coin hoards (Figure 4.2). Once the boundaries of the kingdom expanded, however, the central regions began to enjoy the benefits of the peace. Most of the decades of the thirteenth century and the first half of the fourteenth have relatively few hoards (Figure 4.2). There is a minor upward fluctuation during the second decade of the fourteenth century (perhaps associated with the baronial rebellion at the end of Philip IV reign), but the next major peak of instability

was brought about by the state collapse of the 1350s and 1360s (Figure 4.2). Unfortunately, the third volume of Jean Duplessy's *Les Trésors Monétaires Médiévaux et Modernes Découverts en France* has not been published, and thus we lack information on this extremely useful indicator for the period after 1385.

**Figure 4.2** Temporal distribution of the French coin hoards: 1100–1385 (Duplessy 1985).

#### 4.2 Expansion: 1150–1250

Demographic data are hard to come by for the medieval period. Table 4.1 gathers together several estimates on the number of surviving children in a family from various sources. This is a good statistic because (1) it integrates over fecundity and survival (to adult), and (2) it is directly related to the population growth rate, being twice the replacement rate. Cross-comparisons between different localities, and most important, different social strata, are not valid, but temporal changes within each dataset are in general agreement. There was apparently a slowdown of population growth during the tenth and eleventh centuries (although the data are very crude). What is clear is that replacement rates tended to increase during the twelfth century (Table 4.1).

**Table 4.1.** Average number of children per family in France, 800 – 1500: various sources.

**Bold:** maximum values *Italic:* minimum values

Time period	Number	Area	Source
9th century	2.5	Polyptyque d'Irminon	(Reinhard et al. 1968:65)
980-1050	4.5	The rich of Mâconnais	(Dupâquier et al. 1988a:214)
10th century	3.8	Nobility, northern France	(Reinhard et al. 1968:69)
1000-1050	4.2	Nobility, northern France	same
1050-1100	3.8	Nobility, northern France	same
1100-1150	5.5	Nobility, northern France	same
1150-1200	<b>5.6</b>	Nobility, northern France	same
1200-1250	4.9	Nobility, northern France	same
1250-1300	5.1	Nobility, northern France	same
1025	3-4	Nobility, Picardy	(Dupâquier et al. 1988a:215)
1050	4-4.5	Nobility, Picardy	same
1075	>4	Nobility, Picardy	same
1100	5-6	Nobility, Picardy	same
1075-1100	<b>5.06</b>	Nobility, Picardy	same
1100-1125	4.52	Nobility, Picardy	same
1125-1150	4.70	Nobility, Picardy	same
1150-1175	4.92	Nobility, Picardy	same
1175-1200	5.40	Nobility, Picardy	same
1200-1225	<b>5.54</b>	Nobility, Picardy	same
1225-1250	5.24	Nobility, Picardy	same
1250-1275	5.08	Nobility, Picardy	same
1275-1300	5.32	Nobility, Picardy	same
1245-1300	<b>4.00</b>	Urban elite, Périgueux	(Dupâquier et al. 1988a:302)
1300-1330	2.75	Urban elite, Périgueux	same

1330-1370	1.91	Urban elite, Périgieux	same
1370-1400	2.29	Urban elite, Périgieux	same
1400-1430	1.82	Urban elite, Périgieux	same
1430-1470	2.35	Urban elite, Périgieux	same
1470-1500	3.55	Urban elite, Périgieux	same
1422	1.6-1.8	Reims	(Carpentier and Le Mené 1996)
1350-1375	<b>1.81</b>	Arles	(Dupâquier et al. 1988a:387)
1391-1395	1.75	Arles	same
1471-1475	1.03	Arles	same

During the twelfth and thirteenth century the population of France must have tripled from 6 million to 20 million (Figure 1a). The economic base for this enormous population buildup had to come primarily from the expansion of cultivated lands. As a result of massive internal colonization, farmland expanded at the expense of heath, forest, and marsh. It was estimated that out of 26 million hectares of forest cover in France of 1000, one half was destroyed by 1300 (Braudel 1988:140). To appreciate the magnitude of this land clearance, note that total arable land of the modern France is 18 million ha (CIA 2002). It is difficult to estimate, though, how much new land was actually brought into production. Estimates of the increase range from a conservative 40% to more optimistic 100% (Carpentier and Le Mené 1996:158). The increase of cultivated area was probably accompanied by increased yields per unit of area. Thus, Carpentier and Le Mené (1996:161) suggest that yields increased from 3-4 to 1 before the twelfth century, and 4-5 to 1 towards 1180. This translates into a 40% increase of the *net* yield.

Expanding population coupled with growing productivity (or, at least, productivity not decreasing as a result of diminishing returns, and there is no evidence of diminishing returns prior to 1250) should have translated into healthy state finances. Indeed, the century around 1200 saw a great expansion of royal revenues. Accounts for the year 1202-3 suggest that the ordinary revenues of Philip Augustus were about 115,000 *livres parisis*, and that these increased by 72% since the beginning of his reign in 1180 (Henneman 1999:104). Gross receipts in 1202-3 (including revenue raised for the war against the Plantagenets) amounted to 196,327 *livres parisis* (Hallam and Everard 2001:226). Louis IX's fixed annual revenue was probably between 200,000 and 250,000 *livres parisis* by 1250 (Hallam and Everard 2001:311), twice that of Philip Augustus. Thus, real revenues grew substantially, since the price of grain increased between 1200 and the 1250s only by 20% (Figure 4.1b). Increasing revenues underwrote state expansion, which brought more potential taxpayers in a kind of a virtuous cycle. This dynamic probably explains the explosive growth of the Capetian state during this period.

### 4.3 Stagflation: 1250–1315

#### *Population and economy*

At some point during the second half of the thirteenth century the rate of growth of agricultural production started to lag behind that of population. The reclamation of land ceased between 1230 and 1280 in most provinces (Braudel 1988:155, Carpentier and Le Mené 1996:331). Shortly thereafter—at some point between 1280 and 1315—the population reached its peak. There is a mild degree of disagreement between different authorities about the dating of the peak. Most likely, different regions peaked at different times; there is no reason to expect a perfect synchrony. For example, Carpentier and Le Mené (1996:314) suggest that the population of the Midi may have continued to expand as late as 1340.

Population growth was reflected in the rise of prices (Figure 4.1b). The price of wheat increased through the thirteenth century, but the worst period of inflation was from 1250s to 1310s, when the price of a quintal of wheat went from 24 to 66 g of silver (Abel 1980). There is no systematic wage data for medieval France, but pay rates for soldiers suggest that nominal wages increased, although they did not keep pace with inflation (Table 4.2). What is interesting is that the real wages declined for both elite and commoner soldiers, but commoners suffered more (we saw a similar dynamic in the wages of English soldiers, see Chapter 2).

**Table 4.2.** Daily rates of pay for soldiers in France (Contamine 1984:94)

<b>Pay rate</b>	<b>1202</b>	<b>1295</b>
<i>Knight</i>		
nominal, l.t.	7s. 6d.	10s., 12s. 6d., or 15s.
in silver	25.1 g	41.8 g
in wheat	1.71 hl	1.06 hl
<i>Foot soldier</i>		
nominal, l.t.	10d.	12d.
in silver	2.8 g	3.3 g
in wheat	0.19 hl	0.08 hl

The pressure of population also translated into progressive fragmentation of peasant land holdings. In Dauphiné 75% of peasants had less than 2 ha of farmland, in Hainault 60% held a hectare or less (Carpentier and Le Mené 1996:328, see also pp. 326-9 for data on other regions). This amount of land was far below the level needed to feed a peasant family. Estimates of the production budgets of peasant holdings suggest that the minimum of land allowing comfortable leaving was around 6 ha (Carpentier and Le Mené 1996:340). Assuming three-field system and average harvest of 10 hl/ha, 6 hectares should yield 40 hl every year. From this the peasant had to pay the tithe of one-ninth and *terrage* of one-seventh, leaving him with 30 hl. After reserving 8 hl for seed, the peasant and the family could dispose of 22 hl (16 quintals) of grain for personal consumption, enough for a family of 4-5 people. However, only a small minority of peasants, less than 20%, had land of 6 or more ha (Carpentier and Le Mené 1996). Thus, the huge majority of rural households did not have enough land to feed themselves, and their very existence critically depended on securing outside employment. The result of this process was a vast and growing rural proletariat. In a vain hope of finding employment, many of the rural poor migrated to towns, further depressing urban real wages (Carpentier and Le Mené 1996:357), as well as fueling the remarkable urban growth (see below).

As land became scarce, its price shot up (Carpentier and Le Mené 1996:334). In Normandy an acre of land at the beginning of the thirteenth century cost 2 livres; a century later it went for 20 livres. In Picardy a price of a *journal* (approximately 0.4 ha) during the first half of the thirteenth century varied between 1 and 3, at most 4 livres. During the second half of the century, prices went above 4 livres per *journal* and toward 1300 fluctuated between 6 and 10 livres. There were some regional variations, however. At Beamont-le-Roger, for example, land prices grew until 1260 and then stagnated until 1313. In Beauce (near Chartres) there was actually a tendency for prices to decline (Carpentier and Le Mené 1996:334). Land rents increased even faster than prices. For example, in just 40 years between 1276 and 1316 rents around Lille increased five-fold (Carpentier and Le Mené 1996:336).

While the rural population grew ever more slowly, and eventually stagnated during this period, urban population increased rapidly. Large numbers of new towns appeared during the thirteenth century, with a particularly frenetic pace of urban development after 1250 (Figure

4.3a). Over 70% of planted towns in France outside Gascony appeared during the stagflation period (1250-1315) (Beresford 1967). Note the distinct dynamics of rural development, as measured by the number of assarts mentioned in the documents (Figure 4.3b) contrasted with urban development. Land clearance was concentrated during the expansion phase, while the bulk of urban expansion fell within the stagflation phase.

