

**HAJNAL'S EUROPEAN MARRIAGE PATTERN AND  
THE EVOLUTION OF AGRARIAN STRUCTURES  
IN WESTERN EUROPE FROM THE FIFTEENTH TO  
THE EIGHTEENTH CENTURIES**

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**Resum.-** En aquest article s'analitzen les relacions entre els canvis en les estructures agràries d'Europa Occidental i l'evolució dels règims demogràfics. Més concretament, la transició cap a uns comportaments en què la nupcialitat es retarda, que Hajnal l'anomena el "tipus de nupcialitat europea" i que succeí de forma paral·lela i en la mateixa àrea geogràfica que la transició cap a un règim d'agricultura de parcel·leria. És això només una coincidència? Aquestes dues evolucions paral·leles tenen una causa comuna? O, és possible explicar els canvis demogràfics per l'evolució de les estructures agràries? Intentaré argumentar que aquesta darrera possibilitat és la correcta i la causa dels canvis en els nivells de nupcialitat a Europa Occidental després del segle XVI ha estat la transició d'un règim agrari feudal a un règim de parcel·leria.

**Paraules clau.-** Nupcialitat, estructura agrària, segles XVI-XVIII, Hajnal, Europa Occidental.

**Resumen.-** En este artículo se analizan las relaciones entre los cambios en las estructuras agrarias en Europa Occidental y la evolución de los regímenes demográficos. Concretamente, la transición hacia unos comportamientos donde la nupcialidad se retrasa, que Hajnal lo llamó "tipo de nupcialidad europea" y que sucedió de forma paralela y en la misma área geográfica que la transición hacia un régimen de agricultura de parcel·leria. ¿Es sólo una coincidencia?, ¿Estas dos evoluciones paralelas tienen una causa común? O, ¿Es posible explicar los cambios demográficos por la evolución de las estructuras agrarias? Intentaré argumentar que la última posibilidad es la correcta y la causa de los cambios en los niveles de nupcialidad en Europa Occidental después del siglo XVI ha sido la transición desde un régimen agrario feudal a un régimen de parcel·leria.

**Palabras clave.-** Nupcialidad, estructura agraria, siglos XVI-XVIII, Hajnal, Europa Occidental.

**Abstract.-** In this work I analyze the links between the changes in the agrarian structures in Western Europe and the evolution of the demographic regimes. More concretely, the transition towards late marriage behaviors, which Hajnal called the "European marriage pattern", occurred in parallel and in the same geographical area as the transition towards short-term leasehold agriculture. Is this only a coincidence, or do these two parallel evolutions have a common cause, or is it possible to explain the demographic changes by the evolution of the agrarian structures? I will try to argue that this last possibility is the correct one, and that the cause of the changes in nuptiality levels in Western Europe from the sixteenth century is the transition from the feudal tenure to short-term tenure (share-cropping and tenant farming).

**Key words.-** nuptiality, agrarian structure, XVI-XVIIIth Century, Hajnal, Western Europe.

**Résumé.-** Dans ce travail j'analyse les liens entre les changements des structures agraires en Europe occidentale et l'évolution des régimes démographiques. Plus concrètement, la transition vers des comportements de mariage tardif, ce qu'Hajnal a appelé le "type de mariage européen", s'est produit en parallèle and dans les mêmes régions que la transition vers une agriculture parcellisée. Est-ce une coïncidence, ou ces deux évolutions parallèles ont une cause commune, ou bien est-il possible d'expliquer les changements démographiques par l'évolution des structures agraires? J'essaierai de montrer que c'est cette dernière possibilité qui est la bonne, et que la cause du changement des niveaux de nuptialité en Europe occidentale depuis le XVIème siècle a été la transition d'un régime agraire féodal à un régime de type parcellisé (share-cropping, tenant farming)

**Mots clés.-** nuptialité, structure agraire, XVI-XVIIIème siècle, Hajnal, Europe occidentale.

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## **HAJNAL'S EUROPEAN MARRIAGE PATTERN AND THE EVOLUTION OF AGRARIAN STRUCTURES IN WESTERN EUROPE FROM THE FIFTEENTH TO THE EIGHTEENTH CENTURIES<sup>1</sup>**

One of the most surprising discoveries in the study of past European population is that of the existence of a transition around the sixteenth century from a norm of early and universal marriage towards a norm of late marriage with a significant celibacy. In what is now a classical paper, Hajnal called this last norm the "European marriage pattern" (Hajnal, 1965). The main characteristics of that transition was a significant increase in the age at first marriage, especially for women, for whom in one century this age increased from around 20 years to more than 25. Hajnal added that this transition affected only a part of European populations, those at the West of an imaginary line from Saint Petersburg to Trieste, and that the other part followed the early marriage norm until the beginning of the Twentieth century. Since the publication of Hajnal's work, most of the studies on this theme had confirmed the existence of this transition to a late marriage norm. But the accumulation of data also allowed to gain a clearer view of the picture first uncovered by Hajnal and, in particular, to detect different regional types of transition.

The historical demographers did not loose sight of the importance of this change in the marriage pattern within the general framework of the socio-economic changes, which led to the industrial revolution and the demographic revolution in Europe in the nineteenth century. But what generally held the attention were the possible effects of the adoption of the new norm of nuptiality on the individual behaviors, and thus the late marriage and the emergence of the entrepreneurship are very often associated. From this point of view, the generalization of the European marriage pattern around the Sixteenth century is currently regarded as one of the main preparatory factors of the industrial revolution. The focus on the effects somewhat left in a second plane the concern for the explanation of the causes of this transition. The ideas usually advanced for the causes are generally based on the argumentation developed by Malthus, who considered the delay of the age at marriage a response of civilized societies to the problem of the demographic growth within an

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<sup>1</sup> This text summarize parts of my thesis: Devolder, 1994. This work forms part of the project: "La población de Cataluña. Estudio histórico y territorial" (DGES PB96-1139).

economic context of decreasing returns. I will argue that these explanations are not convincing, on a logical level as well as due to the fact that they do not make possible to integrate the play of the institutional factors on demographic behaviors. Thus, if it is true that the delay in the age at marriage caused a reduction of the demographic growth rate, it does not seem to me that one can characterize in a general way the situation of Western Europe around the sixteenth century as close to overpopulation, as do the authors who follow the Malthusian argument. In many regards, this assumption of overpopulation is made in a mechanical way starting from the simple observation of the reduction of the growth rate of Western European populations during the sixteenth century, and we have here a logically circular explanation.

Moreover, the explanations based on Malthus' arguments generally do not take into account the institutional changes and their possible effects on this transition of nuptiality. However during the same time there were great transformations in the conditions of life of rural people, which had unquestionable effects on their individual behaviors. Thus, Marc Bloch, in his book on the French rural history, speaks about an upheaval of the agrarian structures in France and in most of Western Europe around the sixteenth century (Bloch, 1931, chapter IV). For example, there was a complete change in France in the forms of land ownership, which translated by a conversion from a majority of perpetual tenures to short-term lease tenures. Starting from the second half of fifteenth century, and accelerating during the sixteenth century, increased the proportion of the peasants who were sharecroppers or tenant farmers and held their land for a short term, under 12 years. In the eighteenth century more than half of the cultivated land was held with short-term leases. This evolution common to most of Western Europe is part of a more general process of "reféodalisation" (new feudalism) which in a general way represented for the peasants a loss of control over the land. One can observe that in the areas of Europe where this transition to short-term leases happened, it was accompanied by the diffusion of the late marriage norm. Is this a coincidence, or are they two parallel evolutions whose cause was common, or can one explain the demographic changes by the evolution of the agrarian structures? I will try in this paper to argue that this last possibility is the correct one, and that the changes in nuptiality in Western Europe around the Sixteenth century were a consequence of the generalization of the sharecropping and tenant farming.

