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The Economic History of Later-Medieval and Early-Modern Europe

LECTURE TOPIC NO. 7: part 1

III. LATE-MEDIEVAL AGRICULTURE: Changes in Later Medieval Agrarian European Society, from c. 1300 - c. 1520

A. Late-Medieval Peasant Serfdom: Its Decline in the West and Rise in the East

IV. LATE-MEDIEVAL EUROPEAN AGRICULTURE:

Changes in Later Medieval Agrarian Society, in Europe, West and East, from c. 1300 - c. 1520

A. Late-Medieval Peasant Serfdom: Its Decline in the West and Rise in the East

1. Major Changes in Medieval and Early Modern Serfdom in Europe: West and East

a) A Mirror-Image Dichotomy: of late-medieval socio-economic changes involving serfdom:

- the decline of serfdom in Western Europe and
- the almost contemporary rise and expansion of a so-called 'Second Serfdom' in Eastern Europe (Europe east of the Elbe river, in Germany).

i) **This remarkable socio-economic phenomena involving European serfdom:** marks one the great watersheds in the evolution of the European and indeed world economies:

(1) The decline and eventual disappearance of western serfdom, by the later 15th, early 16th century:

- this major institutional barrier to agrarian development, is surely one of the very major or key factors that help to explain
- the subsequent economic development and eventual industrialization of western, and especially north-western Europe (England and the Low Countries)

(2) Similarly the spreading stain of serfdom in eastern Europe,

- in Europe east of the Elbe river: Mecklenburg, Brandenburg-Pomerania, Prussia, Poland, Lithuania and the Courland, Russia, Hungary, Rumania, Bulgaria, Bohemia, etc.
- is also one of the major factors that explain why eastern Europe lagged so far behind western Europe in economic development from the 16th century -- relative economic retrogression of all of eastern Europe, to the Ural Mountains.

b) The peasantry in eastern Europe: the transition from relative freedom to serfdom

i) **Originally, the Germanic conquests of the eastern Slavic lands,** and subsequent colonization, during the later 12th and 13th centuries, brought new freedoms for at least the western settlers.

(1) much of the newly settled western peasantry in the East experienced a degree of freedom largely unknown in much of the West (or certainly in north-western Europe, west of the Elbe river in Germany).

(2) that eastern peasant freedom was necessary to attract colonists and settlers from the West

(3) but probably the newly settled agricultural settlers from the West enjoyed more freedoms than did the indigenous native and now conquered Slavic and other peasants.

(4) thus it must be noted, with some emphasis, that many of the indigenous Slavic, Prussian, and Baltic peasants were unfree, with varying conditions of what must be called serfdom, imposed by Slavic and other native landlords

ii) Subsequently, from the 15th and 16th centuries,

(1) more and more of the German and other eastern peasantry lost their freedom

(2) as they became engulfed in a spreading stain of the 'second serfdom', as it is often called, for reasons to be explained later.

iii) **To repeat:** this serfdom remained a very powerful barrier to agricultural and general economic

development in eastern Europe up to the later 19th, and in Russia itself, to the early 20th century.

iv) **So we must examine that combination of economic (including demographic), institutional, and socio-cultural factors that help to explain this widening dichotomy between East and West:** from the 13th to 16th centuries, the decline of serfdom in the West and its rise in the East..

c) **For proper historical and proper economic perspectives,** we must begin with an analysis of the economic and institutional forces promoting the eventual disappearance of serfdom in the West.

i) **We will thus be inquiring into the forces that promoted agrarian change and increased productivity in the agricultural sector of Western Europe,** with the decline of serfdom.

iii) **though one question about serfdom remains unanswered:** why did feudal lords seek to oppress their peasant tenants (or those that they could) and deny them full freedom?

2. The Erosion and Decline of Serfdom in the West Before the Black Death: Chief Factors

a) **Economic Factors in the slow erosion of serfdom in medieval western Europe up to the Black Death:** various historians have offered the following hypotheses to explain the slow erosion of serfdom in western Europe (west of the Elbe) during from the 12th and 13th centuries:

i) **population growth during 12th and 13th centuries:**

(1) This thesis is the mirror image of the Bloch Model, discussed last day: i.e., Bloch's contention that serfdom had risen in early medieval Europe in response to labour scarcities:

- the reduction and virtual elimination of a slave supply with the Pax Romana
- and, from the 3rd to 10th centuries, a very substantial decline in population

(2) Thus the rapid population growth that accompanied the 'Birth of Europe' and the ensuing Commercial Revolution era ultimately created excess supplies of labour, perhaps by the later 13th century.