**Figure 4.3** Distinct dynamics of urban and rural development.

During the thirteenth century the population of Paris doubled (Figure 4.4a), and kept on increasing during the next century. The number of cities having populations between 10,000 and 20,000 increased to twenty or so, and there were a dozen in the 20,000-50,000 range (Carpentier and Le Mené 1996:317). Cities grew partly because of the influx of the migrants from rural areas, partly because of increasing trade and crafts. But city walls also offered protection, and as sociopolitical instability increased (see the next section) growing numbers of rural dwellers abandoned exposed *plat pays* and moved to the relative safety of fortified towns and cities.

**Figure 4.4** The dynamics of urbanization in France, 1150–1850. (a) Population of Paris; (b) an index of urbanization (defined as the proportion of population in the capital).

#### *Elite overproduction*

There is abundant, although largely anecdotal evidence of elite overproduction developing toward the end of the stagflation phase, summarized, for example, by Jonathan Sumption (1991:30-32). The main problem of minor noblemen was “the smallness of their holdings, the result of generations of pious bequests and family partitions. Primogeniture was never rigidly applied even in the west and north of France, where it was theoretically the rule of law. Elsewhere, it was not even accepted in principle. As a result, by the beginning of the fourteenth century the holdings of much of the lesser nobility had been reduced to barely workable parcels” (Sumption 1991:31). The situation was particularly dire in the Ile de France. At least a quarter of the noble vassals of the Parisian abbeys and the Crown had an annual income of less than ten livres (data of Guy Fourquin, cited in Sumption 1991:31). Many petty nobles mortgaged their land or sold it to rich peasants. “In the century to come the survivors of this pauperized gentry would turn to war for their living and finally to brigandage” (Sumption 1991:32).

#### *The state*

During the stagflation period royal revenues increased in nominal terms, but could not keep up with inflation. Louis IX’s ordinary revenues were around 0.25 million *livres tournois* c.1250 (Kaeuper 1988:62, Henneman 1999:104). By the late thirteenth century annual income of Philip IV climbed to between 0.4 and 0.6 million *l.t.* (Kaeuper 1988). Thus, nominal income perhaps doubled, but prices also doubled. Philip’s son Charles IV (1322-8) received average net ordinary revenues of 0.28 million *l.t.*, which in real terms amounted only to 53% of what his father had enjoyed 30 years earlier (Henneman 1999:109). The accession of Philip VI (1328-1350) brought the vast appanage of Valois family into the royal domain, but his ordinary revenues (in real terms) amounted to only 80% of those available to Philip IV (Henneman 1999:109).

## **4.4 Crisis: 1315–1365**

### *Population collapse*

By the early fourteenth century, France (as well as most of the western Europe) was literally crammed with people. The “ecosystem” (to use Le Roy Ladurie’s term) was strained to the breaking point, and was on the verge of collapse. The collapse experienced during the fourteenth century was a result of a typical concatenation of famine, pestilence, and war.

Famine struck first. By the early fourteenth century agricultural production was barely enough to provide sustenance for the population, and the majority had just enough food to live. Famines had practically disappeared during the thirteenth century, but returned again and again during the fourteenth. The first important famine hit France in 1302 (Carpentier and Le Mené 1996:353), but the sustained population decline, most likely, began after the multiannual famine of 1315–7. In fact, during 1315–30 a series of terrible winters brought famine in an alarming warning sign of the troubles to come during the following century (Braudel 1988:154-5).

The second blow was delivered by The Black Death. The first wave of bubonic plague swept France in 1348-9. Between a quarter and a half, and in some cases 80–90% of population perished, depending on the region (Braudel 1988:157). Recurrent plague epidemics were to hit France at roughly decadal intervals during the rest of the century. For example, the second highest mortality peak in Lyon after 1348–9 was in 1361 (Lorcin 1974).

The plague imposed a disproportionate mortality on the poor. For example, at Albi between 1343 and 1357 the proportion of very poor (owning possessions estimated at less than 50 livres) fell from 76 to 62%. At the same time, the middle stratum (50-200 livres) increased from 21 to 28.5 %, and the proportion of the rich (over 200 livres) doubled from 4.2 to 8.1% (Dupâquier et al. 1988a:323). Thus, one consequence of the plague was a distortion of the social pyramid, making it even more “top-heavy” than it was before the plague (we saw the same pattern in the English data).

The effects of famine and disease, as well as war (which we discuss in a later section), on the population dynamics during the fourteenth century are well understood in a qualitative way, even if we may lack precise quantitative estimates (Dupâquier et al. 1988a). The French population (similarly to that in other Western European polities) began declining after 1300 CE, then experienced a precipitous drop in the wake of the Black Death epidemic of 1348, followed by further losses as epidemics recurred (as in 1361) and fighting in the Hundred Years War intensified. Overall population numbers declined by about one-half (Dupâquier et al. 1988b:149), from 20 million to 10 million. After that, for about a century population numbers fluctuated at a low level, and started to increase only during the second half of the fifteenth century (more on this below).

Although the crisis of the fourteenth century brought much misery, population collapse had also some positive effects, at least for the lower strata. Relaxation of Malthusian pressure brought economic relief to peasants and workers. Apart from periods of particularly intensive warfare, real wages and consumptions levels of ordinary people improved dramatically toward the end of the fourteenth century (Table 4.3). In 1338 the Provençal drovers working on their lord’s reserve ate a very crude kind of bread made mainly with barley. After the great plague barley bread was considered to be good enough only for the sheepdogs, while the laborers were entitled to wheat bread (Le Roy Ladurie 1987:70).

**Table 4.3** Daily wages (units: s.t.?) (Bois 1984, Contamine 1984)

Year	Building worker at Rouen	Infantryman
1320	1.5	1.0
1350	3.5	2.0

1380	4.0	5.2
1410	3.8	3.3
1440	4.5	2.7
1470	4.0	2.7
1500	4.5	3.4

### *Lords and peasants*

As we noted above, the beginning of the fourteenth century in France was characterized by elite overproduction. As the amount of surplus produced by peasants was shrinking, due to the operation of the law of diminishing returns, the number of elites who were supported by the surplus was increasing. “To preserve caste, the lord was compelled to draw more, on peasant production, and by other means. On the other hand, any additional drain endangered the ability for self-subsistence of the peasant holding. The contradiction was insoluble and disruptive” (Bois 1984:260). The population decline of the years 1315–50 further exacerbated this basic contradiction. The post-1315 famines affected mainly the poorest strata of the society, and although many noblemen died in the plague, it had a disproportionate effect on the poor. As a result, the proportion of elites to the general population increased even beyond the already high levels of the early fourteenth century.

As their incomes declined, the elites had to look to “other means,” in Guy Bois words, to preserve their caste. The end result was the intensification of the intraelite conflict for scarce resources. Particularly hard hit were the poorer nobles. Even in the thirteenth century a great number of the lesser gentry in Forez lived on 25 *livres viennois* (£5) or less (Perroy 1962:28). As the food prices doubled (or even tripled as in the 1310s) these noble households slipped below the minimum level of consumption consistent with noble status. Indeed, some noble households must have starved during the famines of the early fourteenth century. By the mid-century there were literally tens of thousands of destitute and desperate noblemen of fighting age. Philippe Contamine (1997:204) estimates that 25,000 if not 30,000 nobles flocked to the army of Philip VI in 1340 in the hope of military pay (there were 27,000 cavalymen serving in the Royal army in September 1340, Sumption 1991). It appears that the king and his lieutenants were surprised, even disconcerted by the huge numbers of men-at-arms responding to their call to arms (Contamine 1972:73). This disorganized and undisciplined crowd was one of the factors contributing to the subsequent French defeats at Crécy and Poitiers. The presence of huge numbers of men desperate and trained in the use of arms was a tremendous destabilizing factor.

Elite overproduction was not limited to the military class. “Between 1314 and 1343 the number of principal judicial officers of the various royal courts in Paris increased fourfold; the number of notaries by about the same; the ‘sergeants’ who enforced compliance with the orders of of the King’s ministers and judges increased sevenfold.” (Sumption 1991:19)

### *State collapse*

At the same time that the intensity of intraelite competition and conflict was rising the state was gradually losing its ability to keep internal peace and protect the country from external invasion. The main problem was financial. Before the reign of Philip IV (1270–1314) the crown had no difficulty living of its ordinary revenues, and occasionally collecting extraordinary levies (needed, for example, to ransom Louis IX when he was captured while on crusade in Egypt). By the end of the thirteenth century, however, the ordinary revenues stagnated in real terms (see above) while expenses, especially for military operations, soared. To raise his revenues Philip IV exploited his feudal rights, demanded subsidies, imposed forced loans on the bourgeois, and manipulated the currency (Henneman 1999:105-6). These methods incurred much resentment,

and the first half of the fourteenth century saw increasing resistance to taxation on behalf of various elites. The basic and essentially unresolvable problem was that the state competed with the elites for the shrinking surplus. Thus, we should modify the binary contradiction of Guy Bois (between lord and peasant), by a trinary contradiction of the productive class—the elites—the state.

