

Western University, Departments of History & Economics
HIS 3426G / ECO 3318G
Making a Living in the Middle Ages:
Farmers, Guild Artisans and Merchants

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Seminar Time: Thursday 9:30-11:30

Location of Seminar: TBA

Welcome to this class!: Course Description

Was the middle ages a period of general prosperity or poverty? Our answer to this question determines our conclusions on the quality of life and options for the vast majority of its population, ordinary people. It also shapes our understanding of historical change: what was the lever of progress and who directed that lever? were the medieval centuries much poorer than later ones or did they provide the developmental take-off for western Europe's early modern global supremacy? This course provides an overview of select critical debates about the medieval western European economy by examining the lives of its most important actors: farmers, guild artisans and merchants. Students will also learn how to analyse some of the historical documents employed by researchers in these debates in order to arrive at their own conclusions about medieval society (all documents are in translation and no knowledge of Latin is required).

Learning Objectives

- an introduction to the literature's debates over medieval western European economic development and the roles of its players; for history students unfamiliar with development theories, this course will also supply an introduction to some of these concepts
- an introduction to analytical methods employed by historians to assess individual and general wealth and poverty in the past
- an introduction to pertinent medieval historical documents and the issues around their interpretation

Course Grading

- seminar participation and presentations (25% of the final grade)
- 2 short papers, which provide an analysis of historical documents; 3-6 pages each, including any tables and graphs (each paper is worth 25% of the final grade; 50% in total for both).
- annotated bibliography of the assigned readings (7-14 pages, 25% of the final grade)

Course Work and Due Dates for Assignments

Secondary Source Readings and Annotated Bibliography

There is no required textbook for this course. All articles and selections from books for the weekly class discussions, as well as the historical documents for the short papers' analyses of primary sources, will be online, either on our Owl class site or that of Weldon Libraries. Students are also welcome to employ different historical documents for the short papers than those assigned as long as they pertain to the question under discussion with my permission.

Students will do the same readings for the two classes that feature a general introduction to the lives of artisans and merchants; I'll summarize medieval farmers' working lives in a lecture. For the one or two weeks of classes following the general introduction to each of the three sections, students will sign up to summarize and present one of the weekly readings to their classmates. These readings present opposing views on the same question. By dividing up the readings in this fashion, you will gain a greater exposure to more ideas and be able to debate their relative merits in class.

Students who are not familiar with some of the economic terms used in these articles should take heart! None of the papers selected for this course are highly "technical" and even history students without a background in economics will be able to work their way through them. Additional help can be found in *The Penguin Dictionary of Economics*, which supplies a useful short summary to economic terms and theories found in some of these papers.

The structure of the course does not lend itself to a final exam. Instead, you will supply an annotated bibliography that provides a summary of each reading (hypothesis, arguments, historical sources and methods) that you selected to examine for the class, along with your critique of the author's ideas. You will also summarize the contents of a historical document and discuss how it might be employed in research analyses during the week in which you are not analysing a document in a short paper. In total, you will therefore discuss six readings and one type of document (s) in this fashion (about 1-2 pages for each reading). This annotated bibliography is due in hard copy on April 7.

Class Participation

In seminar courses, students discuss and exchange their ideas regarding secondary readings and historical documents. Since each one of you is a unique individual, you can offer each other unique insights! and thereby increase the scope and depth of your own analysis.

Your grade will be based on the quality of your participation, both in the class discussions and your presentations. Quantity also counts! and students who miss more than one class, without obtaining academic accommodation, will lose twenty percent from their final participation grade for each such absence.

Short Papers on the Historical (Primary) Sources

The short papers (3-6 pages, including all tables, graphs and charts) contain your own analyses of primary sources that provide us with some insights into the economic choices made by farmers, artisans and merchants, and some thoughts about their consequences. These analyses will give you the opportunity to engage in the methods and sources employed by historians in the field of economic history. You will be able usually to choose to use either qualitative or quantitative methods of analysis with these historical documents.

You will select which two of the three possible areas (farmers, artisans, merchants) that you wish to study in this fashion. Depending on the number of students in the class, you will present your papers' findings once or twice to your classmates for discussion.

Short papers using documents pertaining to farmers are due in hard copy in class on February 2; those analysing records concerning craft guild members are to be handed in on March 9, and those examining merchants on April 6.

These papers must also be submitted electronically to Turnitin.com, on their respective due dates, in order to receive a mark. I will announce the course password and identification number in class before the due date of the first assignment.

In regards to the employment of Turnitin, the policy at Western University is that "All required papers may be subject to submission for textual similarity review to the commercial plagiarism detection software under license to the University for the detection of plagiarism. All papers submitted for such checking will be included as source documents in the reference database for the purpose of detecting plagiarism of papers subsequently submitted to the system. Use of the service is subject to the licensing agreement, currently between The University of Western Ontario and Turnitin.com (<http://www.turnitin.com>)."