- as we saw earlier, in discussing the economics of Open Field farming under northern manorialism, that population growth in many cases produced disguised unemployment
- although admittedly disguised unemployment did not necessarily lead to peasant emancipation, many manorial landlords did realize that peasant bondage was no longer necessary to guarantee an adequate supply of labour.

(3) In particular population growth provided a larger and larger supply of a free but landless labour supply that was willing to work harder than serfs for cash wages.

ii) **Expansion of landed settlement in both western and especially eastern Europe:**

(1) new lands had to be carved out and settled by colonists, and such colonists, as just noted, could be attracted only by guarantees of personal freedom.

(2) Many serfs escaped their estates to settle such lands, in both the West and the East, but principally the East: to gain both more land and full freedom.

(3) Thus, in order to prevent an excess outflow of servile labour, it has been argued:

- that western manorial lords were forced to offer better conditions to their serfs,
- in order to prevent them from emigrating, when royal power was unable or unwilling to police and enforce serfdom.

(4) The evidence for this, however, seems rather weak, even on the continent;

(5) It is especially difficult to believe that such eastern settlements could have had any discernible impact on peasants and servile status in the rather isolated island of Britain (i.e., in England, in particular, since there was little if any serfdom in Wales and Scotland).

iii) **Similarly, growth of towns as magnets of personal freedom:**

(1) western medieval towns grew rapidly from the 11th century, and

- they grew principally from rural immigration (since urban death rates normally exceeded birth rates, until the 19th century)
- many of them were indeed refugee serfs fleeing from their manorial tenancies.

(2) **Town inhabitants were universally free:** by common medieval custom, those serfs who successfully established urban residence for a year plus a day could claim full freedom.

(3) Again, to the extent that urban growth provided such a magnet for freedom, manorial lords were forced to improve or ameliorate the conditions of their servile tenants

(4) This argument seems logically more compelling than those related to the eastern settlements;

(5) but again the evidence is tenuous, especially for England.

iv) **The growth of town markets, monetary payments, and the commercialization of agriculture:**

(1) markets, either in regional fairs or towns, gave some peasants the incentive and opportunity to produce surpluses for cash sales;

(2) That obviously also depended on the spread of monetary payments: both in the form of coins and of credit (to be discussed in a subsequent lecture for this term)

(3) General implications: the conversion of manorial rents from a combination of labour services and payments in kind (share of harvest) to full rental payment in cash: and defined in fixed money-of-account terms.

(4) Also: many servile peasants were thus enabled, with such cash sales, to purchase better and freer status from their manorial lords.

(5) *Commutation*: was one common method

- that meant the conversion of services into money rents,
- this peasant commutation was not, however, a permanent condition,
- but granted only on an annual or periodic basis.

(6) *Manumission* is the formal term for the outright purchase (or grant of) total freedom from all servile constraints and restraints.

(7) This argument has merit only if feudal manorial lords were not interested in running their demesne estates (domains) as market-oriented enterprises for profitable incomes themselves.

(8) Nevertheless, many lords came to see the wisdom of using money rents (and other sources of money incomes from the demesne)

- to hire landless, free wage-labour,
- and thus dispense with servile labour services
- on the grounds that the productivity of free labour much higher
- while servile labour was not 'free': lords had to pay 'boonwork', supply meat & drink

v) **feudal-manorial demand for ready-cash incomes:**

(1) many manorial lords, however, especially in continental western Europe,

- evidently had little time and interest in running their demesnes for profit,
- because they were too absorbed with their military activities, their governmental roles, or their attendance at royal courts, etc.

(2) And so (it is argued), such feudal lords would have preferred to receive steady cash incomes from a larger rent roll, to help finance their military and other feudal roles in society

(3) Thus increasingly they carved up their demesne into leasehold tenancies

- for annual cash rentals (to be renegotiated when the leases expired),
- these lands were usually leased as bundles of scattered, interspersed strips,
- as were the other tenancies, in enlargements of the village Open Fields.

(4) and as their central estate or domain contracted, so obviously did their need for servile labour.

