

BARCELONA AND ITS
RULERS, 1096–1291

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INTRODUCTION

During the 1160s an adventurous rabbi named Benjamin of Tudela set out from Zaragoza in the upper Ebro Valley on an ambitious journey that would eventually take him to the eastern rim of the Mediterranean and beyond to distant Khurasan.¹ After several days sailing down the broad, slow-moving Ebro and skirting the beaches and rugged hills of the Catalan coast on the first leg of his trip, he arrived at Barcelona. When he described the city many years later in his travel log, Benjamin, by then a seasoned traveler thoroughly conversant with the nuanced idioms of Mediterranean urban life, recalled it as a small but dynamic port, attracting merchants from Genoa, Pisa, Sicily, Alexandria, Greece, and the Levant. Although neither as self-assured or domineering as the bustling Italian communes nor as cosmopolitan as the exotic Greek and Islamic cities he had visited, Barcelona nevertheless seemed to him full of energy and promise. Benjamin of Tudela's terse description captured a medieval city undergoing rapid transformation.

During the twelfth century the maritime powers of the Latin Mediterranean were vying to dominate the sea lanes that Christian galleys had secured from Islamic attacks.² As the lines of commercial, naval, and diplomatic communication grew denser among cities on or in contact with the coasts of Italy, Occitania, and Catalonia, patterns of cooperation and competition emerged that would leave their imprint on the rest of the Middle Ages and beyond. In comparison to its principal Italian and Occitanian

¹ Benjamin of Tudela, *The travels of Benjamin of Tudela*, in *Early travels in Palestine*, ed. and trans. T. Wright (London, 1848), 64.

² On the technological and economic reasons for the reassertion of Christian naval power, see John H. Pryor, *Geography, technology and war: studies in the maritime history of the Mediterranean 649-1571* (Cambridge, 1988), 108-11; Archibald R. Lewis, *Naval power and trade in the Mediterranean A.D. 500-1100* (Princeton, 1951), 225-49; Robert S. Lopez, "The trade of medieval Europe: the South," in *The Cambridge economic history of Europe* (2nd ed., Cambridge, 1941-87), II, 344-50.

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competitors, Barcelona was a late bloomer. Until the mid-twelfth century the city had grown in synchronization with its small hinterland and had firmly established itself as the hub of regional life, but it had not yet projected itself as a major commercial and naval force on the Mediterranean. In Benjamin of Tudela's eyes Barcelona still appeared as a passive point of exchange, not a generator of commerce. By 1300, however, the Catalan capital had forced its way into the leading ranks of Southern European towns. Its merchants competed with the Genoese for economic domination of the Western Mediterranean, its municipal council supervised Catalan trading outposts stretching from Seville to Alexandria, and its financiers held lucrative administrative positions in the extensive dynastic confederation known as the Crown of Aragon. During the two centuries covered by this study, not only had Barcelona itself grown into the largest city in eastern Iberia, but it had come to form an integral part of a vast, interconnected, and highly competitive Mediterranean world.

It would be deceptive, however, to see in overseas trade the only impulse that stimulated the urban economy and set social change in motion. The vitality of Mediterranean towns has long been judged by the face they presented to the outside world rather than by their internal evolution. Ever since the pioneering synthetic works of Adolf Schaube and Wilhelm von Heyd, trade in the medieval Mediterranean has been thought of as an integrated and relatively self-contained system, in which commercial privileges, treaties, tariffs, and private business contracts traced out the stature and defined the position of the major cities.³ The stimulus to Mediterranean studies provided by Fernand Braudel, S. D. Goitein, and Eliyahu Ashtor has deepened and expanded the view that the region formed an interdependent whole, enclosed by the dictates of climate and geography and linked by reliable, cheap shipping and economic interdependence.⁴ The larger the city, the greater the need to keep abreast of its competitors. Braudel's sixteenth-century Mediterranean in particular is a tightly bound,

³ Adolf Schaube, *Handelsgeschichte der romanischen Völker* (Munich and Berlin, 1906); Wilhelm von Heyd, *Histoire du commerce du Levant au moyen-âge*, trans. F. Raynaud, 2 vols. (Leipzig, 1885-86).

