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An Urban Network in its Landscape

The Dynamics and Functions of the Norman Towns, Fourteenth to Fifteenth Centuries

With an area of 30,000 square kilometres and more than 350,000 households, Normandy in 1328 was one of the most important and heavily populated regions of Europe.[1] These facts on their own provide sufficient justification for this paper. But there is another, stronger reason for looking specifically at Normandy: economic historiography in general has paid little attention to the *provinces* of the French kingdom, such as Brittany, Picardy, or Champagne. Most economic historians have taken the larger national market as their main reference point, while many French historians have preferred to study the smaller „*pays*", borrowed from the geographers, for their inquiries into medieval economic and social history.[2] However, since the French kingdom cannot be regarded as a unified market area until the middle of the 18th century, we cannot make a proper study of phenomena of *longue durée* – like the evolution of urban networks, the growth of international trade or the construction of metropolitan regions – without analysing them on the provincial level.

From the creation of the Viking principality in the 10th century right up to the end of the *ancien régime*, Norman society had a distinctive character within the Kingdom of France, and therefore we can use the province as a framework for examining some of the questions discussed in this volume. The originality and perfect stability of the Norman legal system makes it easy to compare different situations and cases across this large area. The political integration of the Duchy into the French kingdom developed chaotically: at the beginning of the 14th century it was an *apanage* for the eldest son of the King, then it became a personal dominion of the crown for the Valois kings, and then, after the treaty of Troyes (1422), the personal possession of the Lancastrian king of England and France. However, Normandy was never regarded as an autonomous political unit, nor did the Norman rulers ever claim any sovereignty or even autonomy for the Duchy. This consistency in the Norman identity – not political but legal, not national but provincial – is important in studying the construction of the French kingdom. Normandy played a major role in this process of construction, particularly in terms of its fiscal contributions: from 1204 onwards, it provided more than a quarter of the kingdom's annual income. This proportion was way in excess of Normandy's proportion of the kingdom's total population.[3] Normandy was – and was recognised as[4] – a rich province and as an essential component in the political and economic construction of the French dominion.

In his *Crisis of Feudalism*, a classic study of the economy and society of the late medieval Pays de Caux, Guy Bois proposed a hypothesis for the development of its population and wealth which has been accepted by all the historians of the province.[5] Its crucial points are the depth of the demographic and economic collapse during the second quarter of the 15th century, when the Duchy's total population fell to one third or even one quarter of what it had been at the beginning of the 14th century, and the very quick recovery during the

second half of the 15th century, after the end of the Hundred Years War. By the beginning of the 16th century, Normandy was again an affluent province and Rouen, its capital, one of the most opulent and striking cities of North-West Europe. Normandy's dynamism is certainly a stimulating question for historians of the early modern economy and I would like to discuss the place and function of the urban network in this development.

The Norman towns: a network?

First of all, we need to define what constituted a town in Normandy at that time. In two classic studies in urban history, Adriaan Verhulst and Rodney Hilton pointed out the difficulty in defining a „town" for the period preceding the 14th century.[6] In French historiography, cultural and political definitions have thus far prevailed. For Jacques Le Goff, the presence of communities of friars is a decisive marker of an urban identity;[7] but in Normandy, the importance of collegiate churches and regular Augustinian chapters make this factor less significant than in other provinces.[8] For Bernard Chevalier, the urban identity of the *bonne ville* is a complex construction, combining both social and political aspects.[9] The town, enclosed within its strong walls and towers, with its tax privileges and local political autonomy, is an essential component of the monarchical state. This hypothesis can be useful for understanding the birth and growth of the modern state in France, but it is not pertinent to our problem: the birth and growth of the *bonnes villes* as institutions is a consequence of late medieval development, not an explanation for it. Therefore, as many historians have pointed out, we have to accept that there is no comprehensive definition of „towns" in Normandy around 1300, nor is there any general urban framework, within which the different parts of the province have precise and explicit places and functions.

A quick survey of the Norman towns confirms this; for many places, the difficulty is not in deciding whether they were actually towns, but in defining where they fitted into a global system. Obviously, it would be very useful to have an idea of their population, but there are no tax returns like those Bruce Campbell examined recently in his survey of English, Irish, Scottish and Welsh towns in the early 14th century.[10] Nevertheless the few figures which can be found in fiscal or seigniorial records for the early 14th or the 15th centuries show that Normandy was a crowded region with some crowded towns. A survey of the county of Beaumont-le-Roger, compiled around 1313 to 1320, gives the return of the *monnéage*, a tax paid by every household (*feu*), for a part of the Pays d'Auge and Pays d'Ouche, the sergeanties of Orbec, Bernay and Beaumont-le-Roger. It would be hard to dispute the urban nature of these last three places. They had important law courts, fortresses (in Orbec and Beaumont) and big monastic communities (in Bernay and Beaumont). A historian of English towns would certainly regard Bernay, with its two parish churches and 1.100 *feux*, and Beaumont, with 538 households in two parishes, as towns. Orbec, with only 308 households gathered in one parish, is more debatable, but it had an important castle held by a viscount, and a large and old leper-hospital.[11] Some other figures given in the same document make the ranking more complicated: Le Sap (550 households), Glos-la-Ferrière (360) or the twin villages of La Neuve-Lyre (400) and La Vieille-Lyre (240) were never described as small towns but only as *bourgs*. They had markets, but no castle, walls or municipal organisation. Although they were densely populated at that time, they were regarded as rural places, with no claim to urban status.[12]

Therefore, population figures, where they exist, give no clear indication as to what constituted the urban network.