The lack of consensus on the need for national taxation had a direct effect on the ability of the state to wage the war against the English. Philip VI (1328–50) and John II (1350–64) were unable to collect subsidies except in the time of outright conflict, and were constantly in the state of financial distress (Henneman 1999:110). As a result, France was always unprepared whenever military operations resumed after a truce. The military disasters of 1346 and 1347 (the defeat at Crécy, the loss of Calais) finally persuaded the Estates General in 1355–6 to authorize necessary taxation, but now their attempts to impose taxes ran into resistance at the local level. In the end, the Estates were unable to produce the money they promised (Henneman 1999:111). The collapse of royal finances was shortly followed by the general collapse of the French state, triggered by the defeat and capture of John II at Poitiers (1356).

The disintegrative phase of the Capetian cycle was dominated by a conflict known as the Hundred Years War. As is well known to historians, the Hundred Years War was not simply a dynastic conflict between the French and English kings, as it is often portrayed in the textbooks, but a period of great political instability primarily *within* France (Salmon 1976). It would be more appropriate to call it a “hundred years of hostilities rather than a hundred-year-war” (Braudel 1988:159)—a period of recurrent state collapse and civil war. The conflict occurred at multiple levels. The highest level factions were led by the great seigneurs of France—the king himself, the dukes of Guyenne (who also was the King of England) and Burgundy, and the Count of Flanders. From then on, the level of conflict descended through the magnates (counts and barons), various factions of nobility, and between knights and peasants. This multilevel nature of the conflict can be illustrated on the example of later medieval Gascony (Vale 1986). At the “national” level Gascony was one of the military frontiers in the Anglo-French struggle. At the regional level, the period from 1290 to the middle of the fifteenth century was dominated by the feud between the houses of Armagnac and Foix over the succession of the viscounty of Béarn. At the more local level, private wars between lesser nobility proliferated in Gascony. Between 1290 and 1327, for example, at least twelve outbreaks of intraelite violence are recorded in surviving sources (Vale 1986:140). And then there were numerous bands of *routiers* and *écorcheurs* who robbed and killed indiscriminantly both lords and peasants, or ran “protection rackets” from castles, fortified churches, and manor houses (Wright 1998).

Interpersonal violence—crime—increased in parallel with organized violence. Statistics on violent crimes in at least one locality indicate that there was a crime wave during the fourteenth century peaking around 1400 and subsiding by the second half of the fifteenth century (Table 4.4).

**Table 4.4.** Dynamics of assaults in the Officiality of Cerisy (Normandy) (Finch 1997).

Period	Number of assaults per year	Percent involving the use of weapons
1314-1346	1.2	2
1370-1414	4.9	25
1451-1458	4.3	40
1471-1486	0.7	8

*The dynamics of sociopolitical instability: 1290–1365*

The sociopolitical crisis of the fourteenth century developed in France by degrees. The first signs of growing instability appeared in the frontier regions towards 1300. Above we have already discussed the collapse of order in Gascony from 1290 on. At the opposite end of the kingdom, in the urbanized Flanders, social conflicts first broke out between 1279 and 1281 and later around the year 1300. The origin of troubles seems to have been the tensions between the established urban patriciate and the newly enriched bourgeoisie using the proletariat as shock troops (Carpentier and Le Mené 1996:356). Eventually the struggle for power led to a full blown rebellion, and the battle of Courtrai (“the Battle of the Spurs”) in 1302 when Flemish infantry crushed aristocratic French cavalry. In 1325–6 the urban communities of Flanders rose against their ruler, Count Louis of Nevers. The burghers were massacred by the French army at the field of Cassel (1328), and Flanders was temporarily pacified. However, in 1337 the Flemish revolted again, and under the leadership of van Arteveldt of Ghent expelled Louis of Nevers (Perroy 1965). The Flemish rebellion opened the northern route for the English invasion under Edward III.

Meanwhile other regions of France were also experiencing increasing instability. The north and east of France (Picardy, Burgundy) were sites of the baronial movement against royal taxation during the reign of Louis X (1314–16). In the county of Artois the revolt against the central power became complicated by internecine fighting between the adherents of Robert of Artois and his aunt Mahaut, who both claimed the county (Hallam and Everard 2001:392-3). Robert of Artois lost the struggle and eventually ended up in exile in England, where he joined his voice to those urging Edward III to war against France. But the events in Brittany had a much more direct effect on the course of the Hundred Years War. In 1341 Duke John III of Brittany died without direct heirs. The succession was disputed between two factions, Blois and Monfort. In the ensuing civil war the lesser nobles and the Celtic west supported the Monforts, while the great lords and French-speaking bourgeois of the east rallied to the Blois faction. The English supported the Monfort faction by launching a *chevauchée* (a mounted raid whose purpose was to lay country waste) and besieging Rennes, Vannes, and Nantes (Seward 1978:49).

Another faction arose in the 1350s. It was led by Charles the Bad, the King of Navarre, who was son of Joan of France (and therefore, a grandson of Louis X, giving him a reasonable claim on the French throne) and Philip of Évreux. This faction was sometimes referred to as the Évreux faction, and sometimes as the Navarrese. Charles the Bad inherited very substantial land holdings in Normandy and Ile de France, and he provided leadership to the dissident nobilities of these regions. Charles the Bad was a disruptive influence from 1354, when he murdered the French Constable (the chief military officer), to 1364, when the rising of his faction in Normandy and Ile de France was suppressed by Charles V.

The examples of internecine fighting reviewed above (to which we should add the later factional conflict between the Armagnacs and the Burgundians) illustrate the thesis, generally supported by modern historians, that the Hundred Years War was primarily an internal conflict. The “international aspect” of the war arose primarily (if not solely) because various rival factions appealed to the Kings of England or France. Thus, the Monfort and Arteveldt factions invited Edward III to intervene in Brittany and Flanders, respectively. It was supposedly Jan van Arteveldt who suggested that Edward III should declare himself the king of France, in order to legitimize the Flemish support. Another example of the same trend is the resumption of war in 1369, which resulted from the appeal to Charles V by the count of Armagnac against the Black Prince. Finally, the darkest period of the war for the French (1420–36) came about as a result of the alliance of the Burgundians and the English (more on this below).

Intraelite conflicts brought a host of other rebellions and uprisings in their wake, of which we will mention only two, the Paris rebellion and the Jacquerie. In 1357 the dauphin (future Charles V), who was the head of state as a result of his father's capture at Poitiers, lost Paris to a coalition of urban elites led by the wealthy cloth-dealer Etienne Marcel. During the revolt the Paris mob murdered two royal marshals in front of the dauphin. Incidentally, the Marcel faction in Paris was allied with another troublemaker, Charles the Bad of Navarre. During the winter of 1357–8 the gangs of Anglo-Navarrese “were day by day conquering and laying waste the entire region between the Loire and Seine” (Froissart, cited from Fourquin 1978:136). The pillaging by men-at-arms added on top of the fiscal demands of the monarchy and the seigneurial reaction pushed the peasants of Ile-de-France beyond the breaking point. The *Jacquerie* started in May of 1358 and was suppressed by the nobles in June (Fourquin 1978:134-6).

The years 1356–60 were the nadir. Shocked by the state collapse the nobility started to consolidate around the dauphin and achieved a general consensus on the fiscal reform (Henneman 1999:112). The immediate stimulus for imposing taxes was the need to pay the huge ransom for John II captured at Poitiers. However, the ordinance of 5 December 1360 became a landmark in French fiscal history (Henneman 1999:113), establishing the basic framework of the Ancien Regime. It imposed the salt tax (*gabelle*) and indirect (sales) taxes on other types of consumption (*aides*). The Estates General agreed to another important new tax known as the *fouage* (the hearth tax). Direct taxes, such as the *fouage*, later renamed *taille*, became a long tradition in French royal taxation. Whereas indirect taxes primarily affected the urban population, direct taxes such as the *fouage* also bore on rural lordships. It was not popular with the nobility, but they did not raise much opposition because the primary purpose of this tax was to pay military salaries. In fact, it may appear surprising how little opposition there was to new taxes. The need to ransom the king was clearly one factor (in the end, the whole amount of ransom was never paid; instead the government of Charles V wisely used the money to build a new army). Perhaps even more important was the collective realization that something had to be done or France will be lost. Another contributing factor was the massive “pruning” of the French nobility administered by the war. The worst disaster, that of Crécy, wiped out 10,000 of the “flower of the French nobility” and Poitiers accounted for another 2,500. Some thousands died at the naval battle of Sluys (1340). And then unknown thousands died in the local civil wars and at the hands of the *jacques* of Ile-de-France. In short, by 1360 there were simply many fewer “noble thugs” to raise trouble – some were killed off, and others inherited property of their slain relatives. The swing in the public opinion in favor of peace is evident in the new tone of literature on warfare and chivalry. Whereas the prior emphasis was on the right of private war and the pursuit of honor and glory, now it addressed questions of discipline and public order (Henneman 1996:142). We should not, however, overestimate the strength of this consensus. It lasted for two decades (the 1360s and 1370s); when the new generation, who did not directly experience the collapse of 1356–60, came to power they allowed things to fall apart again.

When Charles V became king in 1365, the national consolidation, even if temporary, resulted in a rapid recovery of the territory lost to the English. Unlike the huge and undisciplined throngs of the previous reign, the army of Charles V consisted only of 2,400 men-at-arms and 1,000 crossbowmen, of which 60% were mounted (Contamine 1972:138). These troops were permanently employed and regularly paid. The permanent forces were joined during the periods of particularly intense activity by supplementary retainers of men-at-arms (bringing the total to the maximum of 5,200). The first military success of the new army was in crushing the forces of the Évreux faction in Normandy (led by Charles the Bad) in the spring of 1364 (Henneman 1999:115). In 1369 the war with the English resumed as a result of the appeal by the count of Armagnac (see above), and by the death of Charles V in 1380 almost all French territory was

regained. The English held only Bordeaux, Bayonne, Brest, Calais, Cherbourg, Valais, and their immediately surrounding territory.