### **1.- The European marriage pattern (Sixteenth-Nineteenth centuries)**

Marriage behavior was essential in the organization and the dynamics of preindustrial population, due to the fact that the families were often the basic unit of production. So the transition to late marriage discovered by Hajnal was a very significant change for those

populations. The data he had at his disposal in his original work were very fragmentary, especially for the eighteenth century and before, and he was very audacious to speak about the generalization of a marriage pattern common to all Western Europe starting from the sixteenth century. So, before discussing the possible causes of the generalization of this model, it is useful to reconsider its characteristics.

### **1.1.- An European marriage pattern for women**

When Hajnal described what he called the European marriage pattern, he said that its two distinctive attributes were, first a late age at first marriage, and second a high proportion of final celibacy. It is important to note that this new pattern concerned women. This was one of the first things that remarked Hajnal, comparing Western European with Eastern European data around 1900, observation reinforced by the analysis of the data for Third World countries at the same date. Indeed, if one examines closely the data used by Hajnal, one may say that the title of the paper was erroneous. It would have been better to speak of an "European marriage pattern for women". Hajnal noticed it well, specifying that:

"The uniqueness of the European pattern lies primarily in the high age at marriage of women (..) rather than in a high age at marriage for men." (Hajnal, 1965, p. 134)

The paradox then would be to give the same significance and the same explanation to the variations of the female and the male nuptiality rate from the sixteenth century onwards. However this is precisely what a great number of authors do in their analysis of the European marriage pattern. But the immediate consequences of a high age at marriage for women and for men were not identical. Thus late marriage for women led the populations towards a zero growth rate, when this rate is theoretically independent of the age at marriage for men. In fact, men married late as well in populations with early female nuptiality as in populations with late female nuptiality. A possible reason for the fact that men married sometimes towards 28-30 years before and after the sixteenth century was that this age coincided on average with the moment of the death of the father. Age at marriage in the European preindustrial times thus depended certainly on the conditions of mortality, and the needs for the succession between generations, but this was for very different reasons for each sex. The effect of mortality on the female age was indirect, dependent on conditions for the population as a whole, whereas its effect on the male age

was certainly much more direct, since identified with the death of only one person, the head of the family<sup>2</sup>.

An explanatory theory of the European marriage pattern must thus mainly study the factors, which affected women. And, on the contrary, one can regard as incomplete, even as incorrect, any theory of late marriage centered primarily on the determinants of male nuptiality, or a theory which does not discriminate between the two sexes.

## 1.2.- Regional transitions to late marriage

The analysis of available European nuptiality series permits to distinguish several regional types of transition towards late marriage, as one can see for example from the data of the following graphs. It should be noted however that the curves for the Italian and Spanish areas are based on an approximation and data much less reliable than the others curves<sup>3</sup>.

### *Evolution of the age at first marriage for women in North-western Europe (I), in two Italian areas (II) and in three Spanish areas (III)*

The two most significant aspects seem to be, first the precocity of the increase in the age at first marriage for women in England relative to the other areas of Western Europe and, second the significant regional differences in the countries of the South, where the spread of late marriage was apparently not general. The data of these graphs generally confirm the existence of the transition towards late marriage described by Hajnal, since the curves are initially ascending. However the level of the English female age was high from the very start of the seventeenth century, which led some authors to think that this transition

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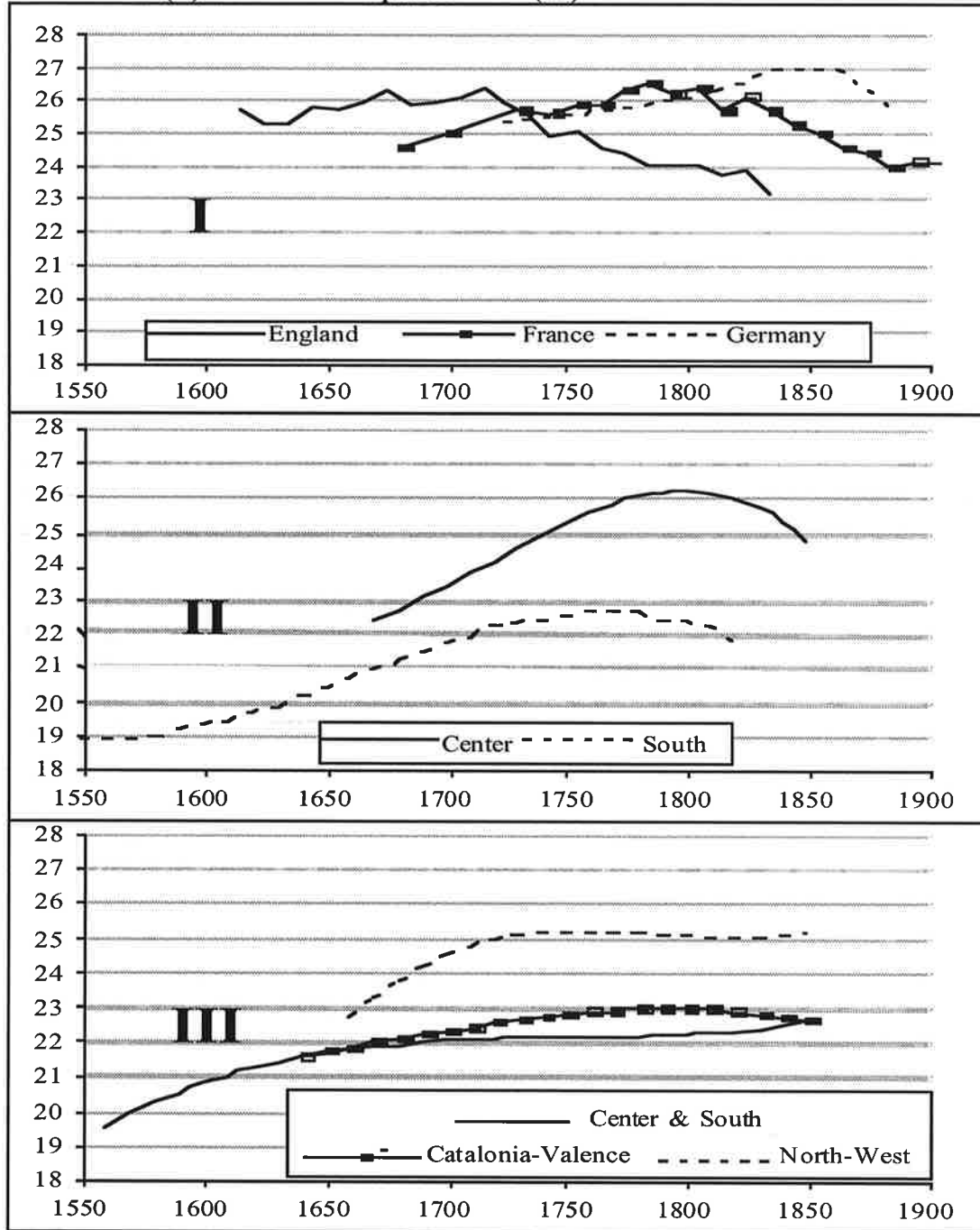
<sup>2</sup> For a more detailed analysis of the demographic significance of late marriage for men and women in preindustrial populations, cf Devolder, 1998.

<sup>3</sup> The data used for the English curve are those of Wrigley and other 1997, table 5.3, p. 134. The French data are those of Henry and Houdaille, 1979, table 9, p. 413. The German data correspond to the 14 parishes studied by Knodel, 1988, table 6.1, pp. 122-23. The Italian and Spanish curves are based on data much more precarious than those of the three former countries. They are generally data of age at marriage obtained from family reconstruction, or from the ages recorded on the marriage certificates, but also in certain cases, of ages calculated from the proportions single in population lists or censuses, according to the Hajnal's method (about half of the observations for the Italian case). The Italian data are those of Barbagli, 1996, table 2, pp. 492-497 and the Spanish data are those of Ardit, 1995, Table in appendix, pp. 13-18. I have excluded the data of large cities like Madrid and Venice as well as the isolated data point at the beginning and at the end of period. The curves are obtained by the adjustment of a third degree polynomial function to the scatter plot formed by the data of age at first marriage, centered on their period of observation. The curve for the center of Italy is based on 34 observations concerning Liguria, Emilia and Toscana. That for the South is based on 45 points for Campania, Basilicata, Calabria, Puglia and Sicilia. The curve for the North-West of Spain corresponds to 131 observations for Galicia, Asturias, País



perhaps occurred in England well before the sixteenth century, perhaps even in the thirteenth century (for example Macfarlane, 1978, Smith, 1983).

