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Marriage, Family and Social Structure in an Early Modern German Town

Birth, marriage, death: to the historical demographer, all three vital events are of equal importance. But to the social historian, one of these three events — marriage — is of special interest. For unlike death, and to a far greater extent than birth, marriage reflects conscious human choice. The decisions involved in the making of a marriage — whether? when? where? and, above all, to whom? — represent crucial choices in which the spouses or their parents articulate their familial purposes or reflect prevailing social values.

Indeed, the social content of marriage is normally taken to have been much greater in earlier times than it is today. It is a truism that marriage in premodern society was generally based on social and economic bonding rather than emotional bonding. But this statement still requires considerable elaboration, for marriage can fulfill very different and potentially even contradictory social and economic purposes. It can serve as a mechanism to reinforce existing social structures, or as a mechanism to promote social readjustment. It can be endogamous, thus promoting group solidarity, or exogamous, thus rendering the composition of groups more fluid. It can, in fact, serve as an instrument either to promote social mobility or to retard it. And marriage can even serve different purposes at the same time in the same society.

This paper will present some findings about marriage and its relationship to social structure in one early modern community — specifically, the south German town of Nördlingen between the late sixteenth and the early eighteenth centuries. For the example of this one community can effectively illustrate both the problems involved and the kinds of results to be looked for in studying the function of marriage in early modern urban society.

There is, in fact, very little direct evidence about the function of marriage in early modern Nördlingen. We do know something about how the community's elites perceived the purpose of marriage in general — but we

know nothing directly about the aims or purposes involved in the making of any particular marriage. Some marriage contracts survive, but they were drawn up only in certain cases — when one of the spouses was getting married for the second or later time — and usually only for one specific purpose — to protect the property rights of children surviving from an earlier marriage.[1] They provide no evidence about why any particular marriage took place.

On the other hand, when we stop looking at individual marriages and start looking at marriages in groups — essentially a statistical approach — certain patterns may become evident. This, then, is the purpose of the present paper: to illustrate how a statistical approach can help us understand marriage practices in an early modern town. We are able to apply this approach to Nördlingen primarily because of the remarkably complete character of the city's parish registers.[2] The level of detail available in the baptismal, marriage and burial registers of this city not only make possible reliable family reconstitutions, but also enable us to carry out linkages to the other most valuable source in Nördlingen: a continuous series of tax registers which provide the name, occupation and assessed real and personal wealth of each citizen of the town during the period under consideration.[3]

Some fundamental questions about marriage will be discussed on the basis of a tabulation of all marriages contracted in Nördlingen between 1579 (when the parish registers were initiated) and 1720. Most of our questions, however, involving greater detail and linkages to the tax records, will be discussed on the basis of a relatively small sample of marriages and families in Nördlingen. The results, accordingly, may appear to be more suggestive than conclusive. But they are sufficient to illustrate the degree to which marriages in an early modern town could reflect not only individual and familial purposes, but also the purposes and policies of the community as a whole.

First, however, it will be necessary to say something about the city which forms the setting for our investigation.[4] Nördlingen was a centre of commerce and craft production in northeastern Swabia, some forty miles north of Augsburg. A strategic location at the intersection of two major trade routes and an annual fair each summer made Nördlingen into a significant centre of transit and exchange. But the community's major activity was manufacture: textiles and leather goods were the city's major export products.

The exact population of seventeenth-century Nördlingen cannot be determined. But the tax registers do make it possible to establish the number of citizen households in any given year, and as a very rough rule of thumb one might assume a ratio of 1:5 between citizen households and the total number of inhabitants. The considerable fluctuations in size that the community

underwent between the sixteenth and the early eighteenth century are clearly illustrated by figures for a few selected years:

	1579	**1615**	**1652**	**1700**	**1724**
Citizen Households	1541	1713	887	1147	1323
Population (est.)	7705	8565	4435	5735	6615

Until the early seventeenth century, then, Nördlingen was a growing community, but the Thirty Years War (1618-48) drastically diminished the town's population, and by the early eighteenth century it had still not fully recovered.

But what about the social structure of Nördlingen? The first and most important aspect of the community's social structure was the division of its adult inhabitants into citizens and non-citizens. The citizens were economically independent heads of households: only a citizen, for example, could belong to a guild and carry out a craft. Non-citizens, by contrast, were socially and economically subordinate: most were apprentices, journeymen, servants or casual labourers. In fact, very few non-citizens were married: most lived in the households of the citizens for whom they worked or in special hostelries for journeymen. The son of a citizen enjoyed the hereditary right to become a citizen himself; a non-citizen, however, had to apply for membership in the citizenry and, if accepted, pay an entrance-fee upon his admission.

We know very little about the number and circumstances of the non-citizens of Nördlingen. About the citizens, however, due to the existence of the tax registers, we know a significant amount. A computer-aided analysis of the tax records has generated information about the distribution of wealth and of occupations and about the distribution of wealth within occupational groups at six-year intervals throughout the period 1579 to 1724.[5] The results of this project need not be discussed in detail here: it will be sufficient to summarize the major findings by way of illustration from the available data.

Almost one hundred different crafts were practiced in seventeenth-century Nördlingen. This figure, however, gives a misleading impression of occupational variety, for most economic activity in the city was concentrated in a rather small number of fields. In any given year, one out of every four or five citizens was a wool-weaver. And throughout the seventeenth century, between one-half and three-fifths of the citizens belonged to the ten largest occupational groups.

Neither the citizenry as a whole nor the members of particular occupations were homogenous in terms of their standard of living. Table I

reports the distribution of wealth among adult male citizens in 1615 and 1700, as well as the distribution of wealth among members of the five largest occupational groups in each of those years. It will immediately be apparent that the distribution of wealth among the citizens of Nördlingen was highly unequal. In fact, in each of these years, over a quarter of the citizens were assessed at less than 50 gulden (fl.) while a handful (six in 1615, four in 1700) were assessed at over 12,000 fl. Clearly the citizenry was highly stratified in terms of wealth.

