Medieval English Urban Social History: A Search through the Chronicles

Willard T. Wolff
Western Michigan University

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MEDIEVAL ENGLISH URBAN SOCIAL HISTORY
A SEARCH THROUGH THE CHRONICLES

by

Willard T. Wolff

A Thesis
Submitted to the
Faculty of The Graduate College
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INTRODUCTION

The existence in medieval Europe of a complex urban environment distinguishable from the rural surroundings has long been recognized. Because of its complexity, historians have developed many varying methods of approach in their analysis of the medieval urban environment. One common method is to create a general picture of the medieval city, rather than to examine the subject in respect to the peculiarities of individual towns. A second method is the specific analysis of individual towns. A third method is the topical approach. Historians using this method isolate one or more of the diverse aspects of a town, such as legal and constitutional history, economic history, population size, or town origins, and study these aspects as they are seen in the abstract town or as they relate to the histories of specific urban centers.

Perhaps the most noted urban historian to construct a general history of the medieval city is the Belgian, Henri Pirenne. Pirenne, in attempting to understand the relationship between the decline of classical urban civilization and the urbanization that typified medieval western

Europe after the Merovingian period, formulated his now famous and controversial "thesis." His works attempted to define the impetuses that created a medieval urban environment markedly different from the classical one, and his explanation was economic. The decline of the classical city was due to the disruption of trade between the eastern Mediterranean and western Europe caused by the rise and expansion of Islam after the seventh century. Similarly, the emergence of medieval urban civilization was explained by the supposed revival of trade in the tenth and eleventh centuries. The interrelationship between the extent of long-distance trade and the development of towns has been disputed by many. Pirenne's theory, however, did suggest answers to many of the basic questions involved in the study of medieval towns. These questions concerned the forces that created the medieval town; the origins of the medieval urban population; the relationship between the classical, Merovingian, and post-Carolingian towns; and the role of trade in towns of the respective eras.

Because of the controversial nature of Pirenne's conclusions, many later works were written on the same basic questions he attempted to answer. One such work by Carl Stevenson, an American medievalist, attempted to apply Pirenne's theory to the English town. This work,
entitled *Borough and Town*, gave a commercial explanation for the origins and social development of the English town. Stevenson's work challenged the "garrison theory" on the origins of the English town proposed by F. W. Maitland, the legal and constitutional historian, in his work, *Township and Borough*. This disagreement arose because Stevenson felt that trade was necessary for the development of towns. For this reason, he did not consider the Anglo-Saxon borough a town, and believed that only after commerce of a large scale developed in England could towns arise. Three years after the publication of Stevenson's work, his conclusions were challenged by the British historian James Tait, who believed that more than long-distance trade was necessary to explain the evolution of the English town.

Historians other than Pirenne have written works discussing the medieval town in general terms. Two such works are both entitled *The Medieval Town*. One of these, written by John Mundy and Peter Riesenberg, can best be described as a primer for the study of the medieval city.

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The authors begin with a definition of the medieval town and then present discussions of its origin, evolution, population, commerce, and legal and constitutional history during the whole period of the Middle Ages. The second section of the work gives samples of the medieval sources used in studying the medieval town. The other work of the same title was written by the German Fritz Roerig. Roerig's work is primarily a discussion of the relationship between international trade and the governmental history of the towns in northern Europe, and is more limited geographically and temporally than the work by Mundy and Riesenberg.

Two in-depth analyses of individual towns were written by Gwyn Williams and William Urry. Gwyn Williams' work on medieval London traces the social and political structure of London from the last few years of the twelfth century to the second quarter of the fourteenth century. This study, basically a legal and constitutional history, examines the growth and development of London's government and the special relationship that existed between the city of London and the royal administration of the English kingdom. The role in the city's government of some of the more prominent merchant families is examined, and the

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family trees of these families are also presented.

William Urry's work on Angevin Canterbury is based on evidence found in the surviving ecclesiastical records of Christ Church. Because Christ Church owned much land within the town, the land rentals of the church are valuable documents in the re-creation of the topography of the city. These same rentals, along with charters, also helped Urry gain valuable insight into the occupations and trades of the urban population. The author was able to isolate the holders of the church's urban property, discover the legal and fiscal relationship that existed between the townsmen and the church, and trace the role played by urban property in the economy of Christ Church.

Another smaller work on medieval London was the essay written by Sir Frank Stenton on Norman London. This essay examines the administrative history of the city, its legal and constitutional history, and the city's early topography.

All the above works, whether discussing cities in general or describing individual cities, have examined their subjects as a whole, including in their discussions many of the various elements which combine to form the

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urban environment. Although this technique is a valid one, other medievalists have approached the study of the town by isolating one or more of the specific elements that do exist within the complexity of a city, subjecting these selected elements to closer examination.

The one question which perhaps more than any other has caught the imagination of urban historians is the problem of town origins. Pirenne, as has been seen above, gave an economic explanation for the origin of medieval towns. Other historians, including Maitland and Tait, proposed legal and constitutional explanations. Still other historians approach the problem using such diverse techniques as linguistics and archaeology. The German medievalist Edith Ennen, in her work entitled Die Frühgeschichte der Europäischen Stadt and in a recent article, suggests that European cities should be classified into urban types, because diverse geographical conditions


produce differing factors for the growth of towns.\textsuperscript{12}

According to Professor Ennen:

\begin{quote}
\ldots it is necessary to recognize the diversity of conditions at the very beginning of medieval European towns, to evaluate the early conflicting forces at work in the Romano-Germanic settings, and to determine the impulses and influences which appeared in the midst of these two cultures. Within the vast area of Europe, numerous subspecies of urban forms were created, due sometimes to the variations and mixing of the principal types of towns, sometimes to differing regional and chronological combinations, and finally sometimes to outside influences or chance.\textsuperscript{13}
\end{quote}

She believes that the origin and development of towns is therefore a product of concrete and understandable regional historical situations.

A second aspect of urban history which has been subjected to much study is the relationship between towns and trade. This element of urban history was at the core of Pirenne's discussions, and for this reason played an important role in the disagreement between Stevenson and Tait. Another historian who has studied the relationship between towns and trade is Robert Lopez.\textsuperscript{14} By using contemporary medieval ideas as to what constituted a town, and then by examining the role of trade in relation to

\begin{quote}
\textsuperscript{12}Edith Ennen, \textit{Frühhgeschichte der Europäischen Stadt} (Bonn: L. Rohrscheid, 1953).


\end{quote}
these ideas, Lopez has attempted to separate the notions of trade and town.

Another aspect of medieval towns that has come under close examination is urban topography. William Urry was able to re-create the plan of Angevin Canterbury through the use of documentary materials. Other medievalists have used town plans to study the topography of medieval cities. As early as 1916, the British historian T. F. Tout recognized that many later medieval cities were subject to systematic design, and that these cities could easily be studied through the careful use of modern or early modern city plans.15 M. R. G. Conzen, in his essay "The Use of Town Plans in the Study of Urban History," explains what he considers to be the usefulness of town plans in the study of those cities which either lack documentary evidence, or for which such material is inconclusive.16 In such situations, only the careful and detailed study of plans can trace the size, structure, and development of these towns during the Middle Ages. Howard Saalman, in his work Medieval Cities, uses town plans not to discuss "... the infinite diversity which distinguishes one town from the other, but the general features which


medieval cities have in common."\(^{17}\) Having this aim in mind, Saalman discusses urban structures and open spaces in relation to the social, political, and economic forces that gave the urban environment its particular form.

