DEMOGRAPHIC research is rapidly rewriting the history of the preindustrial European population. Numerous recent local studies contradict the common stereotype of geographical stability; European communities before 1800 housed highly mobile populations. Much of this new research concerns England and France, but significant migratory movement has also been found in early modern Sweden, Scotland, and Japan. This paper surveys the evidence on mobility in Germany since the later Middle Ages, and places it within a broad socioeconomic context.

Such summaries already exist for other western European countries. The treatments of national data, by Clark on England, and Poussou and Hufton on France, constitute an important first step in creating a comparative understanding of preindustrial migration. These studies, however, provide few statistics which accurately measure migration rate,

I thank R. Burr Litchfield and Elizabeth H. Tobin for helpful criticism of earlier versions.


and analysis is limited to discussion of different types of movement. The evidence for migration before industrialization is still so scattered and unsystematic that generalizations about its frequency, form, distance, and particularly their relation to social structure, are tentative at best. Poussou notes that the historical study of migration has barely begun.

Because of the lack of synthesis, the myth of an immobile preindustrial society, propounded by modernization theorists, continues to dominate historical consciousness. General works on economic history, family life, and social structure still describe preindustrial society as rooted. The absence of discussion of migration in many general studies of social,

3. Peter Clark, “Migration in England during the Late Seventeenth and Early Eighteenth Centuries,” Past and Present, no. 83 (1979), 57–90; Jean-Pierre Poussou, “Les mouvements migratoires en France et à partir de la France de la fin du XVe siècle au début du XIXe siècle: approches pour une synthèse,” Annales de Démographie Historique (1970), 11–78; Olwen H. Hufton, The Poor of Eighteenth-Century France 1750–1789 (Oxford, 1974), 70–92. These studies categorize migration to cities as permanent, while rural movements could be temporary and circulatory. Poussou notes seasonal rural construction workers but does not discuss them in his section on urban immigration; he discusses temporary migration in purely rural terms. Michael Flinn’s The European Demographic System, 1500–1820 (Baltimore, 1981), 66–75, also contains much evidence on mobility, but only as a series of types (colonization, military movements, journeymen’s tramping) and not integrated into his “system.”


economic, and demographic history tends to reinforce a static view. Those who do mention mobility frequently emphasize the short distances travelled by the great majority of migrants. This emphasis on local migration tends to preserve the view that the preindustrial world was stable. Even if mobility was common, it had little social impact.

This belief in a stable "traditional" society continues to influence even its critics. Charles Tilly uses the evidence of mobility before industrialization to attack modernization theory as a model of social change. He argues that these scholars have misplaced the timing of change by focusing on the nineteenth century. Tilly discounts the existence of a stable, immobile world which nineteenth-century economic growth transformed: European society was already mobile by 1800. But he still accepts the distinction between settled peasants and mobile proletarians by claiming that mobility involved the traders, artisans, and landless laborers who became a majority of the population after about 1700. He


merely displaces the watershed between stable and mobile societies backwards in time. "True peasants" were "relatively immobile."\textsuperscript{11}

The historical demography of Germany lags behind even this modest revisionism. Premodern Germans are still described as immobile in most general demographic studies.\textsuperscript{12} Even city populations are considered exceptionally stable. Mack Walker claims that the artisans who controlled the governments of many early modern German towns prevented migration. He argues that the special nature of urban citizenship, or \textit{Bürgerrecht}, effectively prevented migration for this class.\textsuperscript{13} Only with industrialization did German society become mobile.\textsuperscript{14}

One recent dissent from this orthodoxy came from the late Allan Sharlin. His last project, an analysis with John Sammis of the remarkably complete 1701 census in Würzburg, provides detailed support for the importance of temporary migration in urban populations. The lack of comparative material on other German communities, however, left him unable to generalize about these findings.\textsuperscript{15}

Synthesis of local studies is needed to break the grip of outmoded theory. The evidence for German mobility is both voluminous and detailed; it challenges the accepted picture of premodern communities. I hope to provide a framework here for the more systematic local studies needed to explain what made so many Germans move.

\textsuperscript{11} Tilly, "Migration in Modern European History," 63. Flinn also makes this distinction in \textit{European Demographic System}, 23.


\textsuperscript{14} A stress on industrialization as the cause of migration characterizes the work of Germany’s leading migration researcher, Wolfgang Kollmann; his major articles are collected in \textit{Bevölkerung in der Industriellen Revolution} (Göttingen, 1974).

\textsuperscript{15} Sharlin and Sammis, "Migration and Urban Population in Pre-Industrial Europe: Würzburg in the Late Seventeenth and Early Eighteenth Centuries," paper at annual meeting of Social Science History Association (Bloomington, Ind., 1982).
Cities always produce the richest historical records on their populations, and the best documented class of Germans before industrialization are the urban citizens, or *Bürger*. Most cities maintained records, called *Bürgerbücher*, of all newly enrolled citizens, which often indicated place of origin. Occasionally, a town government compiled a list of all current citizens for tax purposes; some of these lists have survived. Such sources afford an enlightening view of the urban propertied class and provide an introduction to the sociology of premodern migration.

Data for many German communities from the twelfth through the eighteenth centuries demonstrate that the typical *Bürger* class was composed of approximately equal parts of immigrants and natives. The map shows the proportion of non-native citizens, usually exceeding 50%, in 24 communities for the years noted on the map. There is no

16. I leave aside the politically important noble and princely families, because their numbers were so small.

17. Although unwieldy, words like “immigrant” and “outmigrant” are used here for precision. Some natives were also migrants who later returned. In any society, immigrants are only a portion of total migrants. I avoid “immigrant” and “emigrant” as too closely tied to migration into or out of German territories as a whole.

reason to believe that these communities were atypical: they include the largest cities (Berlin, Frankfurt, and Cologne), as well as unimportant towns (Lambsheim, Grossalsleben, and Eberswalde). City size had no apparent effect on the percentage of migrants. There is no geographic pattern, although the coverage of Germany is incomplete, especially in the east. The artisan-dominated "hometowns" of central Germany studied by Walker housed as many migrants as other cities. While the data are concentrated in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, the scattered results for the twelfth and thirteenth centuries (Cologne and Rostock) also show migrant proportions near 50%.