⁴ Fernand Braudel, *The Mediterranean and the Mediterranean world in the age of Philip II*, trans. S. Reynolds, 2 vols. (2nd ed., New York, 1973); S. D. Goitein, *A Mediterranean society: the Jewish communities of the Arab world as portrayed in the documents of the Cairo Geniza*, 5 vols. (Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1969-88); Eliyahu Ashtor, *Levant trade in the later Middle Ages* (Princeton, 1983).

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even a claustrophobic world. Bolts of brightly colored cloth, bags of aromatic spices, exotic drugs, bushels of grain, fine brocades, and delicate silks circulated through the great ports in ceaseless motion, at times slowing to form eddies and at others moving rapidly along a swift current together with merchants, sailors, sail-makers, riggers, carpenters, armorers, and other craftsmen and adventurers whose livelihood depended on the sea. In undulating cycles of rise and decline, one town's difficulties worked to another's advantage. As individual cities became enmeshed in the dense web of exchange and the commercial culture that underlay it, they assumed a common profile: their character was therefore largely imposed by the cosmopolitan world in which they were forced to compete. One inevitably approaches Braudel's Mediterranean towns as a traveler.

Although it is impossible to deny that a sailor or merchant in the late medieval Mediterranean would have felt quite at home as he gazed upon the outlines of ships anchored offshore, strolled along the docks, or peeked into the warehouses in one of his ports of call, less familiar scenes, more idiomatically framed by regional traditions, awaited as he made his way to the seats of urban power, the local marketplace, the houses of the well-to-do, or neighborhood churches, mosques, and synagogues. The picture of a unified Mediterranean world depends in large part on the function of towns as highly charged relay points, concentrating, transforming, and redirecting the human and material resources grudgingly provided by a stingy environment. Yet they also faced inland, where they drew upon the products of their hinterlands and established their place in a complex matrix of local power relations. Owing to the very limitations imposed by climate and geography, the fragmentation of the coastline, the dispersion of the strips of vineyards and olive groves, and the frequent separation of coastal plains from large towns, all parts of an historical landscape painted in such brilliant colors by Braudel, towns proved particularly sensitive to the ability of municipal leaders or their lords to organize these dispersed resources through compulsion as well as through commercial exchange for the benefit of the urban community. This is above all true before maritime trade became the lifeblood of urban economies. In the twelfth and thirteenth century the sea itself seemed larger, less secure, and more fragmented than in subsequent periods, for the great ports on its Latin shore were just beginning to stake out and defend their

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spheres of influence. In order to understand how they projected naval power and sustained commercial networks, it is first of all necessary to examine the underlying social transformations and the forms of urban leadership upon which the commercial economy rested. During the period considered here, the individual pieces of a broad Mediterranean community were only beginning to be locked into place.

The purpose of the present study is to look inside the city of which Benjamin of Tudela has provided only a passing glimpse. It will analyze the economic forces that transformed Barcelona from an isolated provincial center into a major commercial emporium, identify the emergence of the patriciate that commanded and profited from urban expansion, and explore how patrician families consolidated their influence and reproduced their power. While the intricacies of local authority and the control of the urban economy will provide the principal focus of the following chapters, the character of the city and the nature of its patriciate can, as Benjamin of Tudela realized, only be understood when set against a broad Mediterranean background.

Barcelona provides a splendid vantage point from which to reconsider the resurgence and early structuring of urban societies in Southern Europe. Because the city emerged rather late as a commercial and maritime power, its rich local documentation permits a detailed examination of the first blossoming of long-distance trade and the internal adaptations required to sustain it. The most dynamic cities of northern Italy had already developed viable commercial structures by the time archival material begins to swell in the twelfth century; in most cases the precociousness of cities south of the Alps makes it possible to study in detail only the results, not the process, of early urban expansion. Catalonia's isolation held back the first surge of growth in Barcelona, but this in a sense allowed the documentation to catch up with the city's development. Yet an investigation of the rise of medieval Barcelona and the consolidation of its leading families into a patriciate has more to offer than a distinctive chronology and an unusually rich archival basis: it presents a vivid contrast to the urban history of medieval Italy.