**Evolution of the age at first marriage for women in North-western Europe (I), in two Italian areas (II) and in three Spanish areas (III)**



Vasco and Navarra. For the interior of Spain, I have used 51 observations made for localities of the center and the south. The curve for Cataluña and the area of Valencia is based on 73 observations.

One must note also the gradual fall of this age in England throughout the eighteenth century, when the curves for the rest of Europe were still generally ascending. The most interesting aspect of these data is precisely this diversity among European regional transitions, and also the fact that late marriage did not spread completely in some parts of Southern Europe. For example age at marriage stayed under 23 years in areas like Catalonia and the region of Valence in Spain, the Po Valley in Italy, in spite of the fact that those regions had socioeconomic and population density levels very similar to regions of North-western Europe<sup>4</sup>.

### **1.3.- Bottom to top spread of late marriage on the social scale**

The spread of the late marriage norm in Western Europe around the sixteenth century had another interesting characteristic, the fact that the process of diffusion occurred from the bottom to the top of the social scale, from the country towards the cities, from the poorest stratum of the farming community towards the rural and urban *élites*. Thus, in fifteenth century Tuscany, at the very beginning of the transition towards late marriage, women of the poorest sharecroppers married at the highest age (Herlihy and Klapisch-Zuber, 1978). Two or three centuries later, when the late marriage was general, the poorest women of rural Tuscany again married the latest (Doveri, 1982). One can find this differential behavior in all the European populations with late marriage: the first women who adopted the prudent behavior of late marriage were the poorest one, and still in the nineteenth century the same group of women often married late when that social norm was losing its importance.

Age at marriage for women in the aristocracy and the upper middle-classes was also generally much lower at that time than for the rest of the population. This spread from the bottom to the top of the European marriage pattern worked in the opposite way relative to the top to bottom spread of fertility control behaviors during the European demographic transition in the nineteenth century<sup>5</sup>.

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<sup>4</sup> There were not sufficient data to build a similar curve for the Po Valley. However at the end of eighteenth century the age at first marriage for women was much earlier in that region than in Tuscany (Barbagli, 1996)

<sup>5</sup> Livi-Bacci, 1986 shows that many groups of the aristocracy and the urban middle-class controlled in a very significant way their fertility as early as the eighteenth century, fifty to one hundred years before the generalization of these behaviors to the remainder of the population.

## **2.- Traditional explanations of the diffusion of the European marriage pattern**

### **2.1.- Criteria for evaluating the theories of late marriage**

One can classify the theories of the European marriage pattern in at least four groups: those which associate late marriage to the emergence of individualism and the capitalist ethic<sup>6</sup>; those which insist on the link between late marriage and nuclear family<sup>7</sup>; those which see the transition towards late marriage as a preliminary phase of the demographic transition<sup>8</sup>; and finally those that identify late marriage to the Malthusian preventive checks. However these theories do not have the same degree of adequacy with the reality that they seek to explain, neither the same level of logical coherence. To evaluate them, I use two different criteria, on the one hand the importance given to female marriage and on the other hand if the stress is laid rather on the effects or, in a more correct way, on the causes of the diffusion of late marriage. It is easy to see that the first three groups of theories do not satisfy at least one of these criteria, and I will not discuss them here. On the contrary, the theories that regard late marriage as a case of Malthusian response to fast demographic growth, seem to be a good candidate, on the ground of those criteria. However a detailed examination of the arguments they present will make possible to see that it is not necessary to call upon Malthus to explain late marriage. This analysis leads me to an attempt to develop an explanation, which seeks the links between late marriage and the contemporaneous changes in land ownership.

### **2.2.- Late marriage as a case of preventive checks**

The most coherent and favored explanation of the European marriage pattern is based on the idea that it is a perfect case of what Malthus called the "preventive checks". Indeed this type of explanations fulfils the two criteria which characterize "good" theories of late marriage. Thus the key demographic variable they consider is the age at marriage of women as the adjustment factor between population and resources. Also the focus in these explanations is clearly put on the causes of late marriage, more than on its effects. But was late marriage from the sixteenth century an answer to an overpopulation problem for the

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<sup>6</sup> Hajnal itself, also Burguière, 1972, Todd, 1990.

<sup>7</sup> For example Laslett, 1983.

<sup>8</sup> Coale, 1973. Also Chesnais, 1986.

European population? If we examine in details the arguments used by the partisans of this kind of explanations we may in fact arrive to the opposite point of view.

Le Roy Ladurie is a good example among the French authors who regard the periods of low growth rate in preindustrial population as typical situations of "absolute" overpopulation, i.e. of reduction in the standard of living due to the previous demographic increase. Following the argumentation of authors like Abel and Postan, Le Roy Ladurie describes two major cycles in the evolution of the French rural populations, the first one between 1100 and 1450 and the second one between 1450 and 1720. These two large demographic waves of the "rural ecosystem", in his own words, were the manifestation of a mechanism in which the demographic growth rate was higher when the population was more distant from its "ceiling":

"In so far as one can judge, the "rule" of the twenty million souls, standing then for more than four centuries, was due (to a customary norm and also) to ecological constants. If we take into account the agricultural techniques (not very sophisticated), also a certain regularity of the microbial aggressions during this interminable time, the combined influence of misery, food shortages, fatal contagions and the eventual late marriage, used for lack of anything better as a "contraceptive weapon", were sufficiently strong to chop or even plane any substantial outnumbering of the fateful figure of the "twenty million souls". In the eighteenth century, this old barrier, which appeared insuperable during a long time, was finally raised. Consequently, as occurred from the 1700-1715 period onwards, the national population will experiment a true progression (...) the ceilings from now on will be bored." (Roy Ladurie, 1990, p. 22)

What is especially interesting in the context of this paper, is the way Le Roy Ladurie approaches the study of the demographic waves through the analysis of the evolution of land ownership. It is indeed starting from the study of the size of the agricultural properties that Roy Ladurie builds his theory of the Malthusian ceilings. To present in a synthetic way his point of view, he builds what he calls the "Poitrineau model", from the name of an historian who particularly studied the rural world of the French Auvergne region. The essential point of this model, is the fact that:

"emerged the idea of the parceling out of the land properties, itself correlated with the demographic increase of the eighteenth century. (And one can note an) irresistible fragmentation of the soils, or at least of the peasant and small-middle-class part of those. One should not indeed imagine the parceling out like a ground swell, of which the impact would be able to pulverize all the structures of the properties. In fact, the breaking process, which corrodes, in the eighteenth century, the archipelago of the flaky plots, stumbles against the solid mole, of the indivisible large estates. I want to speak about the "estate-blocks" from 40 to 50 hectares, equipped with oxen (...). Results: the parceling out plays in a rather free way, and dangerous one, on the 61% of the land which is in peasants' hands. But it is defused on the remaining territories, those of the large estates. These, on their side, prove even aggressive and conquerors. This aggressiveness comes up against its limits quickly: the two blocks, domanial (D) and peasant (P) - one structurally solid (D), the other overall rather stable, but a prey to an intense phenomenon of interior fragmentation (P) -, are both holding the other in check. In Auvergne -and elsewhere-, the question is not one of an evolution of the English kind, in the name of which D would sweep away P. The "peasant economy" (in general) has been masterly described by Chayanov "like an autonomous sector, or an original social formation, obeying its own laws, in consequence of the overlap between family and firm". The estate-blocks of the rulers can cut down this peasant economy, but not destroy it, nor put it down on its knees." (Le Roy Ladurie, 1975, pp. 418-421)

In other words, what Le Roy Ladurie considers primarily is the evolution of the peasant sector, the land controlled by the rural community, the rural families and the small non-peasants holders. In his book on the French Languedoc region, he studies in a systematic way the regrouping or the parceling out of the property in this sector and uses the indicator of the number and the size of the properties to introduce the concept of demographic ceiling. However one can wonder if we can regard the peasant property as an independent factor, without taking into account the well documented fact, of which I will speak about later, that his share of the lands changed in a significant way in France as a whole, probably passing from 70-80% towards 1500 to around 30% about 1750. For Le Roy Ladurie, the "large estates" are another kind of constraint, which reduces the level of the demographic ceiling. But he does not envisage the possibility of a reorganization of the peasant economy as a consequence of the reduction of its share of the land.