The short bibliographical survey presented above illustrates not only the range and scope of works written on medieval urban history, but also the complex nature of the medieval town. This background material indicates those elements of urban history that have come under study and the techniques used in such studies. Widely studied aspects of urban history include legal and constitutional history, economic history, and urban social structure. The materials used in such studies are archival legal documents that have survived in England in great numbers from as early as the ninth and tenth centuries. This type of material includes rentals, charters, tax rolls, and wills.

One aspect of urban history that has not been examined is the daily life of the urban population.\(^{18}\) This situation may exist because the main types of written records used by medievalists in their study of towns deal primarily with financial, legal, and administrative facts.


\(^{18}\) Although the work by Miss Mitchell and Miss Leys, *A History of London Life* (Baltimore: Penguin, 1963) deals with one medieval city's life briefly, I have not located any in-depth studies on urban life.
Perhaps T. F. Tout was too harsh in calling these types of documents "arid things"; yet they do not re-create the atmosphere of day-to-day living in a medieval city. There is, however, one type of written record that does exist, especially from the eleventh century to the end of the Middle Ages, that may contain information on urban life. This body of material is the chronicles—narratives of the history of the period written by contemporary authors.

Concerning this body of material, T. F. Tout said:

> "With the opening up of archives and with their contents becoming more accessible through lists, calendars, summaries, and the publication in extenso of many documents, it has become the fashion to regard the record as superior in authority to the chronicle."  

In this statement, Tout did not attempt to belittle archival materials or those historians who base their studies on them, but rather to show that: "... with the increased study of records, the chronicle has more or less come under a cloud." Tout considered this unfortunate because he believed that the chronicle contained the color, life, and human interest of its period. He believed that the chronicle should have a place among the many types of sources, and that, together with archival records and

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21 Ibid.
literary material, a synthesis that correlated all of the evidence should be formed.

With Professor Tout's advice in mind, and because of the lack of previous studies dealing with the more mundane aspects of medieval urban life, this work was begun as a search through the chronicles to discover what types of information on medieval towns they contain, and to discover what conclusions—if any—on town life could be drawn from narrative sources.
CHAPTER I

THE SOURCES

The Period and Region

Only English narrative sources written during the twelfth century were used in this study. The twelfth century was selected for two reasons. First, this century was generally a high point of medieval civilization. Specifically, for England, this century was important in the development of medieval English culture and in the formation of the English state. The four monarchs Henry I, Stephen, Henry II, and Richard, whose reigns span the years 1100-1199, all left a deep imprint on English life and thought. A second reason for studying the twelfth century is the quantity and the availability of narratives for this period. This century is well documented by numerous and varied narratives although, unlike later periods, none of these narratives is strictly urban in scope. Many have been edited, published, and even translated.

Fourteen primary sources, ranging from universal histories to works describing the deeds of specific individu

\[^1\text{For later periods, especially the thirteenth, fourteenth, and fifteenth centuries, there do exist chronicles written about cities, one example being the Annales Londoniensenses, in W. Stubbs, ed., Chronicles of the Reigns of Edward I and Edward II Edited from Manuscripts, Rolls Series (2 vols.; London: Longman and Co., 1882).}\]
viduals, were used. All were written by men who lived during the twelfth century. In those narratives that span a period longer than this one century, only the material on the twelfth century was examined. This was done so that only accurate twelfth-century descriptions and attitudes, and not the interpolations of a later period, would obtained.

Because this study was limited to the English city, only sources written in England were used. It was hoped that the information gained from these sources would be more accurate than that of Continental authors and chronicles. To keep the scope of the work manageable, a somewhat artificial geographical division was made, so that the region discussed includes England, Wales, and Ireland, but excludes the Continental possessions of the English monarchs.

The Authors and Their Works

Little is known about the lives of the fourteen authors who wrote the works examined. The material that modern readers do have was compiled from internal evidence and from bits of incidental information included at random.

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2For more complete biographical information, see Leslie Stephen and Sidney Lee, eds., Dictionary of National Biography (London: Oxford University Press, Humphrey Milford, published since 1917). For other biographical information and textual criticism, see the prefaces in the volumes given in the notes following.
within the works by the authors. From these few references some factual data does emerge.

Although the *Gesta Stephani* is anonymous, some clues to its authorship are contained in internal evidence. Because of the very exact topographical descriptions of southwestern England, it is probable that the author lived in that region of the country. The author also displays detailed knowledge of Henry of Blois, bishop of Winchester. From these facts and other information, it is speculated that Robert of Lewes, bishop of Bath from 1136-1166 and the first protégé of Henry of Blois, was the author of the *Gesta*. The chronicle is a main source of information for the years of the Anarchy (1142-1154), and was probably written in two parts. The first part, a highly partisan account of King Stephen's actions in his struggle with the Angevin party to retain his weak hold on the English throne, was written in 1148, and the second part was written after the author switched his favor to the Angevin

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4 Davis, pp. 209-32.
The Chronicle of Florence of Worcester, written by a succession of authors, is a universal chronicle which covers the period from 446 to 1295. The only reference to Florence is his obituary, which was included in the chronicle by his first continuator. From this it is known that he died in July 1118. After Florence's death, another monk of Worcester named John continued the chronicle to the close of 1141. Florence and John were contemporary with the events described in the chronicle from at least around 1100 until 1141.

The next two sources are the work of one author. They are the History of the Conquest of Ireland and the Itinerary through Wales, written by Gerald of Wales (Giraldus Cambrensis). Gerald, the youngest son of William de Barri, was born in Wales at the castle of Manorbier in 1147. Of probable Norman descent, Gerald's family had considerable influence and enjoyed the favor

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of the English monarchs. The de Barri family had also played an important role in the attempted conquest of Ireland. Nevertheless, at a young age Gerald became more interested in the affairs of the spirit than those of war, and entered the Church with the permission of his father. He was well-educated, studying three times at Paris. After returning from his first stay at Paris, he became arch-deacon of Brecknock, perhaps through the influence of his uncle, the bishop of St. David's. In 1184, Gerald was invited to the court of Henry II and became one of the king's chaplains. The History of the Conquest of Ireland—an event in which his family played an important role—was written around 1188 and mainly describes events that happened during the preceding eighteen years. In 1189, Gerald was a companion of Archbishop Baldwin when the archbishop travelled through Wales preaching a crusade. This journey was the occasion for the writing of the Itinerary. Gerald wrote other works not used in this study, including an autobiography, a description of Wales, and a topography of Ireland. The date of his death is unknown.

The life of the author of the next narrative is also well-documented. This work is the chronicle of Henry of Huntingdon.7 Henry was born in Huntingdonshire or Cam-

bridgeshire not later than 1084. It is believed that his father was Nicholas, the archdeacon of Huntingdon. As a young boy, he entered the household of Robert Bloet, bishop of Lincoln. Henry became a priest, and sometime before 1123, he succeeded Nicholas as archdeacon. His chronicle begins with the mythical pre-Roman history of Britain and, through successive editions written by himself, ends with the accession of Henry II in 1154. By this date, the author was at least seventy years old, and he must have died shortly after 1154.

Of Jocelin of Brakelond, the author of the next source, little is known. His surname is derived from a street in Bury St. Edmund's where, it is presumed, he lived before entering the monastery in 1173. In 1182 he became the chaplain of Abbot Samson after the abbot's election. In this position, Jocelin was in close attendance upon the abbot for six years. Later he became the monastery's guestmaster, a position he held until at least 1200. Still later, Jocelin was made almoner of the monastery. The date of his death is unknown. His chronicle relates the deeds of Abbot Samson, his patron, and ends eight years before the abbot's death.

