Eco 301Y1: The Economic History of Later Medieval and Early-Modern Europe

Topic 2 [3]: The Problem of Serfdom in European Economic Development, II: The Spread of Serfdom in Eastern Europe, ca. 1400 - ca. 1700

Recommended readings: the more important ones are indicated by asterisks *


3. Markus Cerman, ‘Demesne Lordship and Rural Society in Early-Modern East Central and Eastern Europe: Comparative Perspectives’, in Markus Cerman and Richard Hoyle, eds, Demesne Lordship and Rural Society in Early Modern East Central and Eastern Europe, ca. 1500 - c. 1800. Special edition of Agricultural History Review, 59:ii (2011), 239-58. Offers a different perspective from that of Blum and Brenner (above). See also the other essays in this important volume; and the following book.


24. F. L. Carsten, ‘The Origins of the Junkers’, *English Historical Review*, 62 (1947), 145 - 78. Though now a very old article, it does provide valuable additional information for a better perspective on the Blum article (no.1).  

**QUESTIONS:**  

1. What are the benefits and costs of serfdom for the manorial or estate landlord; and for the servile peasants. What are the benefits (if any) and costs for European economic development? Was serfdom a barrier to economic growth in eastern Europe, and a major factor that explains why eastern Europe lagged behind western Europe in modern economic development and industrialization?  
2. What were the primary and secondary causes of the spread of serfdom into eastern Europe -- what is sometimes called ‘The Second Serfdom’? Why did serfdom increase, expand its extent, in eastern Europe while it was dying out as an institution in western Europe?  
3. Explain the regional variations in the spread of serfdom in eastern Europe, from the 14th to 17th centuries in East Prussia, Poland, Lithuania, Russia, Hungary, etc. Is there any common explanation for the spread of serfdom?  
4. Discuss the Brenner thesis: how valid and valuable are demographic, commercial or market models
in explaining the expansion of serfdom in the East? What is the relevance of institutional factors, especially feudal and state or monarchical institutions in this debate?

5. Why did serfdom last so long -- until the mid to late 19th century -- in much of eastern Europe?