#### 4.5 Depression: 1365 – 1450

##### *Population stagnation*

After the disasters of the mid-fourteenth century that reduced its population by between a third and half, France entered a period of seeming stagnation until 1450. Stagnation, however, does not mean “steady state”. Rather, this period was characterized by short periods of recovery followed by new collapses. The process can be illustrated with data from Normandy (Bois 1984:76). There were three periods of crisis, with population minima in 1380, 1420, and 1450, interspersed with two periods of partial recovery, and then followed by a sustained population growth after 1450 (Figure 4.5).

**Figure 4.5** Population dynamics in Normandy, 1250–1560 (after Bois 1984).

The incidence of population decline is closely correlated with the intensification of internal war (due not only to a direct effect on demographic rates, but also to indirect consequences for the productive infrastructure, see below). Similar dynamics of partial recovery followed by crashes were characteristic of other regions, although the timing of fluctuations varied in accordance with regional variations in the fluxes of internal warfare and recurrent epidemics. Carpentier and Le Mené (1996:378-380) provide an overview of fluctuations in Hainault, Artois, Province, and Dauphiné. Altogether, they propose that the French population decreased between 1350 (that is, after the first shock of the Black Death) and 1450 (the lowest point) by a third. When this decline is added to the demographic catastrophe of the mid-fourteenth century (see the previous section) the overall change between 1300 and 1450 is estimated to be around one-half (Le Roy Ladurie 1987, Dupâquier et al. 1988a). Some regions have experienced declines that were even more catastrophic, such as the 70% fall in Normandy (Bois 1984). Furthermore, a reanalysis of some data suggests that previous historians have been sometimes too conservative in estimating the degree of population crash. For example, in a widely cited estimate Fourquin (1964) calculated that the region of Paris lost one-half of its population. However, a later reanalysis of the same data by Bois indicated a fall of 75% (Bois 2000).

##### *The effect of persistent warfare*

The sociopolitical instability of the Hundred Years War had an enormous impact on the productive capacity of the French society (Braudel 1988:160-1). Some areas were fought over repeatedly and suffered most. We have already quoted (in Chapter 1) from the chronicle of Thomas Basin describing the devastation of Normandy. By 1450 the population of Normandy fell to 30% of the peak of the early fourteenth century (Figure 4.5).

The Paris region was another area where fighting was prolonged, and as we noted above, its rural population may have decreased four-fold. The region suffered both because it was close to Flanders and Normandy, which were the sources of the English *chevauchées*, and because it was the national capital. Here is what Petrarch wrote about his visit to France in 1360: “I could scarcely recognise anything I saw. The most opulent of kingdoms is a heap of ashes; there was not a single house standing except those protected by the ramparts of towns and citadels. Where is now Paris that was once such a great city?” (quoted by Braudel 1988:161). Two generations later Paris was the battleground between Armagnacs and Burgundians, who “vied with each other to prove how far bloodthirstiness could go: murders and massacres never ceased. When the Burgundians entered the capital in May 1418, it was littered with Armagnac corpses ‘piled up

like pigs in the mud” (Braudel 1988:160, the quote is from a contemporary *Journal d’un bourgeois de Paris*).

The south (especially southwest) was similarly devastated. Philippe de la Boissière wrote in the fifteenth century that “this land of Saintonge, except for the towns and fortresses, was deserted and uninhabited ... Where there had once been fine manors, domains, and heritages, towering bushes grew” (Braudel 1988:160). Some areas escaped devastation for a while. When the English under the Black Prince marched through the Massif Central in 1356, they found “the land of Auvergne which they had never before entered ... so prosperous and so full of all manner of goods that it was a marvel to see” (Froissart, quoted in Braudel 1988:160) Needless to say, the prosperity of Auvergne did not survive the Black Prince and his troops.

Famine became endemic in France of the first half of the fifteenth century. There were crises in food supplies around Paris and Rouen in 1421, 1432, 1433, and particularly 1437–9. But these crises were not a fundamental cause of population stagnation—they were, rather, an aggravating circumstance. The underlying cause was the war (Le Roy Ladurie 1987:35). Most graphically this can be seen in the dynamics of the real wage (Allen 2001). The fourteenth century population decline translated into excellent real wages for working people. Thus, in the first decade of the fifteenth century a building laborer in Paris could buy over 20 kg of grain with his daily wage. Similarly high wages prevailed for several decades after the end of the Hundred Years War. During the war decades of the 1420s and 1430s, by contrast, the laborer’s wage collapsed to less than 8 kg of grain per day.

The problem was not lack of cultivable land or people to cultivate it. The fundamental problem was lack of security. Peasants abandoned villages for the relative safety of fortified towns. For example, around such Alsatian towns as Colmar, there were whole “belts” of dead villages. The land that was abandoned was allowed to turn fallow, or was lightly utilized for grazing cattle (Le Roy Ladurie 1987:37). Incessant warfare also destroyed infrastructure. For example, in the area of Langle (modern Pas-de-Calais) the drainage system was abandoned, and the land was first flooded and then deserted (Le Roy Ladurie 1987:38). The degree of village abandonment (similar to German *Wüstungen*) varied with region in France. The south was more strongly affected, with between 25 and 33% of villages abandoned in Provence. Many of these desertions were final, affecting one-quarter of localities in mountainous regions. In the north, by contrast, only 3-10% of villages were abandoned forever (Le Roy Ladurie 1987:38). Altogether Le Roy Ladurie (1974:42) estimates that a minimum of 3–4 million ha of land was abandoned between 1350 and 1440.

#### *Elite dynamics*

Incessant fighting affected aristocracy to an even greater degree than the commoner population. Enormous numbers of French nobles were dispossessed during this period (Wright 1998). Population collapse of the second half of the fourteenth century and the ensuing depression resulted in a divergent evolution of the economic well-being of nobility and peasants (Carpentier and Le Mené 1996:463). After some lag time, declining population pushed down grain prices and drove up real wages. Small people were the beneficiaries of the new economic conjuncture. It would be an exaggeration to call this period the “golden age” of peasants, because they continuously suffered from incessant warfare, periodic epidemics, and recurrent famines (themselves largely caused by warfare, see above). Nevertheless, they usually had enough food to feed the family. And even during bad times, for example, between 1420 and 1440 in Paris their wages were substantially above those during the peaceful period of 1520–60 when population densities again approached the ceiling of the carrying capacity.

The economic well-being of the nobility moved in the opposite direction to that of the peasants. They profited little from cheaper grain, because many grew food on their own estates, and in any case food did not loom as large in their consumption budget as it did for commoners. Because wages increased, nobles had to pay more for manufactures and services necessary for signaling their elite status (the alternative was a quiet slide into the ranks of commoners). In other words, nobles had to spend more just to maintain the level of living they had previously become accustomed to.

Unfortunately, noble incomes declined at the same time as their expenditures increased. Even before 1350, a good half of nobility enjoyed incomes of only 40 *livres* or less, less than a well-to-do farmer with an income of about 60 *livres* (Carpentier and Le Mené 1996:464). After his review of what is known about the noble incomes during the period between 1280 and 1340 Contamine (1997:107) concluded that the great majority of noble incomes were modest or even mediocre, and that it was quite problematic for them to even maintain their means of existence. The severe recession of the fourteenth century coupled with the civil wars and peasant uprisings resulted in nothing short of catastrophe. All sources of noble income declined: rents, revenues from justice, profits from seigneurial equipment such as mills and baking ovens, and tolls from fairs and markets (Carpentier and Le Mené 1996:465, Bois 2000:115). Most seigneurs lost a half to three-quarters of their revenues between 1350 and 1450 (Bois 2000:115). Thus, in just thirty years (1335–64) the income of Jeanne de Navarre from her Champaign and Brie properties fell by 58% (from 23,000 to 10,000 *livres*). Between 1340 and 1400 the income of the abbey of Saint-Denis fell by 50% in nominal terms and by two-thirds in real terms (from 72,000 to 24,000 *setiers* of grain). The buying power in cereals of the seigneurial income of Jeanne de Chalon in 1420 was only 15–20% of that enjoyed by her grandparents in the 1340s (Le Roy Ladurie 1987:61-64).

The Dame de Chalon at least managed to survive modestly and pass to her heirs some vestiges of her patrimony. Other less fortunate noble families disappeared as such: slaughtered in battle, succumbed to the plague, or ruined and plunged into lower classes. In 1378 the average income of a knight in the *châtellenie* of Mello (in the *bailliage* of Senlis, the Paris region) was only 45 *livres parisis*, while squires had to do with only 25 *l.* (B. Guenée, cited from Contamine 1997:89). The peaceful period of 1380–1410 saw some restoration of noble incomes. But with the resumption of civil war and English invasions, the revenues plunged to new lows. For example, the income of the castellanies of Laignes and Griselles in the County of Tonnerre fell from 500 to 238 *l.* between 1405 and 1425. In 1343, before the troubles, the *prévôté* of Tonnerre reported the annual revenue of 520 *livres*. The revenue then fell to 182 *l.* in 1405 and 114 *l.* in 1425 (Contamine 1997:110). The data from Normandy indicate income declines near 50% between 1400 and 1450 (Contamine 1997:111-2). An example of a more extreme collapse is provided by the seigneurie of Sully (in the Orléans region), whose revenue fell from 700 *l.p.* in 1383-4 to 143 in 1455 (Contamine 1997:113).