As in many other French regions, most of the towns originated in the Roman period: this was certainly the case for the seven episcopal sees of Rouen, Bayeux, Lisieux, Coutances, Evreux, Avranches and Sées. Other towns, like Saint-Lô, Alençon, Falaise, and perhaps Caen, had already become centres of public authority in the high Middle Ages, with important courts and strong fortresses; but the standing of a place in the hierarchy was not determined by its antiquity. Yet, French urban history displays a high degree of path dependency. The functions of the different towns were extremely diversified by the end of the 13th century. As we have no precise population figures before the late 16th century, we have to be satisfied with a rough description of the main places.[13]

At the top of the hierarchy, only Caen and Rouen had political functions. The most important bailiffs were based there; they shared the sessions of the Norman Exchequer, the higher court and head of the tax-system in the Duchy. But there is no doubt about the pre-eminence of Rouen, which was the metropolitan see of the province, the second city of the kingdom after Paris both in terms of population and wealth, and one of the most important economic centres in North-Western Europe. Saint-Lô, in the bishopric of Coutances, was a former Episcopal see. It was a major industrial centre with a very important mint, and was perhaps the second city in terms of population after Rouen: a return for the *monnéage* for 1338 gives the amazing figure of 4.654 households in its four parishes.[14] At that time it was certainly one of the major cities of Western France. The Episcopal sees of Bayeux, Lisieux, Coutances and Evreux, and Alençon, chief town of an *apanage*, were places of the second rank. Then there were the two little sees of Sées and Avranches, the important fortresses of Falaise, Argentan, Vire,[15] Verneuil and Saint-James, the sea ports of Barfleur, Pont-Audemer, Harfleur and Dieppe and monastic towns like Fécamp, Montivilliers, Saint-Pierre-sur-Dives, Thorigny-sur-Vire and Bernay. All these places more or less maintained their positions until the end of the Middle Ages.

But there was neither institutional unity among them, nor was there any consistency in their designations. For example, the citizens of Episcopal cities were usually called *cives*, except in Rouen; in the other towns, they were called *burgenses*, as were all the inhabitants of the little *bourgs* of the country. Their municipal institutions, inherited from the final period of the Anglo-Norman kingdom, seem to have been generally weak and their political life apathetic, in spite of some riots in the end of the 14th century.[16] It is hard to tell how far it mattered whether a city was under the power of the King, a bishop or an abbot. Judging by the surviving municipal records, the great charities and hospitals seem to have been considered as important as any municipal institution.[17] There is other evidence to show that the regional urban system was inconsistent, such as the lack of a university until the foundation of the Lancastrian University of Caen in 1432. The urban population had no specific legal identity until the late Middle Ages. Society remained based upon the feudal system of the three orders; it granted no legal or political status to townspeople.[18] We can therefore conclude that at the beginning of the 14th century there was no actual urban hierarchy, no urban system which organised and dominated the Norman country and society.

Markets and towns

There is another, more comprehensive approach which looks at Norman society and its economy as a whole. Its starting point is the network of rural and urban weekly markets established before the end of the 13th century. This was recently examined for the 14th and 15th centuries by Isabelle Theiller in her PhD thesis.[19] The market network was a very complex institution, guaranteed and controlled by the sovereign, at least from the ducal period, and strictly correlated with the seigniorial structure. Each market – that is, the right to hold a market in a certain place and on a certain day of the week – belonged to the owner of the fief. But it was also part of a global commercial structure, whose specific bylaws determined the optimal proximity of markets to be held on the same day. Since the settlement of the markets was a matter of sovereignty, it was the King who decided on the establishment of a new market or any change in its day or place.

The dual nature of markets was expressed in the special courts associated with them. When a market was in operation, the lord of the market, whoever he might be, had the full legal powers of the justice, including an absolute right to determine punishments. For cases of illegal pricing, damaged or counterfeit commodities, the justice could call upon the jurors of the local guilds, whose commercial competence was essential in Norman society. Until at least the end of the 14th century, the greatest part of what was produced within the province had to be sold and bought on the local market. This rule concerned not only foods but also every kind of industrial commodity such as wool, hemp and flax, worsted and thread, woollen cloth, canvas and linen, dyestuffs, leather, rough iron or pottery.