It is interesting to confront the ideas of Le Roy Ladurie with those of Dupâquier. The two authors began their academic work with the study of land ownership and ended with the demographic problems of the Old Regime French population. Dupâquier as Le Roy Ladurie conceives late marriage as a manifestation of Malthus' "preventive checks", but he refuses the concept of a "full World", of overpopulation, as used by Le Roy Ladurie, to explain the demographic crisis and late marriage. Thus, in a significant article, he seeks to show that the French historians did not understand Malthus. He gives as an example of it the fact that the *apologue* of the banquet, which is often used to summarize the Malthusian argument, is almost a myth, presents only in the first edition of the "Principle of population", and quietly withdrawn of the text of later editions (Dupâquier, 1980). However here is how Le Roy Ladurie presents the problem facing rural populations of the past:

"Certainly we are unaware of the real dimensions of the "cake" that share between themselves the "guests" (hear: the real value of the lands that shares between themselves the owners). However, we can know in a precise way the number (variable) of these "guests" and the relative value of the portion allotted to each one of them. The first ones placed at the good end of the table, cut a large piece of the cake. The others, the more, have right only to some crumbs." (Le Roy Ladurie, 1969, p. 32).

Dupâquier says, very honestly, that he shared this point of view for a long time, but that the study of the populations of the Paris basin in the seventeenth and the eighteenth centuries, as well as the reading of Boserup, led it to move away from this type of positions, that he qualifies as "simplistic". His thoughts, based as he says on a thorough reading of Malthus, then progressively changed, up to a point such as he even throw back into question the existence of the Malthusian "positive checks", which would not give a good explanation of the mortality crisis. The only element he wants to retain from the Malthusian argument, is the mechanism of the "preventive checks", the control of demographic growth by the

variation of nuptiality levels, which would give an adequate description of the behavior of rural populations of the Old Regime. But all the problem, and the complexity, of Dupâquier's analysis is that he does not use the concept of preventive checks like an equilibrium mechanism for an immediate need to maintain a balance between the population and the economic resources. On the contrary, for him the mechanism of the preventive checks is in some way "buried" in the territorial structure of the settlement.

Thus, studying the Paris basin populations in the seventeenth and the eighteenth centuries, he notes first of all that the territorial pattern of the settlement does not seem to have a logic of equalization of relative densities: "it is striking to note that the distribution of the settlement is well far from being copied on the natural aptitudes of the soils" (Dupâquier, 1977, p. 374). It seems that the distribution of the men on the territory responds then to an old logic, and not to the necessities of the time in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Dupâquier says that the structure of the settlement is probably inherited from the Middle Age, at the time of the formation of the parochial network: "the creation of a parish could be compared with the plantation of a tree or the foundation of a colony: for the distribution of men, rough space would count less than structured and controlled space" (p. 375). Then he notices a significant fact, that the demographic crisis did not seem to be a question of "ceilings", as their intensity were not correlated with the relative density: "if mortality had really played a regulating role in France in time of Louis XIV, the crisis should have struck primarily the over-populated areas. However the analysis proved that this was not the case" (p. 389). In the same way, the serious crisis seemed to intervene when the population had ceased to grow for a long time: "the most terrible crisis strike a population in a state of decompression" (p. 389). Thus, mortality is not the "keystone" of the demographic regulation in the Old Regime: "the multiplication of men creates conditions favorable to high mortality, less perhaps for reasons of subsistence than by the propagation of contagious diseases. But from there to make of it the main factor of the regulation of traditional populations, there is a great step that we refuse to take" (p. 378).

Which is thus the significant factor of this regulation? Dupâquier notes first of all that population density at the parish level remained stable at two points in time between the fourteenth and the eighteenth centuries, for a same total of the population of the Paris basin. This "permanence of the human densities" over several centuries contrasts with the great geographical differences in relative density, noted before. How does he explain this contrast? For that:

"it is necessary to reconsider the social significance of marriage in the Old Regime (...). All the system was based on three rules so deeply interiorized in people mind that one did not need to formulate them:

- No birth out of wedlock.

- Parents and married children do not cohabit.

- No marriage without "establishment" (setting up an independent house).

"This third rule is a corollary of the second. It implies that the married couple is able to ensure its economic independence, which translates perfectly the expression "to found a hearth". (...) Remain to explain why these populations did not press more on this accelerator pedal, so as to push the demographic expansion up to the subsistence ceiling (...). It is what would have happened indeed if the creation of new farming exploitations had been freer, or the division of old possible. In fact (...), the number of exploitations could only vary very slowly: most of the cultivable lands was in the hands of the nobility and the clergy which rented them in the form of large farms (...); in addition the immense majority of the peasants was owner, but of very tiny tenures, made up of a house and a field, and not easily divisible (...) In these agrarian civilizations, the concept of exploitation played a role similar to that of the territory for the birds, and the numbers of exploitations was almost as limited as the number of "private properties" in the world of the animals (...). the settlement was less a function of natural aptitudes of the soils and the quantity of food than of the agrarian structures, of the relations of production and the mentalities whose origin was lost in the mists of time." (pp. 390-91).

It is thus striking to note that where Le Roy Ladurie sees an almost infinite capacity for the regrouping and the parceling out of the properties, Dupâquier sees an invariability of the number of farms. This invariability was partly due to the institutional framework of the property, the fact that the share of the non-peasants was strong, but also due to the habits created by the "every man for himself" kind of customary behaviors. Dupâquier summarizes that saying that "the geographical distribution of the settlement seem to be the keystone of the Old Demographic Régime" (p. 388). This argument is very close to what I will now develop. But I will show that if for Dupâquier the historical origin of the invariability of the map of rural exploitations is extremely remote, following Marc Bloch, I will say that it is possible to locate this origin in a much recent time, namely the sixteenth century. Doing so, I will also give a different meaning to this concept of "invariability" of the agrarian map, substituting Dupâquier's idea of territorial permanence by that of independence between the mechanism of constitution of the farms and the demographic constraints upon the renewal of rural families.

### **3.- The evolution of agrarian structures in Western Europe between the fifteenth and the eighteenth centuries**

A problem common to all the traditional explanations is that they do not make possible to understand why the late marriage behavior spread in a so fast and so universal way in most of Western Europe, why this diffusion started with the bottom of the social scale and not the privileged stratum, and why certain areas of Europe, at the East, but also at the West of the Saint-Peterburg-Trieste line did not adopt the new behaviors. One could perhaps solve this problem by noticing that great transformations in the agrarian relationships took place simultaneously with the demographic changes. At the same time, in the sixteenth century, there was what historians call sometimes a "réaction seigneuriale" or a "reféodalisation"

(new feudalism) of the agricultural economy in the whole of Europe. One of the significant effects of this process was the concentration of land ownership between the hands of the *élites* to the detriment of the peasant community. In other words a strong increase of the share of the land pertaining to the nobility, the bourgeoisie and, to a lesser extent, the church<sup>9</sup>. In the pages that follow I will summarize the principal features of this process, especially for France, before trying to show how these changes could have affected the demographic behaviors.