The severe depression of landed incomes did not affect all noble families uniformly. Rather, it imposed a selection regime in which the weak and unlucky declined and eventually succumbed, while the strong and lucky held their own, or even got ahead. The impoverished nobles who attempted to maintain the levels of consumption necessary for preserving their status rapidly ran up debt, and eventually had to sell their lands. Thus, the majority of the *plèbe nobiliare*, those families that already were on the brink by 1350, were plunged beyond the point of no return. On the other hand, many magnate families during this period were buying up lands. It was easier for a *grand seigneur* to reduce consumption without crossing the line between nobility and commonality. Furthermore, magnates were better positioned to profit from the royal patronage (even though the volume of the flow of royal favors was greatly diminished during this era), and land was cheap. Another group that profited from the economic situation were certain

bourgeois, particularly those who provided administrators and legists for the state (essentially, these office-holders were the forerunners of the robe nobility that merged into the ruling class during the subsequent centuries). On the other hand, merchants apparently did not do particularly well (unless they first had become office-holders); at least this appears to be true for the Paris region (Fourquin 1964).

What were the consequences of these economic difficulties for noble numbers and replacement rates? There are a few regional studies that yield quantitative data documenting elite dynamics of the medieval France. Lorcin’s (1981) study of wills registered in the officialty of Lyon, yielded the following information on the number of living children at the time of death of a testator (Table 4.5).

**Table 4.5** The number of living children per testator having children (Lorcin 1981, cited from Contamine 1997:59).

Period	Nobles	Non-nobles	Differential
1300-1340	4.3	3.2	+1.1
1340-1380	3.4	2.6	+1.2
1380-1420	3.8	2.8	+1.0
1420-1460	4.2	3.5	+0.7
1460-1500	3.7	5.3	-1.6

This number incidentally gives us information about the relative dynamics of the replacement rate (in order to calculate the absolute replacement rate, we would have to multiply it by the proportion of males among the children and also take into account the proportion of families that did not have any children; however, for our purposes, relative changes is what we need). These data indicate that family sizes of both noble and non-noble families declined during the fourteenth century, and then increased during the fifteenth. The difference between the noble and non-noble families is instructive. During the fourteenth century, noble households tended to have substantially more children than the non-noble families, but with time this differential declined, and even inverted sign by the end of the fifteenth century. However, we should note that the “noble advantage” of greater family size was substantially reduced, if not nullified by the tendency of a high proportion of noble daughters to become nuns. Two-thirds of noblewomen in Lyon went to the monastery during the first half of the fourteenth century, and only 14% during the last half of the fifteenth century (Table 4.6). These proportions should be compared to just 2.4% of non-nobles choosing the religious career during the whole period. It is clear that noble families shipped to monasteries the “surplus” of their female progeny, since the proportion of daughters becoming nuns increased from 15 for small families (three children or less) to 45% for largest families (seven children or more).

**Table 4.6** The proportion (%) of children in noble families becoming priests or monks/nuns (Lorcin 1981, cited from Contamine 1997:246).

Period	Sons	Daughters
1300-1350	45	64
1350-1400	22	40
1400-1450	22	29
1450-1500	16	14

Note also that a very substantial proportion of males also chose a religious career.

The final interesting datum yielded by the study of Lorcin is the disparity between sex ratios of noble and non-noble families. In commoner families the ratio of males to females was 113:100, just as we would expect in a pre-industrial society where a substantial proportion of women died in childbirth. The sex ratio of noble families was an astonishing 85 males per 100 females. In other words, there were one quarter fewer noble males than expected. Partly this pattern must be due to a high proportion of women going to nunneries, and thus being spared the dangers of childbirth, but most of the difference is probably due to the “hecatombs” of the English and civil wars. Taken together—falling family sizes, high proportion of noblemen and noblewomen choosing the religious career, and a huge male deficit—these data suggest that the nobility of the Lyon region was under a substantial degree of pressure to the point where we can really say that this period was characterized by a crisis of nobility. The pressure gradually relaxed during the fifteenth century; however, even by 1500 the replacement rates of noble households continued to lag after that of commoners.

Some less detailed data from other regions appear to support the picture painted by the study of Lorcin. For example, the Breton family of Tournemine de la Hunaudaye produced an average of 4 children per marriage in the thirteenth, 2.75 in the fourteenth, and 3.25 in the fifteenth centuries (Contamine 1997:60). Urban elites were affected in a similar way, as the data from Périgueux indicates: high family sizes in the second half of the thirteenth century, decline to the minimum of the fifteenth century and then increase to 1500 (Table 4.1).

Economic difficulties, elevated mortality due to conflicts, and low replacement rates had a measurable effect on the rate of noble family and lineage extinction. Although the county of Forez (in south-central France) escaped the worst excesses of the Hundred Years War, the rate of extinction of noble lineages in this region increased almost two-fold from 31% during the thirteenth century to 54% and 55% in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, respectively (Perroy 1962:31). In the region of Bar-sur-Seine the family extinction rate during the thirteenth century was 58% (35 out of 60), but this increased to 75% (15 out of 20) during the following century (Contamine 1997:63). Note that one cannot directly compare the Forez and Bar-sur-Seine data, because the former relates to lineages (potentially comprised of several families), while the latter refers to individual families (thus, the rate of lineage extinction is expected to be less than that of families). In the Vésudie valley a third of all families faded away during the first quarter of the fifteenth century, implying an extinction rate of 80% per century. This was much higher than during the fourteenth century, when extinction rate was a rather high 67% (Contamine 1997:63).

#### *The dynamics of sociopolitical instability: 1365–1450*

As we discussed in the previous section, France experienced a full-blown state collapse during 1356–60, followed by a period of temporary consolidation during which most of the territory was reconquered from the English. The concensus, however, proved to be temporary and began unraveling after the death of Charles V. The next reign, that of Charles VI (1380–1422) was to see the second state collapse of the Hundred Years War. At the beginning of his reign, Charles VI was a minor, and the government was dominated by his uncles, the dukes of Anjou, Berri, and Burgundy (also known as the “Princes of the Lilies”). The state policy was disrupted by factionalism. Some taxes were permanently annulled, like the *fouage*, others were first annulled then reimposed (*aides*, *gabelles*), although brief rebellions against them had to be crushed. The erosion of royal taxing power was accompanied by an erosion of royal revenues, brought about by the diversion of large sums by the Princes of the Lilies, who pocketed virtually all taxes collected by the crown in their appanages (Henneman 1999).

The social and political situation began to develop in a manner very similar to that of the 1340s and 50s. Again, there were great crowds of impoverished nobles looking for military

employment. Thus, in the fall of 1386 between 10,000 and 20,000 nobles flocked to L'Écluse, where preparations to invade England were under way (the invasion never took place) (Contamine 1997:205).

Elite factionalism gradually developed into an extremely bitter and sanguinary civil war. One of the main factions coalesced around Philip the Bold, the Duke of Burgundy, who was the uncle of Charles VI. The opposing faction was led by the "Marmousets", a group that included the civil officials and military leaders close to the previous king, Charles V (Henneman 1996). The political program of the Duke of Burgundy was to use the resources of France to build an independent principality in Burgundy and the Low Countries. The Marmousets' objectives were relieving the burden on the taxpayers while building up the resources in the royal coffers (Henneman 1996:141-2). The Marmousets were also supportive of the Italian project of another royal uncle, Louis of Anjou, and his son Louis II, who had dynastic ambitions on the throne of Naples. Another important leader was the king's brother Louis of Orléans who gradually took over the Marmouset faction. As noble factionism grew, the central government was greatly weakened by the intermittent insanity of the king. To cut the long and confusing story short, eventually the French political scene became dominated by two great factions: one led by the dukes of Burgundy (the "Burgundians"), and the other first by Louis of Orléans (the "Orleanists") and then by the Count of Armagnac, father-in-law of Charles, the new Duke of Orléans after his father was assassinated in 1407 (the "Armagnacs").

After the assassination of Louis of Orléans, which was carried out under orders of John the Fearless of Burgundy (the son of Philip the Bold) France divided into two armed camps (Seward 1978:148). The Burgundians drew their strength from John's territories in the northeast and north, and from the Parisian bourgeoisie and academics. The Armagnacs were the party of the greater royal officials and high nobility, with much following in the south and southeast. During 1407-14 the two factions battled for the capital and both appealed for the English aid (at different times). By 1414 the Armagnacs won control of most of France, including the capital (Seward 1978:155), but John of Burgundy allied himself with the new English king, Henry V. In 1415 Henry V invaded France and won the great victory at Agincourt. The loss of 10,000 French knights was a terrible blow to the Armagnacs, because it reversed the balance of forces decisively in favor of the Burgundians. As the new Constable, the Count of Armagnac was besieged in Paris by the Burgundian forces, the English conquest of Normandy proceeded completely unopposed (Seward 1978:172). In 1418 the Burgundian supporters rose in Paris and killed thousands of Armagnacs. This was the occasion of the quote from the Bourgeois of Paris about the Armagnacs lying in the streets like slaughtered pigs (see previous section). The dauphin (future Charles VII) and the Armagnacs abandoned Paris to the Burgundians.

In 1419 Rouen surrendered to Henry V and the English conquest of Normandy was complete. The English advance horrified John the Fearless and he attempted to negotiate with the dauphin and the Armagnacs. But the Armagnacs revenged themselves on John of Burgundy by assassinating him at a conference with the dauphin at the bridge of Montereau. The new duke, Philip the Good, vowed vengeance and returned to the English alliance. Working with the Burgundians, the English overran northern France and installed themselves in Paris. By the treaty of Troyes, Henry V married the daughter of Charles VI and was named the heir to the French throne, while the dauphin (future Charles VII) was disinherited. In 1422 both Charles VI and Henry V died. The infant Henry VI of England was recognized as king of France in the north, supported by the Burgundians, and crowned in Paris (1436).