But at the same time, the distribution of wealth *within* occupational groups was highly unequal as well. It is true that some occupations (e.g. weaving) were predominantly "poorer" than others (e.g. tanning). And it can also be seen that members of some crafts were being squeezed out of the uppermost wealth ranges by the end of the seventeenth century — a development whose significance I have attempted to evaluate elsewhere.[6] But on a more general level, it is clear that major occupational groups were not homogenous in terms of wealth — each occupation had an internal stratification of wealth that paralleled the wealth stratification of the citizenry as a whole.

In many ways, and especially among craftsmen, occupations gave men their basic sense of identity in seventeenth-century Nördlingen. A common training, common tasks, a common guild with common traditions — all these things bound members of the same occupation together. But at the same time, occupational groups included members whose wealth levels were so dissimilar that they must have experienced fundamentally different lifestyles and economic outlooks. The deeply indebted wool-weaver assessed at 50 fl. surely had little in common with the weaver worth 4000 fl., a man with cash to spare for lending to his poorer fellows or for investment in some form of trade. In a sense, then, a system of stratification by wealth must have overlapped with the system of differentiation by occupation. Inevitably one will ask whether, when people in Nördlingen chose spouses for themselves or their children, they tended to make links along occupational lines or along wealth lines — or perhaps along neither.

It should be emphasized from the start, however, that marriage in Nördlingen was not simply a family matter. Every marriage signified the creation or recreation of a household, and in a society in which the household was in a sense the lowest organ of government, the act of marriage had implications that went far beyond the needs or interests of the families involved. This was particularly so in the case of first marriages among men. For a man's first marriage in Nördlingen was almost always part of a much larger group of events: the process by which, at one precise moment in his

TABLE I

DISTRIBUTION OF WEALTH AMONG ADULT MALE CITIZENS, 1615

	ALL MALE CITIZENS	WOOL-WEAVERS	TANNERS	BUTCHERS	BAKERS	SHOE-MAKERS
Up to 200 fl.	54%	76%	45%	40%	36%	67%
201-800 fl.	24%	14%	30%	32%	30%	23%
801-3200 fl.	15%	8%	18%	25%	26%	10%
Over 3200 fl.	6%	2%	7%	3%	8%	0%
(n=)	(1456)	(344)	(137)	(68)	(61)	(61)

DISTRIBUTION OF WEALTH AMONG ADULT MALE CITIZENS, 1700

	ALL MALE CITIZENS	WOOL-WEAVERS	TANNERS	BUTCHERS	LINEN WEAVERS	SHOE-MAKERS
Up to 200 fl.	47%	79%	40%	52%	76%	61%
201-800 fl.	30%	14%	34%	36%	19%	31%
801-3200 fl.	16%	7%	20%	10%	5%	9%
Over 3200 fl.	6%	0%	5%	1%	0%	0%
(n=)	(952)	(138)	(75)	(75)	(38)	(35)

life-cycle, a man was transformed from a dependent son, journeyman or servant into an independent head of household, practitioner of a trade and citizen of his community. Thus, although every marriage was negotiated by the individuals concerned or by their parents or legal guardians, it also required the sanction of institutions other than the family: the church, the magistracy, and in many cases the guilds.[7]

The ministers (Nördlingen was Protestant) were particularly concerned with the moral dimension of marriage — and especially with the need for marriage to coincide with the realities of sexual activity. Hence the clergy's insistence that detected fornicators always be taken to the altar, no matter what the circumstances. The offending couple would be briefly imprisoned; then the wedding banns (which in normal cases would be repeated on three successive Sundays) were read three times at a single service and the wedding held the following day under humiliating circumstances.[8] During the Thirty Years War, the ministers even made a practice of requiring soldiers who were bivouacking in the area to marry their concubines.[9] At the same time, and on the basis of much the same attitude, the ministers of Nördlingen were willing throughout the seventeenth century to sanction divorce in cases of impotence, desertion or adultery — when, in other words, the formality of marriage had ceased to coexist with the fact of cohabitation.[10]

The magistrates of Nördlingen certainly shared the clergy's concern with the moral aspect of marriage. But they were equally or even more concerned with the secular implications of marriage; from their point of view it was important that each head of household have the maturity and economic capacity to sustain a trade and to meet his obligations to the community. Special permission was required for a man to marry under the age of 23 or a woman under the age of 20.[11] Both partners, moreover, were supposed to bring adequate financial resources into the marriage. Although this provision could not be systematically imposed on citizens, the magistrates could and did insist that whenever an outsider wanted to marry into the community, he or she should meet stringent property qualifications.[12] In 1587, for example, the city council postponed one citizen's marriage to a foreigner "because he has not produced sufficient documentation concerning his bride's property;" only when the evidence was submitted was the reading of the banns resumed.[13] In 1601 a Nördlingen widow planned to marry a foreign weaver, but after the banns had been read once the magistrates stepped in and forbade the wedding "because he is a dirt-poor journeyman."[14]

Guilds were also deeply concerned with marriage. Although by the late sixteenth century the guilds of Nördlingen had lost all power of independent political action, their wishes — typically the desire to limit competition by

restricting the admission of outsiders to the community — were carefully weighed and often accepted by the magistrates.[15]

Family, clergy, magistrates, guilds — the interests and demands of all had to be satisfied for a marriage to take place in Nördlingen. For a couple bent on an unacceptable marriage, there was, it is true, one classic technique to circumvent any objections — by exploiting the prevailing principle that marriage and sexual activity must coincide. The entry for the marriage of Gregorius Weckh to Judith Werle in 1592, for example, includes this notation: "He has impregnated her (since his parents, as was only appropriate, did not give permission) and therefore the banns have been read three times at once."[16] But such a procedure was fraught with dangers: not only was the wedding itself attended with punishment and disgrace, but the council might deny the groom his hereditary right of citizenship or even banish the offending couple from the city. Consider, for example, the case of Jacob Linder, a citizen's son, in 1586: "Banns to be read three times at once, because she is great with child and he has already undergone the punishment and lost his right of citizenship; he also married against his father's will."[17] In many cases, the offending groom might be allowed to repurchase his citizenship. But this was a risky procedure, and it is scarcely surprising the number of couples who got married under such circumstances always remained small.[18]

The overwhelming majority of marriages, then, represented unions which enjoyed the sanction of many different institutions in the community. It will be useful to bear this point in mind as we examine marriages in Nördlingen between 1580 and 1720. For these marriages represent more than just the sum of a series of personal and familial choices. In addition, they represent a pattern of relationships shaped by the values and interests of the community as a whole.