The towns of the medieval Mediterranean have usually been viewed through the stylishly tinted lenses of Italian glasses. By their antiquity, number, and fierce independence, the city-republics of northern Italy have certainly merited the attention

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lavished on them by generations of historians, but the problems raised by their study have rather presumptuously been equated with those of Mediterranean towns generally. In order to contrast urban life in Northern and Southern Europe, it has become an historiographical commonplace to fix the early Italian city-republics and the towns of the Low Countries as two poles of development, forming an axis around which European urbanism revolved.⁵ While no one will dispute the remarkable density of urban networks in these two areas, it is far from clear whether they possessed enough common characteristics or sufficient weight to justify this geographical dualism in European town development. Recently Susan Reynolds has questioned Italian urban exceptionalism by insisting upon common, deeply embedded forms of European communal organization, while Paul M. Hohenberg and Lynn H. Lees, arguing from the perspective of widespread urban networks, insist that the revival of towns after 1000 represented a complete reworking of previous patterns, sweeping up and reordering the remnants of earlier urban societies into a distinctive, cohesive new system.⁶ Barcelona offers an opportunity to explore the nature of a Mediterranean town from an original perspective, for many of the characteristic themes of Italian urban history simply do not apply, or need considerable retooling to be useful. First, in contrast to northern Italy, public authority did not shatter into tiny pieces which fell into the hands of individual towns and seignories but remained focused on an assertive, expansionist dynasty. Second, the internal restructuring of urban society in Barcelona had little to do with the territorial expansion of the city, which would never control a *contado*. Finally, aristocratic clans played only a marginal role in the Catalan capital; as a result, the city's political life was not dominated by the factional struggles that overwhelmed many Italian towns. The relative stability of Barcelona's municipal regime and its pivotal role in the expansive confederation of the Crown of

⁵ The approach was most thoroughly articulated in the stimulating comparative study by Jean Lestocquoy, *Aux origines de la bourgeoisie: les villes de Flandres et d'Italie sous le gouvernement des patriciens, XI^e-XV^e siècles* (Paris, 1952). Cf. Edith Ennen, "Les Différents types de formation des villes européennes," *Le Moyen âge*, 62 (1956), 397-412; Robert Fossier, *Enfance de l'Europe* (Paris, 1982), II, 980-86; Jacques Le Goff, "L'Apogée de la France urbaine médiévale, 1150-1330," in *Histoire de la France urbaine*, ed. G. Duby (Paris, 1980-85), II, 276-79.

⁶ Susan Reynolds, *Kingdoms and communities in Western Europe, 900-1300* (Oxford, 1984), 197-98, 204-6; Paul M. Hohenberg and Lynn H. Lees, *The making of urban Europe* (Cambridge, MA, 1985), 59-62.

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Aragon present the problem of Mediterranean urban development in a distinctive and little-explored setting.

Urban historiography has in general shied away from dealing with the ongoing relations between early towns and the feudal and territorial powers that surrounded them.⁷ Because traditional approaches to medieval towns have placed them outside the bonds that held feudal society together, both royal and feudal influences on developing urban communities are usually treated only in terms of an external force legitimizing local municipal institutions or confirming urban autonomy. But officeholding, credit, and military involvement also created many opportunities for urban lords to influence the internal organization of the urban community as well as its external relationships. The more thoroughly medieval towns are integrated into the power structures of the medieval world, the greater the importance accorded their lords in determining their character. This is particularly true of early Catalan towns. Without reference to the resilient territorial authority of the counts of Barcelona and, after the dynasty acquired a crown by marriage into the Aragonese royal house, the daring expansionism of the count-kings, the history of medieval Barcelona would be incomprehensible. Rather than plot the formation of a city-state, the following chapters will therefore explore the expansion of a regional capital within the dynastic confederation known as the Crown of Aragon.

In order to grasp the distinctive contours presented by urban society in medieval Catalonia and understand why the conjunction of dynastic, commercial, and family interests do not fit the traditional model of Mediterranean towns, one must first turn to the historiographical assumptions upon which that model rests.

THE TYPOLOGY OF THE MEDITERRANEAN CITY

In the heated nineteenth-century debates about the origin of European towns, historical interest first focused on Germany, France, and the Low Countries. Although national pride certainly influenced the choice, so too did the ideological cast of liberalism.