These propertied urban citizens had a relatively high mobility despite considerable hindrances to free movement. The process of attaining citizenship was often time-consuming for a newcomer, involving letters from his birthplace attesting to legitimate birth. Sponsorship by respected townsmen was required, as well as a sometimes sizable fee. Those migrants who were unsuccessful in their attempts to enter this privileged group went unrecorded. The rights of citizenship were not automatically transferable between towns. Outmigration meant loss of status, unless the Bürger paid a yearly fee to maintain his privileges on return. In many cities, citizens giving up their residence paid a 10% tax on all their holdings. The sources themselves underestimate the total


Migrants among Urban Bürger in Preindustrial Germany
number of mobile citizens. Origin was not universally specified even in the most carefully kept Bürgerbücher. We must also consider the circular migration of native citizens, who put in their time on the road as journeymen, or became masters temporarily in another town, before returning home. The German urban citizen who did not spend a sizable portion of his working life away from his birthplace was surely unusual.

Citizens were a minority of the urban population: they appear to have comprised at most 10% to 15% of a town’s population. With their immediate families, this social class included 40% to 60% of urban dwellers. In the city lived other respectable craftsmen and merchants waiting to gain citizenship, or unable to afford it, variously named Beisassen, Einwohner, Einlieger, or simply nicht Bürger. They were apparently distinguished from the citizens by their status as renters of living quarters rather than owners, but this line is fuzzy. This group might include about 5%-10% of an urban population (20%-40% with families), even more in the largest cities. Various categories of dependent people filled out the bottom ranks of urban society. Household servants of both sexes were about 10%-15% of the population. Apprentices and journeymen working for the master artisans comprised another 5%-10%, occupying the first steps on the ladder leading toward respectability in a trade. These latter groups shared several important characteristics: they were young, unmarried, and lived with their employers.


22. In Freiberg, as in many places, only houseowners could be citizens: Hermann, Das Freiberger Bürgerbuch, xviii; but in 18 cities in Saxony about 40% of citizens were without houses: Karlheinz Blaschke, Bevölkerungsgeschichte von Sachsen bis zur industriellen Revolution (Weimar, 1967), 178, n. 221.

They were waiting for their own chance to found a household; as they passed into their late twenties, they contributed to the late marriage age typical of western Europe.24

These varied social classes were all more mobile than the Bürger. The available evidence is scattered, but clear in its direction. In Würzburg in 1675, 74% of the Beisassen were immigrants, compared to 57% of the Bürger. The same social category in Lingen, north of Münster, was composed of 80% migrants. In Frankfurt around 1700, two-thirds of the Beisassen were born outside, but only half of the Bürger.25 When we focus on the lower socioeconomic classes, mobility reached extraordinary proportions. Only one in every six craft apprentices in fifteenth-century Rheinfelden, in northern Switzerland, was a native. At the same time, 93% of Würzburg’s apprentices were immigrants.26 After apprenticeship, migration was obligatory for the craftsman; during his Wanderjahre the journeyman might visit a dozen towns seeking work. The bookbinder journeymen who migrated into Frankfurt have been studied in detail. Each year in the eighteenth century about 60 bookbinders stopped in the city from all over southern Germany. Half found a place with one of the 30 masters, remaining for about one year; the rest moved on after a short stay. Of all Handwerksgesellen in Frankfurt in 1762, only 15% were native.27 Each trade saw a constant flow of hopeful apprentices and practiced journeymen arrive, seeking a place in the urban economy. Their yearly numbers probably greatly exceeded the number of resident masters. The lowest social classes were the most likely to be immigrants. In early modern Weissenburg and Frankfurt, the day laborers and carters were more heavily migrant than other social

---

26. Hektor Ammann, Wirtschaft und Lebensraum der mittelalterlichen Kleinstadt: I. Rheinfelden (Thayngen, Switzerland, 1948), 51-54; Hilde Heumüller, Die Stadt Würzburg und ihr Lebensraum (Würzburg, 1939), 61. This was surely a common pattern in western Europe. In sixteenth-century London and Bristol, as in eighteenth-century Lyon, apprentices were overwhelmingly migrants: Patten, English Towns 1500–1700, 133, 135, 240; Maurice Garden, Lyon et les Lyonnais au XVIIIe Siècle (Paris, 1970), 56, 63.
groups. Servants were probably the most migratory occupational group throughout Europe.

Two excellent local studies show the prevalence of migration in the entire urban population. Otto Konrad Roller pioneered the technique of family reconstitution from parish registers in his 1907 work on Durlach in Baden (see map), with a population of about 3,000. Handicrafts dominated the economy, typical for a town of that size. Roller traced all documented residents of the city in the eighteenth century; their mobility confirms the patterns discussed above. Half of the master artisans who lived there had migrated to Durlach. Migrants accounted for 62% of apprentices and 86% of servants.

A much fuller picture is presented by the Würzburg census. In 1701, 65% of the resident adult (20 years or older) population had been born elsewhere, 74% of males and 57% of females. Migrants constituted 69% of male household heads, but 89% of male non-kin household members. The heads included citizens and other property owners, while servants, apprentices, and journeymen, the most migratory groups, would have been among the non-kin. Inmigration of young adult males was largely temporary: migrants seemed to marry or leave town by their late twenties. Age breakdowns of the population also indicate extensive outmigration of native males between 15 and 24 years old. Because this census provides nearly complete coverage of an early modern German urban population, these figures are significant indications of the extent of mobility before industrialization. The volume and age patterns of migration both into and out of Würzburg in the late seventeenth century strikingly resemble those of the late nineteenth century.