(5) In so far as they needed part-time rural labour, they found it cheaper and simpler to hire free, landless labour (as noted, created or increased in supply by demographic growth).¹

(6) Many also allowed the remainder of their demesnes to become separated and intermingled strips: i.e., cast in with the village tenancy strips of the great Open Fields and so interspersed with peasant tenancy strips.

(7) gains for the lord:

- to take advantage of communal ploughing of the Open Fields and
- advantage of communal grazing and 'folding' of village livestock, for manuring the arable and post-harvest open fields

vi) **growth of peasant land markets, at same time:**

(1) in which servile peasants bought free lands, and free peasants bought servile lands, with servile obligations attached to them.

(2) Similarly, when peasants, both free and servile, leased (rented on a contractual basis) demesne (domain) lands from the manorial lord, often in the form of scattered plough strips (interspersed with those retained by the manorial lord).

(3) That obviously added to the confusion of social status, in that servility was attached more and more to the tenancies, i.e., to the land worked, than to the person.

b) Institutional Factors in the Decline of Western Serfdom: the Church

i) **The Church and personal freedoms:**

(1) The Church, following well developed ecclesiastical doctrines, viewed serfdom as akin to slavery, a condition foreign to its conception of human equality;

(2) and thus to some degree church doctrines, church preaching, promoted peasant emancipation.

ii) **But the Church was also as one of the biggest landholders in medieval society:**

(1) holding such vast monastic and episcopal estates, the Church was thus also a major employer and oppressor of peasant serfs, according to Bruce Campbell in particular.

¹ An explanation for a similar situation in 17th century Prussia-Poland is offered in the next topic, on the rise of serfdom in eastern Europe.

(2) In England, certainly, often more oppressive than lay landlords.

c) Political and Institutional Factors: Royal and manorial courts

i) royal courts in France: as previously noted,

(1) **the Parlement de Paris, as the highest royal court, sought to reduce**, or eliminate feudal aristocratic power in various parts of France, from the later 13th and 14th centuries;

(2) **a major means of doing so was to challenge or undermine the nobles' seigniorial (manorial) courts**, especially in their dealings with the peasantry, and especially to promote peasant property rights.

ii) royal courts in England: As already suggested, that was far less true of later medieval England:

(1) The precocious advance of royal courts and common law from the mid 12th century, after the end of the baronial civil wars – i.e., in the reign of King Henry II, 1154-1189 – was necessarily achieved with compromises,

- so that royal justice over purely civil matters (tenurial rights) stopped at the gates of the manor,
- thus limiting royal judicial powers to criminal matters (matters of 'life and limb'),
- while permitting manorial courts full jurisdiction over property rights and civil matters.
- but, as also noted last day, the king, being a major feudal-manorial estate owner, did not want royal justice interfering with his own rule over his own manorial peasantry.

(2) That judicial limitation concerning civil law, tenure, and property rights was a major factor why at least some forms of serfdom remained more deeply entrenched in England: that is, in the manorial regions of England, especially the Midlands.

iii) The peculiar role of manorial courts in England:

(1) **In England, ironically, this manorial institution**, which was originally devised and deemed to be an instrument of oppression, for the enforcement of the lord's police powers,

(2) but: it came to be a major force for the gradual erosion of serfdom, for the gradual improvement of his social status,

(3) especially when manorial courts came to be dominated by the peasant village community.

(4) **When manorial courts made a judicial ruling**, these judgements were recorded as part of the so-called 'customs of the manor.'

- Thus if a peasant could claim before the manorial court that some privilege or arrangement or relationship or use of land had 'been the habitual practice and custom of the manor for so long that no man present has any memory of the contrary.'
- If no one could refute his claim, then that was recorded as the official custom of the manor, which neither lord nor peasant could violate without serious consequences.

(5) **Hence, as also noted earlier: the resulting balance of power between the will and power of the lord and the custom of the manor: voluntas vs. consuetudines**

- this conflict between *voluntas* [of the landlord] and *consuetudines* [the collection of peasant customs and customary law],
- largely determined the division of the surplus, or the relative shares in dividing up the growing economic rent on land.
- along with the collective strength of the peasant village community.