If this is so, then the first question to be considered would logically concern the degree to which the community as a whole was exogamous — the degree to which marriages linked members of the community to outsiders. In a sense, this would constitute a measure of geographical mobility — but only that form of geographical mobility which resulted in permanent relocation. After all, the city was always host to numerous journeymen, servants, labourers and other foreigners, people who came not only from the surrounding countryside but also (especially in the case of men) from very distant communities. Only a few of these men and women, however, married in Nördlingen and were thus accepted into the community of established householders on a permanent basis.

The extent of inward mobility in this sense has been established through an analysis of all 9600 marriages contracted or announced in Nördlingen between 1579 and 1720.[19] (The parish registers, it should be noted, record not only marriages actually contracted in the city but also weddings conducted elsewhere for which the banns were read in Nördlingen.) Table II records these marriages broken down chronologically and by origin of spouses.

TABLE II

MARRIAGES IN NÖRDLINGEN, 1579-1720:
ORIGINS OF SPOUSES (IN PERCENTAGES)

	ALL MARRIAGES					RESIDENT COUPLES ONLY				
Years	Total (n)	1 L/L %	2 L/F %	3 F/L %	4 F/F %	Total (n)	1 L/L %	2 L/F %	3 F/L %	4 F/F %
1579-80	(187)	55	14	25	6	(182)	55	14	25	6
1581-90	(813)	55	22	17	6	(779)	57	22	16	5
1591-1600	(840)	50	23	21	6	(784)	53	23	20	4
1601-10	(865)	56	20	19	5	(814)	59	21	17	3
1611-20	(772)	67	18	11	4	(706)	72	18	8	2
1621-30	(738)	69	16	12	3	(677)	74	16	8	2
1631-39	(716)	71	13	12	5	(629)	80	15	5	1
1641-50	(546)	45	16	17	22	(377)	64	21	13	3
1651-60	(497)	50	17	18	15	(391)	63	20	14	3
1661-70	(586)	59	21	15	5	(500)	68	21	9	1
1671-80	(616)	60	20	14	6	(518)	71	20	9	2
1681-90	(591)	60	20	17	2	(511)	69	17	13	1
1691-1700	(571)	62	17	15	6	(473)	72	15	11	2
1701-10	(650)	62	21	13	5	(549)	73	19	7	0
1711-20	(594)	61	17	16	6	(521)	70	16	13	2

KEY:

1 (L/L): Local groom and local bride.

2 (L/F): Local groom and foreign bride.

3 (F/L): Foreign groom and local bride.

4 (F/F): Foreign groom and foreign bride.

Under the heading "all marriages," we can see that somewhere between one-third and one-half of all marriages recorded in any given decade included at least one spouse from outside the city. This statistic, however, is easily subject to misunderstanding. Most of the marriages recorded in columns 2 to 4 represent cases of immigration — inward mobility — on the part of at least one spouse. Some entries in columns 2 or 3, however, are actually cases of emigration — that is, local sons or daughters who got married (or had their banns read) at home in Nördlingen but then settled down with foreign spouses outside the city. And some entries in column 4 refer to total outsiders, couples who lived elsewhere but got married in Nördlingen — particularly during the wartime 1640's and postwar 1650's, when numerous soldiers and villagers were married by local clergymen.

Obviously it is of greater value to know something about the composition of the "community" in the more limited sense — that is to say, about the origins of couples actually resident in the city. In order to establish this information, an attempt has been made to subtract from the total number of marriages each case in which the couple appears to have lived outside Nördlingen following the wedding.[20] We are left, then, with the resident couples only — representing exclusively cases of endogamous marriage or inward mobility. The data for these couples are recorded on the right-hand side of Table II. From these data we can see that, except for the 1630's, among couples who lived in Nördlingen the percentage of endogamous marriages never exceeded 74 per cent. At least one-quarter and in some periods almost one-half of all marriage partners came from outside the community. This would suggest a very significant degree of exogamy among marriages in Nördlingen.

Two important qualifications, however, must immediately be made. In the first place, with one minor exception (1579-80), the percentage of foreign females who married into the community always exceeded the percentage of foreign males who did so. It is easy to understand why this should be the case, for it was easier to integrate a foreign woman into the citizenry (simply by marriage to a citizen householder) than to admit a foreign male (who would either have to take over an existing household or establish a new one). This suggests, however, that the degree of exogamy in Nördlingen should not be overemphasized — for it apparently took place more often in the form least likely to upset the equilibrium of community life.

In the second place, it will be noted that inward mobility was much higher before 1610 than it ever was thereafter. Until 1610, between 40 and 50 per cent of all marriage partners were outsiders; after that date the percentage of outsiders dropped sharply, falling to a minimum of 20 per cent during the

1630's; it then rose somewhat, but only to reach a constant level of roughly 30 per cent by the end of the seventeenth century. Although there was some diminution after 1610 of the rate at which foreign women were admitted, it will be seen that the drop in inward mobility was primarily due to a sharp reduction in the proportion of foreign men who were able to marry into the community.

This overall reduction in the rate of inward mobility, especially for men, reflects significant changes in the structure and policies of the community itself. Until the early seventeenth century, Nördlingen was a relatively "open" community, which encouraged the admission of outsiders into local crafts and thereby into the local community. By the early 1600's, however, as in many other German communities, the craft guilds in Nördlingen were shifting their sights from an emphasis on growth and expansion to an emphasis on protection from any further competition.[21] Accordingly, they put considerable pressure on the magistrates to limit the influx of foreigners by legislating higher property requirements for anyone who wanted to marry into the community. One ordinance to this effect had already been passed in 1585.[22] Another, and much stiffer one, was promulgated by the city council in 1607;[23] and the resulting drop in the admission of males to the community in the following decade is readily apparent in column 3 of the table.

