Topic 2 [2]: The Problem of Serfdom in European Economic Development,

I: The Decline of Serfdom in Late-Medieval Western Europe

A. General and Theoretical Studies: for Medieval Europe, West and East:


  * (c) Leopold Genicot, ‘Crisis: From the Middle Ages to Modern Times’, pp. 660-742, especially pp. 725-38.


B. On Late-Medieval England:


*14.** Judith M. Bennett, ‘Compulsory Service in Late Medieval England’, *Past & Present*, no. 209
QUESTIONS:

1. What specific economic, social, and legal conditions defined serfdom or villeinage in Western Europe: with what regional variations? To what extent was serfdom a barrier to agrarian change and economic development? What were the costs and benefits of serfdom: for peasants and lords?

2. Explain the basic features and causes of the decline of serfdom in late-medieval western Europe. Compare and contrast that decline in England and in the north-west continent: in France, Low Countries, Germany. What explains the differences? Why was serfdom declining in some regions while being strengthened in others, in late-medieval Europe? What were the basic differences between western and eastern Europe concerning the institution of serfdom during the late medieval and early modern eras?

3. What impact did the Black Death and depopulation have upon the institutions of feudalism, manorialism, and serfdom in western Europe?

4. What were the various causes of peasant revolts in England, and elsewhere in late-medieval western Europe?

5. Discuss the Brenner thesis and his critics. How have various historians used similar demographic, and/or market/commercial models to explain both the rise and the decline of serfdom, in both western and eastern Europe? How can such contrary uses of the same economic models be reconciled -- especially by including a subset of institutional models?

6. Which classes or social-strata of English peasants gained – in terms of landholdings, real incomes, and social status – in later medieval England, from the 13th to early 16th centuries. And, in these same terms, which groups, classes, or social-strata of the peasantry lost.

7. How did former villeins or peasant serfs become copy-holders in 15th-century England. How did their social and economic status differ from ‘free’ peasants, both those who owned or held properties by hereditary tenures, and those who leased lands by contracts for specific terms – numbers of years?