

MIT OpenCourseWare
<http://ocw.mit.edu>

21H.416J / 14.70J Medieval Economic History in Comparative Perspective
Spring 2006

For information about citing these materials or our Terms of Use, visit: <http://ocw.mit.edu/terms>.

Medieval Economic History in Comparative Perspective

Spring 2003
21H416 / 14.70J

Prof. McCants
MW 9:30-11:00

This course will survey the conditions of material life and the changing social and economic relations 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 has a scheduled three hour final exam. In addition, each student will be expected to write two very short (1 page each) discussion papers, and three substantive essays (6 pages each) over the course of the term. The discussion papers will be due on February 19 and March 19, and the longer essays will be due on March 12, April 14, and May 5. The discussion papers should pertain to the reading assigned for the week they are due. Students will be asked to write their first essay on a common assigned topic which will expand on their first discussion paper. The last two essays will be on general themes relevant to the reading we have done just prior to the due dates. More specific information on these themes will be given in class.

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 me 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 kind of source will not be tolerated. Cheating earns an automatic F (0%) for the assignment. Moreover, all cases of cheating 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.

Grading: 20% for each paper -- total of 60%
 5% for the two discussion papers
 20% for final exam
 15% for class participation -- demonstrating mastery of the assigned readings.

Late Paper and Un-excused Absence Policy:

Late papers will be accepted without penalty in the case of a medical emergency or some other type of emergency which has been brought to my 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. Two un-excused absences will be permitted without penalty. However, each un-excused absence above two will result in your final grade being lowered by 2% points. If you know in advance that you must travel during the week for professional reasons, please see me as soon as possible so that we can make appropriate arrangements.

An electronic version of the syllabus as well as a collection of pictorial images which students will find useful for the course can be found at the following website:

Books for purchase at the MIT Bookstore

Hawthorn, The Standard of Living: Tanner Lectures, Cambridge University Press, 1989.
Robert Lopez, The Commercial Revolution of the Middle Ages, Cambridge University Press, 1976.
Giles Milton, Nathaniel's Nutmeg, Penguin, 2000.
Kenneth Pomeranz and Steven Topik, The World that Trade Created, M.E. Sharpe, 1999.

All other readings can be found in PDF format on-line at the course web site.

Lecture Schedule and Reading Assignments

- Feb 5 **Introduction -- why economic growth and the methodology of economic history.**
Reading: Robert Solow, "Economics: Is Something Missing?"
- Feb 10-12 **Late Roman Antiquity and Barbarian Europe**
Reading: Robert Lopez, The Commercial Revolution of the Middle Ages, pp. 1-26; and Paul Bairoch, chapter 7 of Cities and Economic Development.
- Feb 18 **No Class:** despite the 'Tuesday is a Monday' pronouncement.
Feb 19 **The structure of medieval life: manorialism and feudalism.**
No section today – meet as a whole class.
Reading: Duby, Early Growth of the European Economy, pp. 162-180; Robert Fossier, chapter 2 of Peasant Life in the Medieval West; and Leopold Genicot, chapter 1 of Rural Communities in the Medieval West.
- Feb 19 Assignment due: first discussion paper (1 page).**
Please write a one page response to the readings assigned for this week on the structure of the early medieval community.
- Feb 24-26 **Medieval agriculture and commercialization: a revised story.**
Reading: Lopez, Commercial Revolution, pp. 27-55; Gregory Clark, "The Economics of Exhaustion..." in Journal of Economic History, March 1992; and Bruce Campbell, "Economic rent and the intensification of English agriculture, 1086-1350," in Medieval Farming and Technology.
- Mar 3-5 **Rise of the commune and revival of trade: counterpoint to autarkic agriculture.**
Reading: 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" in reader; and Lopez, Commercial Revolution, pp. 56-147.
- March 10 **The wider medieval world: Vikings, Mongols, and Scaracens.**
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; “Traveling to China, in reader; and Edward Bovill, The Golden Trade of the Moors, pp. 67-131.
- March 12 **Medieval military technology: the art of the seige.**
No section today – meet as a whole class.
Video presentation.
- March 12 Assignment due: first paper (6 pages).**
- March 17-19 **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; and Mark Bailey, “Demographic Decline in Late Medieval England, Economic History Review, 1996.
- Mar 19 Assignment due: second discussion paper (1 page).**
Please write a one page response to the readings assigned for this week on the economic consequences of the plague.
- Mar 25-27 Spring Break!
- Mar 31 -Apr 2 **Grand theories about medieval development: Malthusians, Marxists and the Classical Economists.**
Reading: Immanuel Wallerstein, “Three Paths of National Development in 16th Century Europe,” in The Capitalist World Economy.
Recommended reading: Brenner, "Agrarian class structure and economic development," Past and Present, Feb. 1976.
- Apr 7-9 **Methodology and theories of historical demography**
Reading: Wrigley and Schofield's Population History of England, tables from pp. 468 and 474. Robert Fogel, "Second thoughts on the European escape from hunger: famines, chronic malnutrition, and mortality rates." Optional: Kremer, “Population growth and technological change.”
- Apr 14 Assignment due: second paper (6 pages).**
- Apr 14-16 **Overseas expansion of Europe.**
Reading: Kenneth Pomeranz and Steven Topik, The World that Trade Created, chapters 1 & 2, pp. 3-76, and one chapter additional chapter from either chapters 3, 4, or 5.
Columbus, selections from the Diario.
- Apr 21 **No Class.** Patriots Day Vacation!
- Apr 23 **Capitalist organization of economic life: proto-industry and the globalization of trade.**
No section today -- meet as a whole class.
Reading: Braudel, The Wheels of Commerce, pp. 231-249. Gregory King's "Social Table," one page table; and begin reading Giles Milton, Nathaniel's Nutmeg.
Also recommended are two chapters from Merchants, Companies and Trade: Europe and Asia in the Early Modern Era: Michel Morineau, “Eastern and Western merchants from the 16th to the 18th centuries,” and Om Prakash, “The Portuguese and the Dutch in Asian

maritime trade.”

Apr 28-30 **Globalization of trade and the rise of consumer culture.**
Reading: Finish Nathaniel’s Nutmeg.

May 5 Assignment due: third paper (6 pages).

May 5-7 **Measuring welfare.**
Reading: Amartya Sen, The Standard of Living, pp. 1-38, and comment by Keith Hart, pp. 70-93.

May 12 **The rise of north-western Europe: improvements in the standard of living.**
Reading: Joel Mokyr, “Dear Labor, cheap Labor, and the Industrial Revolution;” and Sara Horrell, Jane Humphries and Hans-Joachim Voth, “Destined for Deprivation: Human Capital Formation and Intergenerational Poverty in Nineteenth-Century England.”

May 14 **Review**