

Medieval Economic History in Comparative Perspective

Spring 2011

21H.416J / 14.70J

Lecture (M) 9:30-11:00, Prof. McCants

R01, R02 (W), R03 (F) 9:30-11:00, Section leaders: Steve Ostrow, Ellan Spero

This course will survey the conditions of material life and changing social and economic conditions in medieval Europe with reference to the comparative context of contemporary Islamic, Chinese, and central Asian experiences. Subject covers the emergence and decline of feudal institutions, the transformation of peasant agriculture, living standards and the course of epidemic disease, and the ebb and flow of long-distance trade across the Eurasian system. Particular emphasis will be placed on the study of those factors, both institutional and technological, which have contributed to the emergence of capitalist organization and economic growth in Western Europe in contrast to the trajectories followed by the other major medieval economies.

This course offers credit for the CI-H requirement and will strongly emphasize the teaching of expository and analytical writing as utilized by historians for the dissemination of their scholarly findings. Each student will be expected to write a number of short discussion papers, and two substantive essays (6 pages each) over the course of the term. The discussion papers will be due on February 9, February 23, and March 16. The longer essays will be due on April 6 (with the final draft due on April 20) and May 4. Students will also give a short oral presentation of their intended thesis statement and outline of argument for the first paper draft. The oral presentation will take place in section on March 30. All paper topics will be reviewed in class in advance. In addition, the course has a scheduled three-hour final exam.

No internet sources should be consulted for your papers, other than those which are either primary source collections, or are academically refereed sites. If you are unsure about a site, please consult with one of us prior to using it. If used, all internet sources must be properly footnoted and cited in your bibliography at the end of your paper just as for any other type of source. Plagiarism from any source will not be tolerated. Plagiarism earns an automatic F (0%) for the assignment. Moreover, all cases of plagiarism will be reported to the COD for their consideration of the appropriate disciplinary action to take with the student involved. If you are unsure what plagiarism is please see the MIT Online Writing Communication Center. If you are still uncertain, please see me.

The Writing Center offers several services to the MIT community during the academic year. Students and staff members can get free individual consultation about any writing difficulty, from questions about grammar to matters of style, including difficulties common to writers, such as overcoming writer's block, organizing papers, taking essay exams, revising one's work, or presenting scientific information. They may visit the Center during any stage of the writing process: prewriting, writing a first draft, revising, or editing. Consultations may concern papers that have been (or will be) submitted for a grade. The Center is not, however, a proofreading service; it aims to treat writing as a process, to clarify and promote techniques of good writing.

The Center also offers instruction both to individuals and groups in methods of oral presentation (how to write a speech, how to use visual aids, how to conduct oneself when presenting scientific or nonscientific information). The Center provides specialized help to those for whom English is a second language.

Check out [The MIT Online Writing and Communication Center](#)

Check out [Writing Resources on the World Wide Web](#) for some immediate guidance.

Grading: 15% for shorter discussion papers (5% each)
 5% for oral presentation of thesis for final paper
 10% for first draft of first longer essay
 15% for rewrite of first longer essay
 20% for final paper
 15% for final exam
 20% for class participation -- demonstrating mastery of the assigned readings.

Late Paper and Absence Policy:

Late papers will be accepted without penalty in the case of a medical emergency or some other type of emergency that has been brought to our attention in advance. Otherwise, late papers will be graded down 5% points for each day they are late. Students are expected to attend every class, and to participate actively in section meetings. If you know in advance that you must travel during the week for professional reasons, please see us as soon as possible so that we can make appropriate arrangements.

Books for purchase at the MIT Bookstore

Hawthorn, [The Standard of Living: Tanner Lectures](#), Cambridge University Press, 1989.

Persson, [An Economic History of Europe](#), Cambridge University Press, 2010.

All other readings are either available as on-line journal articles or can be found in PDF format on-line at the course website.

Lecture Schedule and Reading Assignments

- Feb 2 **Some big questions in economic history, and how to think about them.**
Assorted administrative trivia.
Reading: Robert Solow, “Economics: Is Something Missing?”
- Feb 7-9 **Late Roman Antiquity and Barbarian Europe**
Reading: John Hatcher and Mark Bailey, Modelling the Middle Ages: the History and Theory of England’s Economic Development, pp. 1-10.
Introduction and Chapter 1 of Persson, An Economic History of Europe, pp. 1-20.
- Feb 9** *Assignment due:*
2 page discussion paper on a ‘technology’ that you employ on a regular basis, but about the history or characteristics of which you rarely pause to consider. Your discussion should indicate the ways in which this particular technology intersects with the larger themes of economic history. Be creative and feel free to have some fun with this assignment. It has no right answer, but nevertheless your discussion should reveal a high level of thoughtfulness.
- Feb 14-16 **The structure of medieval life: manorialism and feudalism.**
Reading: Duby, Early Growth of the European Economy, pp. 162-180.
Robert Fossier, chapter 2 of Peasant Life in the Medieval West.
Leopold Genicot, chapter 1 of Rural Communities in the Medieval West.
Please also bring with you to class two primary source documents: “The Plan of St. Gall” and articles from “The Capitulary on the Maintenance of the Royal Estates.”
- Feb 22 Monday schedule of classes – fundamentals of good history writing
Feb 23 **The ‘Dark Ages’: myth or reality.**
(Class should all meet together in 32-124)
Reading: Robert Lopez, The Commercial Revolution of the Middle Ages, Chapter 1, pp. 1-26; and Michael McCormick, “New Light on the Dark Ages: How the Slave Trade Fuelled the Carolingian Economy,” Past and Present, 2002.
- Feb 23** *Assignment:* 3 page analysis of a primary source document (to be distributed on Feb. 16th). Your analysis should incorporate insights from the readings on the early middle ages assigned for the previous week
- Feb 28-Mar 2 **The wider medieval world: Vikings, Mongols, and Scaracens.**
Viking film on Monday – class meets together on Wednesday
Reading: Selections from Robert the Monk, A Jerusalem History, c.1110; selections from Jean de Joinville, The Book of the Holy Words and Good Deeds of Our King, Saint Louis, 1309; “Annals of Xanten, 845-853”; and a selection from the Historia Norwegie.
- Mar 7-9 **Medieval agriculture and commercialization: a revised story.**
Reading: Gregory Clark, “The Economics of Exhaustion,” Journal of Economic History, March 1992: 61-84.
Bruce Campbell, “Economic rent and the intensification of English agriculture, 1086-1350,” from Medieval Farming and Technology.