(6) **in particular manorial courts came to fix tenancy rents:** and defined money rents in terms of nominal money-of-account – as customary rents: almost impossible to change

- Thus peasants could actually gain a larger and larger share of the economic rent produced:
- to extent that peasant obligations to the manorial lord became fixed by the lord,
- and recorded by the manorial courts ('customary rolls' -- recording the 'customs' of the manor),
- and to the extent that manorial agriculture became market oriented

(7) the servile peasants gained in particular in gaining more 'economic rent' (Ricardian rent) from the rising agricultural prices,

- so long as their rental obligations were paid largely in cash, and
- so long as those cash rentals were fixed in money-of-account terms: i.e., in shillings and pence of the currently circulating silver money.
- thus a growing gap between market prices for their output and fixed rentals paid

iv) **These institutional factors, especially those determining the relative powers of the lord and the peasant community,** may have been, at certain times and places, more important than immediate economic factors in eroding the conditions of serfdom in western Europe.

e) **The peculiar case of England during the 'Long Thirteenth Century', 1180 - 1320: The Postan Thesis on the 'Reintensification of English Serfdom'.²**

i) **According to the late great Cambridge economic historian, Michael Postan,** medieval England, at least during the specific period of c.1180 - c. 1320,

- (1) did not experience an erosion of serfdom, as is so commonly portrayed on the continent,
- (2) but rather the opposite: the intensification of serfdom,
- (3) or, rather, an intensified demand for servile labour dues from much of the feudal landlord classes.

ii) **Postan's key arguments to sustain this thesis:**

(1) that during this very period, commonly called so-called 'long thirteenth century' (1180-1320), the agrarian sector experienced both:

- the consequences of demographic growth, with steadily rising prices for grains and wool,
- and a much more commercialized agriculture, in response indeed to a veritable export boom in both of these agrarian commodities: wheat and wool.

(2) Those combined economic forces – steeply rising prices and rising export demands for wool and grain – induced many feudal landlords, lay and ecclesiastical, to treat their domains (demesnes) as profit-making commercial enterprises.

iii) **The question of real rents:**

(1) He and others have also contended that the inflation of this era continuously diminished the value of fixed rentals (i.e., allowing the renting-tenant to capture more of the rising economic rent);

² See Michael Postan, 'The Chronology of Labour Services', *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society*, 4th ser. 20 (1937), 169-93; subsequently, a revised version was published in W. E. Minchinton, ed., *Essays in Agrarian History*, Vol. I (Newton Abbot, 1968), pp. 73 - 91, which in turn was reprinted in Michael Postan, *Essays on Medieval Agriculture and General Problems of the Medieval Economy* (Cambridge, 1973), pp. 89-106.

- (2) Inflation thus made direct exploit of the demesne more attractive;
- (3) but leases of the demesne were usually short term;
- (4) and renegotiations should have allowed the manorial lord to recapture rents on new leases (or re-leases)
- (5) furthermore, this argument does not adequately explain why lords would have preferred to use enforced servile labour services rather than hired labour,

- especially when continuously rising population growth may have led to diminishing returns, with excess supplies of peasant labour on estates
- similarly, the growing supply of landless labour should have led to a fall in their wages, if not nominal then at least in terms of real wages ($W_L = MRP_L$)
- at the same time, serfs had a far greater incentive to shirk than hired labour (who, if caught shirking, could be easily dismissed, i.e., fired).

iv) **an explanation for increased exactions of servile labour dues**

(1) As the graph shows, agricultural commodity prices were rising steeply during the 13th century (when there was no coinage debasements)

(2) As John Hatcher, has argued, servile tenants in this era benefited from manorial customs that fixed annual money rents – fixed in money of account terms – again in the form of rising economic rents.³

(3) A reminder: who captured the Ricardian rents?

- consequently, as was demonstrated earlier with Ricardo's theory of economic rent,
- the rising economic rent on agricultural land would have been captured by the servile peasant tenants, rather than by the feudal landlord.

(4) Thus, the only way in which the landlord could hope to appropriate some of that accrued economic rent was in requiring the servile peasants to increase their rental payments in the form of increased labour services on the domain land.

(5) Consequently, in so far as landlords were able to achieve that goal, they had little or no incentive to hire free labour to work the demesne properties.

(6) apart from needing extra labour at harvest time (or spring/Fall planting).