These markets, which were usually associated with annual fairs, could be important commercial meeting places, with connexions to interregional or international trade. The market of Montivilliers in the Pays de Caux is a good example: from 1320 until at least the end of the 15th century, merchants came there from all over Europe to buy the local woollen cloth (*mustervilers* or *musterdeviller* in English, *mostavolieri* in Italian, *Musterwillisch* in Flemish and German). Montivilliers was the centre of a very active and populous district of at least twenty parishes, where spinners and weavers turned local or imported wools into thread and cloth to be sold, either at the local market or an informal trading place close to Montivilliers at the port of Harfleur. In both places, cloth brokers, organised into specific guilds, gave advice and help to the foreign merchants who wanted to export the cloth.[20] From the point of view of urban history, it is not clear whether Montivilliers, with its old and important nunnery, was a town or a *bourg* around the year 1300. Harfleur was a town of the French King, surrounded by a wall and towers, and with an active local council. The privileges granted at its port to communities of merchants from Castile, Portugal and Piacenza at the end of the 13th century gave it a unique status within the province.[22] In a chronicle written before 1453, the Spanish captain Pedro de Nino described it as follows: „Harfleur is a beautiful town and a good port to the deep sea. The ships enter the town by the mouth of a little creek inside it. From the other side, it has a good wall with very strong towers and great ditches built of stones and chalk […]. Many merchants go there, because of the many woollen cloths they produce. At the distance of one league is the town of Montivillier, with an honourable nunnery and many fine woollen cloths."[22] In spite of the close link between the international trading centre of Harfleur and the market town of Montivilliers, the production of prestigious Montivilliers cloth, largely manufactured in rural areas, was not underpinned by any urban structure, or any kind of *Verlagssystem*.

Another interesting example of non-urban market organisation is Regnéville, a minor harbour at the mouth of a small river on the west coast of the Cotentin, near Coutances. A strong and imposing 15th century castle is all that remains now of this once very active trading centre, which, in the first half of the 14th century, imported wine from Gascony and Spain, wool from Spain and England, tin and lead from Cornwall, Spanish iron and English woollen cloth.[23] From records of the French royal administration and English customs accounts we can explore the very complex structure of this huge commercial organisation. It was based partly offshore, on board the ships anchored in the dangerous harbour of Chausey islands, where the merchants of Guernsey used to buy wine to be sold in England, and partly onshore, at the great fair of Montmartin. This was one of most important fairs in western France. Here, merchants purchased local canvas, which enjoyed great success in England, and vegetables, especially onions and garlic, which can be found in huge quantities in the local port-books of Exeter and Southampton. The Cistercian monks of Savigny let out a building for money-changers, which suggests that many foreigners used to frequent the fairs. In this case, we find no town directly involved in the management of the place: the so-called port of Regnéville was no more than a creek with no water at low tide, while for ten months of the year Montmartin was just a very small village.[24] Nevertheless, according to a petition of local merchants, around the year 1350 this casual gathering of traders on local, regional and international markets was trading on average 18 thousand tons of wine each year. This is a very significant quantity, even though the figure is probably exaggerated.

This was, however, an unusual situation. The other largest fair in western Normandy, the Guibray, was linked directly with the important town of Falaise, a big centre for wool and leather works. It would therefore be wrong to suggest that there was a market network with no or little connexion to the urban structure: the most important towns were also great trading centres with important markets. This was obviously the case with Rouen and Caen. Both were major centres of textile production, with great annual fairs and connections to international markets for woollen cloth and linen, across the Channel for Rouen, towards Paris for Caen. They were also important centres of the grain trade. It was true also for Saint-Lô, which was probably the major centre for draperies in western France. But, as historians like Rodney Hilton and Guy Bois have pointed out,[25] the key to understanding the general structure is not the town, but the seigniorial part of the rural and urban landscape, the *bourg*.

Towns and bourgs

The fundamental works of Lucien Musset on the Norman *bourgs ruraux* showed that settlements of this kind were established from the late 10th to the 12th century throughout the area, as a result of the creation and rise of seigniorial powers.[26] Many of them failed to become economic centres, remaining no more than a group of special tenures, the *bourgages*, where families dwelt with the strange and useless identity of *burgenses* of the country. The others, often settled under the walls of the castles, were multifunctional places, with a weekly market, seigniorial oven and mill, and workplaces like tanning mills, fulling mills, and ironworks. The *bourg* with its market would specialise in the final phases of productive processes, which were also the most valuable ones. It played an essential part in the development of commerce, and its *burgenses* were either producers, managers or traders.[27] Montivilliers, referred to above, is an excellent example, but the district of Saint-Lô gives a more impressive