⁷ For some recent exceptions, see R. H. Hilton, *English and French towns in feudal society: a comparative study* (Cambridge, 1992), 87–104; Christian Guilleré, “Ville et féodalité dans la Catalogne au bas moyen-âge,” in *La formació i expansió del feudalisme català. Actes del col·loqui organitzat pel Col·legi Universitari de Girona (8–11 de gener de 1985)* [Estudi General. Revista del Col·legi Universitari de Girona, 5–6] (Girona, 1986), 447–66.

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In order to find a reassuring historical pedigree for the triumphant bourgeoisie of industrial Europe, scholars turned their attention to the formation of the medieval communes in search of ancestors. Because of their association with commerce, craft production, and representative municipal councils, medieval towns seemed the harbingers of capitalism, rationality, and representative democracy; in short, they embodied the forces of progress in the face of agricultural backwardness, clerical obscurantism, and feudal oppression. Towns thus presented an anomaly in feudal Europe. By setting up urban communities as an antithesis to feudalism, it seemed evident that modern industrial societies emerged in those areas where burghers had completely freed themselves of seigniorial control in order to pursue an economic and political agenda of their own; the fullest embodiment of medieval urbanism therefore lay in the North, the future engine of Western industrial development. Mediterranean towns seemed the poor relations of the novel, forward-looking Northern communes. Voicing the predilections of the German, French, and Belgian pioneers of early urban history, Henri Pirenne declared that the medieval town attained its "most classic form" in Flanders, for there neither nobles nor clerics impeded the free development of urban communities, which owed their existence to commerce alone.⁸ In a similar vein, Max Weber asserted that the Western city developed its "purest form" north of the Alps, for there burghers completely severed the "magical taboos" of clannish exclusivity and formed new communities based on individual, contractual responsibilities rather than on family bonds: the new pattern of civic association presented a sharp turn on the road leading to the Protestant ethic.⁹

What disturbed both these influential scholars of European urban societies when they looked over the Alps was the high profile of aristocratic families and knights in the early Italian city-states. Urban communities in the South seemed to emerge almost too effortlessly in a landscape littered with the physical ruins and distant memories of a Roman civic past; without the pressure of hostile, overbearing feudal lords, burghers did not have to organize themselves quite so tightly, assert their claims so forcefully, or see themselves so far removed intellectually and

⁸ Henri Pirenne, *Early democracies in the Low Countries*, trans. J.V. Saunders (New York, 1963), 68.

⁹ Max Weber, *The city*, trans. D. Martindale and G. Neuwirth (New York, 1958), 91, 98-99.

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politically from the seigniorial world surrounding them as did their counterparts in the North. If merchants and an egalitarian legal community lay at the heart of the Western town, then the presence of a privileged aristocratic element in urban society indicated a stunted social evolution in the South: from this perspective an urban nobility undermined the very nature of the medieval town. In spite of the grandeur and sophistication of Italian civic life, the traditions of medieval urban historiography have burdened the study of Mediterranean towns with a psychology of imputed underdevelopment.¹⁰

Since the Second World War this perspective has slowly changed not so much through direct comparative studies among towns in different regions as through a reevaluation of the ties between town and country. In Northern Europe the bonds forged by immigration, credit, and investment between burghers and villagers in the urban hinterland have attracted considerable attention over the past generation. As a result, towns of the North no longer appear to have served primarily as commercial relay stations dominated by long-distance merchants; urban communities possessed deep, firm roots in their hinterlands.¹¹ In Italy, on the other hand, aristocratic elements now do not seem embarrassingly out of place in an urban setting. Because the increased productivity of the countryside lay behind the reanimation of urban life in the Po and Arno Valleys during the tenth and eleventh centuries, nobles resident in the ancient *civitates* but still possessing strong ties to the countryside helped concentrate agricultural surpluses for the burgeoning urban marketplace. The tables have thus been completely turned. Rather than retarding or, at best, disdainfully ignoring trade, nobles are now credited with transforming agricultural profits into commercial capital and, through ship construction in the great ports, directing their aggressiveness to piracy and its twin, overseas trade.¹² The closer

¹⁰ For a similar perspective in ethnology, M. Herzfeld, *Anthropology through the looking glass: critical ethnography in the margins of Europe* (Cambridge, 1987), 64–76.