An even more important long-term factor, however, was the Thirty Years War. The economic hardships generated by the war and its aftermath made Nördlingen a much less attractive destination for outsiders than it had been before 1620. Furthermore, the economic difficulties merely reinforced the protectionist and exclusivist policies already evident among the guilds of Nördlingen. The inevitable consequence of these two factors was an overall reduction in the proportion of outsiders who sought or received permission to marry into the community. In short, as Table II shows, Nördlingen was becoming an increasingly "closed" or endogamous community by the end of the seventeenth century.

With this overall pattern in mind, let us turn to the more detailed evidence available from the two kinds of samples we have taken. The first sample consists simply of all marriages recorded in the parish register of Nördlingen in the years 1601-02 (142 cases) and 1701-03 (136 cases), which provide some basic data about marriage patterns in representative years towards the beginning and the end of our period.[24] The second form of sampling, however, offers much richer possibilities. This sample is yielded by a family reconstitution project covering about four per cent of the Nördlingen population between 1579 and the early eighteenth century, in which the families of all men whose surnames began with the letter G were

reconstructed; in addition, whenever possible the life-histories of the spouses of these men were also traced. Clearly these data do not have the characteristics of a random sample. But this form of sampling is a technique which assures maximum accuracy and completeness of linkages, and the letter-G families (representing 84 different surnames) do constitute a broad cross-section of the population of Nördlingen.[25] The present paper, in fact, draws on only a small part of the results of this reconstitution project, since the concern at the moment is primarily with patterns of marriage. On the other hand, the information that is of import — the marriage data — has been linked whenever possible to information from the tax registers for the men themselves and for the fathers or previous husbands of the women they married.

To start with, one must consider two very fundamental aspects of marriage: the marital status of spouses and the ages of men and women at first marriage. What do the samples tell us about these two questions? And what relationship, if any, do these two aspects of marriage have to the patterns of geographical mobility already discussed?

Data on the marital status of marriage partners in three sample groups are presented in Table III. All three groups report essentially the same pattern. First, in more than half of all marriages, both spouses were single. Second, among the remaining cases (in which at least one spouse was marrying for the second or later time), the proportion of widowers was always much higher than that of widows. In principle, this conspicuous difference in remarriage rates for widowers and widows might be explained in one of two ways: as a function of differences in longevity, or as a function of social practice. The first approach, however (which implies that marriages were more often terminated by the death of the wife than that of the husband, thus creating a surplus of widowers and a deficit of widows), is not persuasive: in fact, from the letter-G reconstitutions it can be established that a slightly greater number of marriages was terminated by the death of the *husband* than the other way round.[26] In other words, the explanation for this differential in remarriage rates must be sought in terms of social practice. Quite possibly widows found it easier than widowers to run a household without the help of a spouse. But in addition, the figures presented here suggest that when his wife died, a man was more inclined to marry a single woman than a widow. Economic factors may have played some part in this: a spinster, by definition, could not be burdened with children and debts as a widow might be. But such arguments cannot be pushed too far, for after all, poor spinsters often married and wealthy widows often did not. Widowers may have preferred to marry single women not so much for economic reasons as for social ones: perhaps a virgin was simply a more attractive candidate.

TABLE III

MARITAL STATUS OF SPOUSES, 1601-02 (n=142)

	Brides: Single	Widows	TOTAL GROOMS
Grooms:			
Single	54.9%	5.6%	60.5%
Widowers	32.4%	7.0%	39.4%
TOTAL BRIDES	87.3%	12.6%	100.0%

MARITAL STATUS OF SPOUSES, 1701-03 (n=136)

	Brides: Single	Widows	TOTAL GROOMS
Grooms:			
Single	55.1%	8.8%	63.9%
Widowers	33.1%	2.9%	36.0%
TOTAL BRIDES	88.2%	11.7%	100.0%

MARITAL STATUS OF SPOUSES, LETTER G, 1579-1720 (n=388)

	Brides: Single	Widows	GROOMS
Grooms:			
Single	58.9%	8.7%	67.6%
Widowers	23.0%	9.3%	32.3%
TOTAL BRIDES	81.9%	18.0%	100.0%

It was not only widowers who were more inclined to marry spinsters; to an even greater extent bachelors preferred to marry single women. One need only consider, after all, the selection of spouses made by the single men in the three sample groups:

Single Men Who Married. . .	Spinsters	Widows
1601-02	90.7%	9.3%
1701-03	86.2%	13.7%
Letter G (1579-1720)	87.1%	12.9%

Clearly marriage to a widow was not the standard route by which a journeyman or other bachelor established himself as a householder; like the widower he preferred to take a never-married woman to wife.

This pattern yields two obvious results. In the first place, Nördlingen must have had a perpetual surplus of widows — an impression confirmed by the fact that throughout the seventeenth century, one-sixth to one-fifth of all citizen households were headed by widows.[27] In the second place, since both widowers and bachelors preferred to marry single women, there must have been a constant demand for spinsters.

In a closed community, the consequences of all this would be easy to predict. The heavy demand for spinsters would tend to push their ages at first marriage downward. And, since bachelors had to compete with widowers for the available spinsters, one would expect their ages at first marriage to be driven upward. In short, a significant differential would emerge between the ages of men and women at first marriage: low for women and high for men. But was this actually the case in Nördlingen?

On the basis of the letter-G reconstitutions, it is possible to determine the ages at first marriage for a substantial number of men and women, and these findings are recorded in Table IV. That a general rise in the age of marriage occurred between the early seventeenth and the early eighteenth centuries may occasion little surprise to those familiar with early modern European demography; it is more important, however, to compare the ages of men and women, and here the results run directly counter to what one might expect on the basis of what has already been said: during most of the seventeenth century the ages of men and women at first marriage were, on average, equal — and by the early eighteenth century the average age of women at first marriage was actually *higher* than that of men.

