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## Introduction

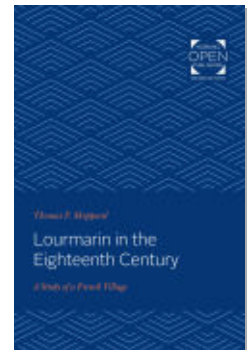
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**T**HE PROVENÇAL VILLAGE of Lourmarin lies in a long, narrow valley between the Luberon Mountain to the north and a series of steep hills to the south which gradually diminish until they reach the Mediterranean 30 miles away. The landscape does not have the verdant lushness found nearer the Mediterranean, but it is green and fertile. The valley is strikingly beautiful in the spring and fall, first when there are white blossoms on every grape vine and later when the leaves turn a brilliant golden red.

Approaching from the south, the visitor follows a narrow road which slowly winds its way toward the crest of the hill. From the summit one can see the whole panorama of the Luberon valley. Below lies the village where perhaps two hundred buff or gray stucco houses, each with the red tile roof indigenous to the south of France, are jumbled together. Slightly apart from the village are the soccer field, the Protestant church, severely plain except for a single bell tower, and the impressive chateau, its turreted magnificence ringed by stately cypress trees. Finally one sees the cemetery with white granite crosses and tombs reflecting the bright sunlight. But above all one is aware of the Luberon Mountain.

Brooding over the landscape all stark gray granite with a sparse growth of scrubby pines, the Luberon is the color of ages-old moss even on the brightest summer day. Down from its heights rushes the winter *mistral* with an icy breathtaking intensity. In the spring, rainclouds wreath its

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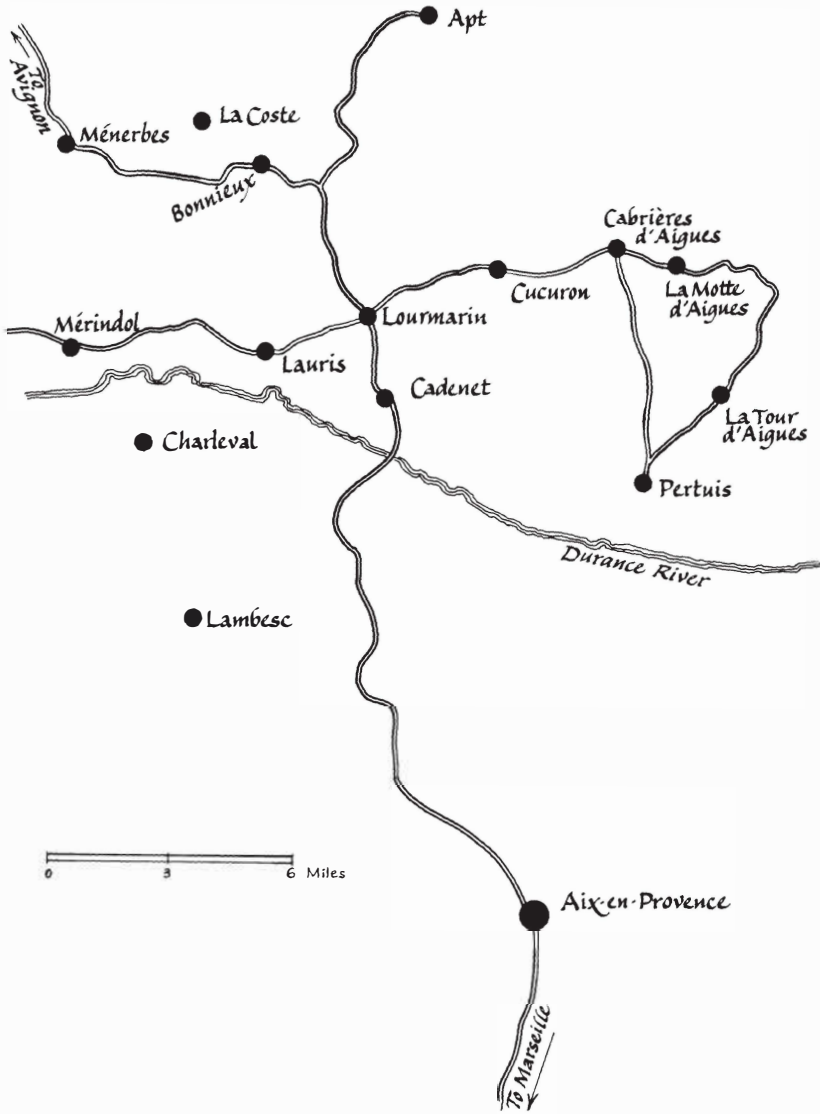
summit with vapor. No, the Luberon is not classically beautiful as is Aix's Mont Sainte Victoire, favorite subject of Cézanne, but the raw strength of its beauty is strangely primitive and awe-inspiring. Something of the Luberon's brute force also pervades the valley to which it gave its name.