Although many studies document only migration into cities, the
Würzburg census points to mobility as a continual turnover, the result of constant arrivals and departures. The rare sources which follow newcomers demonstrate how quickly most of them left. Lists of occupants of houses in a section of seventeenth-century Hannover reveal that within 14 years, 51% of these dwellings sheltered entirely new families. The next 11 years showed a 44% turnover.\(^{32}\) Moves within the city are included here: residential transience included local and regional components. In a nearby rural region, also in central Germany, renters of land were in constant motion. Village registers showed that 38% had left after 5 years, while after 10 years, only 18% of the original tenants remained.\(^{33}\) The founding of a new city could draw on a large pool of prospective migrants. Christian of Denmark proclaimed the city of Glückstadt in 1616 in northern Germany. During the next four decades, 2,300 household heads arrived, but the city grew to only 750 residents: 18% left within one year of arrival, 32% within two years, and nearly half within six. The turnover of migrants from outside Germany was even higher.\(^{34}\)

The scarcity of sources capable of showing turnover increases the importance of the few which trace migration in both directions. Roller’s family reconstitution study stressed the constant flux in Durlach’s population. Of those born in Durlach during the eighteenth century, only 64% died there. When we allow for high infant and child mortality, the proportion of Durlach natives who reached adulthood and died in Durlach drops below half. Migration is still underestimated here since many of these people had moved away and later returned; this was probably true of virtually all those natives who became master artisans. Migrants to Durlach, even family groups, usually moved through rather than into the town: 70% of all new households later left. Included in this figure are 110 families of master craftsmen, about a sixth of all immigrant masters.\(^{35}\) Their temporary sojourns would not have appeared in a Bürgerbuch. Permanency of residence was an exception in Durlach.

Similar detail is available from another study of a small town, Friedrich Blendinger’s reconstruction of seventeenth-century Weissenburg.


\(^{34}\) Gerhard Köhn, Die Bevölkerung der Residenz, Festung und Exulantenstadt Glückstadt von der Gründung 1616 bis zum Endausbau 1652 (Neumünster, 1974), 115.

\(^{35}\) Roller, Einwohnerschaft der Stadt Durlach im 18. Jahrhundert, pp. 46–47, (23)–(28), (54)–(55), (62)–(63).
in northern Bavaria. The native-born left in about the same proportion as in Durlach, approximately a third of the total. This constant outmigration meant that few families could ever be considered "old-timers": in 1720 about 20 families in a population of 1,000 were still represented from 1550. Half of these families held office often in the town government, indicating the correspondence between geographical stability and political power. Of the newcomers between 1580 and 1720, less than 30% stayed permanently. While these transients were represented in all occupations, they were concentrated in the most menial jobs such as day laborers or carters.36

Were there others in the city, too, who do not appear in the usual sources? I am not referring to visitors or travellers, but to regular, though temporary, residents. In normal times, there were always unskilled jobs for temporary workers. Construction or reconstruction after military devastation, street cleaning, and transport were possible employments for day laborers seeking an alternative to begging. Local fairs or markets could be a boon to the underemployed. Some German scholars of premodern cities mention a "fluctuating population" of unknown size. We cannot know much about these people because they apparently escaped even the most detailed urban documentation.37 This floating population was probably entirely migratory, making a living through mobility.

Onto the usual blend of temporary and permanent migration, which was an integral part of preindustrial German life, we must add extraordinary migratory movements in response to emergency. The recurring demographic crises which shattered premodern communities usually


resulted in floods of migrants. When a city was devastated by plague or war, reconstruction involved the replacement of the urban population through migration. After the prosperous cities of Durlach and Speyer were devastated by French troops in 1689, leaving only a handful of houses standing, the number of immigrant Bürger was unusually high for the next 20 years.\(^{38}\) City walls might offer protection against marauding armies or the possibility of food reserves. During the worst years of war and disease in the early seventeenth century, 2,500 refugees were counted in Kassel, alongside a normal population of 5,700.\(^{39}\) Some of these newcomers might later fill the gaps left in the local society, while the rest departed. Less spectacular were the minor events which seriously affected local economies. When the Markgraf of Baden-Durlach moved his residence from Durlach to Karlsruhe in 1715, a tide of artisans and merchants followed the court.\(^{40}\) The construction of a palace, a treaty altering the trading privileges of a city, or a change in political or religious allegiance could create new streams of migration or deflect old ones.

The above evidence suggests extensive mobility. Annual migration rates provide the most accurate comparison of the volume of migration with other times and places, but their calculation requires knowledge of the size of a population and the number of migrants, an unusual combination in premodern sources. Table 1 displays those migration rates which can be reliably estimated, both for Bürger and for total populations. These rates, although based upon different types of sources (Bürgerbücher, tax lists, and parish registers), lie within a relatively narrow range. They are similar to more speculative estimates made by Theodor Penners, who carefully compiled evidence for migration to Baltic cities in the fourteenth century: he believed that the rate of inmigration of citizens to Lübeck, Danzig, Wismar, and Stralsund was at least .03 yearly.\(^{41}\) The constant turnover of urban populations is indicated by the


\(^{39}\) Lasch, Bevölkerung und Wirtschaft der Stadt Kassel, 72.

\(^{40}\) Roller, Einwohnerschaft der Stadt Durlach im 18. Jahrhundert, 19-21.

\(^{41}\) He also estimated Bürger outmigration from the Lüneburg region near Hanover to be .02 yearly in the fourteenth century: Penners, “Umfang der altdutschen Nachwanderung,” 32-41.
equivalence of in- and outmigration rates wherever both can be calculated.