TABLE IV

AGES AT FIRST MARRIAGE

		MEN	WOMEN	(Size of Sample)
1611-1650	Mean	25.1	25.1	(48 M. 89 W.)
	Median	25.1	25.1	
1651-1690	Mean	26.2	26.0	(47 M. 93 W.)
	Median	25.3	25.6	
1691-1730	Mean	29.2	30.2	(54 M. 81 W.)
	Median	28.6	30.9	

The sample includes men whose surnames begin with G, their daughters and their brides (if spinsters at first marriage).

How was this possible? A number of different explanations might be adduced, but by far the most convincing one is derived from the fact that Nördlingen was, in fact, not a closed community. As Table II has already shown, there was always a substantial rate of immigration into the community — and the immigration of women always exceeded that of men. It has already been suggested that it was easier for the community to absorb foreign women than foreign men. But now one can go one step further, and suggest that the immigration of women was not only more readily tolerated, but in fact served a vital function: for it provided a useful source of brides for men — both single and widowed — who clearly preferred to marry spinsters than to find spouses among Nördlingen's surplus widows.

The more frequent acceptance of women into the community was, in fact, a matter of social policy. It must be borne in mind, after all, that the marriage of foreigners to citizens of Nördlingen was closely regulated by the magistrates. And throughout our period, the property requirements and the fees imposed on women who sought admission to the citizenry were substantially lower than those imposed on men.[28] The immigration of too many men — potential rivals to Nördlingen's own craftsmen — tended to be discouraged. But the immigration of women, to meet the constant demand for brides, was a process to which the community's leaders gave their sanction and support.

Intermarriage between local residents and foreigners, however, represents only one form of exogamy. There were other forms of intermarriage as well, forms that concern primarily the internal structure of the community. To what extent did marriages cross occupational boundaries? And to what extent did they cut across the division of the community in terms of wealth?

One can begin with the degree to which marriages crossed occupational lines. Normally this question, if asked at all, is posed as a two-dimensional comparison: did the groom marry the daughter (or widow) of a man whose occupation was the same as or different from his own? This approach, for example, forms the basis of Charles Tilly's elegant discussion of marriage patterns in the Vendée.[29] The two-dimensional approach, however, makes no comparisons between the occupation of the groom and that of his own father — and in the case of first marriages, this omission may yield highly ambiguous results. Consider, for example, the case of a young tanner who married the daughter of another tanner. If the groom's father was also a tanner, the evidence for occupational solidarity would be convincing. But if, say, the groom's father were a baker, the marriage could more correctly be taken as evidence of occupational mobility: the culmination of a process in

which the baker's son had crossed occupational lines in getting apprenticed to a tanner and now, as he reached maturity, reinforced his mobility by marrying into his new occupational group.

Accordingly, in using marriage registers to measure the frequency of occupational change, we have applied a three-dimensional approach, in which the groom's occupation is compared both to that of his father and to that of his bride's father (or previous husband). Occupations, it should be emphasized, have been defined in the narrowest sense. Among weavers, for example, distinctions are made between wool-weavers, linen-weavers, "quality cloth" weavers and so on — distinctions that reflect the differences in training and organization among these crafts themselves. The results of this three-way comparison for sample groups are recorded in Table V.[30]

From Table V it will be apparent that almost three-fifths of all men followed their fathers' occupations. Heritability of occupations in the paternal line was clearly the norm in Nördlingen. This was particularly so among craftsmen — a point which is especially apparent if we compare some of the largest of the letter-G families. Consider the Geiders: Caspar Geider, a tanner, had twelve male descendents who reached maturity and married in Nördlingen between 1580 and 1720; of these twelve, eight were tanners like Caspar himself. Or the Goschenhofers: Sixteen male descendents of Wolf Goschenhofer, a butcher, married during the same 140-year period; thirteen of them were butchers. By contrast, consider the progeny of Veit Genzler, a surgeon who married in 1587. Twenty-six of his descendants married before 1720; seven of them were surgeons or barbers, but there were also seven government officials, three retailers, three tinsmiths, and two each of teachers, painters and weavers. Professionally-oriented families like the Genzlers, however, were in the minority; craft families like the Goschenhofers, in which a trade was passed down from one generation to the next, formed by far the majority.

To what extent, however, did marriages link families who practiced the same occupations? If we return again to Table V, we can see that there was no pronounced tendency to marry within occupational groups. Of the sixty per cent who entered their fathers' occupations, substantially less than one-third took brides from the same background. And among the forty per cent of men who abandoned the parental path and entered new careers, in all but the smallest sample group only a third married women connected with that new occupation. The great majority of marriages, in fact, cut across occupational lines. Nor was there detected any clustering of occupations among which intermarriage took place with particular frequency; if, say, a tanner married outside his group, there was no single occupational category in which he was

TABLE V: HERITABILITY OF OCCUPATIONS

(IN PERCENTAGES)

	OCCUPATION OF GROOM AT FIRST MARRIAGE:						
	SAME AS HIS FATHER		DIFFERENT FROM FATHER				
	and SAME AS BRIDE'S FATHER OR PREV. HUSBAND	but DIFF. FROM BRIDE'S FATHER OR PREV. HUSBAND	but SAME AS BRIDE'S FATHER OR PREV. HUSBAND	and DIFF. FROM BRIDE'S FATHER OR PREV. HUSBAND	NUMBER USED	INCOM-PLETE DATA	TOTAL
LETTER G, 1579-1650	18.1	41.9	13.3	26.6	105	40	145
LETTER G 1651-1720	13.3	43.9	13.3	29.6	98	11	111
1601-02 SAMPLE	16.1	41.1	21.4	21.4	56	30	86
1701-03 SAMPLE	15.1	43.0	12.8	29.1	86	1	87

especially likely to find a bride. Clearly marriage was not serving as a mechanism to promote occupational solidarity — nor did it function on any large scale as a stepping-stone into new careers. Occupational background was not major factor in the selection of marriage partners.