Late Policy

Because your classmates will discuss and present their interpretation of historical documents in class, no extension is possible for these short papers, unless you obtain academic accommodation. Otherwise, the grade will be zero for papers not handed in on their due date. Similarly, if you sign up to make a presentation on a reading and do not do so, you will receive a mark of zero for the presentation, unless you obtain accommodation. The penalty for late annotated bibliographies is five percent a day, including weekends, unless you obtain accommodation (see the procedure to do so at the end of this syllabus)

Weekly Topics and Readings

January 5: Introduction to the course and its materials (secondary and primary sources). Lecture providing an overview of the middle ages and researchers' opinions on economic growth and its mechanisms. What are the current debates over medieval growth and

development? How does these relate to the questions over pre-industrial patterns of growth and comparative differences in global development found between countries into the present? What sorts of historical documents do historians use to shed light on these questions?

Farmers (the agricultural sector)

January 12: General introduction to farmers and agriculture in the middle ages (lecture). Outline provided of historical documents for analysis. Students select one reading to present in the next two weeks of classes.

January 19: This week, we will study the debate over land productivity in the middle ages (the amount of food produced per acre by farmers): Was it enough to support the population or were periodic food shortages and related starvation crises a medieval problem? What determined the amount of food that farmers decided to produce? Were they subsistence- or commercially-oriented producers? (This debate also pertains to the early modern era.) In the next two classes, we will consider this question by focussing on the agriculture scene of medieval England. Due to the superiority in the quality and quantity of English medieval historical documents, this country's agricultural trends have become the vehicle by which historians estimate trends likely experienced elsewhere in similar farming regimes of other western European nations.

Bruce M. S. Campbell, "Land, Labour, Livestock and Productivity Trends in English Seignorial Agriculture," in *Land, Labour and Livestock: Historical Studies in European Agricultural Productivity*, edited by Campbell and Overton (Manchester University Press, 1991): 144-182.

Michael Postan, Chapters 3 and 4 of his *The Medieval Economy and Society*: 30-80 (the page numbers will vary according to the edition that you select; this reading is a bit longer than the others but is much less quantitative)

Alexandra Sapoznik, "The Productivity of Peasant Agriculture: Oakington, Cambridgeshire, 1360-99," *Economic History Review* 66 (2013): 518-544.

January 26: Our focus this week is on the issue of medieval agricultural labor productivity (the amount of food produced by each farm worker): Was it high enough to feed workers outside agriculture, and thus allow for other sectors, like industry, to develop? Given the importance of the huge agricultural sector to the economy, was the value of farm workers' production high enough to promote economic growth or was it so low that it undermined wealth and living standards? (This debate also pertains to the early modern era, and also figures largely

in the question of divergent global comparative development, that is, why some countries became wealthy and others developed less quickly or remained poor over the centuries.)

Robert Allen, "The Growth of Labour Productivity in Early Modern English Agriculture," *Explorations in Economic History* 25 (1988): 117-46.

Gregory Clark, "Labour Productivity in English Agriculture, 1300-1860," in *Land, Labour and Livestock: Historical Studies in European Agricultural Productivity*, edited by Campbell and Overton (Manchester University Press, 1991): 211-35.

Eona Karakacili, "English Agrarian Labor Productivity Rates Before the Black Death: A Case Study," *Journal of Economic History* 64 (2004): 24-60.

February 2, Historical Documents: Farm accounts and agricultural treatises. Short analysis of one document type due in class. Students will present and compare their findings for discussion.

Guild Artisans (the industrial sector)

February 9: General introduction to medieval craft guilds and their artisans. Outline provided of historical documents for analysis. Students select one reading to present in the next two weeks of classes.

Reading for introduction to craft guilds: Sylvia Thrupp, "The Gilds," in *Cambridge Economic History of Europe*, Vol. III, edited by Postan, Rich and Miller (Cambridge University Press, 1963): 230-80.

February 16: Were craft guilds elitist closed organizations that stifled technological progress in industry?

Hilario Casado Alonso, "Guilds, Technical Progress and Economic Development in Preindustrial Spain," in *Dalla corporazione al mutuo soccorso: Organizzazione e tutela del lavoro tra XVI e XX secolo*, edited by Paolo Massa and Angelo Moiola (Milan, 2005):

S. R. Epstein, "Craft Guilds, Apprenticeship and Technological Change in Pre-Industrial Europe," *Journal of Economic History* 58 (1998): 684-713.

Peter Stabel, "Guilds in Late-Medieval Flanders: Myths and Realities of Guild Life in an Export-Oriented Environment," *Journal of Medieval History* 30 (2004): 187-212.

Reading Week, February 20-24. No class.