TABLE 1

ESTIMATED MINIMUM MIGRATION RATES IN GERMAN COMMUNITIES, 1400–1800

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>City</th>
<th>Period</th>
<th>Population</th>
<th>Immigration</th>
<th>Outmigration</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Oldenburg</td>
<td>1607–1646</td>
<td>690 Bürger</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>.02</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Frankfurt a.M.</td>
<td>1401–1500</td>
<td>2,100 Bürger</td>
<td>.02</td>
<td>—</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kaiserslautern</td>
<td>1597–1769</td>
<td>220 Bürger</td>
<td>.03</td>
<td>—</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eberswalde</td>
<td>1724–1775</td>
<td>300 Bürger</td>
<td>.04</td>
<td>—</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Würzburg</td>
<td>1565–1584</td>
<td>1,200 Bürger</td>
<td>.06</td>
<td>—</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

for total population:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>City</th>
<th>Period</th>
<th>Population</th>
<th>Immigration</th>
<th>Outmigration</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Durlach</td>
<td>1701–1800</td>
<td>3,100</td>
<td>.03</td>
<td>.03</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Veen</td>
<td>1787</td>
<td>185</td>
<td>.06</td>
<td>.06</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Weissenburg</td>
<td>1580–1720</td>
<td>1,000</td>
<td>.06</td>
<td>—</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Glückstadt</td>
<td>1641–1652</td>
<td>750</td>
<td>.08</td>
<td>—</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

NOTE: Populations are averages for time periods given. All rates calculated based on data in the sources.


The values in Table 1 are most useful as minimum migration estimates for communities in preindustrial Germany. The records of Bürger mention only those who applied successfully for citizenship, who established permanent residence in a town, and who gained a certain respectability. The rates for entire populations originate in sources which reported only those persons who participated in major familial events—birth, marriage, or death. Entire families could enter and leave a community without ever becoming involved in these documents. Single apprentices and servants are hardly ever noted; seasonal movements are ignored. Only the rates for Veen indicate all reported migrations from a population register.
Based on Table 1, we must limit our conclusions to the following modest statements. Before 1800, Bürger had yearly migration rates of about .02 to .06, at a minimum. Since they were the least mobile urban group, the rates shown for total populations were higher, ranging from .03 to .08. The inclusion of all migrations, as would be measured by modern population registers, might well bring the rate for many communities to .10 or more. Cities experienced equivalent volumes of in- and outmigration, representing a mixture of temporary circulation and permanent entries and exits. As measures of mobility within premodern German urban society, these preliminary calculations have profound implications. The equivalent rate in the mid-nineteenth century was under .10. In the 1970s, migration rates in and out of German cities averaged .06 per year. In all probability, German urban communities in the centuries before industrialization housed a more mobile population than they do now. Only in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries did urban migration reach significantly higher levels than those shown in Table 1, peaking at nearly .20 just before World War I.42

Population movements in rural villages are much more difficult to describe due to the scarcity of studies. Although the evidence is meager, it does conform to the urban results regarding volume and class differentials. Several studies of rural communities indicate the volume of permanent outmigration. In several villages in the Rhön mountains of central Germany, about 20%–22% of those born in the early eighteenth century left home. The same was true for eighteenth-century Finkenwärder, an island in the Elbe near Hamburg; in the seventeenth century an even greater proportion had left, about 25%–30%. These numbers must be corrected to reflect high rates of infant and child mortality. From one-third to one-half of all children died before reaching the age of 20, so that of those who achieved maturity, outmigration reached 40%–50% in the seventeenth century and 35% in the eighteenth. These villages were relatively isolated from contact with neighboring communities.43

As in the city, class strongly influenced migration rates. Moreover,
the structure of the community as a unit affected the mobility of all its classes. A study of three Mecklenburg farming communities in the eighteenth century, in which land was held by peasants, a monastery, and a nobleman, respectively, demonstrates differential mobility among social classes, as well as among village types. In all three communities the most rooted were the children of peasants with title to or long leases on their land. More likely to leave were children of landless laborers or peasants with plots too small to support a family. The offspring of rural craftsmen had the highest mobility. On the farm, as in the city, the highest social class (among the peasantry) was the least geographically mobile. The peasant village had the most stable population; even here, however, 42% of all peasant children and over 50% of landless children left in the eighteenth century. In the monastery village, a much higher outmigration reflected the less secure land tenure. Two-thirds of peasant children departed. Least stable were the farmers of the nobility’s land: 75% of peasant children and nearly all of the day laborers’ offspring left. The migrants from these latter two villages often moved locally, sometimes returning in subsequent generations, as they sought employment rather than land.44 In sum, well over half of all children born in these villages who reached adulthood left their homes.

Probably more important than permanent migration for agrarian communities was the seasonal migration which helped to supplement insufficient incomes. The temporary migrants found in preindustrial German cities were mainly of rural origin.45 They comprised one current in the many streams of temporary migration flowing in and out of agricultural villages. For landless laborers unable to find enough work with their more prosperous neighbors, for peasants with too little land to support a family, and for artisans with insufficient customers, the most effective and frequent response was seasonal migration. “Each spring the roads of Europe came alive as peasants streamed out of their villages and fell in with the bands from other villages to seek work in distant places, and the roads teemed again in late autumn when the


workers began their homeward trek." Earnings from outside labor permitted the establishment of families and the retention of tiny plots by supplementing the family's own farm income. From Spain to Russia migratory peasants linked disparate economic systems: traditional grain production, city construction projects, hay-growing livestock regions, rural industry, and herring fisheries.