Please also bring with you to class two primary source documents: “The Plan of St. Gall” and articles from “The Capitulary on the Maintenance of the Royal Estates.”

- Mar 14-16 **Rise of the commune and revival of trade: counterpoint to autarkic agriculture.**
Reading: Persson, Chapter 2, pp. 41.
Lopez, Commercial Revolution, Chapter 3, pp. 56-84.
Also read documentary selections from Lopez, Medieval Trade in the Mediterranean World, on “The Jewish Role in World Trade,” “Milan in 1288,” and “Reports from the Fairs of Champagne”; also read “The Great Fair at Thessalonika”; “Traveling to China.”
- Mar 16** *Assignment:* 3 page discussion paper comparing traditional accounts of the manorial economy with more recent evaluations of it.
- Mar 21-23 **Spring Break – no class!**
- Mar 28-30 **The plague and its consequences.**
Reading: Barbara Harvey, “Introduction: the crisis of the early fourteenth century.”
Selections from Henry Knighton, Chronicle, 1348.
Evessy Domar, "The causes of slavery or serfdom," Journal of Economic History, March 1970: 18-32.
Mark Bailey, “Demographic Decline in Late Medieval England,” Economic History Review, No. 1, 1996: 1-19.
Persson, Chapter 3, pp. 42-59.
- Mar 30** Oral Presentation of thesis for 6 page essay on the plague and its consequences:
Each student is expected to present to the class a brief summary of the historical problem or question you intend to address in your essay, a clear thesis statement, a note about the kinds of evidence you intend to gather to support your thesis, and a quick wrap up of all these components. If you do this, you will be well on your way to writing a strong essay.
- Apr 4-6 **Methodology and theories of historical demography**
Reading: Wrigley and Schofield's Population History of England, tables pp. 468, 474.
Robert Fogel, "Second thoughts on the European escape from hunger: famines, chronic malnutrition, and mortality rates."
Optional: Kremer, “Population growth and technological change.”
Very highly recommended: Mark Hatcher, 'Understanding the population history of England, 1450-1750', Past & Present, 2003.
- Apr 6** *Assignment:* first draft of 6 page paper due on the plague and its consequences.
- Apr 11-13 **Overseas expansion of Europe.**
Reading: Persson, Chapter 4, pp. 60-73.
David S. Jones, “Virgin Soils Revisited,” William and Mary Quarterly, 60, 2003.
Columbus, selections from the Diario.
- Apr 13** **Paper drafts returned with comments.**
- Apr 18 **No Class:** Patriot’s Day vacation.
- Apr 20 **Grand theories about medieval development: Malthusians, Marxists and the Classical**

Economists. Class meets together.

Reading: Immanuel Wallerstein, "Three Paths of National Development in 16th Century Europe," in The Capitalist World Economy.

Mauricio Drelichman, "All that Glitters: Precious metals, rent seeking and the decline of Spain," European Review of Economic History, December, 2005: 313-36.

Hatcher and Bailey, Modelling the Middle Ages, pp. 174-201.

Further reading: Brenner, "Agrarian class structure and economic development," Past and Present, Feb. 1976.

Apr 20 Paper re-writes due on the plague and its consequences.

Apr 25-27 **Capitalist organization of economic life: the globalization of trade and the rise of consumer culture.**

Reading: Fernand Braudel, The Wheels of Commerce, pp. 231-249. (Skim)

McCants, "Exotic Goods, Popular Consumption, and the Standard of Living: Thinking About Globalization in the Early Modern World," Journal of World History.

Persson, Chapter 5, pp. 74-91. (This will be very helpful for writing the final paper.)

Please bring with you to class a copy of Gregory King's "Social Table."

May 2-4 **Measuring welfare.**

Reading: Amartya Sen, The Standard of Living, pp. 1-38, and comment by Keith Hart, pp. 70-93.

May 4 *Assignment due: 6 page paper on a subject to be given later.*

May 9 **The rise of north-western Europe: improvements in the standard of living.**

Reading: Joel Mokyr, "Dear Labor, cheap Labor, and the Industrial Revolution," from Favorites of Fortune, ed. By Paul Bairoch, Harvard University Press, 1991.

Jan de Vries, "Economic Growth before and after the Industrial Revolution: a Modest Proposal," in Prak, Early Modern Capitalism.

Recommended: Sara Horrell, Jane Humphries and Hans-Joachim Voth, "Destined for Deprivation: Human Capital Formation and Intergenerational Poverty in Nineteenth-Century England," Explorations in Economic History, No. 3, 2001: 339-365.

May 11 **Wrap-up**

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<http://ocw.mit.edu>

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