Another chronicle used was written by Richard of

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Devizes, a monk of St. Swithun's, or the Old Minster at Winchester. Born at Devizes, thirty-five miles northwest of Winchester, Richard probably spent his adult life at St. Swithun's. His chronicle on the events that occurred during the absence from England of King Richard I was written some time between 1192 and 1198. The work is completely original and shows no indication of having been based on other narratives. Other medieval authors make no references to it, indicating that it was written as private entertainment for the friend of the author to whom the work is dedicated, and that the chronicle was probably never widely circulated.

The author of another source, Roger of Hoveden, either took his name from Hoveden or was born there. Roger, probably the son of a well-to-do tenant living on monastic land, was educated at the monastic school of Durham. He led a life of public service, becoming a clerk of Henry II in 1174 and serving Henry as a diplomat on at

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least two occasions. In 1189 he was appointed an itinerant justice of the forests. After the death of Henry II, Roger may have retired, and it is at this time that he probably began his chronicle. The chronicle is a universal one, beginning in 732 and ending in 1201. Although the earlier sections of the work, including the years 1148-1170, were based on other written works, the composition and arrangement of the material is original. Because the author's public life gave him access to many records and letters, these types of documents were included in the text of the narrative. The author's public service also enabled him to travel and meet persons of importance, which gives his narrative a high degree of credibility. A probable date given for Roger's death is 1201.

The Flowers of History was written by Roger Wendover, a monk of St. Alban's Abbey. There is little information on Roger's birth or education, although it is probable that he was a native of Wendover in Buckinghamshire. While in the abbey, Roger rose to the position of precentor and later was promoted to prior of Belvoir, a cell attached to St. Alban's. Between 1224 and 1231, Roger was deposed as prior and returned to St. Alban's. In 1231, he became the

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monastic historiographer, and may have begun his chronicle at this time. The chronicle is a universal one from the Creation to 1235. Roger used many other works, including Florence of Worcester and Henry of Huntingdon, as sources for those events which he did not personally know. After 1188, he did have personal knowledge of the events he described, and from this date on the chronicle is wholly original. Roger probably died in 1236, the year after his chronicle ends.

The next source was written by Simeon, a monk of Durham. Although the exact date of his birth is unknown, a probable date given is 1060. Simeon was already a monk when his monastery was moved to Durham in 1083. Nothing of his education is known, but he did hold the office of precentor in the monastery. His chronicle covers the years 616 to 1129. The material from 848 to 1121 is taken from Florence of Worcester and from John, Florence's first continuator. The years 1121-1129 are Simeon's original work. Although the date of Simeon's death is unknown, the chronicle ends in 1129, and 1130 is a probable date given.

The one source used which is not a historical narrative is William Fitzstephen's description of London.

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prefaced to his biography of Thomas Becket. William calls himself a fellow-citizen of Becket, but it is not known if this meant he was also a Londoner by birth. He was a member of Becket's household, holding various offices in it, including that of chaplain. He states that he was with Becket at the fateful Council at Northampton in 1164, and also that he was an eyewitness to Becket's martyrdom, although he did not follow Becket into exile during the intervening period. Whatever William's relationship to Becket, a year after the Saint's murder, William was in the service of Henry II as a sheriff of Gloucestershire. Later he became an itinerant justice. The description of London written before 1183 is the best twelfth-century description of any English city in existence today.

The next two sources were written by William of Malmesbury. They are the Chronicle of the Kings of England and the Historia Novella. William, born in 1090 of a


14An early thirteenth-century urban description is the Liber Luciani de laude Cestrie, transcribed and edited by M. V. Taylor in the Lancashire and Cheshire Record Society, 1912. This text was received too late to be included in this work, but does merit consideration in other works on the subject of urban daily life.

well-to-do Anglo-Norman family, entered the abbey at Malmesbury at a young age. Having a taste for study and scholarship, he eventually became the monastic librarian. He met and was on familiar terms with many important men in the kingdom, gaining the patronage of Robert, earl of Gloucester, son of Henry I and half brother to Empress Matilda. Earl Robert was Matilda and the Angevin party's chief support in the war that followed Matilda's attempt to regain the throne from King Stephen. The Chronicle of the Kings of England, written before 1139 and probably between 1124 and 1125, begins with the arrival in England of the Angles in 449 and ends in 1119. The Historia, written almost as a continuation of the Chronicle, is a contemporary narrative of the civil wars during Stephen's reign. It begins in 1140 and closes in 1142. Because the work is unfinished and unrevised, ending with the promise of a fourth book which was never written, the author must have died shortly after 1142.

The last source was written by William of Newburg.16

William, born at Bridlington in 1136, entered the Augus-


tinian priory of St. Mary's at Newburg as a young boy. He spent his whole life at St. Mary's and does not seem to have travelled. In 1196, at the request of Ernald, abbot of the neighboring monastery of Rievaux, William began to write the History of England. The History is a narrative of the events that happened between 1066 and 1197. The earlier section is composed of material taken from other authors, while the later section is written from accounts the author received from eyewitnesses of the events. In the introduction to the History, William states that he was in ill health when the work was begun, and because the narrative ends abruptly in 1198, it is probable that the author died shortly after this date.

Although these fourteen sources do not constitute the entire body of existing twelfth-century narratives, and although the quality and quantity of the specific information contained in them can vary widely, they may be considered representative, and probably present an accurate picture of the types of material on town life contained in the chronicles.
CHAPTER II
THE MATERIAL FROM THE NARRATIVES

The goal of this study is twofold: first, to discover what types of information on towns exist in the narratives, and second, to determine what conclusions about town life can be drawn from this information. The material from the narratives falls into two basic categories: information on urban location and structures, and information on urban populations.

Urban Location and Structures

The material in the first category includes information on town location, fortifications, quarters or other forms of internal organization, streets, open spaces, and urban structures. Through this information some understanding of the appearance and structures of the medieval town is possible.

Many towns were located either near rivers or on the sea coast. The nearby water played an important role in the defense and in the economy of some of these towns. Bristol, situated on a tidal estuary, was a town for which water played a dual role. The author of the Gesta Stephani states that Bristol was wealthy because of its shipping, which brought merchandise to the city from foreign areas and from the local coast. The tide formed a harbor in
which a thousand ships could conveniently and safely anchor. Bristol also used its position on a peninsula of land between two rivers for defense, especially since at high tide every quarter of the city was surrounded by water. With constructed fortifications on the one side of town most open to attack, the city was almost impregnable.\textsuperscript{1} Wexford, an Irish city described by Gerald of Wales, was a trading city on the sea coast, while Waterford, another Irish city, was built on the bank of the Suir river.\textsuperscript{2} London, of course, was situated on the Thames, and Durham was also a river city.\textsuperscript{3} Unfavorably located cities were also noted by the chroniclers. According to Richard of Devizes, "Bath, placed or, rather, dumped down in the midst of the valleys, in an exceedingly heavy air and sulphureous vapour, is at the gates of hell."\textsuperscript{4} Similarly, Ely is in a region that stinks because of the surrounding fens, and the march cities of Worcester, Chester, and Hereford are poorly located because of the frequent attacks made by the Welsh on those cities.\textsuperscript{5}