Peasants' need for supplemental income was one prerequisite for seasonal migration. The other was an uneven seasonal distribution of agricultural labor which allowed part of the peasant family to spend extended periods away from home. This symbiotic balance is shown by the *Hollandsgehen*, probably the most extensive seasonal stream in preindustrial Germany. Cereal agriculture in the Münsterland using the three-field system and hand tools had its slack season in the summer. During this time the farm could be left in the hands of the wife or older children, while one or both parents migrated to southern Holland, where livestock production required summer hay harvests. Dutch brick factories also provided summer work. The native labor force of Dutch landless peasants had already been absorbed by the rapid growth of commercial cities on the coast. Thus the agricultural regions of Holland drew labor from less developed areas of northwestern Germany.

Johannes Tack, the major investigator of the *Hollandsgehen*, estimated that sizable portions of the population in the corner of Germany between the Dutch border and the cities of Münster, Hanover, and Hamburg spent every summer in Holland cutting hay, digging peat for fuel, catching herring, or firing bricks. The scattered statistics now available show a clear growth in the number of these seasonal migrants after the Thirty Years' War. By the eighteenth century some districts annually sent half of their total male population. At the same time, poor peasants in the Ruhr valley used winter coal mining as an income supplement, remaining on the farm during the summer growing vegetables.

47. Franz Bensing, *Der Einfluss der landwirtschaftlichen Maschinen auf Volks- und Privateirtschaft* (Breslau, 1897), 39–42.
The first factories in the Nürnberg area in the seventeenth century employed the seasonal labor of local peasants.\(^\text{50}\)

Although there is little known about the direction, extent, and duration of the individual seasonal migrations which crisscrossed the map of Germany before 1800, they seem to have become more prevalent in the eighteenth century. Streams of migrants were threads knitting together urban and rural communities. Many rural seasonal migrants appeared in cities as carters, masons, or day laborers. Primitive forms of industrial labor were frequently seasonal. Longer migratory periods were characteristic of urban servants, who usually originated in the countryside. Urban turnover was merely rural circulation seen from another perspective. The map and Table 1 demonstrate that community size had no obvious effect on mobility. One valuable study of the wine region around Rudesheim, the Rheingau, allows us to estimate an inmigration rate of .03 for sixteenth-century Bürger in the villages along the Rhine and in the hills.\(^\text{51}\) On the basis of the evidence presented so far, there is little reason to believe that cities were more mobile than villages. Migration affected all types of German communities, although the forms of mobility may have differed widely. Probably only a minority of German migrants fit the pattern of permanent rural-to-urban migration which is frequently taken for the norm.

Using English data, Keith Wrightson hypothesizes that three nearly separate communities existed in rural England: well-established landowners participating in local affairs, the more transient poor, and constantly mobile servants.\(^\text{52}\) A more complex model might be applied to the German evidence presented above. Possession of substantial urban or rural property made migration less likely and more permanent. It was not unusual, however, for self-sufficient peasants or master craftsmen to move during their working lives. Higher mobility characterized those with less sizable investments: apprentices and journeymen, on one hand, and peasants with small plots, on the other, would both move frequently until they could establish themselves in a community. In both countryside and city, wage labor was furnished by the poorest


\(^{51}\) Calculations based on data in Struck, \textit{"Sozialgeschichte des Rheingaus,"} 126, 129.

\(^{52}\) Wrightson, \textit{"Social Differentiation in Rural England,"} 37.
classes, who followed whatever opportunities for employment existed in the interstices of the preindustrial economy. Here were the seasonal migrants, the urban “floaters,” the vagrants and beggars in hard times. These people were recruited from the bottom of the rural hierarchy, holders of tiny plots, cottagers, and Tagelöhner, who provided temporary labor wherever it was needed. These social layers also represent stages in the life cycle: some apprentices became masters; inheriting peasant sons might have been sent out as servants in their teens. Mobility was especially characteristic of the young and the poor in preindustrial Germany. But no social group was “immobile” in this economy; dichotomies between stable peasants and mobile proletarians or between permanent migration and aimless wandering are misleading. Migration was an integral and regular part of a relatively stable social and economic order.

THE MIGRATORY PATH

The previous section concentrated on frequency and form of migration. We now turn our attention to the migratory path itself. Where did migrants originate and how far did they travel? The distance travelled by migrants helps us to assess the character of mobility in a society. If migration covered only short distances, high levels of mobility could still be associated with relative isolation of communities. The importance of migration in the lives of individuals increases as their journeys extend over wider areas and cross cultural or economic boundaries. The German data indicate that long-distance movements were significantly more important than in France or England. The length of migration was related to the migrant’s social and geographical background. Religion and politics played an important role in determining possible destinations.

A number of studies have published detailed breakdowns of the distances migrants travelled. Most of this information concerns Bürger. The variety of distance categories used makes comparison somewhat difficult: the data are summarized in Table 2 under several overlapping rubrics. Certainly the most intense migratory movement to any community was from its surroundings. Probably about 20% to 40% of all migrant citizens originated in the local area, within a radius of 10–15 miles. Half or more came from less than 30 miles. But significant numbers travelled further, with 10% to 20% moving over 100 miles. The seasonal Hollandsgänger travelled 100 miles each way. Longer distances were covered by the hundreds of thousands of colonists moving east-
ward: cities on the periphery of German settlement, like Danzig or Iglau (see map), drew sizable numbers from distant locations.