illustration of the general system. In this very great city, ruled by the bishops of Coutances, many wool workers (ten thousand men in 1346, according to the chronicle of Jehan le Bel) made woollen products of very high quality, including prestigious scarlet cloth. The nearby bourg of Thorigny-sur-Vire, based around a Cistercian abbey, specialised in scarlet „draps de bourre", which were just by-products of the Saint-Lô drapery. Southwards, in the bourg and royal castle of Saint-James, which kept the border with Brittany, according to an inquiry made in 1347, there were at least twelve fulling-mills and more than sixty cloth-finishing establishments (*clouyères*) built around the castle. A local tax-return for 1367 suggests a figure of six thousand pieces of cloth finished and sealed every year in Saint-James.[28] The episcopal town of Coutances was another important centre of woollen production. Customs tariffs and accounts or commercial ledgers show that producers and merchants from Saint-Lô and Saint-James came together at the fairs of Châlon-sur-Saône, at Spanish markets or at Avignon.[29] It is not easy to show exactly how this important industrial district was connected with the commercial centre of Montmartin-Regnéville described above. The weavers of Saint-James used either good local wool or imported wool from Brittany and Aquitaine. The arrival of English and Spanish wool in the 14th century at Regnéville may have been in response to increased demand from local producers. We do not know much about how production was organised, but documents about Saint-James suggest that the spinning and much of the weaving took place in the countryside, outside the boroughs and towns. The region also produced a lot of canvas and linen, mainly by peasant weavers. The dramatic narrative by Jehan le Bel and Froissart concerning the raid of King Edward III in 1346 depicts a very prosperous and industrious region, where the towns were open to the countryside, the villages were rich in cattle and food, and wealth was everywhere. In Saint-Lô, said Froissart, „no man alive could imagine the great wealth that there was won or robbed, and the great amount of cloths that they found; they would have let it go cheap, if they had had anyone to sell it to". According to Giovanni Villani, no fewer than forty thousand pieces of cloth were stolen in Saint-Lô, Coutances, Bayeux, Caen and others places pillaged by King Edward.[30]

This evidence for a kind of proto-industrial structure where agriculture and industry came together in the countryside, without any political organisation (it is not even clear whether Saint-Lô, perhaps the second town of Normandy in terms of population, had a municipal organisation) raises the problem of how the different sectors of the economic network articulated with one another. There are many documents about credit contracts which provide at least a partial answer. In an old but still definitive study about the role of Normandy's monastic communities in money-lending, Robert Génestal showed that from the middle of the 12th century on, thousands of charters granting rents, in kind or in money, were the counterpart of a huge and constant stream of money from the towns and boroughs to the villages. This was invested in building houses, mills, and barns, which in turn brought about both rural and industrial development in the region.[31] He suggested that these investments by the monastic communities served to compensate for the rural contribution to the development of the towns, particularly through tithes paid to the monastic houses. Moreover, the sources for the 14th century, especially the earliest notary registers (1344 for Coutances, 1353 for Alençon) confirm what Génestal said about the 11th to 13th centuries.[32] They give further information about the crucial role of the food market in regulating the credit market. In a recent paper, Isabelle Theiller shows that the many rents stipulated in grain from the late 12th to the 15th century were in fact monetary contracts, since the quarter had to be paid at the market, at a fair price set by the legal and sworn authority of justice.[33]

Welfare, too, was closely linked with the markets. From the 12th century, leper houses, hospitals and all kinds of lay and ecclesiastical charities had usually been funded by a portion of the income from the local markets and fairs. After the 13th century, once the commercial network of the region was completed, such foundations became impossible or exceptional. Instead, they were replaced as the usual instrument for assistance and alms by gifts of rent in kind, often wheat, to be paid at the local market. In the first half of the 14th century, the royal administration recorded in its *lettres d'amortissement* thousands of legacies and gifts made by men and women of all social conditions to the Norman hospitals, a great part of them being expressed in kind. They were a crucial element of the social and economic structure, linking rural and urban communities through the marketplaces.[34]

It would be important to know how this sort of social, economic and geographic organisation, which was original within the French context, compared with other European cases. The southern region of England (particularly Hampshire, Dorset and Devon) should provide the best comparison. It was an active rural and industrial region with important towns and ports, closely linked with the metropolitan area of London and with the trade system of the Channel. The complex relationship which connected the episcopal towns of Winchester and Salisbury, the industrial centre of Romsey and the great port of Southampton corresponded in significant ways with the Rouen region. This similarity may not have been accidental: both of these urban and economic areas had been born and developed in the same Anglo-Norman political and commercial system. Up to the 16th century they were both part of a greater European network, involving Hanseatic, Flemish, Spanish and Italian trade.[35]

Destruction and recovery of a network

Normandy's highly commercialised system, whose rise in the first half of the 14th century may have been a paradoxical consequence of the commercial and customs policy of the English kings, was in a weak position when Edward III decided in 1344 to punish it. Peaceable Normandy was noted for its wealth and the excellence of its workers, but all its towns were open to the countryside, and it could not defend itself against the English soldiers. The looting and destruction of its industrial system may have been a way for King Edward to recover the tax revenues he had lost through Norman competition. Unlike Brittany or the Bourguignon territories, the Duchy, which belonged to the King, was politically passive and unable to negotiate in an extremely violent and confused conflict. Its fate depended mainly upon the uncertain position it occupied within the international system of trade and power, which had developed on both sides of the Channel and the North Sea.