But, as we noted earlier, the community was not only divided into occupational groups; it was also stratified by wealth. Clearly one will want to inquire about the extent to which marriages joined partners whose families shared a proximate level of wealth. In considering this question, however, we are confronted by a number of methodological problems. In the first place, unless all data come from the same year — and of course they do not — we must take into account the fact that the basic unit of measurement, the gulden, changed its value over time. It would be possible to construct a price index to correct for changes in the value of the gulden, but such indexes generally raise as many difficulties as they solve. A more reliable method is available if we can divide the citizenry for each year into wealth categories on a percentile basis: the richest 10 per cent, the next 10 per cent, and so on. Using this method, one can, for example, determine whether a man who belonged to the top tenth of the citizenry in one year still belonged to that category twenty years later. On the basis of our computerized study of the tax records at six-year intervals from 1579 to 1724, the citizenry was divided into percentile groups of this kind; because in this paper we are dealing with a rather small sample group, the percentile groups have been collapsed into four basic categories.

In considering occupational endogamy, the occupation of the groom was taken as the basic reference point. But in comparing the wealth background of marriage partners, the parallel principle cannot be applied. Occupations in Nördlingen tended to remain highly stable after marriage. (From the tax records we know that of the men who married and became citizen householders in Nördlingen between 1580 and 1670, a mere 15.3 per cent changed their occupations at any point during their lifetimes — and in many cases the new occupation merely supplemented rather than supplanted the older one.[31]) By contrast, wealth was highly subject to change in the course of a man's career, as will become apparent if we examine the wealth mobility of men in the letter-G sample. Table VI records the wealth category of each letter-G citizen at the time of his first marriage, and cross-tabulates this information with his wealth level (if he survived) twenty years later. Even though our categories have been very broadly defined, less than one half of the men remained in the same one in which they started. The majority moved into different categories — and in most cases, as they grew older, they moved upward.

TABLE VI: INTRAGENERATIONAL WEALTH MOBILITY
(LETTER-G MALES)

MEN WHO MARRIED 1579-1650

WEALTH AT TIME OF MARRIAGE		WEALTH TWENTY YEARS LATER					
		No Longer	Still Listed in Tax Register				
Cat.	No.	Listed	I	II	III	IV	Tot.
I	8	4	3	1	–	–	4
II	17	4	5	5	1	2	13
III	36	12	5	9	7	3	24
IV	47	24	–	4	4	13	23
Tot.	108	44	13	19	12	18	64

MEN WHO MARRIED 1651-1720

WEALTH AT TIME OF MARRIAGE		WEALTH TWENTY YEARS LATER					
		No Longer	Still Listed in Tax Register				
Cat.	No.	Listed	I	II	III	IV	Tot.
I	3	1	2	–	–	–	2
II	5	3	1	1	–	–	2
III	24	2	1	11	7	3	22
IV	45	14	–	6	7	18	31
Tot.	77	20	4	18	14	21	57

KEY: I TOP 10% of Citizenry by Wealth
II NEXT 15% of Citizenry by Wealth
III NEXT 25% of Citizenry by Wealth
IV BOTTOM 50% of Citizenry by Wealth

Thus, a groom's wealth bracket at the time of his marriage would not provide a very realistic indication of his family background in terms of wealth. It will be more accurate to take the wealth bracket of his father and compare that to the wealth level of his bride's father (or, in the 10 per cent of cases in which the bride was a widow, to that of her previous husband). We have taken as the basis for comparison the wealth of the father (or previous

husband) as near as possible to the time of the wedding. When the father had died, as was often the case, his wealth level in the last available year before his death was used.

Table VII provides this comparison of wealth backgrounds for all first marriages of letter-G males in which both spouses came from citizen families. Among men married in 1579-1650 for whom data are complete, we find that 24 grooms married brides within the same wealth bracket, while 18 married into a higher category and 13 into a lower one. In the second period, only one-third of the grooms married within their own wealth bracket, while one-third married into a higher and one-third into a lower bracket. There are some subtle differences between the two groups, but the overall pattern is clear: despite the very broad definition of wealth categories used here, by far the majority of men married outside their categories — and they married "upward" and "downward" in roughly equal numbers. Clearly marriage did not systematically link partners from similar backgrounds in terms of wealth. Marriage cut not only across occupational lines, but across wealth lines as well.

There does, however, appear to have been one way in which patterns of marriage reflected the wealth of parents. This has to do with the ages of spouses at their first weddings, especially the ages of women.

Earlier, in Table IV, the ages at first marriage for all spouses within the letter-G sample were summarized. Table VIII now separates those spouses into two groups: those whose parents belonged to the richest 25 per cent of the citizenry and those whose parents belonged to the remaining 75 per cent.

For men, the pattern is somewhat ambiguous. In the early seventeenth century, poorer men seem to have married at a slightly earlier age than rich ones. By the end of the century, however, there has been a reversal: now the poorer men must, on average, wait longer than the richer ones before they can marry. Possibly this reflects an increasingly strict attitude on the part of the magistrates and guilds towards the admission of young men to the status of householder. In an environment of increasingly exclusivist tendencies among the guilds, it might take a poorer man, even though his father was a citizen, a bit longer to convince the authorities that he could meet the financial and other obligations associated with householding.

Among women, in any case, the relationship between age at marriage and wealth of parents is clear and consistent throughout the period studied. Poorer women had, on average, considerably longer to wait than the richer ones before they could get married. The reasons for this are easy to surmise.

TABLE VII: CROSS-TABULATION OF CITIZEN SPOUSES BY WEALTH BRACKETS

FIRST MARRIAGES OF LETTER-G MALES, 1579-1650

GROOM'S FATHER		BRIDE'S FATHER/PREV. HUSB.				
Cat.	No.	I	II	III	IV	N.A.
I	11	6	1	1	1	2
II	20	5	7	3	4	1
III	16	2	4	2	3	5
IV	18	1	3	3	9	2
N.A.	12	4	–	2	2	4
Tot.	77	18	15	11	19	14

FIRST MARRIAGES OF LETTER-G MALES, 1651-1720

GROOM'S FATHER		BRIDE'S FATHER/PREV. HUSB.				
Cat.	No.	I	II	III	IV	N.A.
I	11	7	4	–	–	–
II	24	4	7	9	3	1
III	13	4	3	2	4	–
IV	12	–	4	3	3	2
N.A.	–	–	–	–	–	–
Tot	60	15	18	14	10	3