### **3.1.- The movement of *reféodalisation* in Europe starting from the sixteenth century**

This *reféodalisation*<sup>10</sup> contemporary of the transition to late marriage must be compared, as its name indicates, to the first classical European feudalism, which starts around the tenth century and enters in crisis especially in the fourteenth. This crisis resulted in particular in a kind of withdrawal of the higher classes from agricultural production and the almost general parceling out of the lord's demesne -hitherto exploited directly by the lord- in smaller farm managed by peasants. The *reféodalisation*, starting from the sixteenth century, corresponds to a phase of revival of the control over the land by non-peasants, especially the nobility and the bourgeoisie, under the pressure of a new economic situation. This general movement of "return to the land" of the higher classes of all Europe taken varied forms, from the simple repurchase of tenures to the violent expropriation of peasants. The mode of exploitation of the land in the hands of non-peasants was also varied, from sharecropping to the direct administration by the non-peasant owner. But overall, the result was a division of Europe in two zones with opposite agrarian regimes. The first one was characterized by an agriculture of tenancy where the tenants worked for their own account, but were narrowly controlled by the owner. This control was possible because the lease was for a short term, generally twelve years or less, or, as in certain German areas or in the Scandinavian countries, because of the strict application of rules

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<sup>9</sup> The bibliography on this topic is very large. One can find partial or overall account of this process of "reféodalisation" in Blum, 1978, Kellenbenz, 1976, Maddalena, 1970, Slicher Van Bath, 1977.

<sup>10</sup> To the best of my knowledge, Romano, 1962 is the first author who made use of the term "reféodalisation". I preferred this term to the expression "réaction seigneuriale" traditionally used by the French historiography. At the beginning, these two expressions were used for the same phenomenon, but the French historians has tended to use the term "réaction seigneuriale" for smaller periods, when the conditions of life of French peasants was worsening, in particular during the second half of the sixteenth century, the end of seventeenth and the decades preceding the Revolution. On the contrary, the movement of *reféodalisation* about which I speak here extends from the fifteenth to the eighteenth centuries and relates to all Europe, even if the forms were not the same everywhere. The defect of the expression



prohibiting the parceling out of the land or rules for controlling the number of workers presents on the farm. The second great European zone was characterized by the existence of great estates managed directly by the overlord and accompanied by the enslavement of the peasants. At the geographical level, took place the following partition:

"We shall divide agricultural Europe into two parts, taking the Elbe as the line of demarcation: the eastern regions, distinguished by the definite prevalence of *Gütherrschaft* (direct administration, at his own risk, of an entire, or practically entire, property by the overlord), and the western regions, characterized by the preponderance of *Grundherrschaft* (where the management of properties is entrusted by the owner to others in exchange for leases, rents, payment in cash or kind, etc.)" (Maddalena, 1970, p. 287).

One can bring some local nuances to this divide, as in certain areas there was a mixing of the two types of agrarian regimes. In addition, this East-West partition must be completed for Mediterranean countries. For example the South of Italy, the center and the South of the Iberian peninsula, evolved in the sixteenth century to a latifundist system similar to the *Gütherrschaft* of Eastern Europe, the main difference being the lack of serfdom. But what is particularly necessary to underline here, it is the narrow correspondence between the nuptial pattern map and the agrarian regime map, correspondence noted by Hajnal himself:

"A system of large estates with large households as in Eastern Europe might thus be conducive to a non-European marriage pattern, while small holdings occupied by a single family and passed on to a single heir would result in a European pattern" (Hajnal, 1965, p. 133).

Of what says Hajnal, the only thing that I will modify is this idea, largely shared by non-historians, that in Western Europe, the majority of peasant families lived on lands which they transmitted from generation to generation. One will see that, on the contrary, the peasants did not control the allocation of the land, which is the principal consequence of the *reféodalisation* at the West of the Elba. To show that this situation was generalized, I will present here the French case of *reféodalisation* which can be regarded as representative of an intermediate situation between several extremes like the English case, the Italian case or the German case in which the position of the small peasants was worse.

### **3.2.- The French case: a system of short-term lease tenancy**

The agrarian structure in France changed from a situation in the fifteenth century and before in which the peasants worked a land that they held for life and transmitted to their children, to the situation of the eighteenth where more than half of the arable land was held

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"reféodalisation", is that in its strict sense, the "feudalism" is not an economic system, but a relationship between people (suzerain-vassal).

by peasants with short-term lease, for a period generally under 12 years. This complaint made in 1667 by peasants of Saint-Germain-du-Plain illustrates this matter well:

"Autrefois tous les habitants ou peu s'en falloit estoient propriétaires des héritages qu'ils façoient, et à présent ils ne sont que grangiers (métayers) et simples cultivateurs"<sup>11</sup>.

Marc Bloch gives a synthetic description of this upheaval:

"(In France) the lord endeavored to take, in the form of the breeding, an immediate share of the profits of the land. He achieved more effectively the same goal by the reconstitution of the domain. Reconstitution at the expense of communal lands (...) At the expense of tenures also, and perhaps, especially (...) It was by a slow gathering, according to the most normal ways - purchases, exchanges- that was recreated, within the hands of the lords, the large estates. On this point, their work cannot be separated from the work, very similar, accomplished at the same time by much of other members of the easy classes, bourgeois (...) or large peasants " (Bloch, 1931).

Jacquart reaffirms this evolution, summarizing more than 40 years of studies made after the publication of Bloch's classical work:

"From 1560 to 1700, the distribution of land ownership () was deeply modified, whatever the area of France which one considers (...) Of all the provinces, the same reports arrive. The independent ploughman (...) must pass the hand. Of copyholder, he becomes sharecropper, often on his own farm, sold to some lord or to some enriched middle-class man (...) Like the English peasant, the French peasant was the victim of a progressive loss of the land. Like him, but it should be said less than him (...) the movement of the structures of land ownership covers an immense phenomenon of transfer of the land from the hands of those which cultivate it to the hands of those which enjoy it " (Jacquart, 1975, pp. 261-265).

On the whole, at the end of the Old Regime period, the share of the peasant property in France was on average 35% of the arable land<sup>12</sup>. Peasant often had the worse land, and the average surface of the peasant properties was often less than the minimum necessary for an independent exploitation. This national average however hides a large variety of regional and local situations, but a stable principle can be worked out beyond this diversity: the share of the peasant property was weaker when a city (its market and its middle-class men) was close or when the soil was rich (commercially speaking). This process of monopolization of the lands seems to have started in the fifteenth century, but become more intense especially after 1560:

"An overall feature of the evolution of the peasantry in modern times and which is extremely striking, it is that its share of the property of the land tends to decrease (...). In a general way, the peasant deprivation seems to have started or seems to have accelerated after 1560 " (Lemarchand, 1974, p. 93).

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<sup>11</sup> This is old French, which can be translated as: "In the past all or most of the inhabitants inherited and were owners of the land they worked, but now they are mere sharecroppers or tenant farmers, or even simple laborers" (Jacquart, 1975, p. 267).

<sup>12</sup> The estimate is that of G Lefebvre, as reported by Lemarchand, 1974

This "feature" applies to France, but it is transposable in the terms if not in the dates to the whole of Europe. Still let us insist on the novelty of the socio-economic system which is set up in the sixteenth century, for, as says Bloch, it is by deciphering this new agrarian regime that one can hope to interpret the social relationships in the countryside up to very recent times:

"Thus, to interpret in its diversity and its fundamental features today rural France - for which one should not say, as one did sometimes, that it is a country of small properties, but rather than, according to a proportion that vary strongly from province to province, large and small property coexist- it is the evolution of rural France from the fifteenth to the seventeenth centuries that is necessary to study". (Bloch, 1931, p. 154).

### **3.3.- The agriculture of short-term lease tenancy and the regrouping of lands**

In France, starting from the sixteenth century, the farms were mainly managed by peasants and their families who held the land from the noble or the middle-class owners. These farms generally consisted of lands belonging to only one owner. The types of lease differed from one exploitation to another, from one area to another, and even from one time to another. But in a general way one observes that tenant farming, i.e. with a fixed price set at the beginning of the lease and generally payable in money, dominated in the North-East, whereas share-cropping, i.e. for a lease paid by proportional sharing of harvest between the owner and the peasant, dominated especially in the Center and the South. Moreover, and this is a very significant point, the term of the lease was also fixed at the beginning and generally short, under 12 years<sup>13</sup>.