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{1}Forester, Henry of Huntingdon, p. 350.
\item \textsuperscript{2}Wright, Historical Works of Giraldus Cambrensis, pp. 191-92, 207.
\item \textsuperscript{3}Butler, Description of London, p. 27; Stevenson, Historical Works of Simeon of Durham, p. 716.
\item \textsuperscript{4}Appleby, Chronicle of Richard of Devizes, p. 66. "Batonia in imis uallium in crasso nimis aere et vapore sulphureo posita, immo deposita, est ad portas inferi."
\item \textsuperscript{5}Ibid.
\end{itemize}
Town fortifications included walls, castles, trenches, and baileys. In the twelfth century Exeter still had Roman walls. Durham had walls that were enlarged and strengthened by Bishop Ralph, who also built a rampart from the choir of the church to the wall of the castle. The Irish town of Waterford had walls under which the Suir river flowed. During the Anglo-Norman invasion of Ireland, these walls were breached when a small wooden house hanging from the outside of the wall and supported by a post collapsed after the post was cut down, carrying with it a section of the town's wall. The town was then taken by the besiegers entering through this breach in the wall. Another Irish town, Wexford, also had walls and towers from which the townsmen threw large stones and beams onto their besiegers in a ditch below. The city of Worcester had walls and a castle, and may have been internally fortified. John, the continuator of Florence of Worcester, described the sack of the town by the men of Gloucester. The attackers entered the town through a gate and collected in a body to attack a fort in the southern quarter of town near the castle. Failing in this

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6 Forester, Henry of Huntingdon, p. 338.
7 Stevenson, Historical Works of Simeon of Durham, p. 715.
8 Wright, Historical Works of Giraldus Cambrensis, p. 207.
9 Ibid.
endeavor, they rushed to the northern, unfortified quarter of town and set fire to the houses there. Because of this action, a portion of the city was burned, although most of the town remained unburned and standing. London was fortified by two castles on the west and the Tower on the east. The walls of the Tower and its bailey had deep foundations, and the mortar used in their construction was mixed with animal blood. Toward the north, the city was protected by a wall with towers and seven double gates. On the south side, the city's wall and towers had been washed away by the Thames. Farther upstream, two miles from the city to the west, stood the royal palace with outworks and bastions. In 1190, William, bishop of Ely and chancellor of England during the absence of Richard I, attempted to surround the Tower of London with a moat by digging a trench to bring the Thames into the city.

Within the walls of the medieval town the land area was probably organized into quarters. In Worcester, some quarters may have been fortified. Every morning in London traders, vendors, and day-laborers were found in their individual quarters engaged in their own particular

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11 Butler, *Description of London*, p. 27.
12 Giles, *Flowers of History*, II, 100.
The streets of medieval towns were unpaved and dirty. London's streets are described as "muddy" by Roger of Hoveden, although William Fitzstephen states that they were equipped with sewers and conduits. Two of the rights of the cellarer of St. Edmund's Abbey included the issuance of a license to dig chalk or clay from the roads outside of town, and the possession of all dung found in every street of the city except from in front of the doors of those persons who owned their property. This privilege slowly eroded, forcing the cellarer to seize the carts loaded with dung which the townsmen had collected. The townsmen protested, and their will prevailed. After this, everyone had the right to collect the dung on his own holding, and the poorer men sold theirs when and to whom they wished.

Open spaces were another internal feature of the town. Such spaces are mentioned in the descriptions of Durham and Bury. In Durham, the area between the church and castle was cleared of the many houses built there by the poor and made into an open field to protect the church from the danger of fires and from the filth created by the

14 Butler, Description of London, p. 28.


16 Butler, Chronicle of Jocelin of Brakelond, p. 104.
shacks. In Bury, the abbot's house had a yard surrounded by stables and workshops, and Abbot Samson added a new larder to these buildings.

Although the exact number of churches for each city is not given in the narratives, 130 is the number given for London and its suburbs. The ringing of the church bells was used as a signal for war, and during times of war the churches were used as sanctuaries by the urban population. During the sack of Worcester by the men of Gloucester in 1139, the citizens of the town took refuge in church and carried their goods with them. The monks of the church stripped the high alter of its ornaments, removed the crucifix and the image of Mary, and hid curtains, palls, albs, copes, stoles, and chasubles in recesses in the church walls. Taking refuge in churches was not always the best procedure. During the sack of Nottingham by the forces of Robert, earl of Gloucester, in 1140, those persons who had sought refuge in the churches perished there when the city caught fire.

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17 Ibid.
18 Ibid.
19 Butler, Description of London, p. 27.
22 Ibid., p. 279.
Other urban structures mentioned in the sources include a prison, a hospital, bridges, and an unidentified structure built by Henry I at Cirencester. Florence of Worcester describes a private house. This building, probably of the first-floor hall type, had an underground cellar, chambers, and a hall. During the above-mentioned siege of Nottingham, the owner of the house, who had hidden his wealth in an underground cellar, was seized and promised to lead his captors to his goods in return for his freedom. Taking his captors to the cellar, he slipped away, escaping through the chamber and the hall, closing and bolting the doors behind him. He then set fire to his house, killing the men in the cellar.

24 Ibid., p. 45.
28 Forester, *Chronicle of Florence of Worcester*, p. 279. The urban population must have often hidden its wealth underground during times of danger. After the capture and burning of the French town of Brionne, soldiers dug up the ground, finding chests filled with such things as gold, silver, valuable garments, palls, and spices. Stevenson, *Historical Works of Simeon of Durham*, p. 611.
Building materials mentioned in the narratives include stone and wood for houses, thatch and tiles for roofs. Most of the construction must have been of wood, and the danger of fire was always present. Many cities were completely or partially destroyed by flames.

In some medieval towns the remains of classical antiquity were present. Exeter had Roman walls. The Welsh town of Caerleon, a former winter camp of Roman legions in England, was described by Gerald of Wales:

This city was of undoubted antiquity, and handsomely built of masonry, with courses of bricks, by the Romans. Many vestiges of its former splendor may yet be seen; immense palaces, formerly ornamented with gilded roofs, in imitation of Roman magnificence, inasmuch as they were first raised by the Roman princes, and embellished with splendid buildings; a tower of prodigious size, remarkable hot baths, relics of temples, and theatres, all inclosed within fine walls, parts of which remain standing. You will find on all sides, both within and without the circuit of the walls, subterraneous buildings, aqueducts, underground passages; and what I think worthy of notice, stoves contrived with wonderful art, to transmit the heat insensibly through narrow tubes passing up the side walls.

The relationship between the medieval city and the surrounding countryside is difficult to determine. Suburbs

29 Butler, Chronicle of Jocelin of Brakelond, pp. 96, 45; Wright, Historical Works of Giraldus Cambrensis, p. 212.

30 Roger Hoveden mentions nine major urban fires in 87 years, Simeon of Durham three in thirteen years. William Fitzstephen calls fires a plague of London (see note 43).

31 Forester, Henry of Huntingdon, p. 338.

32 Wright, Historical Works of Giraldus Cambrensis, p. 372. For Latin text, see Appendix.
existed outside the walls of medieval towns. These suburbs may have been agricultural. Around London they consisted of houses, gardens, pasture lands, mills, grain fields, meadows, and an open field used as a market.33 Every week at the London market both riding and war horses were sold. Nobles residing in the city went to this horse market to make purchases or observe the animals. On another section of the field, farm animals, including swine, milk cows, sheep, and mares for plowing, were sold. Also for sale in this section of the market were the implements and wares of farming.34 There was a market at Bury, but its location is unclear. The townsmen, however, did have shops, booths, and stallage there, through privileges granted them by the town reeves. The population of the city's suburbs was not exempt from the town's market toll unless they were members of the merchant's guild, indicating that the market was possibly within the circuit of the town's walls.35 Bury had a mill, hospital, and fish pond at Babwell.36 The abbot raised the water level of the pond and flooded the land by the waterside from Towngate to Eastgate, so that arable land, gardens, pastures, meadows, and orchards were ruined.37

33 Butler, Description of London, p. 27.
34 Ibid., pp. 28-29.
36 Ibid., pp. 45, 131.
37 Ibid., p. 131.
Urban Populations

The second category of material found in the narratives is information on the urban populations. This includes material on urban size, population composition and occupations, the moods of the population, and information on education, diet, and recreation.