(7) In so doing, by increasing market production from their demesne lands, they would also strive to acquire more of the economic rent on their properties that was being created by rising agricultural prices, especially for both wool and what (see graph).

v) **The consequences:** in intensified domain agriculture by the greater landlords:

(1) In Postan's view, many English manorial lords were able to do so,

- much more so than their continental feudal counterparts,
- precisely because -- with relative peace and more centralized royal rule in England, after the reign of Henry II (1154-89) – they were or became far less involved in military activities, court, and other feudal activities.

³ John Hatcher, 'English Serfdom and Villeinage: Towards a Reassessment', *Past and Present*, no. 90 (Feb. 1981), 3-39. Reprinted in T. H. Aston, ed., *Landlords, Peasants and Politics in Medieval England* (Cambridge, 1987), pp. 247-84.

(2) In focusing more and more upon their domain economies as profit-making enterprises, they

- sought to increase their profits by extracting as much labour as possible from their tenants:
- i.e., with compulsory labour services from their servile peasants under their jurisdiction.

(3) And thus, from the 1180s, a reversal of commutation, and leasing-out of demesne lands, that had been present as such lords increased their demands for labours services on the demesne.

vi) **from Grundherrschaft to Gutsherrschaft:** in effect, these 13th-century English manorial lords had a rational economic motive to shift their sources of manorial income from a *Grundherrschaft* basis to a *Gutsherrschaft* basis: i.e., as discussed earlier (and now repeated):

(1) from a system based fundamentally:

- on rents from peasant tenancies (*Grundherrschaft*) to
- one based on the commercial (market-oriented) exploitation of the demesne lands (*Gutsherrschaft*), using principally servile labour services

(2) We will see the fullest development of the latter when we come to the late-medieval, early-modern 'Second Serfdom' in eastern Europe (east of the German Elbe river).

vii) **Marc Bloch and the Postan thesis:**

(1) To the extent that Marc Bloch's dichotomy on manorialism in France and England holds true –

- namely, that English feudal landlords managed to retain more powerful manorial courts, as instruments of peasant oppression,
- i.e., that was much more free from royal interference than was true on the continent (in France in particular)
- then the Postan thesis does seem to have or should have some merit worthy of consideration

(2) Nevertheless, Postan failed to provide any substantial evidence for any such re-intensification of serfdom in England during the 'long thirteenth century'.

viii) **The Reed-Drosso Model:** a recent review and revision of this thesis:⁴

(1) They argue a position that may now be considered generally accepted, indeed commonplace: that

- while rents on leased portions of the demesne were flexible on short-term contracts,
- those on servile 'customary' holdings were fixed, unless adjusted by commutations.

(2) They thus argue that English manorial lords had a strong incentive to increase the price of commuting labour services into higher annual rents on customary holdings, especially with rising economic rents on lands (rising grain prices) and a growing scarcity of rental land.

(3) In opposition to their manorial lords, customary tenants believed that fixed rentals were the strongest symbol of their inheritance rights:

- that flexible rents would give the manorial lord a greater claim subsequently to incorporate their tenancies in the demesne (a very dubious argument).
- and that most tenants resisted any such rental increases (preferring to keep their own portions of the rising economic rents),

⁴ Clyde G. Reed and A.M. Drosso, 'Labour Services in the Thirteenth Century', *Journal of European Economic History*, 26:2 (Fall 1997), 333-45.

- and thus they preferred to supply labour services rather than agree to money rent increases.

(4) Finally, they argue that landlords were also in accord with this option, since the exaction of labour services also provided the strongest evidence of servile status of customary tenants.

(5) Like Postan, they really fail to provide any convincing documentary evidence for their case – more of any hypothesis than a theory.

f) Bruce Campbell's Revisionist Views on Serfdom in 14th-England before the Black Death:

i) **Professor Bruce Campbell (Belfast), one of Britain's most eminent agrarian and economic historians,** has recently provided the following data and revisionist observations about the extent of serfdom and servile oppression in later-medieval England:⁵

(1) that free peasants produced 43% of total rental values on tenant lands on lay manorial estates

(2) and thus that servile or customary (or villein) tenants produced 57% of total manorial rent (tenancy) incomes.