The position of the Dauphinists (formerly Armagnacs) continued to deteriorate during the 1420s. In 1424 they lost the battle of Verneuil, and in 1428 the English began the siege of

Orléans. Meanwhile, the Lancastrian France has become a wilderness laid waste by its garrisons, by Dauphinist raiders, by deserters, and by *écorcheurs*. The *écorcheurs* or flayers were the heirs of *routiers* of the previous century. They took their name from the custom of stripping their victims to the skin, or even flaying them alive (Seward 1978:194). As we discussed in the previous section, during this period the populations of Ile de France, Normandy, and doubtlessly many other regions declined to the level of 25–30% of their 1300 peak.

*The disintegrative trend reverses itself*

The years 1428–29 were the nadir of the second French state collapse of the Hundred Years War. The turning point came when Jeanne d’Arc lifted the siege of Orléans followed by the coronation of Charles VII in Reims (1429). The conclusion of a treaty with the duke of Burgundy (1435) brought the civil war to an end, and the French reconquest slowly gathered steam. Paris was recovered in 1436, Gascony (except Bordeaux and Bayonne) was reconquered in 1442, Normandy in 1450, and finally Bordeaux fell on 1453.

The decade after 1435 saw a permanent establishment of state finance in France (Henneman 1999:117). Indirect taxes (*aides*) were restored in 1435 (Languedoil) and 1437 (Languedoc). In 1439 the Estates of Languedoil granted direct taxes (*taille*) for one year to support regularly paid troops. The restoration of fiscal and political order was briefly interrupted by a revolt of princes in 1440 (the Praguerie), but the crown continued collecting the *taille* without consulting the Estates. In 1445 Charles VII established a regular cavalry (*compagnies d’ordonnance*). By 1460 the restored fiscal system was producing 1.8 million *livres tournois* a year, most of it coming from direct taxes, and only 50,000 livres from the royal domain (Henneman 1999:118). Thus, the basic fiscal system first introduced in the 1360s was finally implemented in the 1440s. Solid fiscal foundation was a factor of critical importance in ending the Hundred Years War, but it itself was a consequence of the new-found feeling of national unity among the elites.

What was the basis of this new unity, and how did it replace the the divisive atmosphere of the early fifteenth century? We suggest that two factors were at work. The first one was the shift in the social psychology: everybody was tired of incessant internal and external warfare. Around 1400 the yearning for peace increasingly became to be voiced. “*Veniat Pax*” (let there be peace) was the cry of an early fourteenth century sermon by Jean Gerson (Tuchman 1978:537). Furthermore, although the conflict started as a civil war, it gradually transmuted into a national war of liberation against the English (Henneman 1996).

The second factor was that the nobility was numerically decimated, removing the social pressure for elite factionalization that had fueled the civil conflict. The hecatombs inflicted on the French nobility during the second stage of the Hundred years War were comparable in magnitude, if not greater (proportionately speaking) than those of the first. The worst was undoubtedly Agincourt (1415) where 10,000 French nobles died (Contamine 1984). Among the fallen were more than ten dukes and counts, 120 barons, and 1,500 knights (Seward 1978:169). Earlier, many thousands of French nobles participated in the crusade to free Hungary from the Turks, where they perished at the battle of Nicopolis (1396). The Dauphinist casualties at the battle of Verneuil (1424) were about 7,000, although many of them were the Scots. But casualties in the large battles were probably only a minor part of the total drain on the French nobility. Untold thousands lost their lives in the civil wars and small-scale military operations (sieges, skirmishes) against the English. We have already referred to the massacre of Armagnacs in Paris (1418). King Henry V of England (as well as other military leaders of the time) was notorious for the atrocities that he routinely committed. Best known is the killing of the prisoners that he ordered on the field of Agincourt, but there were many others. For example, when he took the

Armagnac castle of Rougemont (1421) he hanged the entire garrison. Those defenders, who escaped and were caught later, were drowned (Seward 1978:186). When dispossessed nobles in Normandy persisted in fighting a guerilla warfare, the English called them “brigands” and hanged them when they caught them (Seward 1978:178). Other atrocities include the butchering of 2,000 men, women, and children in Caen (1417) and Henry’s refusal to allow 12,000 poor folk driven out of the besieged and starving Rouen to leave. He forced them to stay in the ditch where most of them died of inclement climate (it was winter) and starvation (Seward 1978). The last two examples refer to commoners, but they illustrate how callous the fighting men were about taking life, and the nobility were often treated in the same way as commoners (except when there was a hope of ransom). The result of this casual attitude to taking life was a population decline in general, but more specifically the decimation of nobility. Because the proportion of nobility among the general population declined between 1300 and 1450 (Section 4.1), the numbers of nobility decreased even more than the general population.

The crisis phases of secular cycles are typically characterized by increased social mobility, both upward and downward. The main factor driving the turn-over of the social hierarchy is the growing economic inequality during the stagflation and crisis phases. As the conditions of overpopulation develop and large numbers of peasants are impoverished, some favored few, nevertheless, become richer. These families desire to translate their improved economic conditions into social status. Similarly, under the conditions of elite overproduction the majority of aristocrats lose ground and are faced with the prospect of downward mobility, but a few accumulate property and wish to move up into the magnate stratum. The pent-up demand for upward social mobility from elite and magnate aspirants during the crisis phase provides a cheap alternative for cash-strapped rulers to recompense their supporters. As a result, this is when we typically see evidence of upward social mobility. In medieval France, we can quantify this process by observing how the numbers of letters of ennoblements fluctuated between different reigns (Contamine 1997:67-68). According to this indicator, the movement of commoners into the ranks of the nobility greatly accelerated in early fourteenth century and peaked during its second half (Figure 4.6, solid curve). Social mobility into the magnate ranks, as indexed by the numbers of new peers created per quarter century (Figure 4.6, broken curve with diamonds) also increased during this period, reaching the first peak during the third quarter of the fourteenth century and an even higher peak during the first quarter of the fifteenth century. During the rest of the fifteenth century, however, both indicators declined to much lower levels, suggesting a greatly decreased upward social mobility. Because downward mobility continued unabated during this period, the net result was a substantial decline of elite numbers.

**Figure 4.6** Indices of upwards social mobility in France, 1250–1500: royal letters of ennoblements and new peerages created by the French kings.

In the previous sections we have cited numerous data suggesting that the rate of extinction of noble families went up in the fourteenth and fifteenth century, compared to that of the preceding period. When upward mobility was also choked off (Figure 4.6), it stopped compensating for the losses of old families, and the old nobility shrank in numbers. However, a conclusion that the old elites were replaced, wholesale, by new, recently ennobled elites would be too hasty. Many of the newly ennobled lineages did not manage to establish themselves and went extinct. Of the old lineages, some lost ground and disappeared, but others persisted and even managed to increase their lands. This process can be illustrated with the situation in the Sologne (within the county of Blois). The Sologne contained nine fiefs possessing the right of high justice. Five of these fiefs remained within the hands of the old nobility without interruption. Of the remaining four, one was seized by the Duke of Orléans for its debts, one was sold to another old noble family, and the last two were acquired by new nobility—the d’Étamps family, originating

in the late fourteenth century. Thus, the total number of old noble families shrank appreciably, but there was only one *parvenu* family to plug the resulting gap (Guérin 1960). A study by Maurice Berthe (1976) indicated, similarly, that in the county of Bigorre there were forty fiefs in 1313 but only eighteen in 1429. Twelve fiefs disappeared together with villages on which their existence depended, while ten had been acquired by six of the surviving eighteen seigneurs (cited from Major 1981:23). Another example comes from the study of Edouard Baratier (1971). In 1377 five villages in Provence were inhabited by thirty-eight nobles, of whom seventeen were not living as nobles (probably because they could not afford it). By 1427–31 the number of nobles declined to twenty-two. In 1458 there were only six nobles left, but after that the number increased and there were twelve nobles in 1474 (Major 1993:70). As the number of elite families was pruned, those who remained were strengthened.

#### **4.6 Conclusion: “A near perfect multi-secular cycle”**

The quote in the heading of this section is, of course, from Braudel (1988:131). Our starting date for the cycle differs from that of Braudel (there are reasons to believe that the period 950–1150 was a separate secular cycle in Western Europe, a claim that we intend to document in a future publication). But if we focus on France between 1150 and 1450, then indeed, the data reviewed in this chapter paint a nearly perfect example of a secular cycle.

All the major variables behaved during this period as postulated by the demographic-structural theory. Population, prices, and other economic variables for which we have data went through a high-amplitude oscillation. For example, the difference between population minima and the maximum was two-fold (and in some regions, such as Normandy and Ile de France, the difference was three- and even four-fold).

Social structure also oscillated in a manner predicted by the theory. We should note that the estimates of Contamine (1997) that nobility was 1.8 percent of the total population around 1300 (and then decreasing to 1.5 percent in the fifteenth century) is overly conservative. The average of the eleven regions for which he found data on noble/commoner proportions is 2.4 percent. Furthermore, after the famines and epidemics of the first half of the fourteenth century, the noble/commoner ratio should have increased even further, driven by variation in mortality rate among classes. In other words, the decline in the elite/commoner ration between 1350 and 1450 was probably more extreme than what is suggested by Contamine’s estimates. The extreme nature of elite overproduction in the fourteenth century France is graphically illustrated by tens of thousands of “surplus nobility” seeking military employment but finding death or capture on the fields of Crécy, Poitiers, and others.

