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

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## Medieval Economic History in Comparative Perspective

Spring 2006  
21H416 / 14.70J  
TTh/F 9:30-11:00

Prof. McCants

Lecturer: Steve Ostrow

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 a number of very short (1 or 2 pages each) discussion papers, and two substantive essays (5 or 6 pages each) over the course of the term. The discussion papers will be due on February 14, February 23/24, March 9/10, April 6/7, and April 20/21. The longer essays will be due on March 21, and May 2. The discussion papers should pertain to the reading assigned for the week they are due, while the topics for the two longer papers will be assigned 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:           5% for each discussion paper -- total of 30%  
                      15% for each of the two substantive papers – total of 30%  
                      20% for final exam  
                      20% 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 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. 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 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.  
Robert Lopez, The Commercial Revolution of the Middle Ages, Cambridge University Press, 1976.  
Deirdre McCloskey, Economical Writing, Waveland Press, 2000.  
Kenneth Pomeranz and Steven Topik, The World that Trade Created, M.E. Sharpe, 1999.  
Richard Hodges, Towns and Trade in the Age of Charlemagne, Duckworth, 2000.

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 7-9 Introduction -- why economic growth and the methodology of economic history.**

*Reading:* Robert Solow, "Economics: Is Something Missing?" and Deirdre McCloskey, Economical Writing.

#### **Feb 14**

*Assignment:* 1-2 page short discussion paper on a 'technology' which 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 14-16/17 Late Roman Antiquity and Barbarian Europe**

*Reading:* Robert Lopez, The Commercial Revolution of the Middle Ages, pp. 1-26; and make substantial headway into Richard Hodges, Towns and Trade in the Age of Charlemagne.

Feb 21 No Class: President's Day holiday

#### **Feb 23/24**

*Assignment:* 2-3 page discussion paper on some aspect of the historiographical debates surrounding the economy of late antiquity as revealed in the Lopez and Hodges reading assignments. There is no new reading for this class.

#### **Feb 27-Mar 2/3 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; and Leopold Genicot, chapter 1 of Rural Communities in the Medieval West. Please also consult two primary source documents: The Plan of St. Gall, and articles from “The Capitulary on the Maintenance of the Royal Estates.”

Mar 7-9/10 **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: 61-84 (available in JSTOR); and Bruce Campbell, "Economic rent and the intensification of English agriculture, 1086-1350," in Medieval Farming and Technology.

**Mar 9/10** *Assignment:* 1 page discussion paper on some aspect of the reading for this class.

Mar 14-16/17 **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”; and Lopez, Commercial Revolution, pp. 56-147.  
*Recommended:* Patrick Chorley, “The Cloth Trade of Flanders and Northern France during the 13<sup>th</sup> c.,” Economic History Review, No. 3, 1987: 349-79.

Mar 21-23/24 **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; the instructions for “Traveling to China”; and a selection from the Historia Norwegie.

**Mar 21** *Assignment:* 5 page paper due – topic to be assigned.

Mar 27-29/30 **Spring Break – no class!**

Apr 4-6/7 **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; and Mark Bailey, “Demographic Decline in Late Medieval England, Economic History Review, No. 1, 1996: 1-19.

**Apr 6/7** *Assignment:* 2 page response to the readings assigned for this week on the economic consequences of the plague.

Apr 11-13/14 **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 18 **No Class:** Patriot’s Day vacation.

Apr 20/21 **Overseas expansion of Europe.**

*Reading:* Kenneth Pomeranz and Steven Topik, The World that Trade Created, chapters 1 & 2, pp. 3-76, and one additional chapter from either chapters 3, 4, or 5. Columbus, selections from the Diario.

**Apr 20/21** *Assignment:* 2 page response to the readings assigned for this week.

Apr 25-27/28 **Grand theories about medieval development: Malthusians, Marxists and the Classical Economists.**

*Reading:* Immanuel Wallerstein, "Three Paths of National Development in 16<sup>th</sup> Century Europe," in The Capitalist World Economy; and S.R. Epstein, "Regional Fairs, Institutional Innovation, and Economic Growth in Late Medieval Europe," The Economic History Review, August, 1994, 459-482; and Mauricio Drelichman, "All that Glitters: Precious metals, rent seeking and the decline of Spain," European Review of Economic History, December, 2005: 313-36.

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

May 2-4/5 **Capitalist organization of economic life: the globalization of trade and the rise of consumer culture.**

*Reading:* Braudel, The Wheels of Commerce, pp. 231-249. Gregory King's "Social Table," one page table; and Anne McCants, "Exotic Goods, Popular Consumption, and the Standard of Living: Thinking About Globalization in the Early Modern World," unpublished manuscript.

**May 2** *Assignment due:* 6 page paper on a subject to be given later.

May 9-10/11 **Measuring welfare.**

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

May 16 **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; and 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 18 **Review**

Friday section should attend a Thursday section if at all possible.