¹¹ Fundamental among the works reorienting urban historiography toward the connections of the city to its hinterland is Jean Schneider, *La Ville de Metz aux XIII^e et XIV^e siècles* (Nancy, 1950). Cf. André Chédeville, *Chartres et ses campagnes, XI^e au XIII^e siècles* (Paris, 1977), 393–504; R. Fictier, *La cité de Besançon de la fin du XI^e au milieu du XIV^e siècle*, 3 vols. (Lille, 1978); David Nicholas, *Town and countryside: social, economic, and political tensions in fourteenth-century Flanders* (Bruges, 1971); Léopold Gemicot, "Villes et campagnes dans les Pays-Bas médiévaux," *Acta mediaevalia*, 7–8 (1986–87), 163–92.

¹² The reorientation of Italian urban studies toward the countryside was initiated by Cinzio Violante, *La società milanese nell'età precomunale* (Bari, 1953). For recent appraisals of the

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medieval towns are brought to their countrysides, the narrower the historiographical gap that separates Northern and Southern Europe.

This *rapprochement*, however, has come at the expense of denying medieval urban communities much of the institutional originality and social cohesiveness that earlier generations of scholars had so admired in them. Philip Abrams has trenchantly pointed out the methodological weakness of treating the town as an abstract, generic social entity in itself; urban communities assume their character and functions depending upon their place in larger systems of economic and political organization rather than from a transhistorical, reified "townness."¹³ This general criticism has left a deep mark on medieval scholarship. In economic terms, the reanimation of urban life after the year 1000 now seems more the product than the cause of Europe's broad advance in productive capacity, which was still overwhelmingly agricultural in nature. Long-distance trade, once considered the lifeblood of the urban revival, has now taken a back seat to the emergence of a market-oriented agriculture and local craft production.¹⁴ In conjunction with a reevaluation of the economic functions of early towns, doubts have been raised about the distinctiveness of their communal cohesiveness and social structure. In a recent refurbishing of von Below's *Landgemeinde* theory, which found in medieval urban communes a projection of an older village solidarity, Reynolds argues that the character of medieval communes differed little from other forms of medieval lay collectivities.¹⁵ By means of such criticism towns have therefore been stripped of the

economic and social impact of urban nobles in Italy, Georges Duby, *The early growth of the European economy*, trans. H.B. Clarke (London, 1974), 260-63; Giovanni Tabacco, *Egemonia sociale e strutture del potere nel medioevo italiano* (Turin, 1974), 226-36; Philip Jones, "Economia e società nell'Italia medievale: il mito della borghesia," *Economia e società nell'Italia medievale* (Turin, 1980), 51-61; M. Tangheroni, "Famiglie nobili e ceto dirigente a Pisa nel XIII secolo," in *I ceti dirigenti dell'età comunale nei secoli XII e XIII* (Pisa, 1982), II, 323-46; Gerhard Rösch, *Der venezianische Adel bis zur Schließung des Großen Rats* (Sigmaringen, 1989), 69-80.

¹³ Philip Abrams, "Towns and economic growth: some theories and problems," in *Towns in societies: essays in economic history and historical sociology*, eds. P. Abrams and E.W. Wrigley (Cambridge, 1978), 9-33.

¹⁴ Charles Verlinden, "Marchands ou tisserands? A propos des origines urbaines," *AESC*, 27 (1972), 396-406; Adriaan Verhulst, "The 'agricultural revolution' of the Middle Ages reconsidered," in *Law custom, and the social fabric in medieval Europe: essays in honor of Bryce Lyon*, eds. B.S. Bachrach and D. Nicholas (Kalamazoo, 1990), 23-24.

¹⁵ Reynolds, *Kingdoms and communities*, 155-218. Cf. M. von Below, *Der Ursprung der deutschen Stadtverfassung* (Dusseldorf, 1892).

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revolutionary merit badges of political equality, democratic representation, and lay communal solidarity that had once distinguished them within "feudal" Europe. Their "bourgeois" character has even been put in doubt.¹⁶ In contrast to a model of social stratification that emphasizes horizontal classes marked off by levels of wealth, economic occupation, and shared, self-conscious political interests, vertical solidarities based on family, neighborhood, and religious corporations that encompass individuals of varied economic levels have for a generation received the greatest attention, especially in northern Italy.¹⁷ The corporate solidarity which to Max Weber appeared to provide the essence of the Occidental city has been gradually evaporating; medieval towns have virtually taken on the appearance of uncomfortable, volatile agglomerations of villages.