From the highest tower of the chateau, a pattern of land utilization is clearly evident—here a few neat rows of grape vines, there a cherry orchard, beyond land planted in grain, while a few brown cows contentedly graze on the green meadowland at the foot of the chateau wall. Much of Lourmarin's land is devoted to vineyards, small in size but carefully cultivated. Often the tiny fields are separated by low walls of loosely piled rock near which spring wildflowers bloom in profusion. And everywhere one sees olive trees with their fine, slender leaves glowing a soft gray when they ripple in the wind. There are also tall gray-green cypresses and cedars and occasionally a huge pine, or *sapin*, long-needed and bearing clusters of cones.

Although the population is much smaller today than in the eighteenth century, the land, houses, and other buildings have changed little, and a stroll along Lourmarin's narrow streets or across its vineyards makes one feel a kinship with the past. The people who live in the village of Lourmarin or in the farmhouses nearby are typical of the rural population of Provence. The men, clad in faded trousers and shirts or smocks, bend from the waist as they cultivate their vines. The women are neatly dressed, usually in black, as they draw water from the village fountains or go about their marketing, basket on their arm. The children wear the nylon smocks and high stockings one sees everywhere in France as they walk back and forth to school or play in the narrow streets. But Lourmarin has become a village of the young and the elderly. I happened to be in the town hall one cold, windy morning in early March when the church bell began tolling a funeral. All of the villagers joined the walking procession which carried the casket to the cemetery. The old men, many of them wearing their war decorations, came first, followed by the black-clad women and the children. There were very few young faces.

Clustered close to the narrow streets and arcades, the houses of Lourmarin usually have three stories. All windows are protected by heavy wooden shutters to keep out the *mistral* and the hot summer sun. The buildings have a bleak, worn appearance, especially when the weather-

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beaten shutters are closed, since there are no window boxes or flowers; only a few weary green plants grow in the casements. Water constantly trickles from three fountains in the village and is used both for washing and for drinking. One fountain is located in front of the Catholic church, a small building in the center of town next to the clock tower. The Protestant church is at the western edge of the village, adjacent to the chateau. Unlike the parish church, its interior, with whitewashed walls and wooden pews, has no sculpture, paintings, or stained glass windows.

The chateau, erected on a knoll northwest of the village, was begun in the fifteenth century. Of buff-colored stone, the oldest tower is guarded by ferocious gargoyles and has narrow slits from which arrows might have been shot, but it was not erected primarily for defensive purposes and the walls are not high. There is a large garden whose walks are shaded by ancient pines and a spacious terrace with a well-stocked goldfish pond surrounded by rose bushes and ornate stone jardineres filled with fuschia and purple petunias. Above the massive wooden front door is a carved inscription offering free water but no other alms to passing beggars. On the first floor of the chateau are a large kitchen and storage rooms. Ascending the ornate, curved Renaissance staircase, one reaches the salon which houses a collection of antique musical instruments and the library with its collection of notarial records dating back to the fifteenth century. The carved stone fireplace in the library shows an eighteenth-century interest in the Americas since some unknown sculptor flanked the mantle with two large caryatids said to represent South American Indians. On the third floor are several small bedrooms where young artists stay during the summer months. Although the chateau is beautiful, it is far from comfortable from October through March since it has neither heat nor electricity in the rooms open to the public. Working with the notarial records often became an endurance contest, enlivened only by occasional groups of tourists who were usually more interested in the shivering American researcher than they were in the elegant surroundings. The wealth of material to be gleaned from records in the chateau more than compensated for occasional physical discomfort however.

What was daily life like in an eighteenth-century French village? What could be learned about the population of the village? Who owned the land, how was it utilized, and what type of obligations did it bear? What

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was the relationship between the village and other institutions—royal, seigneurial, and ecclesiastical? How was the village government organized and to what extent did the community leaders regulate Lourmarin's political life? What was the role of the church? What effect did the Revolution have on this village, and did the Revolution and its attendant changes ultimately prove to be a blessing or a curse for village life? Finally, what long-range changes occurred in Lourmarin from 1680 to the early nineteenth century?