KEY: I TOP 10% of Citizenry by Wealth
II NEXT 15% of Citizenry by Wealth
III NEXT 25% of Citizenry by Wealth
IV BOTTOM 50% of Citizenry by Wealth

TABLE VIII
AGE AT FIRST MARRIAGE
AS A FUNCTION OF PARENTAL WEALTH

		MEN		WOMEN		
		A	B	A	B	(No. in Sample)
1611-1650	Mean	25.4	24.6	23.4	27.1	(47 M. 84 W.)
	Median	25.4	23.5	22.8	27.0	
1651-1690	Mean	26.3	25.9	24.9	26.9	(47 M. 88 W.)
	Median	24.8	26.0	25.1	27.2	
1691-1730	Mean	27.8	30.5	28.6	31.5	(53 M. 80 W.)
	Median	28.0	29.5	27.0	31.6	

KEY: A: Father belonged to top 25% of the citizenry by wealth
B: Father belonged to bottom 75% of the citizenry by wealth

The sample includes those persons recorded in Table IV for whom parental wealth can be established.

Not only might it take longer for a poor man to accumulate the dowry for his daughter, but on the whole his daughter was at a competitive disadvantage on the Nördlingen marriage market. There was, as we discussed earlier, a constant demand for unmarried women. But the communal policy was to satisfy this demand by admitting immigrant women to the citizenry at a much higher rate than immigrant men. Accordingly, a poorer spinster was competing not only against the daughters of richer citizens but against women from outside as well. Under such circumstances, it is scarcely surprising that it should take her, on average, a good deal longer before she found a husband.

What, then, does all this suggest about the relationship between marriage and social structure in seventeenth-century Nördlingen?

If our only point of reference were the internal division of the community by occupations or wealth, it could be argued that marriage patterns had little to do with the social structure of Nördlingen. Marriages routinely crossed both occupational and wealth lines. A son was very likely to take his father's occupation — but there was no pronounced likelihood that he would choose a wife from the same background: marriage did not regularly link families within the same occupational group. Nor did it systematically link families in the same wealth bracket. Although, as we have seen, it took longer for a girl of modest means to find a husband, the economic motivation in a man's choice of marriage partner was a relatively limited one. The reason for this probably lies in the fact that dowries were relatively small — and a man's obligations to his bride often exceeded her own contributions to the household. Consider, for example, the wedding contract of 1618 between

Georg Wernher, a widowed merchant, and Dorothea Zaiser, the daughter of a ropemaker. Balthas Zaiser (who was assessed at 4000 fl. in 1615) provided his daughter with a dowry of 400 fl. plus household goods. In return, however, Wernher (who was worth 9000 fl.) had to guarantee Dorothea 1400 fl. in the event of his death.[32] In 1685, the young widower Daniel Wörner married the daughter of Johann Haas, a deceased magistrate. Haas had been worth 4000 fl. in 1676, but his daughter's dowry was a mere 250 fl. plus bedstead. Considering that Wörner's own father was worth 10,200 fl., a dowry of that size must have been a negligible contribution to the family's fortunes.[33]

In terms of her specific background or contribution, then, the wife had relatively little impact on the social or economic characteristics of the family. Occupations and wealth were transmitted predominantly through the patrilinear family. In this sense, marriage and social structure were not intimately linked.

In another sense, however, there was a crucial relationship between marriage and social structure. There were differences — very profound differences, in fact — in terms of wealth, occupation and economic power among the citizens of Nördlingen. But even so, the most important single social division in Nördlingen was the demarcation between citizens and non-citizens. And that demarcation corresponded essentially to the distinction between married, economically autonomous householders, and unmarried, dependent persons. The son of a citizen could normally expect, sooner or later, to marry and become a full member of the community. An outsider, however, could not take for granted that he would be able to do so. In fact, for a journeyman or casual labourer or servant the act of marriage, with its attendant change in status, represented a major achievement in social mobility.

And it was precisely this form of social mobility, far more than any mobility of wealth or occupation *within* the body of established householders, that the communal leaders of Nördlingen were concerned to regulate. Wives from outside were crucial for the smooth creation or re-creation of households in a society whose male members were reluctant to marry widows. Husbands from outside, however, threatened to disrupt the social structure by rivalling the economic activities of existing households. By keeping the supply of foreign brides high and the supply of foreign grooms low, communal marriage patterns as a whole were thus oriented against change and towards preservation of the existing social structure.

In short, it is when seen in the context of communal policy and purposes that patterns of marriage in Nördlingen become most meaningful. Marriage in past times is normally discussed as part of the history of the family, or as a reflection of social values articulated in countless individual decisions. But

there is another perspective from which marriage can also be viewed — the perspective of the community as a whole. When examining marriage patterns in the premodern town, that perspective may turn out to be the most illuminating one of all.

NOTES

[1] Stadtarchiv Nördlingen (StAN): Heiratsbriefe.

[2] For example, marriage registers normally indicate the name, occupation and place of residence of the groom, of his father, and of the bride's father or previous husband; additional details are often included as well. All baptisms and most marriages and burials in Nördlingen were recorded in the parish registers of the Hauptkirche St. Georg, which are preserved by the Evangelische Kirchengemeinde, Nördlingen. The baptismal and marriage registers (Tauf- und Eheregister, hereafter: TR and ER) are complete from 1579 onward, with the exception of one year, 1640, in which marriages are missing. The burial register (Sterberegister) is complete from April 1618 onward. Some additional marriages and burials conducted in Nördlingen, along with all marriages and burials for the nearby village of Baldingen, are recorded in the Trau- und Sterberegister of the Spitalkirche Nördlingen (complete from 1602 onward; now preserved by the Pfarrei Nähermemmingen). My work on these records was supported by Canada Council research grant S73-1992.

[3] StAN: Steuerregister. The series is extant from 1495 to 1746; for the last two decades, however, the registers contain numerous inaccuracies and omissions.

[4] For a more complete introduction to the history and social structure of Nördlingen, see Christopher R. Friedrichs, "Nördlingen, 1580-1700: Society, Government and the Impact of War", (Ph.D. Thesis, Princeton University, 1973), esp. chaps. 1, 4-6.