References from the narratives do not clearly indicate the sizes of the urban populations. Exeter is named as the fourth largest English city, while Norwich is described as populous, and Nottingham is said to have a large population. Rochester and Chichester are mere hamlets, according to Richard of Devizes, and are called cities only because they are bishop's seats. Although no numerical figures are given in the above descriptions, Gerald of Wales and William Fitzstephen give in numerical terms the size of certain urban armies. The accuracy of these figures, however, is doubtful. Because the infor-


40 Gerald of Wales gives the size of the army of the city of Wexford as 2,000 men and the army of Waterford as 3,000 in Wright, Historical Works of Giraldus Cambrensis, pp. 191, 207. According to William Fitzstephen in Butler, Description of London, p. 27, the size of the army of London during the Anarchy was 20,000 armed horsemen and 60,000 foot soldiers. Compare these figures with the one given in Forester, Henry of Huntingdon, p. 387: 1,000 well-armed men with helmets and breastplates. William of Newburg, in Stevenson, History of William of Newburgh, pp. 652-54, gives
mation found in the narratives is obscure and of doubtful accuracy, it is impossible to form any definite conclusions about the size of urban populations.

Although no accurate information on the size of urban populations exists in the narratives, they do contain material on the composition and occupations of urban populations. Richard of Devizes comments on the people of some English cities in a digression about a French boy-martyr. Before leaving for England, the boy is given advice by a French Jew:

York is full of Scotsmen, filthy and treacherous creatures scarcely men. . . . In Durham, Norwich, and Lincoln there are very few people of your sort amongst the powerful, and you will hear almost no-one speaking French. At Bristol there is no-one who is not or has not been a soap-maker. . . .

It must be remembered, however, that Richard is expressing a strong regional prejudice in these descriptions. This prejudice is more obvious in his very favorable account of his home city, Winchester:

In each locality there are some good men, but there are fewer by far in all of them put together than in one city, Winchester. . . . That city is a school for all those who want to live and fare well. There they breed men; there you can have plenty of bread and wine for nothing. Monks are there of such mercifulness

52,000 as the number of persons involved in William Longbeard's conspiracy (see below, p. 35).

and gentleness, clerks of such wisdom and frankness, citizens of such courteousness and good faith, women of such beauty and modesty. . . . I send you to that city, the city of cities, the mother of all and better than all others. There is one vice there and one alone, which is by custom greatly indulged in. I would say . . . that the people of Winchester lie like sentries.  

William Fitzstephen was also very proud of his home city, London:

I do not think there is any city deserving greater approval for its customs in respect of church-going, honour paid to the ordinances of God, keeping of feast-days, giving of alms, entertainment of strangers, ratifying of betrothals, contracts of marriage, celebration of nuptials, furnishing of banquets, cheering of guests, and likewise for their care in regard to rites of funeral and the burial of the dead. The only plagues of London are the immoderate drinking of fools and the frequency of fires.  

William states further:

The citizens of London are everywhere regarded as illustrious and renowned beyond those of all other cities for the elegance of their fine manners, raiment and table. The inhabitants of other towns are called citizens, but of this they are called barons. And with them a solemn oath ends all strife. The matrons of London are very Sabines.  

This description of the London citizenry is quite different from the one given by Richard of Devizes:

When you reach England, if you come to London, pass through it quickly, for I do not at all like that city. All sorts of men crowd together there from every country under the heavens. Each race brings its own vices and its own customs to the city. No one lives in it without falling into some sort of

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42 Ibid., p. 27. see Appendix for Latin text.

43 Butler, Description of London, p. 30. see Appendix for Latin text.

44 Ibid., p. 27. see Appendix for Latin text.
crime. Every quarter of it abounds in grave obscenities. The greater a rascal a man is, the better a man he is accounted. . . . Behold, I prophesy to you: whatever evil or malicious thing that can be found in any part of the world, you will find in that one city. Do not associate with the crowds of pimps; do not mingle with the throngs in eating-houses; avoid dice and gambling, the theatre and the tavern. You will meet with more braggarts there than in all France; the number of parasites is infinite. Actors, jesters, smooth-skinned lads, Moors, flatterers, pretty boys, effeminates, pederasts, singing and dancing girls, quacks, belly-dancers, sorceresses, extortioners, night-wanderers, magicians, mimes, beggars, buffoons: all this tribe fill all the houses. Therefore, if you do not want to dwell with evil-doers, do not live in London. I do not speak against learned or religious men, or against Jews: however, because of their living amidst evil people, I believe they are less perfect there than elsewhere.45

The population of London was not homogenous, and social stratification existed. In 1196 a man named William Longbeard organized a conspiracy of the London poor against the richer men of the city. William, a citizen of London and a magistrate, claimed that the rich did not pay the royal taxes but through their power imposed the entire tax burden on the poor. He so influenced the poor and the moderately wealthy that a conspiracy under his direction was formed. A large number of iron tools was collected to break into the houses of the rich. Eventually, the king's administrator trapped William in a church, and he was slain when he was forced to flee the church. After his death, the poor people honored William as a martyr.46


46Stevenson, History of William of Newburgh, pp. 652-54.
Although the origins of other urban populations are not clear, the inhabitants of Bury were subject to certain taxes and rents that may suggest a rural origin for the town's population. After the town had received the liberty of a borough, a penny was collected every August from each house to pay for the reaping of the monastery's grain.\textsuperscript{47} One rent later abolished by Abbot Samson was the payment of one penny a year for each cow owned by the townsmen for the privilege of grazing the animals in an enclosed field.\textsuperscript{48} The cellarer of the monastery maintained sheep folds where the burgesses had to keep their flocks.\textsuperscript{49} The cellarer also had the privilege of keeping a bull on the town's fields, but this right was impinged upon by other townsmen.\textsuperscript{50} The cellarer had the privilege of plow service of one rood per acre without food and could demand cartage from the townsmen, until this service was commuted for a money payment.\textsuperscript{51} Such rights indicate a high degree of agricultural involvement not only for the townsmen but also for the cellarer.

Jews formed an element of the urban population. References to Jewish communities in the cities of London, Win-


\textsuperscript{48}Ibid., p. 100.

\textsuperscript{49}Ibid., p. 102.

\textsuperscript{50}Ibid., p. 103.

\textsuperscript{51}Ibid., p. 102.
Chester, Northampton, York, Bury St. Edmund's, Lynn, Stamford, Norwich, and Lincoln were found. Because of their occupations as moneylenders and royal tax farmers, the Jews became wealthy. Their wealth and their religion made their lives precarious, for not only were they hated because of their religion, but their wealth and rich houses made the Christian population even more resentful. During the reign of Henry II, the English Jews prospered under royal protection. Under Richard I, however, pogroms against the Jews took place in London, Norwich, Lynn, Stamford, York, and Bury St. Edmund's. These attacks began in London during the coronation of Richard, and were motivated by both religious feelings and the hope of personal financial gain. In London the Jews were beaten by a mob and fled to their houses. Their houses, probably constructed of stone, were surrounded by the mob from three in the afternoon until sunset. However, because of their construction and the lack of siege equipment, the houses withstood the assault until their roofs were set afire. The fire spread to Christian houses, so that the most beautiful parts of the city were burnt.