During the peace negotiations at Arras in 1436, the French ambassadors offered to give all property and sovereignty over the Duchy to the English crown, in exchange for the renunciation of every claim on the French crown.[36] The English refused, so we cannot know how serious this proposal was. However, we should remember that the commercial lobby led by Jacques Coeur was very active at the court of Charles VII at this time. It had banned all trade in Norman woollens in the French part of the Kingdom, and had tried to create privileged guilds for wool workers, specially opened to the weavers of Rouen, in the major towns of the Loire valley.[37] We can therefore be sure that France's rulers could see the links

between European politics and regional economics. From the English point of view, the *Libelle of Englysche Policye*, written during this period by a counsellor of the English King, confirms this point.[38] Thus, in order to understand the extraordinary crisis, which almost destroyed Normandy's economy and society at the end of the Hundred Years War, we need to bear in mind the importance of international competition.

There is no doubt about the significance of the demographic losses, of which the tax returns give so much evidence, across almost the entire Duchy. As Guy Bois pointed out for the Pays de Caux, the rural population level did not actually begin to recover until 1480.[39] Across the countryside, there were completely deserted parishes, and the average population was usually a third or a quarter of the level of 1300. Yet, recent urban studies, such as those of Philippe Cailleux on the development of Rouen as a town, have revealed evidence of a more complex situation.[40] Compared to the deep depression afflicting the surrounding Pays de Caux, the city remained busy and the value of urban tenure never fell. We can therefore hypothesise that the economic and demographic losses of the rural settlements were partly caused by a trend towards emigration and urbanisation. In the same years, there was a significant migration of Norman weavers, especially from the Saint-Lô district, towards Breton towns like Fougères and Pontorson. At the same time, commercial sources like ledgers or inventories show that products from Rouen or Montivilliers were arriving in Flanders or Italy, having crossed the Channel to the international market at Southampton, London or Bruges, before continuing to Geneva or Florence. There is a curious illustration of this activity in the treaty by which the Earl of Somerset surrendered Rouen in 1449: its final article granted the English soldiers an extra week before leaving the country, so that they can go across the „*pays*" and buy woollen cloth.[41] So, considering country and towns more broadly, we can reappraise the deep slump of the second third of the century, – dubbed „Hiroshima in Normandy" by Guy Bois – as a period of urbanisation and economic and industrial conversion, in particularly chaotic and dramatic circumstances, with deserted villages and crowds of refugees in the towns. In fact, according to sources from rural communities and seigniorial estates across the Duchy, the mills and industrial installations were rebuilt immediately after the end of hostilities, long before the houses or churches, and long before the demographic recovery began. As often happens, a social and demographic crisis provided an opportunity for the economic system to adapt.

At first glance, as Normandy recovered, its urban network did not look very different of the old one: the same towns, almost the same ranks, with Rouen and Caen at the top. There had been some changes as a result of the Lancastrian experience, such as the university established at Caen, or the complete destruction of Harfleur, which was now a mere coastal suburb of Rouen.[42] But on closer examination we can see that Normandy's urban network had been profoundly transformed, both in its configuration and in its relation with the countryside.

The lack of precise urban and rural population figures makes it difficult to describe the composition and development of the network. But recent studies on different towns, small, medium and large, allow us to make hypotheses about the general trend. The most important phenomenon is the delayed recovery of the towns in the western part of the province. Caen, which has been well studied by Denise Angers, can serve as a good example here.[43] In spite of its new importance as a university town, there was neither an increase in its population nor any economic recovery until the end of the 15th century. It remained a very minor centre, with the functions of a regional capital but perhaps no more than 5,000 inhabitants.

The positions of Bayeux and Coutances were comparable: their institutional situations remained unchanged, but with demographic and economic stagnation. For the major economic centres of Saint-Lô and Falaise, the loss of status and population seems to have been irreparable: deprived of their functions as industrial and commercial centres, they were relegated to the rank of big rural markets, more than *bourgs*, less than medium towns. But, paradoxically, the surrounding countryside, and the whole western part of the Duchy more generally, never lost its industrial dynamism. In the last years of the 15th century, the lists of merchants at the great fair of the Lendit at Saint-Denis, near Paris, show that woollen cloth production was widespread in many villages of the Cotentin. The thousands of contracts for the wool trade kept in the notarial archives of Paris allow us to understand a complex and highly organised system, in which the great fairs of Lendit and Guibray, near Falaise, were set as the payment dates for wool and cloth; most Norman products were bought unfinished and sent to Paris for finishing and dyeing. This organisation, which reached its pinnacle in the middle of the following century, involved Norman sheep, spinners and weavers in a great industrial network in which English and Spanish wool, pastel from Toulouse and a high demand for luxury black woollen cloth from Paris on the market of Seville played an important part.[44] In this situation, towns like Saint-Lô, Bayeux, and Caen served as markets for consumer goods of low and medium quality. They were no longer decisive economic centres.
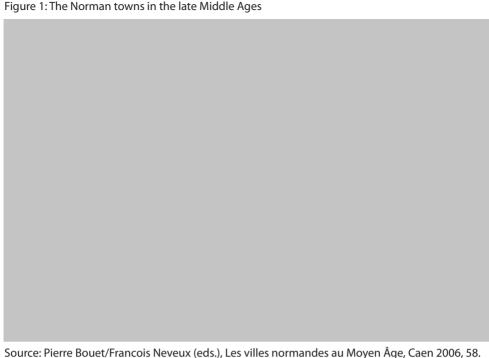
Rouen, in the eastern part of the Duchy, was in a very different situation. Being one of the most important ports of Northwest Europe, with important colonies of Flemish, Spanish and Italian merchants, the town had its own urban network. Its sea ports of Dieppe, Fécamp and Honfleur were able to specialise, and had their own groups of merchants, although they had to accept the leadership of the Norman capital. As one of the most important trading centres in Europe for woollen cloth, linen, canvas, leather and paper, Rouen had developed a coherent policy of proto-industrial control of the surrounding countryside. It had a hierarchical and very efficient merchant organisation, embracing almost every part of the Duchy.[45] But the regional domination of the city did not consist merely in its capacity to organise production on an industrial scale and control the trade in commodities. If we look more closely, we can see that traders from Rouen also controlled the regional markets for food and everyday commodities. Given the high standard of living of the Norman population, this captive local demand for medium- and low-grade products ensured valuable profits for merchants who had to face the uncertainty of the international market.