In an act of "ethnic revenge," the shift of scholarly interest away from the North to Mediterranean societies has created new models that have challenged traditional assumptions about the Middle Ages worked out in England, Germany, and northern France.¹⁸ Fundamental to the reevaluation of medieval urban life has been the stress on aristocratic clans in the formation of Italian cities. In a direct assault on the relevance of modern social categories to the study of precapitalist societies, Jacques Heers has denied the usefulness of class analysis for medieval urban communities and has tossed the medieval "merchant class" on the scrap heap of historiographical anachronisms.¹⁹ Not associations of long-distance traders, he argues, but aristocratic clans provided the framework for Italian urban societies and politics. Strongly agnatic in character, cohesive groups of rural nobles entrenched themselves in urban soil as the cities began to revive in the tenth

¹⁶ Jones, "Economia e società," 6-11.

¹⁷ The same can be said for Renaissance cities, whose distance from their medieval predecessors is rapidly diminishing; for an historiographical overview of work on two of the most thoroughly studied Italian towns, see Gene Brucker, "Tales of two cities: Florence and Venice in the Renaissance," *American historical review*, 83 (1983), 599-616.

¹⁸ Thomas N. Bisson, "Some characteristics of Mediterranean territorial power in the twelfth century," *Proceedings of the American Philosophical Society*, 123 (1975), 143 [repr. in *Medieval France and her Pyrenean neighbours: studies in early institutional history* (London and Ronceverte, WV, 1989), 257].

¹⁹ Jacques Heers, *Le Clan familial au moyen âge: étude sur les structures politiques et sociales des milieux urbains* (Paris, 1974) [*Family clans in the Middle Ages: a study of political and social structure in urban areas*, trans. B. Herbert (Amsterdam, London, and New York, 1977)] and *Les Partis et la vie politique dans l'Occident médiéval* (Paris, 1981) [*Parties and political life in the medieval West*, trans. D. Nicholas (Amsterdam, London, and New York, 1977)].

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and eleventh century, promoted family cooperation in economic and military affairs, and built defensive strongholds at the very center of ancient, partially deserted towns. Although not unique to Italy, defensive towers dominated the civic skyline south of the Alps: Florence possessed 135 towers in 1180, Pisa 60, and more than 100 are recorded in Bologna and Verona.²⁰ Some still serve as monuments to the enduring strength of aristocratic kinship in emerging civic societies. The factionalism for which Italian towns are famous therefore had its roots in feuds among competing noble families rather than in conflicts among commercial and craft groups with articulate economic and political interests. Based on his familiarity with the Italian urban scene, Heers has attempted to generalize his findings to towns throughout medieval Europe. Urban aristocracies, once thought a Mediterranean deviation from the "true" development of Western cities, have now been offered as a key to unlock the underlying family structures that provided the framework for all medieval towns. Especially in Southern Europe, urban life now seems dominated by tall towers, long knives, and short tempers.

Outside Italy, however, little work has been done on family structure to confirm or modify these conclusions. Particularly problematic for the present study is the assumed continuity between rural and urban family organization, in itself a critical element in the reevaluation of the relationships between town and country. In order to make medieval towns more at home in a predominantly agricultural society, a long proto- or preurban phase, sometimes plunged into the murky past of pre-Roman settlements, is posited to smooth the way for their integration into a regional context.²¹ Recent historiography has done its best to rub away the once dazzling novelty of European towns.

Often lost, however, in the attempt to break down the dialectic between feudal and bourgeois categories are the structural adjustments required of families and factions within the nascent towns to come to terms with their new social environment. The most challenging criticism to the continuist model comes from a sociologist, Yves Barel.²² Drawing upon theories of social reproduction

²⁰ See the summary in Fossier, *Enfance*, II, 93.

²¹ Anne Lombard-Jordan, "Du problème de la continuité: y-a-t-il une protohistoire urbaine en France?" *AESC*, 25 (1970), 1121-42.

²² Yves Barel, *La Ville médiévale: système social, système urbain* (Grenoble, 1977), esp. 69-119.