(3) These proportions, however, obviously varied by the size of the manors:

- On small manors (worth under £10), 55% were freehold, 45% were villein
- On large manors (worth over £50), only 38% were free, and thus 62% were servile

Free and Villein Rents and Services on Lay Manors, 1300 - 1349:

Estimated Percentage of Rents and Services by Value

Type of Rent	Small Manors worth under £10 per year	Large Manors worth more than £50 per year	All Manors
Free Rents	24.6	15.8	18.4
Free Assize Rents	7.9	6.2	6.5
Unspecified Assizes	18.6	12.1	14.2
Unspecified Rents	3.9	3.8	3.8
TOTAL FREE RENTS	55.0	37.9	42.9
Villein Rents	26.3	30.1	29.1
Villein Assize Rents	1.7	3.6	3.2
Unspecified Assizes	4.6	8.1	7.1
Unspecified Rents	4.8	7.5	5.8
TOTAL VILLEIN RENTS	37.4	49.3	45.2

⁵ Bruce Campbell, 'The Agrarian Problem in the Early Fourteenth Century', *Past & Present*, no. 188 (August 2005), pp. 1-69. See also his recently published book: Bruce M.S. Campbell, *English Seigniorial Agriculture, 1250 - 1450*, Cambridge Studies in Historical Geography no. 31 (Cambridge, 2000); but this magisterial and indispensable book has little on the question of serfdom and its decline, though much on the economics of agrarian change that facilitated that decline.

Type of Rent	Small Manors worth under £10 per year	Large Manors worth more than £50 per year	All Manors
Unspecified Villein Services	7.5	12.9	12.0
TOTAL VILLEIN RENTS & SERVICES	44.9	62.2	57.2
no. of manors	1,910	334	4,090
Mean value of rents & services	£2.3	£38.2	£9.3
Mean Value of manor	£4.8	£85.5	£19.1
Percentage free land	70	55	60
Percentage villein land	30	45	40

Bruce Campbell, 'The Agrarian Problem in the Early Fourteenth Century', *Past & Present*, no. 188 (August 2005), Table 4, p. 27

(3) He further agrees, however, with the standard view that ecclesiastical estates generally had a higher proportion of customary-servile tenants than did lay or secular estates

(4) On the other hand, but based on the assumption that rents per acre on villein (servile) lands were on average double those on freehold land, he estimate that, overall – again on lay estates only – that the ratio of freehold land to villein land was about 60:40

(4) The question of labour services, as indicated earlier, but to be repeated here:

- that labour services had become much less required and much less arduous, so that most customary-servile tenants were paying money-rents
- labour services around 1300 were only 7.5% of seigniorial incomes on small manors,
- but somewhat larger, 12.9%, on large manors (those worth more than £50).
- and about the same: 12.0% as the mean for all manors

(5) He also contends that not all labour rents were in fact rendered in the form of labour service: i.e., many had been commuted into cash rents.

(6) For early fourteenth century England, as a whole, money rents were about four times more valuable to English manorial lords, i.e., for the landlords' incomes, than were labour services.

(7) He also demonstrates (with maps) that lay manors with free tenants were very widespread in early fourteenth-century England:

- especially in the West Midlands, East Anglia, parts of Lincolnshire, and the London region.
- in total, free tenancies accounted for about half of the arable lands in England

- as noted earlier, money rents on traditional freehold tenancies were about half of those for comparable villein tenancies.
 - but they were also on average smaller in size than villein tenancies
- (8) As he has commented: 'lay manors dominated by serfs holding by villein tenure and owing a combination of money and labour rents ... were the exception rather than the rule in early fourteenth century England'.⁶
- the regions with the largest number of villein tenancies were also the areas that had been most thoroughly feudalized (as we saw in an earlier lecture on manorialism and serfdom)
 - chiefly in the North of England, most of the Midland belt, and then down to SW England (Devon and Cornwall region).
 - in sum: only about a third of the total English population around 1300 (still chiefly rural and agrarian) was servile or villein.

(9) This viewpoint is very important in countering the still common views about the extent and nature of medieval English serfdom, before the Black Death – but one may ask if that view is fully supported by his tables?