Conclusions

This outline of the Norman case has necessarily been schematic and general. This clearly flows from our choice of a narrative presentation. In conclusion, it is therefore useful to make three methodological points. The first regards the scale of this analysis. It is valid to take a large provincial area, instead of a smaller *pays*, or a micro-historic point of view, not because it is the „right" one, but because it allows us to identify the pertinent scale for each situation or process, from the village or the fief, up to the metropolitan area of Paris or the international scale of maritime trade. Since provinces did not themselves have any specific economic function, an inquiry on the provincial level can shed light on all kinds of economic processes.

A second important point is that, in every case, the market actually articulated economic causes and effects. This is a truism if we use the word market as a notion or a concept, that is a mental instrument, rather than as an historical institution. But the term „market" in my narrative refers to the institution named as such in the medieval records. This should not be confused with the ideal and ever-fluid condition of the economic process described in neo-classical analysis. Medieval markets were precise institutions, with days and hours, places and borders, legal rules and social functions. They were the places were economics became actual and expressed conditions. In Normandy, urban and rural markets had grown during the 11th to 13th centuries, within feudal society. By the later Middle Ages, they were well-established institutions where money, products, and loans came together in a strictly organised situation. They were the basis on which industrial specialisation grew up at the end of the 13th century, and where proto-industrial structures were born after the Hundred Years War.

The third point regards the towns. There were many important cities in Normandy, but Normandy never became the territory of its towns, as Flanders was by the end of the Middle Ages. When we consider the great importance of Rouen both within the French kingdom and within the Channel and North Sea commercial networks, we have to ask why it did not actually become a capital city. The proximity of Paris is a factor, but not a complete explanation. The essential point is that the Duchy lacked any political identity. The crisis of feudalism, which Guy Bois identified as one major cause of the disasters, was not the only one. Wealthy, industrious, and peaceable, the Duchy was never able to defend its wealth, its workers and its peace against the highly political attack it suffered from 1344 on. Brittany, Burgundy, Flanders and England, obviously, had the capacity and political will to do so. But Normandy was merely a stake in the political conflict, and only once that conflict had come to an end, could it again become the same wealthy, industrious and passive dominion of the French King.

Figure 1: The Norman towns in the late Middle Ages

Source: Pierre Bouet/Francois Neveux (eds.), Les villes normandes au Moyen Âge, Caen 2006, 58.

[See print version for illustration]

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4 Cf. the description given (circa 1250) by Bartholomew the Englishman in the encyclopedia De proprietatibus rerum (l. 15, ch. 106): „Est autem gleba eius frugifera et pinguis, campis, nemoribus et pratis insignis, portibus maris nobilis, feris et pecudibus fertilis, nobilissimis civitatibus et oppidis valde fortis, cuius metropolis dicitur Rothomagum, civitas nobilis sita super fluium qui Secana dicitur, cuius gens populosa est, fortis et bellicosa, urbana in habitu, modesta in effectu, pia affatum, pacifica in convictu.“
5 Cf. Guy Bois, The crisis of feudalism, Cambridge 1984.
6 Cf. Adriaan Verhulst, The rise of the cities in North-West Europe, Cambridge 1999; Rodney Hilton, English and French towns in feudal society. A comparative study, Cambridge 1992.
7 Jacques Le Goff, La ville médiévale des Carolingiens à la Renaissance (Histoire de la France Urbaine, vol. 2), Paris 1980, 234-239. Recent books by French historians on the topic of urban networks focus on political and ecclesiastical more than economic factors: Laurence Buchholtzer-Rémy, Une ville et ses réseaux. Nuremberg à la fin du Moyen Âge, Paris 2006; Jean-Luc Fray, Villes et bourgs de Lorraine. Réseau urbain et centralité au Moyen Âge, Clermond-Ferrand 2006.
8 Mathieu Arnoux, Des clercs au service de la réforme. Études et documents sur les chanoines réguliers de la province de Rouen (Bibliotheca victorina, vol. 11), Turnhout 2000, 20-30, 119-127.
9 Cf. Bernard Chevalier, Les bonnes villes de France du XIVe au XVIe siècle, Paris 1982.