### TABLE 2

**DISTANCE OF MIGRATION IN PREMODERN GERMANY**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>City</th>
<th>Period</th>
<th>Number of Migrants</th>
<th>Proportions Moving Various Distances</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Under 15 Miles</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bürger only:</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Köln</td>
<td>c. 1150</td>
<td>419</td>
<td>22%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Göttingen</td>
<td>1550–1639</td>
<td>920</td>
<td>45%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Frankfurt</td>
<td>1351–1500</td>
<td>5,226</td>
<td>32%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nördlingen</td>
<td>1450–1550</td>
<td>1,795</td>
<td>55%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Esslingen</td>
<td>1450–1550</td>
<td>1,753</td>
<td>38%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Würzburg</td>
<td>1675</td>
<td>1,346</td>
<td>40%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Iglau (Jihlava)</td>
<td>1511–1649</td>
<td>1,104</td>
<td>18%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Merseburg</td>
<td>1507–1524</td>
<td>76</td>
<td>36%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Schwäbisch Hall</td>
<td>1545</td>
<td>162</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kaiserslautern</td>
<td>1597–1769</td>
<td>1,114</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ansbach</td>
<td>1645–1740</td>
<td>1,087</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Danzig</td>
<td>1558–1709</td>
<td>13,430</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marriage Partners:</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Giessen</td>
<td>1701–1800</td>
<td>676</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Surroundings</td>
<td>1701–1800</td>
<td>791</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Journeymen:</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>23 Rhine Cities</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Frankfurt</td>
<td>1312–1440</td>
<td>842</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Frankfurt</td>
<td>1402–1524</td>
<td>2,835</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Frankfurt</td>
<td>1762</td>
<td>1,635</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**NOTE:** Percentages do not add to 100 because above categories overlap and do not include all possible distances. Numbers of migrants include only those whose origin is known. For Würzburg and Schwäbisch Hall only, data represent censuses of all resident Bürger on the given dates.

The data in Table 2 show how average distance varied with the social group under consideration. Both groups of journeymen travelled further than the Bürger. On the other hand, marriage partners in and around Giessen were recruited locally. This latter pattern may be the basis for the belief that preindustrial migrants moved short distances. Many French studies of migration are based only on marriage records, which tend to exclude much mobility, especially over longer distances. Data for Canterbury also show shorter average moves than any of the Bürger samples. Perhaps the English did tend to travel locally. The German evidence demonstrates that sweeping characterizations of preindustrial migration as local are incorrect.

The length of a migrant’s journey to a preindustrial city was strongly influenced by social factors. While rural and urban communities contributed equally, on the average, to urban immigration, recruitment patterns differed substantially by type of origin. Migrants from cities became more numerous with increasing distance travelled, until they were clearly predominant among those moving 100 miles or more. Expressed in another way, the majority of rural migrants to cities were locally recruited, while the majority from other cities moved long distances. The differences in average distance travelled shown in Table 2 were partially due to the differing blends of urban/rural origin of the migrants. The journeymen were mostly urban and they moved the


55. Sources cited in Table 2; also Clark, “Migration in England,” 64–68.
greatest distances; the marriage partners in the Giessen hinterland were 88% rural, probably accounting for their shorter moves.  

Migrants’ socioeconomic status influenced their ability to negotiate longer distances. While the more affluent migrated less frequently, their movements covered greater distances. In seventeenth-century Weissenburg, only 36% of day laborers came from more than 10 miles away, but 65% of artisans travelled at least that far. Danzig in the seventeenth century and Braunschweig in the eighteenth showed the same pattern. Urban origin itself was an indication of a migrant’s higher status. Danzig had three distinct classes of Bürger: merchant, artisan, and worker. Among merchant inmigrants, 77% were of urban origin, but only 59% for artisans, and 44% for day laborers. In eighteenth-century Wolfenbüttel, 38% of rural but only 4% of urban inmigrants acquired the lowest level of citizenship. Yet urban/rural origin and distance were separately related to the migrant’s place in the new community. Even when urban or rural migrants to a city are considered alone, the average status of the migrant rose as distance from the point of origin increased.

The link between distance, social status, and mobility returns us to the tricky question of permanence. For the lower classes, the search for a livelihood could end with the next village or a nearby city. This allowed for easy and frequent return to origin. Distances increased with the difficulty of finding a suitable social position, a niche in local society, commensurate with the migrant’s previous socioeconomic status. The more rarefied the position, the more dispersed it was over the German landscape. At the very top of the social hierarchy, the European aristocracy’s international search for appropriate marriage partners reflected their willingness to migrate as far as necessary to maintain status.

Migratory distance and especially direction in premodern Germany were also affected by regional differences in culture and politics; religion played a major role in determining paths of migration. Durlach was a Protestant city and 78% of the migrants with known origin came from Protestant territories, some at great distance; few arrived from neighboring Catholic Baden-Baden. Protestant Berlin housed many migrants.

from the Rhineland, mainly a Catholic region, but they originated in the scattered Protestant towns there. Considerable movement existed within the Rhineland, but it tended to link communities of similar religion. The religious controversies of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries did not always alter the existing geography of migration. Würzburg in northern Bavaria drew most of its fifteenth-century migrants from the east and south, as political conflicts and the Main River tended to isolate the city from its northern neighbors. The religious division of the next two centuries hardened this separation, as Bavaria remained Catholic and northern Germany favored Protestantism. The distribution of migrant origins remained the same in Würzburg throughout this period. Yet Weissenburg, which became a Protestant enclave in the heart of Bavaria, attracted migrants mainly from northern Germany. Changing political alignments could affect existing patterns: after a 1728 agreement between the Badische Pfalz and Baden-Durlach forbade any migratory exchanges, few migrants from the Pfalz appeared in Durlach. Ethnic and national affiliation also shaped migration fields. The German city of Iglau (Jihlava) in present-day Czechoslovakia drew from regions populated by Germans toward the northwest, rather than from Slavic areas to the east or south. Migrants to Strasbourg were German until French occupation in 1681 ended the city’s independent status; thereafter more French Catholics were recorded. Neither politics nor religion could entirely prevent migration in certain directions, but they substantially influenced and guided pathways.