I use the generic term of "agriculture of short-term lease tenancy"<sup>14</sup> to qualify the situation of the French countryside during the sixteenth to the eighteenth centuries. In that period, the peasants normally cultivated a land they hired to the owner. In former centuries, the peasants also held their land from the overlord, but the main difference was that the tenures were for a very long term, in much case for as long as the family was able to pass the land by inheritance. Beginning with the sixteenth century, there was a generalization of the short-term leases, something nearly unknown before that time.

In my opinion, the situation in France, but also in most of Europe at the West of Elba, during the period which goes approximately from 1500 to 1800, is original, unique in the history of agrarian societies, and deserves a special denomination. Indeed, sharecropping

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<sup>13</sup> In a more exact way, a multiple of the duration of the system of rotation of crops: 4, 6, 8 years in a biennial system or 6, 9, 12 years in a triennial system.

<sup>14</sup> The expression of "agriculture of tenancy" is employed in particular by Badouin, 1979, who compares the principal features of the agriculture of tenancy in the underdeveloped countries with that of Western Europe of Ancien Régime.

and tenant farming are universal contracts between owners and farmers, which existed from immemorial times. In the same way, the agriculture of tenancy, i.e. the fact that the peasants do not have a complete property of their farm, is the normal situation in Europe since at least the tenth until the nineteenth centuries. The situation was the same in the majority of the underdeveloped countries until the 1960s. But, what clearly differentiates the agrarian system of Western Europe between 1500 and 1800 from the rest, is the generalization of the short-term lease, the fact that the majority of the lands were worked under conditions of precariousness, for a short-term duration set at the beginning of the lease<sup>15</sup>. The newness and the uniqueness of that system can be better understood by comparing it with the one that preceded it. Indeed, in the system of the traditional, typical domanial economy of the feudal societies of the eleventh to the fourteenth centuries, and also in Europe at the East of Elba after 1500, the lord used a kind of "demographic policy", in order to keep the peasant population on the territory of the seignior. Beyond the possible violence exerted on the men, this policy was based above all on the system of the perpetual and hereditary tenancy. This is well seen in the moment of the crisis of this system in Western Europe in the fourteenth and especially in the fifteenth centuries. Indeed disappeared in an almost total way at that time the serfdom status, the forced labor and also the lord estate. The latter is generally dismembered during this period, and disappears gradually absorbed by the mass of peasant tenures until the fifteenth century. In other words is maintained over all the system of perpetual tenure as a means to keep the peasants on the territory of the seignior. When spreads in the sixteenth century the economy of short-term lease tenancy, one witnesses a complete inversion of this policy. Indeed what imports now for the owner, is the maximization of the output of the land to the detriment of the stability of the peasant families. This situation reaches sometimes an extreme such as, in certain zones, for example in Tuscany, there is an annual rotation of the peasant families from one farm to another.

In order to study more in detail the characteristics of the agriculture of short-term lease tenancy, I will analyze a book by Louis Merle on the countryside of *Gâtine*, a small region in the center of France during the seventeenth and the eighteenth centuries (Merle, 1958). This book is remarkable by many points, the personality of its author, the contrast

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<sup>15</sup> Byres, 1983 shows that "share-cropping is as old as the history", which is comprehensible, since the rent is paid in product. For the same reason, tenant farming is probably more recent and less universal than share-cropping, since it generally involves a monetary payment. Byres indicates that one of the distinctive characteristics of the share-cropping in Europe during the modern time is precisely the fact of the short-term leases. The share-cropping, like the other classical system of tenure, are characterized by the permanence of the farmers on the exploitation, whereas the share-cropping of the fifteenth to the eighteenth centuries in Western Europe is often accompanied by the periodic rotation of the peasant families from one exploitation to another.

which it presents with the writings of other historians of the modern period who at the same time had given up with the study of agrarian structures<sup>16</sup>, but especially by the very clear and very conscious presentation which is made in this book of the characteristics of the agriculture of short-term lease tenancy and its demographic consequences. The analysis of Merle makes it possible to see what were the practical consequences of the increase of the share of lands that were property of non-peasants from the sixteenth century onwards. The three essential points treated in this book are: the phases and the means of the transfer of the property of land to non-peasants, the surface and the organization of the farms taken to rent by the peasants, the long-term evolution of the relations between owners and farmers.

What shows Merle is that the principal objective of the landowners was the constitution of independent farms, which receive the generic name of *métairies* (sharecropping farms), even if the leasing arrangement was not always strictly of share-cropping. This objective is a true obsession, and the book shows it well, since the constitution of the non-peasant property were carried out by a patient process of purchase of pieces. The constitution of the independent farms was often the result of the effort of two or three generations of noble or middle-class families. This process was slow, but it accelerated especially in the sixteenth century, so that at the beginning of the eighteenth, it was nearly completed. At that time, the share of the peasant property of the land had gone down to 25%. Speaking about the consequences of this transfer of property, Merle uses the expression of "regrouping of land". This is because the first consequence of this transfer was the constitution of independent farms, which did not exist before. The new owners constituted new units of exploitations, adapted to the working possibilities of one family or in much case of two families in association<sup>17</sup>. These independent farms invaded and modified in a considerable way the rural landscape of *Gâtine*. The first consequence is the appearance of fences, in a landscape dominated until then by the open fields. The independent farms thus were generally enclosed, independence reinforced by the fact that the peasant lived on the farm with his family. The second consequence of the generalization of the independent farm is thus also the passage of a type of concentrated settlement, in village, typical of the former period, to a dispersed settlement. The third significant aspect of this regrouping of land is that it was not universal. It conduced to a division of the territory of the rural

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<sup>16</sup> For example, in the introduction of Le Roy Ladurie, 1969, the author explains why he gave up with Bloch's research program in favour of Abel's one.

<sup>17</sup> Merle does not say anything about the family types of the sharecroppers, even if the content of the lease contracts which it reproduces makes it clear that the peasant families were extended, of the *frérèches* kind. Goubert makes also the same interpretation from the reading of these contracts: Goubert, 1977, p. 191

community in two zones. The first, those of the independent farms on which lived the farmers with their families, and the second, where still predominated the peasant property, was centered around the village which in the past gathered the whole of the population. This partition was logical, since the peasant families that worked these independent farms did it only for a given time, with relatively short duration lease, around 5 years in the sixteenth century, and around 7 years towards the end of the eighteenth century. Merle unfortunately does not indicate it, but one can think that, since the leases were short, there must have been a certain rotation of these families, from the independent farms to the village zone, according to the phase of their life cycle. Such is thus the origin of the rural landscape of Gâtine, which in the time of Merle's book, is an area of enclosed and independent farm which dominate over the small-scale farms gathered around the village. Merle then raises the question of the origin of this rural landscape, and this is perhaps the main contribution of his book:

"Of when date the division of the land which has just been just described? Is it lost in the mists of time or has it, on the contrary, a recent origin?" (p. 42).

Merle then devotes several chapters to describe the process of the regrouping of lands, and he shows that the rural landscape and the agrarian structures of Gâtine were completely different in the fifteenth century from those of the eighteenth. Thus the Gâtine was formerly an area of openfield, where the peasants cultivated exploitations parceled out in pieces dispersed on the territory of the parish, which is the principal characteristic, and which remained it until the nineteenth century, of the agriculture of the North-East of France. Moreover, the peasants were often tenants, but they had no limit on the time of the lease. What dominated then in the fifteenth century, was the feudal "perpetual tenure", which the peasant families kept from one generation to another. The contrast with the situation in the eighteenth century is thus considerable, since what dominated then was the short-term lease tenancy, the independent and enclosed farms whose arable lands were of only one holding. In three centuries, there was an evolution from perpetual tenure to short-term tenure, from openfield to enclosed fields. Merle indicates that this complete upheaval in the rural landscape and the settlement type took place especially in the sixteenth century.

