

**ECO 2210Y**

**No. 4: Manorial Agriculture: How and Why did Northern ‘Open’ or ‘Common’ Fields Function?**

**The Bloch Thesis and General Surveys:**

1. Marc Bloch, French Rural History: An Essay on Its Basic Characteristics (1966 edn.), chapter 2, pp. 35-64.
2. Michael Postan, The Medieval Economy and Society (Cambridge, 1972), pp. 41-72.
- \*3. Rosemary L. Hopcroft, ‘The Origins of Regular Open-Field Systems in Pre-Industrial Europe,’ Journal of European Economic History, 23:3 (Winter 1994), 563-80. Most recent survey.
4. Richard Hoffmann, ‘Medieval Origins of the Common Fields,’ in W. Parker and E. L. Jones, eds., European Peasants and Their Markets: Essays in Agrarian Economic History (1975), pp. 23-71.

**The Thirsk Debate**

5. Joan Thirsk, ‘The Common Fields,’ Past and Present, no. 29 (Dec. 1964), pp. 3-25.
6. Jan Z. Titow, ‘Medieval England and the Open-Field System,’ Past and Present, no. 32 (1966), pp. 86-102. An attack on the Thirsk thesis.
7. Joan Thirsk, ‘The Origin of the Common Fields,’ Past and Present, no. 33 (1966), pp. 142-47. Her reply to Titow.
8. George C. Homans, ‘The Explanation of English Regional Differences,’ Past and Present, no. 42 (1969), pp. 18-34. Continuing the debate.

**The McCloskey Thesis and its Critics**

9. Donald McCloskey, ‘The Persistence of English Common Fields,’ in W.N. Parker and E.L. Jones, eds., European Peasants and Their Markets (1975), pp. 93-120; also his ‘English Open Fields as Behavior Towards Risk,’ Research in Economic History, 1 (1976), 124-70.
10. Stefano Fenoaltea, ‘Risk, Transaction Costs, and the Organization of Medieval Agriculture,’ Explorations in Economic History, 13 (Apr 1976), 129-51; and Donald McCloskey, ‘Fenoaltea on Open Fields: A Reply,’ Explorations in Economic History, 14 (Oct 1977), 405-10.
11. Michael Mazur, ‘The Dispersion of Holdings in the Open Fields: An Interpretation in Terms of Property Rights,’ Journal of European Economic History, 6:2 (Fall 1977), 461-71. Then see: Donald McCloskey, ‘Scattering in Open Fields: a Comment,’ and Michael Mazur, ‘Scattering in Open Fields: A Reply,’ both in Journal of European Economic History, 9 (1980), 209-14, and 215-18.

12. D.N. McCloskey, 'The Prudent Peasant: New Findings on Open Fields,' Journal of Economic History, 51 (June 1991), 343-55. The latest by McCloskey; but see also his recent articles and debates with John Komlos in C. 42, 46, 48-9.
13. M. M. Cosgel, 'Risk Sharing in Medieval Agriculture,' Journal of European Economic History, 21:1 (Spring 1992), 99 - 110.

**The Dahlman and Campbell Theses and Other Views:**

- \*14. C.J. Dahlman, The Open Field System and Beyond (1980), See chapter 2, 'Theories of the Open Field System,' pp. 16-64; and chapter 4, 'The Economics of Commons, Open Fields, and Scattered Strips,' pp. 93-145.
- \*15. J.A. Yelling, 'Rationality in Common Fields,' Economic History Review, 2nd ser.35 (1982), 409-15: a critique of the McCloskey & Dahlman theses
16. Trevor Rowley, ed., The Origins of Open Field Agriculture (1981): the following essays:
  - a) H. S. A. Fox, 'Approaches to the Adoption of the Midland System,' pp. 64 - 111.
  - b) Bruce Campbell, 'Commonfield Origins: The Regional Dimension,' pp. 112-29.
  - c) Robert Dodgshon, 'The Interpretation of Subdivided Fields: A Study in Private or Communal Interests?' pp. 130-44.
17. Eric Kerridge, The Common Fields of England (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1992). A recent survey that has not pleased all agrarian historians.
- \* 18. Gregory Clark, 'Commons Sense: Common Property Rights, Efficiency, and Institutional Change,' Journal of Economic History, 58:1 (March 1998), 73-102. A broader view, covering later periods.

**QUESTIONS:**

1. Explain the origins, form and organization, economics, and especially the persistence of common or open field systems in northern Europe.
2. Explain why the open or common field system was found chiefly in: (a) northern Europe -- north of the Loire and Danube Rivers; (b) chiefly in strongly feudalized manorial regions; (c) regions of high population densities; (d) agricultural regions that practised a mixed farming that combined arable (heavily grain-oriented and livestock husbandry ('sheep and corn'))?
3. Why were the English Midlands, with parts of East Anglia, the chief zone for open-field farming. To what extent does the physical, economic, social, cultural, and 'political-institutional' geography of this region fit the components listed in no. 2 above.
3. Examine critically the various theses to explain its origins and persistence: by March Bloch, Joan Thirsk, Donald McCloskey, Carl Dahlman, Bruce Campbell, Gregory Clark.
4. What were the benefits and costs of open-field farming? Were common/open fields a barrier to agrarian and economic change?
5. How did three-course crop rotation systems evolve with open-field farming? What were the benefits and costs?