10 Bruce M. S. Campbell, Benchmarking medieval economic development. England, Wales, Scotland, and Ireland, c.1290, in: Economic History Review 61 (2008) no. 4, 896-945.

11 But an incomplete return of 1527 gives the names of circa 500 tax-payers, a rather elevated figure for this period: Michel Nortier, Inventaires des rôles de fouage et d'aide, 6e série. Rôles de fouage paroissiaux de 1518 à 1533, in: Cahiers Léopold Delisle 39 (1990), 81, n. 554.

12 Joseph R. Strayer, Economic conditions in the county of Beaumont-le-Roger, 1261-1313, in: Speculum 26 (1951), 277-287.

13 Campbell, Benchmarking, see reference 10.

14 Michel Nortier, Documents manuscrits de la Bibliothèque nationale de France concernant Saint-Lô, spécialement au XVe siècle, in: Revue de la Manche, 48 (2006), 3-34.

15 The return of the monnéage of 1395 for the „ville et faubourgs" of Vire gives the names of 455 tax-payers, to whom must be added an unknown figure for the poor and tax-exempt people: Michel Nortier, Inventaires des rôles de fouage et d'aide, 1e série. Rôles de fouage paroissiaux de 1368 à 1419, in: Cahiers Léopold Delisle 19, (1970), 84, n. 605.

16 Catherine Bougy/Sophie Poirey (eds.), Images de la contestation du pouvoir dans le monde normand, Xe-XIIIe siècle, Caen 2007.

17 In Coutances, Alençon and Argentan, almost all the records of municipal institutions are now preserved in the Archives of the Hospital. For Argentan, see Marie-Anne Moulin, Argentan au Moyen Âge. Aspects urbains, sociaux et économiques, unpublished PhD thesis, École des Hautes Études en Sciences Sociales 2007.

18 Paul Le Cacheux, L'ordonnance de Louis X Hutin du 25 décembre 1315 et ses rapports avec la Charte aux Normands, in: Mémoires de la Société des antiquaires de Normandie 50 (1946-1948), 85-104.

19 Isaballe Theiller, Les marchés hebdomadaires en Normandie Orientale (XIVe siècle – début XVIe siècle), unpublished PhD thesis, Université Paris-7 Denis Diderot 2004; Mathieu Arnoux/Isabelle Theiller, Les marchés comme lieux et enjeux de pouvoir en Normandie (XIe-XVe siècle), in: Anne-Marie Flambard-Héricher (ed.), Les lieux de pouvoir en Normandie et sur ses marges, Caen 2006, 53-70.

20 Isabelle Theiller, Un document pour l'histoire de la draperie médiévale de Montivilliers, 1374-1383, in: Alain Becchia (ed.), La draperie en Normandie du XIIIe au XXe siècle, Rouen 2003, 67-83; Mathieu Arnoux/Jacques Bottin, Autour de Rouen et Paris. Modalités d'intégration d'un espace drapier (XIIIe-XVIe siècles), in: Revue d'histoire moderne et contemporaine 48 (2001) no. 2, 162-191; idem, Les acteurs d'un processus industriel. Drapiers et ouvriers de la draperie entre Rouen et Paris (XIVe-XVIe siècles), in: Mathieu Arnoux/Pierre Monnet (eds.), Le technicien dans la cité en Europe occidentale, 1250-1650 (Collection de l'Ecole française de Rome, vol. 325), Rome 2004, 347-386.

21 Anne Curry, Harfleur et les Anglais, 1415-1422, in: Pierre Bouet/Véronique Gazeau, La Normandie et l'Angleterre au Moyen Âge, Caen 2003, 249-263.

22 Le Victorial. Chronique de don Pero Niño, comte de Buelna (1378-1453), translated by Jean Gautier Dalché, Turnhout 2001, 227.

23 Michel Le Pesant, Le commerce maritime de Regnéville au Moyen Âge, in: Annales de Normandie 8 (1958) no. 3, 323-333; Mathieu Arnoux/Jacques Bottin, La Manche, frontière, marché ou espace de production? Fonctions économiques et évolution d'un espace maritime (XIVe-XVIIe siècles), in: Simonetta Cavaciocchi (ed.), Richezza del Mare, richezza dal mare (secc. XIII-XVIII) (Atti della trentasettesima settimana di studi dell'Istituto Datini), Florence 2006, 875-905.

24 There were only 28 tax-payers in Regnéville in 1473 and 31 in 1493; the return of the monnéage for Montmartin in 1449 gives only 49 names of tax-payers and tax-exempt. Cf. Michel Nortier, Inventaires des rôles de fouage et d'aide, 3e série. Rôles de fouage paroissiaux de 1422 à 1458, in: Cahiers Léopold Delisle 22 (1973), 91, n. 608, and Inventaires des rôles de fouage et d'aide, 4e série. Rôles de fouage paroissiaux de 1461 à 1497, in: Cahiers Léopold Delisle 25 (1976), 181, n. 1167-1168.