To finish, I would like to insist on another significant aspect, that Merle did not treat well. This aspect is the reduction of the effective sphere of control of the rural community. It is clear indeed that the principal consequence of the regrouping of land in *Gâtine* was a partition of the territory of the commune in a zone of dispersed settlement, independent farms controlled by the owners and managed by peasants, and a smaller zone of concentrated settlement, the village, the true place of the sociability of the rural group. The zone of the independent farms escaped in multiple way to the control of the village. First

because the collective customs like common grazing, the rhythm of crop rotation, or the access of the poor to the lands after the harvest, were not respected on the independent farms. Second, and Merle indicates it only very indirectly, because one of the characteristics of the regrouping of land related with the generalization of short term lease tenure is that it was often made to the detriment of communal pastures. Thirdly because the distribution of the arable lands now did not depend on the need of the peasant families and the internal arrangements of the rural group. Indeed, when tenure was hereditary, the marriage was also a mean of redistribution of the lands between families. When the destiny of the independent farms depended exclusively on the will of non-peasants owners, family formation did not have any effect on the allocation of lands.

Once summarized this remarkable book, the only question which, in my opinion, is worth to make, is to know whether the evolution described by Merle also applies to the remainder of Western Europe, in the zone where dominated the same kind of tenancy. Unfortunately, it is not easy to answer this question. This is one of the limitations of this book. Merle was interested only by the history of its small region. By references he makes to a book by Raveau on the close region of Haut-Poitou, one can see that Merle thinks that its description applies not only to the Gâtine, but also to all the Poitou, a much wider territory. But for the description that makes Merle to be valid for all the Western Europe in the sixteenth to the eighteenth centuries, one would have to show that there was the same kind of regrouping of land, the same formation of independent farms, the same partition in two zones of the territory of the village.

So is this type of regrouping of land common in Western Europe at that time, or, on the contrary, is it a specific form, suitable only for Gâtine, of the loss of control over the lands for the peasants? Another formulation of this question consists in wondering whether the non-peasants owners from the sixteenth century onwards sought as in Gâtine, to constitute independent farms that they gave to work to one or more peasant families. Or, on the contrary, whether the peasant families were able to obtain lands by pieces, eventually from several non-peasant owners, in order to supplement their small properties.

The answer to these questions is fundamental for the understanding of demographic phenomena like late marriage. If the distribution of farms were fixed, if they were independent entities made by the owners, then the families had to adapt their composition and their size to the mode of allocation of land. On the other hand, if the peasant families could supplement their property leasing small plots on the landed market, this would have greatly increased the flexibility of this mechanism of allocation of land compared to the former period of perpetual tenures.

If one observes what occurred in Gâtine, one sees that it is the first situation that existed: a relative invariability of the distribution of the farms and the necessity for the peasant families to adapt their composition in order to lease a farm. They did so generally by association between brothers and cousins, the recourse to a type of complex family known as *frèrèches*. It is not difficult to see that the situation was the same in most of Western Europe where the type of contract was sharecropping. One often finds in this zone the complex family type of Gâtine, and this type is closely associated with the generalization of the independent farms between the fifteenth and the eighteenth centuries. The situation of Gâtine, described by Merle, is worth primarily for all the zone where the sharecropping became the main mode of access to the land, for example the West, the Center and the South of France, the North-West of Spain, the Center of Italy, part of Southern Germany<sup>18</sup>.

The question now change and what we may want to know is if the situation described by Merle, that was probably valid for most of the sharecropping regions of Europe, can also be found in the regions where the main agrarian contract was tenant farming. In fact the problem is not the type of contract per se, but rather the kind of regrouping of land associated with the loss of control of the land by the peasants. One sees that, in Gâtine, the regrouping changed the landscape from an openfield to an enclosed fields system. However the openfield system remained much longer in the North of Europe. The openfield of Gâtine did not resist much to the non-peasant owners in the process of regrouping of the lands. On the other hand it had a harder life in the North-East of France, harder in any case than in England, where the process known as enclosures had consequences, especially in the sixteenth century, very similar to what occurred in Gâtine: regrouping and enclosing of the lands, constitution of independent farms given to peasant families. It is also well known that later, especially in the eighteenth century, the movement of enclosures in England definitively broke with the agriculture of family farms, in favor of the very large farms. The situation of the sixteenth century in Gâtine looks similar by

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<sup>18</sup> Shaffer (1982) for example describe essentially the same situation for the French Nevers' region than do Merle for the Poitou region. The main interest of Shaffer's work is that it shows clearly the links between the spreading of sharecropping and the emergence of joint families of the *frèrèches* type. The analysis which show the similarity with Gâtine of the situation in all the regions where the sharecropping farming was predominant are innumerable. For example, the principal feature which is the regrouping and the constitution of independent farms, rented to one or more families is the typical situation in Tuscany. One finds it as early as 1427 in the central part of the *contado*, where the *mezzadria* dominates, associated with repopulation: Herlihy and Klapisch-Zuber, 1978, p. 268. This is a typical feature of the share-cropping in Italy, which is associated with the clearings and the repopulation of the countryside after the great demographic crisis. The sharecropper was often given the name of "colonist" (*coloni*), and the independent farm, on which lived the colonist with his family, even had a specific name, the *podere*, a sign that it is something different from the rest of the farms. Works of the Italian historians on the share-cropping multiplied after 1960. The broadest overall vision is presented by Giorgetti, 1974.



certain aspects with what occurred in England at the same time, but the independent farms will remain what they were almost up to 1850, whereas the evolution in England was later very different (see Cooper, 1985).

The impression which one has, with the reading of work of historians like Jacquart, is that it seems that, at least in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries and for the first part of the eighteenth, the situation described by Merle for Gâtine is worth for Northern France, in spite of the fact that the regrouping of lands by non-peasants did not completely eliminate the openfield system. Thus, what then invades the campaigns of the South of Paris are the average farms, with tenant farming with short term lease, to the detriment of the small perpetual tenures. On the other hand, and contrary to the case of Gâtine, the farmers of the South of Paris did not form *frérèches*, or association of peasants families, in order to lease the farms. They preferred the recourse to paid work or domestic work. The situation then changed progressively, and starting from the end of the seventeenth century, began to appear very large farms, in detriment of the median one, adapted to the work of a family with the help of some servants. Contrary to what one observes in Gâtine, where what is striking is the permanence of the average familial farm, one assists in the French zone of tenant farming to a polarization of the peasant society, between families of large farmers on one hand and on the other hand of small farmers and even of landless farm workers, whose relative number was increasing (Jacquart, 1975 and Jacquart, 1990).

For the zone of the tenant farming of the North of France, one thus finds many features of the picture traced by Merle for the zone of the sharecropping of the Center and the South, but there are also significant differences. The principal similar feature is that the allocation of lands was for a long time a decision of non-peasants owners, and did not depend on the needs of the families. Another significant similarity is the reduction in the communal lands, which were often sold and integrated into the independent farms, which reduced more the total surface of land controlled by the rural group. On the other hand, the owners could not break completely with the framework of the openfield, and the community customs of the rhythm of culture. Moreover, during the eighteenth century appeared the very large farm, carried out by enriched peasant families, which were able to fight effectively against the claims of the owners. The principal consequence was the reduction in the precariousness of the agrarian contracts: the families of large ploughmen preserved from generation to generation the same leased lands, even when the lease were still of short duration (This is very clear for the families of "large" ploughmen described by Moriceau and Postel-Vinay, 1992). Incontestably, there was then a kind of resumption of control by the peasants of their destiny in the North of France, something that did not happen for the sharecroppers of the South and the Center.

### **3.4.- Demographic consequences of the diffusion of the agriculture of short –term lease tenancy around the sixteenth century**

To summarize the direct and indirect effects on peasant families of the diffusion of the new system of tenure starting from the sixteenth century, one can say that:

- their spatial mobility increased due to the fact that the peasant became a short-term tenant;

- the composition and the size of these families had to adapt to the needs of the farm in order to be able to obtain and to keep a lease;

The consequences for the rural community, i.e. the group of peasants families living normally on the territory of a parish, were:

- the partition in two zones of the lands of the parish, first the independent farms leased by peasant families to non-peasant owners and second the remaining lands occupied by a population whose situation can be described as marginal;

- the reduction in the density of the population in the part of the independent farms, and the correlative increase in the part of the peasants lands;

- the reduction in the surface and the role of the communal lands;

- the fact that the change in the distribution of land between independent farms was related more to the logic of profitability of the landed capital than to the needs of the demographic reproduction of peasant families and of the rural group as a whole.

