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## ECO 2210Y

### Topic 6: The Decline of Serfdom in Late-Medieval Western Europe, 13th - 15th Centuries

#### **READINGS: Continental Late-Medieval Europe: General**

1. Marc Bloch, French Rural History: An Essay on its Basic Characteristics (1966), chapters IV and V, pp. 102-97; and also his Seigneurie française et manoir anglais (Cahiers des Annales no. 16, Paris, 1967), pp. 90 - 135 (skim read much of this).
2. Georges Duby, Rural Economy and Country Life in the Medieval West (1962), pp. 232 - 59, and 312 - 57.
3. François Ganshof and Adriaan Verhulst, 'Medieval Agrarian Society in its Prime: France, The Low Countries, and Western Germany,' Cambridge Economic History, Vol. I: Agrarian Life (1966), pp. 305-39.
4. Thomas W. Robisheaux, 'The World of the Village,' in Thomas A. Brady, jr., Heiko O. Oberman, and James D. Tracy, eds., Handbook of European History, 1400-1600: Late Middle Ages, Renaissance and Reformation, Vol. I: Structures and Assertions (Leiden/New York/Cologne: E.J. Brill, 1994), pp. 79-112. [Much of this lies beyond our period, but is still valuable]
5. William H. TeBrake, A Plague of Insurrection: Popular Politics and Peasant Revolt in Flanders, 1323 - 1328 (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1993).

#### **England: 13th - 15th Centuries**

- \*6. Michael Postan, The Medieval Economy and Society (1972), chapter 9, 'The Villagers: Serfdom and Freedom,' pp. 143-55. And also Postan, Essays on Medieval Agriculture and General Problems of the Medieval Economy (1973), especially 'Chronology of Labour Services,' pp. 89-106; 'Legal Status and Economic Conditions in Medieval Villages,' pp. 278-90.
- \* 7. Clyde G. Reed and Anne-Marie Dross, 'Labour Services in the Thirteenth Century,' The Journal of European Economic History, 26:2 (Fall 1997), 333-46.
- \* 8. John Hatcher, 'English Serfdom and Villeinage: Towards a Reassessment,' Past and Present, no. 90 (Feb. 1981), 3-39.
- \* 9. Mark Bailey, 'Peasant Welfare in England, 1290 - 1348,' The Economic History Review, 2nd ser., 51:2 (May 1998), 223-51.
10. Rodney H. Hilton, The Decline of Serfdom in Medieval England (Studies in Economic History series, London, 1969), pp. 9-59.

11. Rodney H. Hilton, Class Conflict and the Crisis of Feudalism: Essays in Medieval Social History (1985), especially: 'Peasant Movements in England Before 1381,' pp. 122-38; 'Popular Movements in England at the End of the Fourteenth Century,' pp. 152-64; 'Social Concepts in the English Rising of 1381,' pp. 216-26.
12. R.A. Dobson, ed., The Peasants' Revolt of 1381 (London, 1970).
- \*13. R.H. Hilton and T.H. Aston, eds., The English Rising of 1381, Past and Present Publications (Cambridge, 1984.) Essays by Hilton, Dyer, Faith, Cazelles, Butcher, Dobson, Cohn, Harding, Tuck. See especially: Christopher Dyer, 'The Social and Economic Background to the Rural Revolt of 1381,' pp. 9-42.
- \*14. W. M. Ormrod, 'The Peasants' Revolt and the Government of England,' Journal of British Studies, 29 (January 1990), 1 - 30.
- \*15. Richard H. Britnell, 'Feudal Reaction after the Black Death in the Palatinate of Durham,' Past & Present, no. 128 (August 1990), pp. 28-47.
16. J.M.W. Bean, 'Landlords,' and E.B. Fryde, 'Peasant Rebellion and Peasant Discontents,' in Edward Miller, ed., The Agrarian History of England and Wales, Vol. III: 1348 - 1500 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), pp. 526-86, 744-819.
- \*17. David Farmer, 'The *famuli* in the Later Middle Ages,' and Ambrose Raftis, 'Peasants and the Collapse of the Manorial Economy on Some Ramsey Abbey Estates,' in Richard Britnell and John Hatcher, eds., Progress and Problems in Medieval England: Essays in Honour of Edward Miller (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 1996), pp. 191-206, 207-36.
- \*18. Robert Brenner, 'Agrarian Class Structure and Economic Development in Pre-Industrial Europe,' Past and Present, no. 70 (February 1976), pp. 30-74, reprinted in Aston and Philpin, The Brenner Debate: Agrarian Class Structure and Economic Development in Pre-Industrial Europe (Cambridge, 1985), pp. 10 - 63. A very important study, a contentious but seminal article that must be read, but after the others; and its primary discussion will be left for the following session.

### **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 the north-west continent: France, Low Countries, Germany. How much of the decline in western serfdom came before the Black Death, and how much came after?
3. Was the Black Death followed by a 'feudal reaction' that attempted to reimpose elements of serfdom or to strengthen existing conditions? If you believe that there was such a 'feudal reaction' did it succeed or fail -- in the short run and in the longer run? Explain why.

4. How useful are demographic, commercial, institutional and other models in explaining the decline of serfdom: in all its various forms? Why is population growth and commercialized agriculture evidently accompanied by intensified serfdom in some regions but by a relaxation of serfdom in others; why is population decline (evidently) accompanied, in some regions, by intensified serfdom, but by a reduction of servile bonds in other regions?