The strength of the state followed a grand cycle: from geopolitical successes during the twelfth and thirteenth centuries to persistent fiscal troubles and territorial losses of the Hundred Years War, which were reversed only after 1450. The fall and then rise of political instability is graphically illustrated by the time-distribution of coin hoards.

The main reasons for an excellent match between theoretical predictions and empirical patterns are probably two. First, the slow advance of technology (and especially agricultural technology) during the period. Thus, it appears that the carrying capacity of France hardly changed between 1150 and 1450 (in contrast to the following early modern period). Second, during most of the period France was the hegemonic power in Western Europe (Tuchman 1978, Sumption 1991). Thus, its dynamics were primarily determined by endogenous, rather than exogenous forces. The only major exception to this is the arrival of the Black Death from the steppes of Eurasia in 1348. But the plague epidemic arrived already after the population started

declining, and thus it accelerated and deepened the ongoing decline, rather than shifting the endogenously driven trajectory to an entirely different attractor.

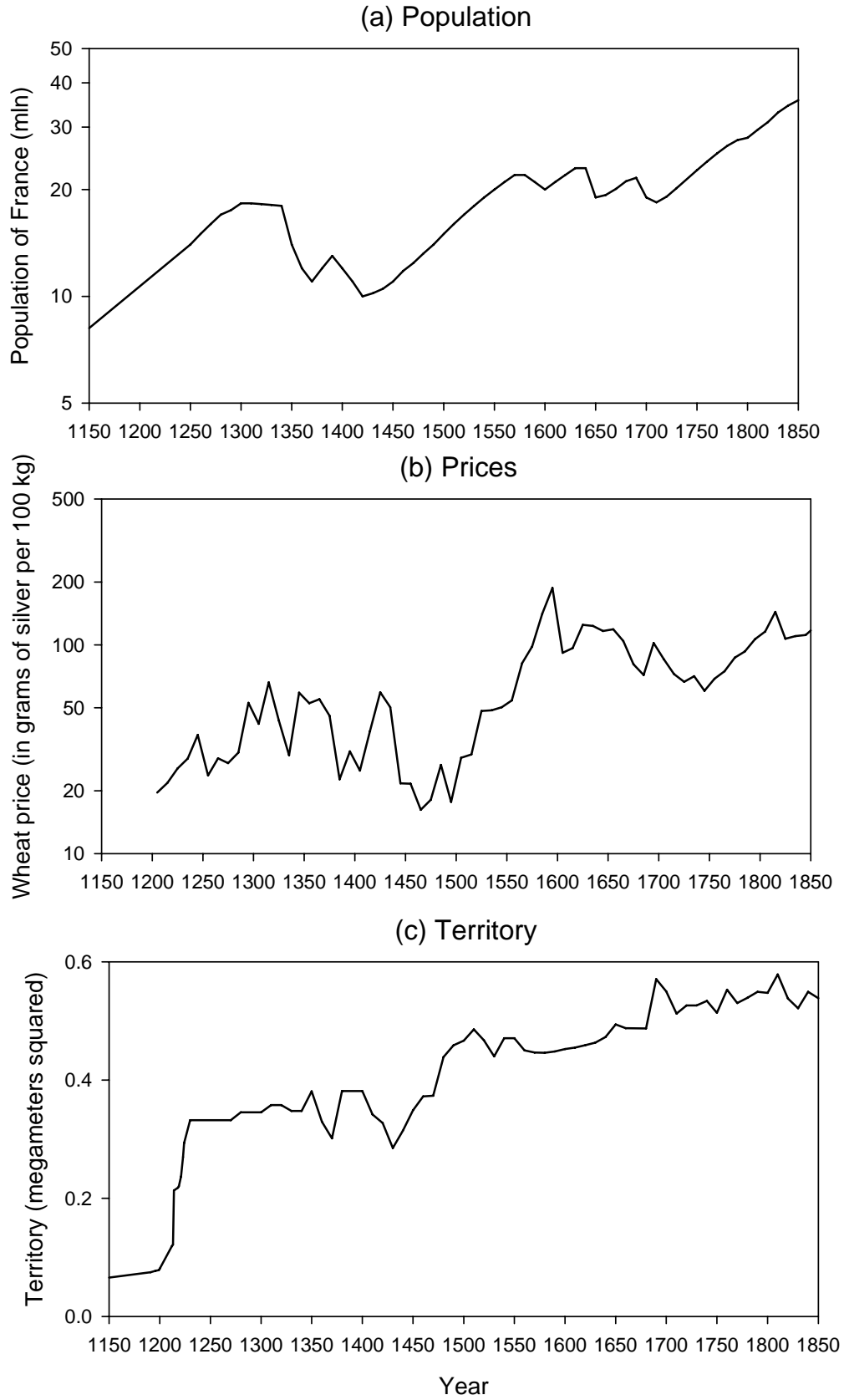


Figure 1. Demographic, economic, and territorial dynamics of France, 1150-1850

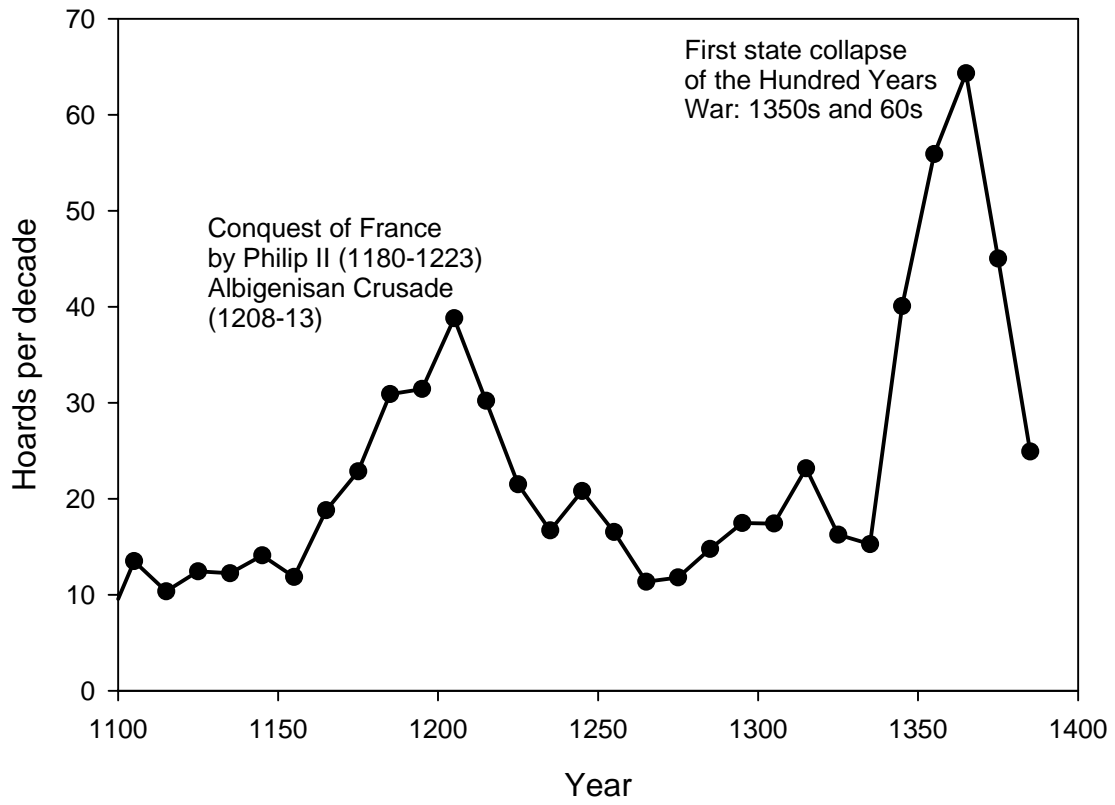


Fig. 4.2: Hoards in France: 1100-1385

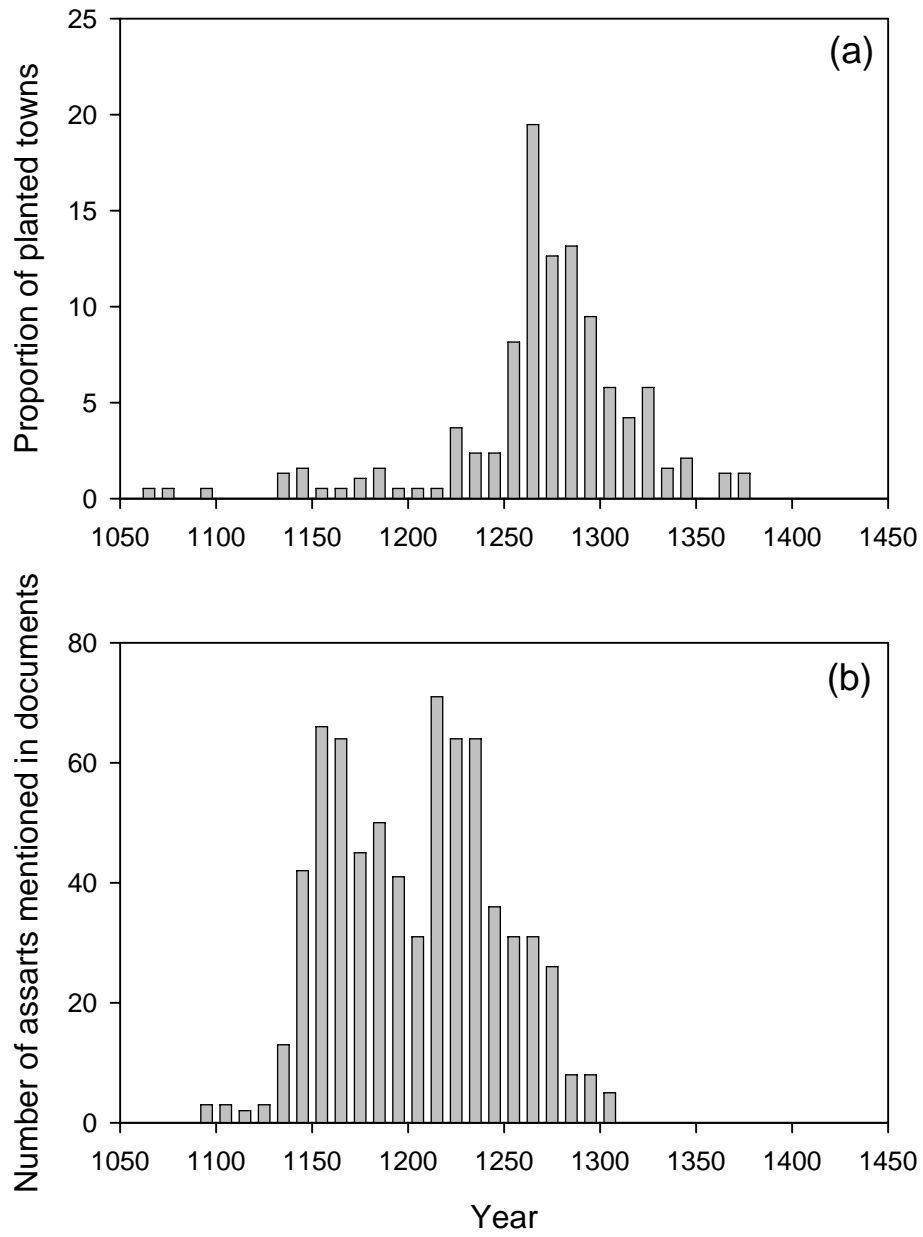


Figure 4.3 Distinct dynamics of urban and rural development

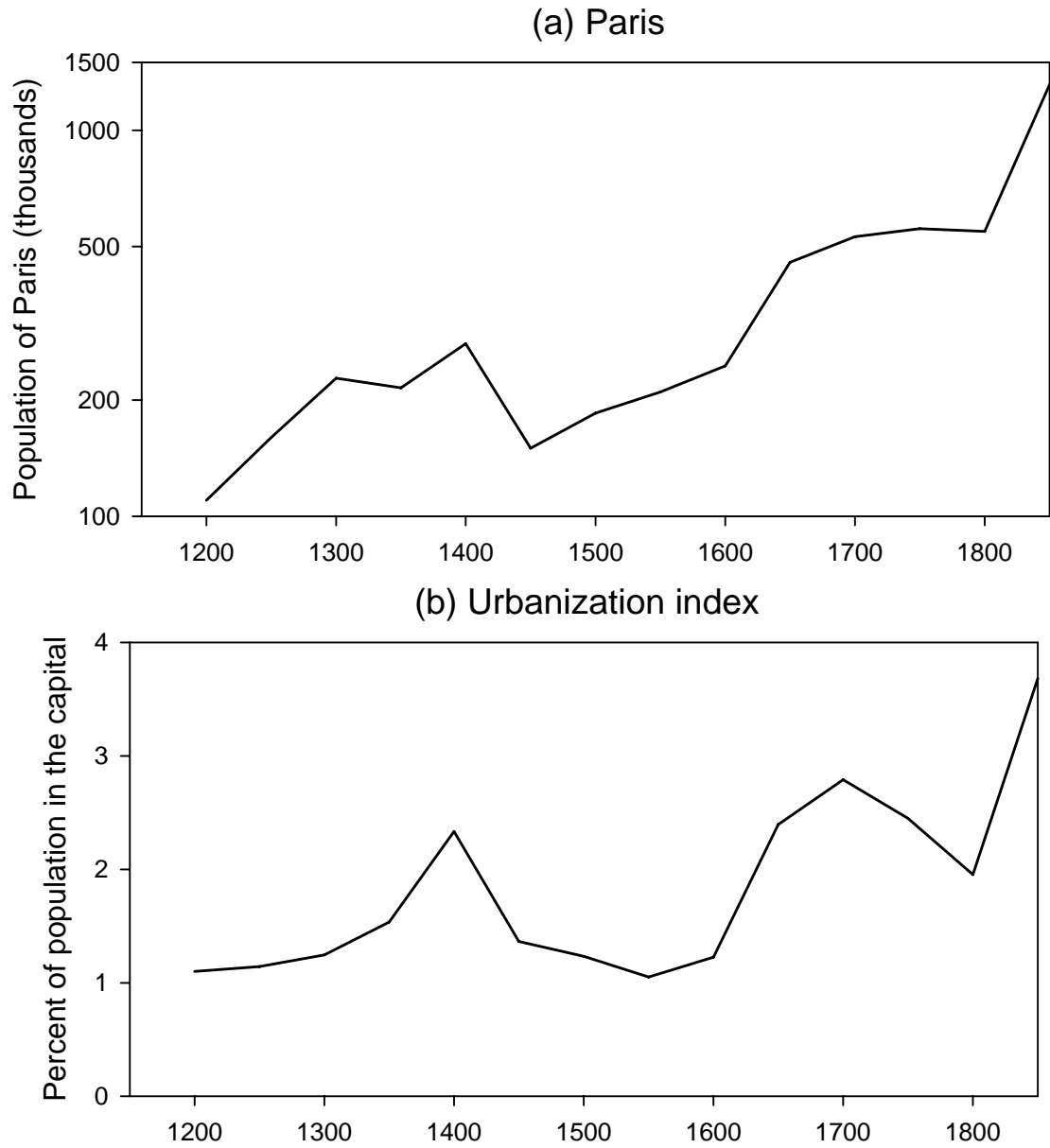


Figure 4.4

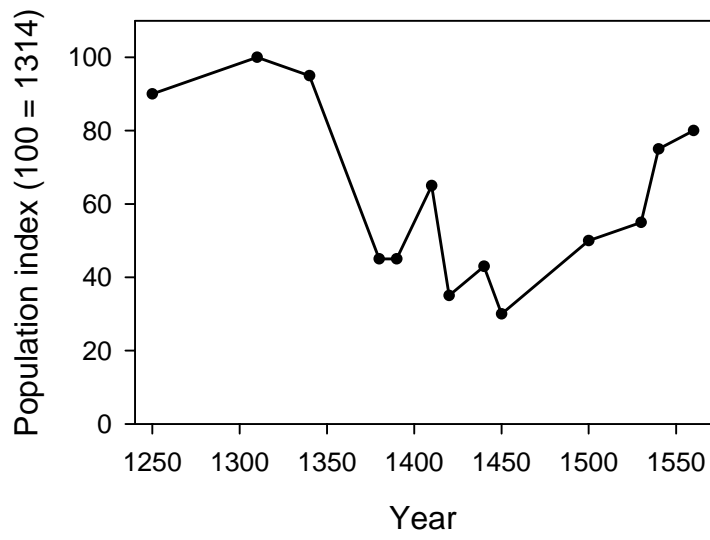


Figure 4.5

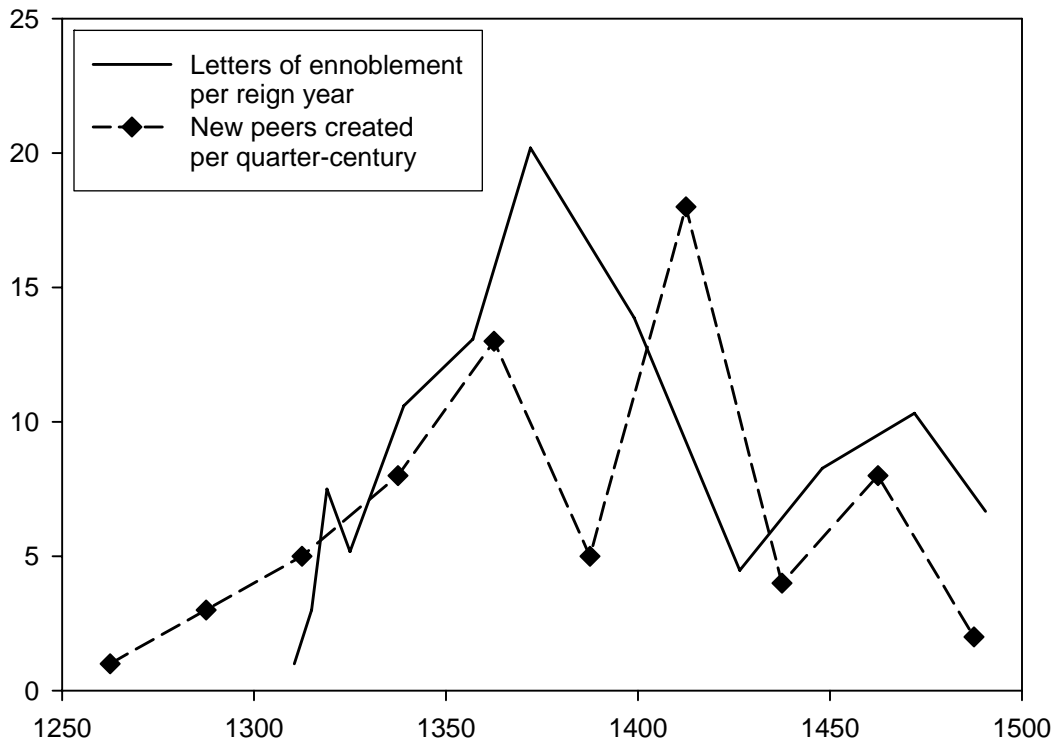


Figure 4.6 Upward social mobility

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