All these observations can be summarized in an even more synthetic way, by noticing that with the transition from perpetual tenure to short-term tenure around the sixteenth century, the rural group lost the control of the mode of allocation of the lands. From now on the allocation was the responsibility of the non-peasants owners, who behaved accordingly to an individual type of rationality, and sought to maximize the income of their investment. It was the logic of the rent that imposed itself when the short-term tenures spread. In the former period, when the peasants worked lands that they could dispose at least for their life, and in much case that could inherit their children, the behavior of the owner, primarily the lord, aimed at keeping the population on the demesne. The payments the peasants made for their tenure were not in much case a function of the harvest, but of their presence on the territory. This appears clearly when one sees that the traditional peasant tenure of the eleventh century, the manse, had primarily a tax dimension for the lord, often without any relationship with the actual surface of the farms or the level of their production. These tax units of the seignory had then neither a fixed limit, nor the function to establish a

given density of the population. And often, the distribution of the lands between the manors one or two centuries later is very different, largely due to change in the composition of the peasant's families. On the contrary the short-term tenures after the sixteenth century had their limits fixed by their owners, according to the logic of the land market. The owner decided what was the more adequate size for the farm. If a peasant wanted to lease a farm, he often had to associate his family with another one, or contract servants in order to work the farm in adequate conditions. So now the families had to adapt to the size of farms, just the reverse of the situation two or three centuries ago.

#### **4.- Late marriage as a response of the rural community to the generalization of the agriculture of lease tenancy**

I will try now to formulate a hypothetical framework that is adapted to the preceding observations on the evolution of agrarian systems. The link between demographic and institutional phenomena must be done by analyzing the role of the family as an economic unit and its place in the reproduction of the rural group.

One must, in my opinion, start from the interest of the rural community, and not of the individual, his family, or the landowner, to find the reasons of the increase in the age at marriage in Western Europe from the sixteenth century onwards. Indeed, it is often said that one of the principal causes of the late marriage was the need for young people to wait until the death or the departure for retirement of their elder in order to find a farm and marry. One observes indeed, that the age at first marriage for men were often at a level in correlation with the moment when the father passed the hand, generally because he died. However one observes this for many populations of the early marriage and the late marriage. Thus, in the urban zones of Tuscany in 1427, the age at first marriage for men was around 30 years, when the age for the women was below 20 years. But, as I already indicated, the European marriage pattern is not characterized by the late marriage of men, but by the late marriage of women. It does not seem to me that in order to explain the increase in the age at marriage, we need to invoke the necessity that the young men wait until the father passed the hand so that his son can take the farm and marry.

It is better to start from the observation, made *inter alia* by Dupâquier, that the distribution of the farms was to some extent rigid, from the sixteenth century onwards. This new rigidity was due to the action of the non-peasant owners, who then choose to gather the pieces that they obtained from the peasants, in independent farms. The consequence was that the number of farms became less variable with time, tending towards a number if not fix, at least independent of the number of peasant families.

The immediate consequence of this situation was that, on most of the territory of the rural parishes, there was a constraint on the number of families of farmers, which led to the stability of the density of the population. This constraint was not a kind of overpopulation ceiling, but a consequence of the conditions of profitability of the landed capital. On the other hand, on the other part of the territory, the control of the lands corresponded rather to the peasants and to the rural community. Because of the short duration of the leases, of that only the complete families could take those leases, this zone of peasants lands became a dependence of the zone of independent farms. When for a reason or another, a family could not hold anymore an independent farm, this family had to come back to the peasant zone, and if it did not have a property on this zone, it fell into a lower state, of domesticity, of paid work, or even of begging. Generally, these families which could not rent an autonomous exploitation were not "complete", that is made of a widow with children too young to marry or made of old people whose children had married or emigrated.

Another significant aspect, consequence of the fact that it was the owners who determined what was the optimal surface of the farms, is that the families had to adapt their composition to be able to lease a farm. One sees the consequences of that in the zone of the sharecropping where often two brothers or two cousins joined to take a farm. In the zone of the tenant farming, the families exchanged their young people who worked as servants on the exploitation of the neighbors.

The consequence of this situation was that the number of complete peasants families, made of a couple and its children, have tended to equalize with the number of independent farms, and that the peasants lands slowly became only a complement, in the case that a family was not able due to its demographic composition to find a farm. Then, according to the position of the families in their life cycle, they carried out a rotation between the commercial farms and the zone of peasant property, more turned towards autosubsistence. Very often young people were not being able to marry until the family scatter, by the withdrawal of the parents or by the leasing of another exploitation. In addition, as the peasant lands could not easily accommodate a complete family in independent conditions, then progressively marriage and establishment of young people coincided, and were made dependent of the possibility of finding an independent exploitation. But one notices that it is not the age at marriage of men which was the adjustment variable, but rather the age at marriage of women, since the principal criterion was of demographic balance, of stability of the density of the population. The age at marriage of women was slowly forced towards a level that guaranteed a long-term demographic growth rate of zero, due to the fact that the number of complete families had to be equal to the number of independent farms, owned by non-peasants.

It is the rural community only that could prevent young people to marry and live on the peasant lands. The rural group forced young people to wait until a farm was available, in order not to break the fragile balance of the demographic circulation between the two sectors of the agricultural territory. For me the late marriage of women was thus a response of the rural community to the problems arising from the loss of control of the allocation of arable lands. The purpose of this answer was not directly to stop the demographic growth, and the reduction in the growth rate was only a consequence.

This interpretative "model" is worth especially for Southern and Central Europe where the sharecropping was prevalent, In that zone, the invariability of the agrarian map was practically maintained during three to four centuries. In Northern Europe, where the typical leasing agreement was tenant farming, the agrarian map was controlled by non-peasant owners only during part of the sixteenth and during the seventeenth centuries. During the eighteenth century, certain peasant families placed themselves in the situation of being able to lease very large farms, which they worked with the assistance of servants or day laborers. Then they could decide more freely of their fate and in particular to decide to lease plots according to the needs of their demographic composition<sup>19</sup>. So the contradiction between the demographic regulation and the mode of allocation of land broke earlier in Northern Europe, especially in the zone of commercial tenant farming, in the North of France, England, Belgium and the Netherlands. But this was accompanied by a true "proletarianization" of the remainder of the peasant group, which was compensated by the diffusion of the textile rural industry, the "putting-out system" as said the English historians, or the "proto-industrialization", as we say now. It was in this more dynamic zone of Europe than the age at marriage of women decreased during the eighteenth century when it was still increasing in the South and the Center of Europe dominated by sharecropping.

For me the transition of perpetual tenure to short-term tenure, such as it occurred in Western Europe around the sixteenth century, was a radical change. It had immediate consequences on the territorial structure of the settlement, but also probably on the demographic regime, primarily on the nuptiality, but also on the evolution in time of births and deaths<sup>20</sup>.

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<sup>19</sup> As show very well Moriceau and Postel-Vinay, 1992.

<sup>20</sup> Points developed in Devolder, 1994 and summarized in Devolder, 1997.

## **5.- Conclusions**

My explanation of late marriage such as described by Hajnal is based on the relation with the contemporary changes in the agrarian structures. At that time was setting up what I call an agriculture based on short-term lease tenancy. This new system had significant effects on the reproduction of the families and the rural group. I argue that late marriage was part of the changes this system brought about. The demographic dynamics of Western European populations in the sixteenth to the eighteenth centuries appears to be original, in particular compared with the populations of the feudal societies of the tenth to the fifteenth centuries. In my opinion, this new demographic regime, characterized inter alia by the late marriage was the consequence of the mode of allocation of the land. There was a contradiction between the needs for the demographic reproduction of the rural group, and the mode of distribution of the farms, which followed the rules of a land market dominated by non-peasants. Late marriage can then be regarded as a response to this contradiction, a consequence of the passage from perpetual tenure to short-term lease tenure.

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