March 2: Were craft guilds monopolistic rent-seeking institutions that undermined growth?

S. R. Epstein, "Craft Guilds in the Pre-Modern Economy: A Discussion," *Economic History Review* 61 (2008): 155-74 (a medieval historian attacks the views of Ogilvie)

Sheilagh Ogilvie, "Guilds, Efficiency, and Social Capital: Some Evidence from German Proto-Industry," *Economic History Review* 57 (2004): 286-333. (She employs early modern German evidence but the types of sources and the debate also pertain to medieval guilds.)

John H. Munro, "Urban Regulations and Monopolistic Competition in the Textile Industries of the Late-Medieval Low Countries," in *Textiles of the Low Countries in European Economic History*, edited by Erick Aerts and John Munro (Leuven, 1990): 41-52.

Gary Richardson, "Guilds, Laws and Markets for Manufactured Merchandise in Late-Medieval England," *Explorations in Economic History* 41 (2004): 1-25.

March 9: Historical Documents: craft guild ordinances and court cases. Short analysis of one document type due in class. Students will present and compare their findings for discussion.

Merchants (markets and the financial sector)

March 16: General introduction to merchant guilds. Outline provided of historical documents for analysis. Students select one reading to present in the next two weeks of classes. Reading for introduction to merchant guilds: R. De Roover, "The Organization of Trade," in *Cambridge Economic History of Europe*, Vol. III, edited by Postan, Rich and Miller (Cambridge University Press, 1963): 42-118.

March 23: Why did merchant guilds emerge in the middle ages? Was their impact on markets ultimately positive or negative for growth?

Oscar Gelderblom and Regina Grafe, "The Rise and Fall of the Merchant Guilds: Re-thinking the Comparative Study of Commercial Institutions in Pre-Modern Europe," *Journal of Interdisciplinary History* 11:4 (2010): 477-511.

Avner Greif, "Reputation and Coalitions in Medieval Trade: Evidence on the Maghribi Traders," *Journal of Economic History* 49 (1989): 857-82.

Avner Greif, Paul Milgrom and Barry R. Weingast, "Coordination, Commitment and Enforcement: The Case of the Merchant Guild," *Journal of Political Economy* 102 (1994): 745-76.

Oliver Volckart, "The Economics of Feuding in Late Medieval Germany," *Explorations in Economic History* 41 (2004): 282-299.

March 30: The Economics of Prejudice. In previous classes, you examined the various ways in which ordinary medieval people organized their economic activities. It was commonplace, in all three economic sectors, for people to unite and form institutions that sought to overcome some economic hurdle; these institutions also promoted individual wealth through collective action. But was participation in these institutions open to everyone in medieval society? What would you do, as a medieval person, if you were faced with an additional economic hurdle of social prejudice? In today's class, I'd like you to begin to consider the economic ramifications of prejudice. In western medieval Europe, both Jews and women experienced discrimination and exclusion, albeit to varying degrees across time and place (in the case of Jewish people, it could

even culminate in their murders or expulsion from home and country). Who economically benefited from social prejudice in medieval western Europe? To what extent could individuals counteract legal and social policies that sought to economically subordinate and/or exploit them?

Jews:

Yoram Barzel, "Confiscation by the Ruler: The Rise and Fall of Jewish Lending in the Middle Ages," *Journal of Law and Economics* 35 (1992): 1-13.

Maristella Botticini, "A Tale of 'Benevolent' Governments: Private Credit Markets, Public Finance, and the Role of Jewish Lenders in Medieval and Renaissance Italy," *Journal of Economic History* 60 (2000): 164-189.

Maristella Botticini and Zvi Eckstein, "Jewish Occupational Selection: Education, Restrictions, or Minorities?" *Journal of Economic History* 65 (2005): 922-948. (Discusses the situation of Jews in the Muslim Empire but also pertains to Jews in western Europe.)

Women:

Judith Bennett, *Ale, Beer and Brewsters in England: Women's Work in a Changing World, 1300-1600* (Oxford, 1996), read Chapter 8 (pp. 145-157) and skim Chapters 5 to 7.

Maryanne Kowaleski and Judith Bennett, "Crafts, Gilds, and Women in the Middle Ages: Fifty Years After Marian K. Dale," *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society* 14 (1989): 474-88.

Margaret Wensky, "Women's Guilds in Cologne in the Later Middle Ages," *Journal of European Economic History* 11 (1982): 631-50.

April 6: Last class! Historical Documents: merchant letters and diaries. Short analysis of one document type due in class. Students will present and compare their findings for discussion.

April 7: Annotated Bibliography due. Please leave in the History Department's essay drop-box located outside the History's Departmental Office (Lawson Hall, Room 2201).

I look forward to getting to know each one of you this term. Please feel free to drop by my office to discuss the readings, historical documents or just to chat.

Professor "K"