25 Hilton, Towns, see reference 6, 32-41; Guy Bois, La grande dépression médiévale, XIVe et XVe siècles. Le précédent d'une crise systémique, Paris 2000, 21-25; cf. also André Chédeville, La ville médiévale des Carolingiens à la Renaissance (Histoire de la France Urbaine, vol. 2), Paris 1980, 59-83.

26 Lucien Musset, Peuplement en bourgage et bourgs ruraux en Normandie du Xe au XIIIe siècle, in: Cahiers de civilisation médiévale 9 (1966) no. 2, 177-208.

27 Mathieu Arnoux, Bourgs, marchés et seigneuries. Remarques sur l'organisation spatiale de la production dans les campagnes normandes (XIIe-XIVe siècles), in: Jean-Marie Yante (ed.), À l'approche d'une autre ruralité. Campagnes et travail non agricole du bas Moyen Âge à 1914 (Archives et Bibliothèques de Belgique, 72), Bruxelles 2004, 21-39.

28 François de Beaurepaire, Un bourg drapier de Basse-Normandie au Moyen Age, Saint-James-de-Beuvron, in: Revue du département de la Manche 7 (1965) no. 25-26, 3-37.

29 Henri Dubois, Drapiers normands aux foires de Bourgogne à la fin du Moyen Âge, in: Mélanges d'Archéologie et d'histoire médiévale en l'honneur du doyen Michel de Boüard, vol. 1, Caen 1982, 229-242.

30 Jean Froissart, Chroniques, I, 255, ed. by Peter F. Ainsworth, Paris 2001, 538-539; Giovanni Villani, Nuova Cronica, XIII, 64, ed. by Giuseppe Porta, Parma 1991, vol. 3, 447.

31 Robert Génestal, Le rôle des Monastères comme établissements de crédit, étudié en Normandie du XIe à la fin du XIIIe siècle, Paris 1901.

32 These very ancient notarial records, now preserved in the archives of the Coutances and Alençon Hospitals, will be soon published.

33 Isabelle Theiller, Prix du marché, marché du grain et crédit au début du XIIIe siècle. Autourd'un dossier rouennais, in: Le Moyen Age 115 (2009) no. 2, 253-276.

34 Paul Le Cacheux, Essai historique sur l'hôpital de Coutances, Paris 1899.

35 The most valuable research can be found in Maryanne Kowaleski, Local markets and regional trade in medieval Exeter, Cambridge 1995; there is no comparable global inquiry for Hampshire towns, but Alwyn A. Ruddock, Italian merchants and shipping in medieval Southampton, Southampton 1951, remains very useful.

36 Joseph Stevenson (ed.), Letters and papers illustrative of the wars of the English in France during the reign of Henry the sixth, king of England (Rerum Britannicarum Medii Aevi scriptores, 22), London 1861-1864, vol. 2, pt. 2, 56-64.

37 Mathieu Arnoux/Jacques Bottin, Les acteurs d'un processus industriel. Drapiers et ouvriers de la draperie entre Rouen et Paris (XIVe-XVIe siècles), in: Mathieu Arnoux/Pierre Monnet (eds.), Le technicien dans la cité en Europe occidentale, 1250-1650 (Collection de l'Ecole française de Rome, 325), Rome 2004, 349.

38 The Libelle of Englyshe Polycye, ed. by George Warner, Oxford 1926.

39 Bois, Crise du féodalisme, see reference 5, 309-328.

40 Philippe Cailleux, Le marché immobilier rouennais au XVe siècle, in: Pierre Bouet/Francois Neveux, Les villes normandes au Moyen Âge, Caen 2006, 241-266.

41 Stevenson, Letters, see reference 36, 615; Arnoux/Bottin, Rouen et Paris, see reference 20.

42 Anne Corry, Harfleur et les Anglais, see reference 21; Christophe Allmand, Lancastrian Normandy, 1415-1450. The history of a Medieval occupation, Oxford 1983. The new town and port of Le Havre was to be founded thereabouts only in 1517.

43 Denise Angers, Le redressement difficile d'une capitale régionale après la guerre de Cent ans: Caen, 1450-1550, in: Philipe Contamine et al. (eds.), Commerce, finances et société (XIe-XVIe siècles), Paris 1993, 185-197, and id., Une ville à la recherche d'elle-même: Caen (1450-1500), in: Pierre Bouet/Francois Neveux, Les villes normandes au Moyen Âge, Caen 2006, 305-316.

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45 Michel Mollat, Le commerce maritime normand à la fin du moyen âge, Paris 1952; Jacques Bottin, Structures et mutations d'un espace proto-industriel. Rouen et sa région à la fin du XVIe siècle, in: Annales E.S.C. 38 (1988) no. 4, 975-995.