[5] The methodology and results of this project for the period 1579-1700 are described in greater detail in Friedrichs, "Nördlingen," chaps. 4, 5. Subsequently data for the years 1712 and 1724 were added. (Thus, for the period after 1700 the information is actually available not at six-year but at twelve-year intervals.)

[6] "Capitalism, Mobility and Class Formation in the Early Modern German City," *Past and Present*, no. 69 (Nov. 1975), 24-49.

[7] For a more general discussion of the interest of such institutions in marriages, see Helmut Möller, *Die kleinbürgerliche Familie im 18. Jahrhundert: Verhalten und Gruppenkultur*, (Berlin, 1969), pp. 67-100; cf. Mack Walker, *German Home Towns: Community, State and General Estate 1648-1871*, (Ithaca, N.Y., 1971), pp. 73-77 *et al.*

[8] These practices are evident from frequent notations in the marriage registers themselves. Their historical development is traced in Alfons Felber, *Unzucht und Kindsmord in der Rechtsprechung der Reichsstadt Nördlingen vom 15. bis 19. Jahrhundert*, (Diss., Bonn, 1961), pp. 51 ff. Felber stresses that fornicators were only punished when proof existed in the form of a pregnancy.

[9] For example, on February 26, 1632 a Nördlingen minister baptised the child of Peter Saur, a soldier from Lusatia, and Barbara Valtin, from Strasbourg — but only after he had married the parents. (TR masc. 2/1632 and ER 2/1632). For other cases, see ER 1632-39, *passim*. In 1647, however, a musketeer acknowledged paternity of a child by a village woman, but refused to marry her because she was a cripple. (TR fem. 1647).

[10] See ER 9/1593, 11/1619, 10/1687, 9/1689, 2/1698, 8/1710.

[11] ER 5/1591. See also Friedrich Wilhelm Romul (comp.), "Der Stadt Nördlingen Statuta und Satzungen . . . 1650," in: August Friedrich Schott (ed.), *Sammlungen zu den deutschen Land- und Stadtrechten*, vol. I, (Leipzig, 1772), p. 224.

[12] *Ibid.*, p. 210.

[13] ER 3/1587.

[14] ER 1/1601.

[15] For a particularly clear example of this, involving linen-weavers, see StAN: Ordnungsbuch 1641-88, fols. 359-61, (Mar. 1679). See also Heinz Dannenbauer, "Das Leinenweberhandwerk in der Reichsstadt Nördlingen," *Zeitschrift für bayerische Landesgeschichte*, 3, (1930), 275-6, and *passim*, and W.H. Konrad Ebert, *Die Lodweberei in der Reichsstadt Nördlingen*, (Nördlingen, 1919), p. 19 and *passim*.

[16] ER 9/1592.

[17] ER 9/1586.

[18] 3.2 per cent of all marriages conducted in Nördlingen between 1579 and 1720 were "Monday marriages," in which the bride was known to be pregnant. Probably only a small proportion of these cases were engineered by the bride and groom to make possible an otherwise forbidden union. The majority appear to have been cases in which the offending couple was forced to marry. In some cases, in fact, the groom was so reluctant that he disappeared before the wedding could be solemnized (e.g. ER 9/1609, 1/1610); in at least one instance, the magistrates attempted to circumvent this possibility by ordering the couple to be brought directly from the prison to the altar — and then be banished (ER 8/1612).

[19] This tabulation includes all weddings conducted in the Hauptkirche (recorded in ER) and in the Spitalkirche of Nördlingen, but not those weddings which took place in the village of Baldingen.

[20] The criteria for distinguishing between those couples who lived in Nördlingen and those who left to settle down elsewhere are explained in Christopher R. Friedrichs, "Bevölkerungsstatistik und Bevölkerungsentwicklung der Reichsstadt Nördlingen, 1580-1720," *Jahrbuch des historischen Vereins für Nördlingen und das Ries*, 26, (forthcoming, 1976).

[21] Cf. Dannenbauer, "Leinenweberhandwerk," pp. 274 ff.

[22] StAN: Ordnungsbuch 1567-87, fols. 229-31, (Nov. 1585).

[23] StAN: Ratsprotokolle 16 April 1607.

[24] ER 1601-02, 1701-03. Sixteen Nördlingen marriages recorded in the Spitalkirche register for the 1701-03 period are not included here.

[25] The arguments in favor of this form of sampling in family reconstitution studies are presented in Jacques Dupaquier, "Problèmes de représentativité dans les études fondées sur la reconstitution des familles," *Annales de demographie historique*, 1972, pp. 83-91. Because of the existence of superb alphabetical indexes to the Nördlingen parish registers, the major difficulty mentioned by Dupaquier — the problem of tracing the births of women who married into the sampled families — was easily overcome. The letter G was selected for two reasons: first, it represented a sample of a size which could be reconstituted in the time available; and second, it contained none of Nördlingen's largest surname-groups (e.g. Mair, Beck), in which the likelihood of inaccurate linkages would have been higher.

[26] Of the 272 marriages in the sample group for which this information can be established, 51.8 per cent were terminated by the death of the husband and 48.2 per cent by the death of the wife.

[27] This was established from the analysis of the Steuerregister for 1579 to 1700.

[28] The ordinance of 1607 cited in footnote 23 established the property requirement for men at 200 fl. and for women at 100 fl. plus linens. These requirements remained in effect throughout the seventeenth century. The admission fee for men rose from 10 fl. in the late sixteenth century to 20 fl. by the late seventeenth; the fee for women was always 5 fl. less (see StAN: Bürgerbuch 1513-1672, *passim*).

[29] Charles Tilly, *The Vendée*, (New York: Wiley ed., 1967), pp. 88-98.

[30] The cases in which data are incomplete are cases in which one parent was a foreigner for whom occupational information was not provided.

[31] Cf. Friedrichs, "Nördlingen," pp. 207-13.

[32] StAN: Heiratsbriefe, 18 Mar. 1618.

[33] StAN: Heiratsbriefe, 18 Aug. 1685.