52 Ibid., pp. 555, 563-66; Giles, Flowers of History, II, 89; Riley, Annals of Roger De Hoveden, II, 120.
53 Stevenson, History of William of Newburgh, pp. 566, 571. One Jew was called a "celebrated physician," p. 564.
54 Ibid., p. 555.
55 Ibid., pp. 555-57; Giles, Flowers of History, p. 89.
Finally fleeing their burning houses, the Jews were slain and their homes plundered. The plunder included gold, silver, valuable garments, and Jewish writings. After this massacre, Richard I granted peace and legal security to the English Jews, but the news of the events in London triggered similar pogroms in other cities. The Jews of Lynn, "arrogant from their numbers, the magnitude of their riches, and the royal protection," were attacked by sailors. The Jews were slain, and their houses plundered and burned. When the Jews at the fair of Stamford were attacked, some escaped and were admitted to the royal castle for protection. Nevertheless, their homes were plundered and a sizeable quantity of money was taken. The Jews of Lincoln, at the first sign of trouble, took their money and sought refuge in the royal castle. According to William of Newburg, the Jews of York were not so fortunate. There the Jewish community included two wealthy Jews who lived in the center of town in houses of such abundance and luxury that they were compared to royal palaces. A secret plot was instigated against the Jews by men of high rank who owed large sums of money to them. Late at night, a large por-

56 Stevenson, History of William of Newburgh, pp. 555-57.

57 Giles, Flowers of History, p. 81.

58 Stevenson, History of William of Newburgh, pp. 563-64.

59 Ibid., pp. 564-65.

60 Ibid., p. 565.
tion of the city was set afire, so that the other towns-
men, occupied with the task of protecting their own homes,
would not interfere with the plot against the Jews. Armed
and with iron tools, the plotters broke into the home of
an extremely wealthy Jew killed earlier in London, slew
his wife, sons, and other members of the household, plun-
dered the house, and set it afire. After this, the other
Jews sought the protection of the governor of the royal
castle. They were given refuge and, taking their money,
went to the castle. After a few days, the plotters attacked
another Jewish home, said to be so large and strongly con-
structed that it resembled a castle. At length the house
was broken into, plundered, and burned. The next morning,
a mob carried off what remained in the house after the fire,
including the household furniture. The Jews in the castle
were attacked after the governor of the fortress went out-
side the structure and was refused readmission by the Jews.
The mob that attacked the castle included the workmen of
the city, all the young men of the city, armed knights, and
country people. The nobility and the more respectable ci-
tizens refused to join in. When the cause of the Jews in
the castle seemed hopeless, they decided in a council that
the heads of the households would slay their families and
then commit suicide. Before this was done, to prevent
their attackers from becoming rich through plunder, they
burned all their valuable garments and threw valuables that
could not be destroyed by fire into the garderobe pit so as
to deny the use of these things to their enemies. Those Jews who did not commit suicide were slain by the besiegers after the castle was taken. In this way the whole Jewish community of York perished. Roger Wendover gives the size of this community as five hundred, not including women and children. The sizes of the other urban Jewish communities mentioned above are not known. Roger states that fifty-seven were slain at St. Edmund's, although this is no indication of the total size of the Jewish community at that town.

Pogroms were not the only fate of the Jews. The Jews of Bury St. Edmund's were expelled from the town by Abbot Samson. However, they were permitted to keep all their moveable property and were given the value of their homes and land. They were also permitted to return to Bury for two nights and two days to plead in the abbot's court for the repayment of the money owed them by their debtors.

Another aspect of Jewish life mentioned in the narratives was the problem of the burial of the dead. It

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61Ibid., pp. 565-71.
63Ibid., p. 89.
64Butler, *Chronicle of Jocelin of Brakelond*, p. 45. This expulsion may have been for the protection of the Jews.
65Ibid., p. 46.
was not until 1177 that Jews were allowed to have ceme­
teries in each English city. Up to this time all the Jews
of the kingdom were buried at London. This new permission
allowed Jews to bury their dead outside the walls of cities
wherever they could purchase land for this purpose.  

The riots against the Jews give some indication of
the moods of the urban population, which could be quite
violent. At times this violence was directed towards
other cities. As seen above, the city of Gloucester,
with the aid of other horsemen and infantry, attacked,
pillaged, and burned the city of Worcester in 1139.
During this attack the town's chattel was carried off as
plunder. The population was also seized, dragged into
captivity, and forced to buy its release. In retaliation,
the Earl of Worcester attacked the town of Sudely, which
belonged to the Earl of Gloucester, seized the population
with its goods and cattle, and carried the townspeople off
to Worcester. At another time, the men of London, dis­
pleased because the town reeves of Bury St. Edmund's had
taxed some of their goods, threatened to destroy the stone
houses the abbot had recently built in Bury if the abbot
did not right this supposed wrong.  

\[68\] Ibid., pp. 271-72.
\[69\] Butler, Chronicle of Jocelin of Brakelond, p. 76.
York also knew how to show its displeasure. Gerard, the archbishop of York during the early years of the twelfth century, was skilled in collecting improper contributions from his congregation and was also said to believe in witchcraft. When he died his corpse was buried outside the church and, contrary to custom, neither the clergy nor the citizenry went out to meet the funeral procession. Not only was the corpse insulted in this way, but the bier was also the target of stones thrown by young boys.⁷⁰

Pride in their respective cities was also manifested by the urban populations. This pride clearly sets the tone of the descriptions by Richard of Devizes and William Fitz-stephen. The Londoners' pride arose because the townsmen clearly recognized their political and economic importance. During the Anarchy, London's population played an important role in the revival of King Stephen's good fortune.⁷¹ London's citizens drove Matilda from the city in 1140 after she had angered the town's population by her requests for taxes and by her refusal to free the captive king. Londoners were also important in the capture of Robert, earl of Gloucester, at the siege of Winchester


London's economic importance is shown by an incident that occurred at Bury St. Edmund's. The merchants of London claimed that they were exempt from the market toll of Bury through the rights granted them in a charter by Henry II, although some London merchants had paid the toll reluctantly and under compulsion. When the abbot refused their claim, the merchants of London did not attend the market at Bury for two years. Because of this, the market suffered a great loss, and the revenues of the sacrist were diminished. Finally, through the arbitration of the bishop of London, it was agreed that the Londoners would again attend the market and that some merchants should pay the toll, but this toll would be immediately returned. In this manner, the liberty of both parties was preserved.  

Concerning education, William Fitzstephen states that the three principal churches of London had famous schools, and that there were other schools which operated through special license and permission. In London, on holy days, the schoolmasters assembled their students in those churches whose patron saints were being celebrated on that day. Then the students from the different schools debated and disputed, "... some in demonstrative rhet-

72 Butler, Chronicle of Jocelin of Brakelond, pp. 75-76.
73 Butler, Description of London, p. 27.
oric, others in dialectic." Some students did this for display, while others did it to "... establish the truth for the sake of perfection." Other students debated in verse such topics as grammar. Bury St. Edmund's also had a school, and Abbot Samson purchased some stone houses for use as student lodgings, so that the poor clerks would not have to rent houses.

Although no complete menus are given in the narratives, spices, ginger, salt, fish, eels, pickled herring, venison, wine, corn, bacon, and bread are all mentioned. William Fitzstephen states that London had a cook-shop on the river bank, where there were wine shops and wine was sold from ships. There, according to the season, were roasted, fried, or boiled fish, delicate meat for the wealthy, and coarser meat for the poor. The cook-shop was open day and night, and those patrons who desired delicacies could find sturgeon, "Guinea-fowl," and "Ionian francolin" there. In other cities, however, the quantity

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74 Ibid., p. 28.
75 Ibid.
76 Ibid.
77 Butler, Chronicle of Jocelin of Brakelond, p. 45.
79 Butler, Description of London, p. 28.
and quality of food was not as good as that of London. According to Richard of Devizes, "Oxford scarcely sustains, much less satisfies, her own men," and "Exeter refreshes both men and beasts with the same provender."\footnote{"Oxonia uix suos homines non dico satiat sed sustentat. Exonia eodem farre reficit homines et iumenta." Appleby, Chronicle of Richard of Devizes, p. 66.} From this passage, however, it is impossible to determine whether the beasts of Exeter consumed the same food that humans would normally eat, or whether the men of Exeter ate livestock feed. From the contemptuous tone of the passage, it is presumed that the latter was supposed to be the case.