CAUSES OF MIGRATION

Migration is a necessary element in all historical forms of material life, nomadic, agrarian, and industrial. Thus it cannot be said to be uniquely “caused” by a certain stage in the development of economic life. Yet


the particular significance of migration in a society is determined by the relationship between social structure and economic activity. The migratory streams which swept through each German city and village were shaped by the general organization of material life in a predominantly agricultural society. In this final section, I will attempt to create a socioeconomic framework for explaining German preindustrial mobility which both fits the known evidence and goes beyond it. A broader empirical basis is needed to confirm these generalizations.

Each historical system of food production requires a certain level of mobility for its own maintenance. As nomadism gave way to agriculture, the level of mobility fell: a community could use a piece of land for longer periods before needed resources were exhausted. Early forms of organized agriculture, using slash-and-burn forest clearance and long fallows, still required entire villages to move after several decades in one location. During the Middle Ages, European agriculture gradually became more settled. The first reference to the three-field system in Germany occurred in the eighth century. During the next few hundred years, this technological leap increased the permanence of rural communities, reducing the required level of mobility. Thus the volume of “technologically determined” mobility has gradually decreased.

The three-field system circumscribed the amount of cultivated land in a village. Short fallow periods necessitated perpetual fertilization, in turn dependent upon sources of fertilizer. The area of the local heath or peat bog and the size of animal flocks put a limit on the area which could be kept fertile. As long as population size was congruent with the availability of good land, most families could be supported by their own plots. When population growth caused the size of the community to surpass this limit, “socially determined” mobility began to increase. The relatively high volume of migration traced in the previous sections was a result of socially determined mobility in a period of expanding population.

For several centuries, attractive migratory opportunities helped main-
tain the balance between population and agricultural resources in rural Germany. Open land still existed before the fourteenth century. Wastes were cleared and new settlements founded in western Germany between the ninth and fourteenth centuries. After about 1100 colonizing thrusts from the older settled areas of Germany around the Rhine penetrated into Mecklenburg, Brandenburg, and east Prussia, moving the frontier eastward; perhaps 350,000 people migrated into Saxony from 1100 to 1300. Theodor Penners calculated that in the fourteenth century the region around Lüneburg, near Hanover, sent about 1% of its population yearly to settle in Baltic ports, from 100 to 300 miles away, while Westphalia sent even more. This was as high a level of outmigration as the nineteenth-century emigration to the United States. Through the late Middle Ages, city authorities still encouraged migration by offering freedom from the taxes and power of local lords; this is the origin of the saying, “Stadtluft macht frei.” In some cities land was given to newly enrolled Bürger.67

Despite such safety valves, an expanding population still strained the rural social structure, creating new social layers underneath the landowning peasants. A class of cottagers (Kötter) grew up between the tenth and thirteenth centuries, who were granted limited commons rights but controlled little or no land. Cottagers with no commons rights existed already in the twelfth century. In the northwest, classes of landpoor, called Markkötter or Brinksitzer, grew in the villages. As the size of inheritances dwindled in the Black Forest, landless laborers lost


67. August Knieke, Die Einwanderung in den westfälischen Städten bis 1400 (Münster, 1893), 16, 40–42, 125–33.

employment opportunities when peasant families farmed their plots themselves. Braudel notes that Württemberg, the most densely populated German area around 1500, was the best place to recruit mercenaries.\(^69\) Saxony, the eastern "frontier" of the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, began to experience the same problems of overcrowding that had propelled migrants out of the older German regions. By the sixteenth century, urban renters and rural landpoor there were seeking work.\(^70\) Socially determined mobility emanated from these classes.

Demographic disasters periodically relieved the pressure on resources and employment. The combined effects of the Black Death and the Thirty Years' War probably left the German population in 1650 at a lower level than in 1350.\(^71\) Only in the late seventeenth and especially in the eighteenth century did the rural social structure change fundamentally under the combined influence of demographic and economic factors. Population growth accelerated unchecked. Throughout early modern Germany, renters of tiny parcels or independent day laborers were becoming a substantially larger proportion of the rural population; their names varied from Hauslinge or Brinksitzer in lower Saxony, Einlieger or Instleute near the Dutch border, Soldner or Seldner in Bavaria, to Tagelöhner in many places. For example, the number of self-supporting peasants in Saxony barely grew between 1550 and 1750, while the landpoor and landless multiplied five times, only to triple again during the next hundred years.\(^72\) These peasants were Germany's migrant workers.


\(^{71}\) Abel estimates that the population reached preplague levels of about 14 million by 1560, increasing to at least 16 million by 1620: *Geschichte der deutschen Landwirtschaft*, 115–17, 152.

Inheritance patterns affected the form but not the essential content of this population growth. Lutz Berkner compared the seventeenth-century social structure of two regions in central Germany: Calenberg, where inheritances were not divided, and nearby Göttingen, where they were. By 1689, over two-thirds of rural holdings were under five hectares in both places. In Calenberg, there was a higher proportion of landless, while the majority of Göttingen peasant households were cottagers with tiny plots. Population growth led to disproportionate increase in rural classes unable to support themselves. These areas typified the wider German landscape, divided broadly between the partible southwest and impartible north and east. In regions of partible inheritance, subdivided parcels became too small to support a family. Where governments intervened to protect the Vollbauer, as in northwestern and central Germany, a landless proletariat developed. Landowners could turn this situation to their advantage. In the northwest, they created a new class of partially dependent laborers by renting small plots in exchange for cash and help in the harvest. These so-called Heuerleute were thereby rooted but underemployed.