It was to answer such questions that I went to France in the fall of 1967, hoping to find in the archives of Aix-en-Provence data relevant to the social, economic, and political life of a rural village during the *ancien régime*. I was aided in my search by Professors Coulet and Vovelle, who suggested that Lourmarin, a predominantly Protestant village with an embryonic textile industry and an absentee lord, might prove a productive subject for research. Located 20 miles north of Aix-en-Provence, the commune of Lourmarin now has a population of 612, but it was a thriving village of about 1,500 persons at the time of the Revolution. The village officials of Lourmarin were most helpful and allowed full access to their municipal archives located in the town hall in a small room which is nearly filled with street signs, shovels, sawhorses, and other useful objects. Against the back wall stands a large armoire filled to overflowing with record books, letters, and various other documents. Stacked under the work table are the *cadastres*, the community tax records, along with old maps of the village. Much to his secretary's amazement, I discovered the parish registers carefully stored in the back of a large closet in the mayor's private office.

The data gleaned from the municipal deliberations, parish registers, tax rolls, and other records helped me gain an idea of village life in the eighteenth century. The parish registers enabled me to follow population trends and to reconstitute many of the village families. From the municipal deliberations I learned how the community was governed and how the village government coped with the myriad of problems confronting it, many of them fiscal in nature, while the tax records showed how the village property was divided and assessed. Other records in the departmental archives at Avignon and Marseilles as well as in the Musée Calvet at

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Avignon provided information about the seigneur and supplemented the data available in village records.

One of the most fascinating aspects of a village study is the opportunity afforded the researcher to learn about the villagers' lives, sometimes in the most minute detail. It is possible to see that divisions occurred along social, economic, religious, and political lines, and that occasionally feuds erupted and threatened to disrupt community life. One learns with interest something of how the *travailleurs*, *ménagers*, artisans, and village *bourgeois* lived, how they met crises, and how they celebrated their *fêtes*. As one becomes familiar with the villagers, as one reconstitutes their families through several generations and reads about their political activities in the municipal council minutes, as one strolls along Lourmarin's narrow streets, the past becomes less remote and the village as it was in the eighteenth century lives again.

From an examination of the complete Catholic and Protestant parish registers from 1680 to 1830 we may see the patterns emerging. Analyzing the choice of marriage partners, we can discover how often mates were chosen from outside the village. Using the parish registers, family reconstitution will enable us to record the age at marriage, number of children born, and the interval between marriage and the birth of the first child. Indirectly such statistics will also give us an insight into village mores: does the evidence indicate that the Lourmarinois made a conscious attempt to limit the size of their families? We can also measure the frequency of premarital conception and illegitimacy which, if they occurred often, testify as to the villagers' attitudes toward sexual behavior and might also indicate a change in their religious orientation.

It will be our task to attempt to measure the political sophistication of the villagers as well as the amount of participation in local affairs and the degree to which the village was free to act without interference from either civil officials or the seigneur. The political organization of the village will be explained and related to the making and implementing of decisions at the local level.

To the Lourmarinois, as to us, one of the most important issues was the expenditure of their money. We shall examine the taxes paid to the three governmental units—district (*viguerie*), province, and crown—as well as the seigneurial dues and the church *dîme* (tithe). An important part of

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this study will investigate how the villagers, both collectively and on an individual basis, met their fiscal responsibilities. Since the primary source of wealth was real property, this will necessitate an examination of the land, its use, and its distribution among the villagers, as well as speculation about the amount of property held by the various segments of the population.

We shall also examine the relations of the villagers with their seigneur, who was both a Catholic and an absentee lord. It is interesting to discover how the community cared for its poor and reacted to the crisis engendered by the plague in 1720. It will also be important to learn how the Protestants managed to survive and, it would appear, prosper, when their existence was not even recognized after 1685.

This study will conclude with an examination of the effects of the Revolution on all facets of life in Lourmarin in an attempt to determine what, if any, lasting changes were introduced into the village after 1789.

Ultimately, of course, the end result of a village study depends on what sources are available. Although there are some blind spots and some areas which are illuminated only faintly, I feel fortunate that the data available answered many questions about one Provençal village in the eighteenth century.