William Fitzstephen's description of London gives an excellent account of recreation in that city. For relaxation on summer evenings, the students of London and the young men of the city took walks and visited Holywell, Clerkenwell, and Saint Clement's Well in the suburbs.\footnote{Butler, Description of London, p. 27.} Instead of theatre and stage-plays in London, there were religious plays depicting the miracles of saints or the sufferings of martyrs.\footnote{Ibid., p. 30.} In Bury, on the day after Christmas, there were gatherings in the cemetery, where wrestling matches between the townsmen and the abbot's servants were held. On at least one occasion, these gatherings ended in a brawl. After this, the abbot publicly forbade gatherings.
and shows in the cemetery.\textsuperscript{83}

The sports of London included hunting with either falcon or dogs, leaping, archery, wrestling, putting the stone, throwing the javelin, horse racing, and sword fighting.\textsuperscript{84} On Carnival day, the schools were closed in the morning so that the students and their schoolmasters could hold cock-fights. After dinner the youths of the city went out into the fields for a game of ball. Each school or guild had its own ball. The ball games were watched by older men who came on horseback.\textsuperscript{85} Every Sunday in Lent, there was jousting outside the city walls. Armed with lances and shields or with shafts forked at the end but with the steel points removed, the sons of lay citizens or the young men of the Court and of baronial households exercised their skill with arms.\textsuperscript{86} At Easter there were naval tournaments on the Thames. A shield was placed on a pole in the middle of the river. A young man attempted to strike the shield while standing on the prow of a boat that was either rowed or carried along by the river current. The goal of the sport was to break the lance by striking the shield while remaining standing. If the lance did not break and the jouster was thrown into

\textsuperscript{83} Butler, \textit{Chronicle of Jocelin of Brakelond}, pp. 92, 94.

\textsuperscript{84} Butler, \textit{Description of London}, pp. 31-32.

\textsuperscript{85} Ibid., p. 30.

\textsuperscript{86} Ibid., pp. 30-31.
the river, there were two ships on each side of the shield to pick him up. Spectators lined the river banks and the bridges to observe the event.\textsuperscript{87} During the winter, before dinner on feast days, boar, hog, and bull fights were held. Another popular entertainment was bear-baiting.\textsuperscript{88}

When the marshes to the north of the city walls froze in winter, there were ice sports, including running or gliding on the ice. Other people made ice skates from the shin bones of animals and propelled themselves with iron-tipped poles. Sometimes two ice skaters would joust using the poles as lances. All these ice sports led to falls and sometimes injuries, including broken arms and legs or scraped and skinned heads.\textsuperscript{89}

From the preceding discussions, it is clear that much information on towns exists in the narrative sources. This material ranges from evidence on urban structures and fortifications to descriptions of sports, recreation, and occupations. Unfortunately for the second goal of this study, the material, although varied and wide-ranging, is too incidental, miscellaneous, and fragmentary to be used as a foundation upon which solid conclusions about medieval urban social life can be built. Because this study was undertaken as an exploration of the narratives rather than

\textsuperscript{87}Ibid., p. 31.
\textsuperscript{88}Ibid.
\textsuperscript{89}Ibid.
than as an in-depth analysis of a specific problem, the information obtained raised many questions about medieval cities and urban social life that it did not answer. By raising these questions, the information delineates certain avenues of approach for the study of urban history, and necessitates some suggestions for the further study of medieval urban social life.
CHAPTER III

CONCLUSION

Some Problems

A first group of problems raised but left unsolved by the narrative evidence involves town appearance and physical composition. Although the material gathered from the narratives describes location, fortification, and some structures, it does not describe urban settlement or housing patterns, inter-urban travel and communication, or architectural styles, decoration, and usage. Medieval urban population density also remains obscure. Some individual structures are named or described in the narratives, but no clear indication of either settlement or housing patterns is given. The relationships of open spaces, internal divisions, occupations, family origin, and family size to housing or settlement patterns remains unknown. Streets are mentioned in the chronicles but it is impossible to determine the effect of open spaces, housing patterns, and internal divisions on intra-urban travel. Some knowledge of population density is also necessary if the amount, speed, and ease of internal communication is to be determined. Urban architecture also remains somewhat obscure. One good description of an urban private dwelling was found; however, architectural
decoration and usage cannot be discovered through the narratives alone. The number of occupants living in the described structure is not certain. The types and kinds of furniture they possessed are unclear. Jocelin of Brakelond describes how, in Bury, three-legged stools, doors, and utensils were taken from the homes of the poor as security for the payment of a tax. Nevertheless, this type of reference does not give a clear picture of moveable property, especially that of the more wealthy and cosmopolitan population of London. From the narrative evidence, it is impossible to know whether medieval urban populations spent most of their time inside or outdoors.

A second group of questions concerns the urban population, its origins, diversity, and stratification. The narrative material indicates that some assumptions concerning these types of problems can be made. On such matters as population density, family size and structure, diet, and the daily routine of the population, the evidence is insufficient. Although some foodstuffs are mentioned in the narratives, questions about the urban diet remain. The differences, if any, between urban and rural diet are unclear. The number of meals eaten, the proportions of the various foods consumed, and the origins of these foods are not mentioned in the narratives.

The narratives do not describe in detail the daily

1Butler, Chronicle of Jocelin of Brakelond, p. 99.
routine of the medieval burgesses. William Fitzstephen gives a marvelous description of the recreations of London, including the kinds of sports and when they occurred, but he does not indicate the proportion of time spent in working to the amount of time available for relaxation. Other problems, such as the amount and frequency of travel or seasonal fluctuations in the work schedule are not discussed.

Finally, the variations in and quality of medieval life styles are not presented by the narratives, although a thorough examination of the distribution of luxury trade goods would perhaps be possible, and would give some idea of the quality of urban life.

In addition to specific problems, a much greater and more general issue is also raised by the narrative evidence. This issue lies at the basis of any discussion on urban social history and was at the core of the disagreement between Stevenson and Tait over the origins of the English town. Stevenson's and Tait's discussions centered around the question of what kinds of settlements constituted towns and how these towns could be defined. Both scholars adopted different definitions based upon varying frames of reference by isolating particular aspects of towns, whether commercial activity or military and administrative functions, and by using these aspects to define the medieval town. Because of this approach, they attempted to apply to all cities a comprehensive definition.
based upon one or two isolated urban functions. From the narrative evidence, however, it is clear that medieval cities were quite varied and that perhaps no one city was representative of all. Because of differences in origin, function, size, and degree of urbanization, medieval towns probably varied as much as modern cities and, just as it would be difficult to devise a definition that would encompass such diverse cities as New York and Kalamazoo, it would be difficult to describe Bury St. Edmund's and London with a single definition.

The narratives suggest that medieval towns did vary, and that the social histories of the towns must also have differed. If this is correct, then before an adequate examination of a city's social life could begin, the individual characteristics of specific cities would have to be organized into a system of medieval urban types. Then the variations in social life exhibited by the differing urban types could be described and subjected to a comparative analysis.