A newly hostile urban attitude toward inmigrants reduced opportunities for permanent escape from rural poverty. By the sixteenth century, many cities were no longer welcoming newcomers; urban governments tried to use political force to limit immigration. In the Frankenland in northern Bavaria, where the area inside many town walls was already filled with houses in the fifteenth century, local officials tried to restrict citizenship to the first-born sons of native Bürger. The xenophobic attitude of seventeenth- and eighteenth-century townsmen, which Mack Walker documents in German Home Towns, surely resulted from population growth. Yet it is easy to mistake their rhetoric for success. Scattered evidence does point to slightly declining immigration of Bürger in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Those series of Bürger-

---


75. Ullrich, Zur- und Abwanderung in der Würzburger Bevölkerung, 7.

76. Walker assumes that “hometownsmen” in Germany successfully minimized migration. Yet the town he singles out for closer analysis, Weissenburg, had a rather high rate of immigration, .06 per year, in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries (see Table 1).
Migration in Preindustrial Germany

bücher which cover lengthy periods (there are eight) show falling proportions of migrants among newly inscribed citizens after 1600. In Frankfurt, not only did the number of immigrant male citizens diminish, but both migrants and natives increasingly found their wives within the city. Yet these data are not definitive evidence for declining urban immigration. Local governments had full control over legal admission to citizenship, but much less power to stop migration. In the Rheingau, as the immigration of Bürger fell, the class of Beisassen grew rapidly. Emigration from Germany was the last available means of permanent migration. In the eighteenth century, unprecedented waves of emigrants, especially from the overcrowded southwest, flowed to Hungary, America, Poland, and Russia. Hans Fenske estimates that 500,000 left between 1683 and 1812.

German mobility changed in response to socioeconomic transformation. As opportunities for permanent exit dwindled, circulatory forms of migration increased. The cities may have been successful in limiting citizenship to natives, but they could do little to stop the constant flow of temporary migrants in and out. Growth in the number of Heuerleute or Tagelöhner fueled the expansion of seasonal movements. The Hollandsgehen spread to new regions in the northwest, reaching its peak in the eighteenth century.

77. These cities are scattered over Germany and included a variety of sizes. One (Grossalsleben) showed no change for 1604–1800; in another (Angermünde) the migrant proportion rose in the seventeenth century but fell more steeply in the eighteenth; all the others had steadily falling migrant proportions for the periods covered in the sources. Two other series, of houseowners and their wives in Hersbruck, and of marriage partners in Platten, show the same apparent decline in permanent immigration. The sources are: Walther, “Die Danziger Bürgerschaft,” 159; Penners-Ellwart, Die Danziger Bürgerschaft, 17–18; Adolf Dorider, “Recklinghauser Neubürger: Eine Untersuchung über die Einwanderung in Recklinghausen vom Ende des 16. bis in den Beginn des 19. Jahrhunderts,” Vestische Zeitschrift 48 (1941): 91–92; Braun and Rink, Bürgerbuch der Stadt Kaiserslautern 1597–1800, 350–51, chart at back; von Gebhardt, Bürgerbuch der Stadt Angermünde 1568–1765, xiii–xiv; Wiedemann, Hersbrucker Häuserbuch, 42; Pohl, “Bergstadt Platten,” 229; Altrichter and Altrichter, “Die Iglauer Neubürger,” 105; Struck, Neubürger von Grossalsleben 1604–1874, 43; Soliday, Community in Conflict: Frankfurt Society, 45–47; Struck, “Sozialgeschichte des Rheingaus,” 161.


79. International migrations have not been stressed in this paper because of their limited importance within the context of total German mobility: emigration in the eighteenth century involved under 5,000 people per year in a population of nearly 20 million. For this emigration, see Hans Fenske, “International Migration: Germany in the Eighteenth Century,” Central European History 13 (1980): 332–47, esp. 344–46.

80. Seraphim, Heuerlingswesen in Nordwestdeutschland, 12; Hans Hüls, “Das Lipperland
Steve Hochstadt

The rural poor of late seventeenth- and eighteenth-century Germany made one final adaptation, besides migration, to persistent agricultural underemployment: they applied their energies to home manufacture of industrial goods. Protoindustrialization, the extension to the countryside of large-scale, although dispersed, methods of manual production in textiles, metals, and other products, allowed poor peasants to supplement inadequate incomes. By adding earnings from cottage industry to those provided by tiny plots or agricultural labor, the rural lower class might avoid migration. The availability of surplus labor in the countryside, the ultimate cause of mobility, was also a precondition for the growth of rural industry, which could replace the need for migration. 81

Did protoindustrialization anchor the German population? Although migration data from before 1800 are inadequate to confirm this hypothesis, the earliest nineteenth-century German statistics do provide support. Unique community-level registration data for the region around Düsseldorf show a clear relationship between economic activity and mobility. In general, migration rates hardly varied between agricultural villages and industrial cities. But in the purely cottage-industrial communities near Düsseldorf mobility was 50% lower. 82 The spread of protoindustry in both villages and towns in the eighteenth century provided an alternative use of underemployed time for poor families. In the Rhineland, Silesia, and other industrial regions, the need for mobility was reduced by protoindustry, while simultaneously being encouraged by population growth. Yet protoindustrialization could only be a temporary solution. In some regions, the demographic response was even more rapid population growth, a useful short-term family strategy with disastrous long-term consequences. 83 Income from rural
industry allowed small plots to become even more fragmented. In more general terms, the processes which had encouraged early protoindustrialization continued beyond the capacity of this expedient to provide subsistence. When cottage industry collapsed in the nineteenth century, mobility was the only alternative for the rural poor.

CONCLUSION
The lack of congruence between existing general characterizations of preindustrial society and the evidence presented here points to the need for better conceptualizations of demographic history. Such models cannot arise from isolated consideration of urban documents or parish registers, because at the community level migratory paths appear truncated. No doubt this revision will be uncomfortable, as widely accepted links between mobility and modern attitudes are broken. The industry of family reconstitution will require a new technology to insure that laboriously recreated social structures represent more than the residentially stable minority. The fact of extensive mobility calls for a dynamic model of social structure and economic activity across a variety of community types. Mobility created pervasive human connections between city and countryside; medieval urban walls were sieves for rural migrants. Migration should also link historical demography with the broader sociological and economic studies needed to explain its findings.