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taken from contemporary urban studies, Barel avoids the pitfalls of both traditional urban historiography, which views towns as out of place in medieval Europe, and a recent, continuist approach, which denies them a clear identity. Auto-reproduction provides the key to autonomy. Barel argues that towns did not emerge in opposition to a seigniorial, agrarian regime, but as its by-products. As defensive, administrative, and ecclesiastical centers and places of aristocratic consumption, early towns served the dominant system of authority and social organization grounded in the countryside, here presented in terms of a "feudal system." Even though the urban population began to increase and its economic activities diversified, the internal organization of the community depended ultimately on external forces beyond its control; the basic structures of urban life were therefore reproduced over time by the feudal system rather than by the power of the burghers themselves. A distinct urban system could only emerge when a patriciate coalesced as its leading element and identified its interests with those of the town as a whole in order to promote its commercial potential. The basic structure of urban society matured and began to reproduce itself over generations, rather than being recreated as an unstable product of a feudal regime. Although Barel tends to look upon fully developed urban societies in terms of systemic abstractions, this approach nevertheless has considerable advantages in understanding the processes by which medieval towns took shape. The "birth" of European towns has painted medievalists into a conceptual corner, for they have been forced to offer abstract, ahistorical, and ultimately unsatisfactory definitions of what a town is in order to fill out its birth certificate properly. The transition from "reproduction" to "auto-reproduction" of an urban society provides for a much more subtle transformation since it does not present town and country as inherently opposed worlds yet at the same time allows for the creation of a civic self-consciousness and for considerable variety in the forms of urban life. The following chapters will argue that Barcelona did not consolidate its social structure and assume its distinctive place in the medieval Mediterranean during the first phase of urban growth but only later, when a patriciate emerged to lead the town in new directions and to give the city the basic character it would retain throughout the *ancien régime*.

Introduction

THE HISTORIOGRAPHY OF MEDIEVAL BARCELONA

Even though the towns of the Crown of Aragon have not received the same degree of scholarly attention as the Italian city-republics, Barcelona has certainly not lacked its historians. Because of its centrality to Catalan identity, few medieval cities have received such partisan and impassioned treatments of their pasts as Barcelona.

While the erudite sixteenth- and seventeenth-century works on Catalan history by Zurita, Pujades, and Bosch showed a passing interest in the city, the groundwork for the modern study of Barcelona was laid in 1779-92 with the publication of *Memorias históricas sobre la marina, comercio y artes de la antigua ciudad de Barcelona* by Antonio de Capmany y de Monpalau.²³ Capmany turned to the medieval past of his native city in order to stimulate interest in Spanish commercial and industrial development. His explorations of Barcelona's royal and municipal archives produced a magnificent collection of commercial documents, principally from the fourteenth and fifteenth century, accompanied by an insightful discussion of the expansion of the city's medieval trade; carefully reedited and annotated, Capmany's work remains the vade mecum for explorers into the city's past and has oriented subsequent research toward commerce.

Unfortunately, the early impetus to medieval urban studies provided by Capmany did not carry over into the nineteenth century. Little of note appeared either in terms of specialized monographs or the publication of local sources until around the turn of the twentieth century. The nineteenth-century revival of Catalan literature and culture, the *Renaixença*, eventually spilled over into other fields as well, but the early history of the Catalan capital was approached obliquely. The philologist José Balari Jovany probed the early charters of Catalonia for evidence of naming patterns, family ties, and local customs, which bore indirectly on urban life.²⁴ With the publication of *Les monedes catalanes* by the numismatist Joaquim Botet y Sisó, a solid basis was laid for an investigation into the medieval economy,²⁵ but the exploration into the

²³ Antonio de Capmany y de Monpalau, *Memorias históricas sobre la marina, comercio y artes de la antigua ciudad de Barcelona*, 2nd ed., revised and introduced by E. Giralt i Raventós and C. Batlle i Gallart, 3 vols. (Barcelona, 1961-63).

²⁴ José Balari Jovany, *Orígenes históricos de Cataluña*, 2 vols. (2nd ed., San Cugat del Vallés, 1964) [original edition 1899].

²⁵ Joaquim Botet y Sisó, *Les monedes catalanes: estudi y descripció de les monedes carolingies, comtals, senyoriales, reials y locals propries de Catalunya*, 3 vols. (Barcelona, 1908-11).