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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 2009
21H416 / 14.70J

Prof. McCants
MW 9:30-11:00

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 has a scheduled three hour final exam. In addition, 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 and May 4. All paper topics will be reviewed in class in advance.

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: 20% for shorter discussion papers combined
20% for each of the two substantive papers – total of 40%
20% 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 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, 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.
Robert Lopez, The Commercial Revolution of the Middle Ages, Cambridge University Press, 1976.
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 4 **Some big questions in economic history, and how to think about them.**
Assorted administrative trivia.
Reading: Robert Solow, “Economics: Is Something Missing?”
- Feb 9-11 **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; and Chapters 1-2 of Richard Hodges, Towns and Trade in the Age of Charlemagne, pp. 7-67.
- 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 17 Monday schedule of classes
- Feb 18 **The ‘Dark Ages’: myth or reality.**
 (Class should all meet together in 32-124)
Reading: Robert Lopez, The Commercial Revolution of the Middle Ages, pp. 1-55; and Michael McCormick, “New Light on the Dark Ages: How the Slave Trade Fuelled the Carolingian Economy,” Past and Present, 2002.
Recommended additional reading: Hodges, Towns and Trade, chapters 3-4, and chapter 5 (pgs. 119-125) strongly recommended here.
- Feb 23-25 **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 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 23** *Assignment:* 3 page analysis of a primary source document (to be distributed on Feb. 18th). Your analysis should incorporate insights from the readings on the early middle ages assigned for the previous week
- Mar 2-4 **The wider medieval world: Vikings, Mongols, and Saracens.**
 Viking film on Monday
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 9-11 **Medieval agriculture and commercialization: a revised story.**
Reading: Gregory Clark, “The Economics of Exhaustion,” Journal of Economic History, March 1992: 61-84; and 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 16-18 **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”; “The Great Fair at Thessalonika”; “Traveling to China”; and Lopez, Commercial Revolution, pp. 56-147. Also read Ethan Segal, “Chinese Coins and Flying Cash: Economic Innovations in Medieval Japan”, unpublished manuscript.
 Recommended: Patrick Chorley, “The Cloth Trade of Flanders and Northern France during the 13th c.,” Economic History Review, No. 3, 1987: 349-79 (in JSTOR).
- Mar 16** *Assignment:* 3 page discussion paper comparing accounts of the traditional manorial economy with more recent evaluations of it.

- Mar 23-25 **Spring Break – no class!**
- Mar 30-Apr 1 **The plague and its consequences.**
Reading: Barbara Harvey, "Introduction: the crisis of the early fourteenth century". Selections from Henry Knighton, Chronicle, 1348. Evessa 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 6-8 **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."
Very highly recommended: Mark Hatcher, 'Understanding the population history of England, 1450-1750', Past & Present, 2003 (in JSTOR).
- Apr 6** *Assignment:* 6 page paper due on the plague and its consequences.
Apr 13-15 **Overseas expansion of Europe.**
Reading: Kenneth Pomeranz and Steven Topik, The World that Trade Created, chapter 1, pp. 3-43; David S. Jones, "Virgin Soils Revisited," William and Mary Quarterly, 60, 2003 (in JSTOR); and Columbus, selections from the Diario.
- Apr 20 **No Class:** Patriot's Day vacation.
- Apr 22 **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; Mauricio Drelichman, "All that Glitters: Precious metals, rent seeking and the decline of Spain," European Review of Economic History, December, 2005: 313-36; and Hatcher and Bailey, Modelling the Middle Ages, pp. 174-201.
Further reading: Brenner, "Agrarian class structure and economic development," Past and Present, Feb. 1976 (in JSTOR).
- Apr27-29 **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; and Anne McCants, "Exotic Goods, Popular Consumption, and the Standard of Living: Thinking About Globalization in the Early Modern World," Journal of World History. Please bring with you to class a copy of Gregory King's "Social Table."
- May 4-6 **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 11 **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 (in JSTOR)..

May 13

Review