Suggestions for Further Study

A necessary first step in the study of English medieval urban social history is the creation of a descriptive, definitive system for classifying medieval English cities to provide the social historian with a frame of reference within which he can define problems and collect evidence for adequate scholarly discussion. This task, although
simple to describe, is in reality quite complex. Scholars
of other disciplines, especially modern urban sociologists,
have been faced with a similar task, and although their
results are not as useful to medievalists as I had at first
hoped, they do aid the historian by showing non-historic
approaches to similar methodological and interpretive prob-
lems.  

After this general groundwork is completed, the
study of urban social life could focus itself on the more
specific questions raised by the narrative evidence and
discussed briefly in the preceding section. These questions
are extremely complex and involve the collection and ex-
amination of a large body of data.

One source for this data is the written historical
material that survives from the Middle Ages. In addition
to the narrative sources, there are two kinds of written
material. Notarial records have already been recognized
as important and valuable collections of information, not

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Two sociologists, Max Weber in his work, The City
(New York: The Free Press, 1958), and Gideon Sjöberg in
The Preindustrial City: Past and Present (New York: The
Free Press, 1950), have both attempted to study urban
sociology of both past and present societies. However, in
discussing the medieval city, both works suffer from the
authors' incomplete understanding of the time period and
their tendency to generalize about the medieval city on the
basis of data collected not only from all of Western Europe
but also from other cultures and civilizations which vary
in time, geographic dispersion, and degree of cultural so-
phistication. For the study of historical urban social
life, a more useful approach would be the detailed exami-
nation of cities in specific regions and specific time
periods.
only for the economic and political aspects of urban history, but also for urban social history. The narratives suggest that another collection of written source material may be extremely valuable for the study of social history. These are the vitae, or saints' lives. Two of the more complete descriptions of cities used in this study were William Fitzstephen's description of London and Richard of Devizes' chronicle. William Fitzstephen's description was written as the preface to that author's Life of St. Thomas Becket. Most of the material from Richard of Devizes is from a digression detailing the life and murder of a boy-martyr in Winchester. This digression is in most respects a vita. A thorough search of the vita literature would most certainly expose much useful material for the study of urban social history, especially if the vitae describing the lives of saints who had lived in cities were examined. These stories, although written as religious panegyrics rather than as social histories, would contain much valuable information for the social historian in their descriptions of the saint's life or daily routine. The possibility that such information, ancillary to the main theme of the work, would be inaccurate or incorrect does exist, but severe or intentional falsification of such minor and, to the author, unimportant details is unlikely.

Other sources of information valuable to the social historian are not written, and include architectural and
archaeological material. Many of the questions concerning family size and structure, population density, and daily life could be partially answered through detailed and exacting studies of surviving medieval urban structures. A more complete understanding of medieval buildings, building styles, decoration, usage, and construction would help to explicate the written evidence and further our understanding of the physical aspects of medieval cities and city life. This type of architectural study could have two aims: first, the careful location, surveying, and examination of surviving buildings and, secondly, the restoration of good examples of medieval structures.

If urban social history is to emerge from obscurity, exacting archaeological studies are also necessary. Excavations of streets and towns could provide evidence on street plans, town layouts, travel, communication, sanitation, and the relationship of open spaces to structures. Although restored structures could also be used, those structures doomed to destruction, if excavated first, would probably yield information on building usage, size, decoration, and construction techniques, while exacting excavations of specific areas such as hearths, kitchens, or garderobe pits would produce data on the type, quantity, and proportion of consumed foodstuffs.

From the types of problems posed to the kinds of skills involved in its study, urban social history is a complex discipline. The origins and development of urban
society are so complex that historians alone, without the aid of sociologists, archaeologists, and architectural historians, cannot effectively deal with all the problems of urban history. Only through detailed interdisciplinary studies can the social history of cities be understood and the social life of medieval cities emerge from its present obscurity.

The attraction of urban history to modern scholars is simple. We live in a highly urbanized civilization, where the urban element of the culture is vital and progressive; however, our cities are beset with physical, social, and economic problems that may threaten their existence. By searching for the origins and development of urban society, historians, through interdisciplinary studies, may create a better understanding of urban dynamics and help develop viable cities.
Erat autem haec urbs antiqua et authentica et a Romanis olim coctilibus muris egregie constructa. Videas hic multa pristinae nobilitatis adhuc vestigia; palatia immensa, aureis olim tectorum fastigiis Romanis fastus imitantia, eo quod a Romanis principibus primo constructa, et aedificiis egregiis illustrata fuissent; turris giganteam, thermes insignes, templorum reliquias, et loca theatralia: egregiis muris partim adhuc exstantibus omnia clausa. Reperies ubique, tam intra murorum ambitum quam extra, aedificia subterranea, aquarum ductus, hypogeosque meatus. Et quod inter alia notabile censui, stuphas undique videas miro artificio consertas; lateralibus quibusdam et praecangustis spiraculi viis occulte calorem exhalantibus.


In singulis etiam locis aliqui boni sunt, sed multo minus in omnibus quam in una, Wintonia. Hec est in partibus illis Iudeorurn Ierosolima; in hac sola perpetua pace fruuntur. Hec est scola bene uiuere et ualere volentium. Hic fiunt homines; hic satis est panis et uini pro nichilo. Sunt in ea tante monachi misericordie et mansuetudinis, clerus consilii et libertatis, ciues ciuilitatis et fidei,
femine pulcritudinis et pudicitie, quod parum me retinet

Robertson, ed., Materials for the History of Thomas Becket, III, 8.

Non puto urbem esse in qua sint probabiliores consuetudinae, in ecclesiis visitandis, ordinatis Dei honorandis, festis feriandis, eloemosynis dandis, in hospitibus susciendiis, in desponsationibus firmandis, matrimoniis contrahendis, nuptiis celbrandis, conviviis ornandis, convivis hilarandis, etiam in exsequiis curandis et cadaveribus humandis. Solae pestes Londoniae sunt immodica stultorum potatio, et frequens incendium.


Civis Londoniae ubicunque locorum prae omnibus aliis cibi-
bus ornatu morum, vestium, et mensae lautioris, spectabili-
Angliam ingressus, si Londoniam ueneris celeriter per-
transibis. Multum enim michi displicet illa polis. Omne
hominum genus in illam confluit ex omni natione que sub
cele est. Omnis gens sua uitia et suos mores urbi intulit.
Nemo in ea sine crimine uiuit. Non omnis in ea uicus non
habundat tristibus obscenis. Eo ibi quisquis melior est
quo fuerit maior in sclere. Non ignoro quem instruo.
Habes supra tuam etatem feruorem ingenii, frigiditatem
memorie, ex utrinque contrariis temperantiam rationis.
Nichil de te michi metuo, nisi cum male uiuentibus com-
moreris. Ex conuictu enim mores formantur. Esto.
Londoniam uenies. Ecce predico tibi. Quicquid in singu-
lis, quicquid in uniuersis partibus mundi mali uel malitie
est, in una illa ciuitate repperies. Lenonum choros non
adeas. Ganearum gregibus non immisceris. Vita thalum
et tesseram, theatrum et tabernam. Plures ibi quam in
tota Gallia trasones offendes. Gnatonum autem infinitus
est numerus. Histriones, scurre, glabrones, garamantes,
palrones, pusiones, molles, mascularii, ambubaie, farmac-
apole, crissaie, phitonisse, uultuarie, noctiuage, magi,
mimi, mendici, balatrones. Hoc genus omne totas rep-
pleuere domos. Ergo, si nolueris habitare cum turpibus,
non habitabis Londonie. Non loquor in litteratos uel
religiosos, siue Judeos, quamuis et ex ipsa cohabitatione
malorum, minus eosibi quam alibi crediderim esse perfectos.
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