(10) Finally a reminder of an earlier and very important observation on customary rents:

- that customary (villein or servile) tenants in early fourteenth-century England (indeed, up to the Black Death, paid money rents that were well under market rates, i.e., than the rents paid on newly assarted (cleared and developed for agriculture) or leased lands.
- though, of course, they were still higher, on average, than those on freehold tenancies
- in part because the size of their holdings, on average, was larger.⁷

ii) **The landlord's share of national income, as a measure of overall economic exploitation, was remarkably low in the early 14th century:**

(1) about 14% of national income, and 18% of rural incomes

(2) a proportion that compares very closely to Gregory King's estimate of a 17% share of national income in 1688,

(3) but, in 1688, 34% of rural incomes: for the then English aristocracy (temporal and spiritual lords), according to Bruce Campbell's own estimates.⁸

Estimated Seigniorial Landlord Income as Shares of National and Rule Incomes, 1086 - 1801

⁶ Campbell, 'Agrarian Problem', p. 32

⁷ Campbell states (p. 69) that 'by 1300, most head tenants [i.e., those not holding sub-lets], both freemen and villeins, were paying less than a competitive market rent for their land'.

⁸ Campbell, 'Agrarian Problem', Table 2, p. 15

Year	Estimated Population in millions	Estimated Seigniorial Income in £ sterling in millions	Estimated National Income in £ sterling in millions	Estimated Rural Income in £ sterling in millions	Seigniorial Income as percent of National Income	Seigniorial Income as per cent of Rural Incomes
1086	2.25	0.10	0.40	0.38	25%	27%
1300	4.25	0.54	3.85	3.03	14%	18%
1688	4.90	9.46	54.44	28.02	17%	34%
1759	6.00	12.39	66.84	40.68	19%	30%
1801	8.70	29.35	198.58	83.84	15%	35%

Bruce Campbell, 'The Agrarian Problem in the Early Fourteenth Century', *Past & Present*, no. 188 (August 2005), Table 2, p. 15.

iii) **Prof. John Hatcher, another equally eminent economic historian**, had earlier argued a similarly persuasive case: to repeat the key points made earlier (but so relevant here).⁹

(1) in pointing out that servile peasants, with fixed customary money rents, were actually able to capture a larger share of the growing economic rent on land – i.e., with rising grain prices, etc. – during the 13th and 14th centuries,

(2) and thus they did so at the expense of many or most of the landlords.

iv) **In sum they and other historians (e.g. E.A. Bridbury) have found no merit in the Postan thesis** on the supposed reintensification of English serfdom during the 'long thirteenth century'

(1) But they do inadvertently make a good case to explain why some manorial lords would wish to intensify serfdom: to substitute more labour services for fixed money rents, declining in real values

(2) They argue, however, (to repeat the point) that there is little if any real evidence for any such reintensification of serfdom and

(3) furthermore, they contend that labour services rarely accounted for a significant proportion of rental and seigniorial income (in contrast to evidence of 16th century Prussia and Poland).

(4) Indeed, that only a minority of peasants had ever performed servile labour services

(5) that the value of cash rents ca. 1300 was much greater than rents in kind (with labour).

vi) **Status and landholdings of free-hold peasants:** Free peasants were, of course, even better off:

(1) for they paid very low rents, usually fixed in nominal or money-of-account terms

⁹ John Hatcher, 'English Serfdom and Villeinage: Towards a Reassessment', *Past and Present*, no. 90 (Feb. 1981), 3-39; reprinted in T. H. Aston, ed., *Landlords, Peasants and Politics in Medieval England* (Cambridge, 1987), pp. 247-84.

- (2) their rents were usually substantially lower than those on servile or villein holdings
- (3) Indeed, Bruce Campbell estimates that around 1300 customary fixed rents on traditional freehold land was probably only half of the real market value of those rents (i.e., if the land had been newly leased on contract).
- (3) but, on the other hand, their holdings tended to be more smaller, in that they were more likely to be subdivided by partible inheritance,
- (4) servile or villein lands, on the other hand, were generally more subject to impartible inheritance, i.e, in that seigniorial lords were less willing to allow subdivisions by inheritance in order not to weaken the link between tenancies and the rents (and labour services) owing
- (5) free tenancies could be viable in smaller units, because the rent burdens much less
- (6) In general, around 1300, peasant tenancies on manorial estates were paying rents below free market values, though more so with free than with servile (villein) tenancies
- v) **Yet Campbell himself, Maddicott, and various other historians have also painted a rather bleaker picture of the economic status of the English peasantry:** free and servile, in the first half of the 14th century, with:¹⁰
 - (1) mounting demographic (Malthusian) pressures and
 - (2) increasingly oppressive burdens of English taxation, especially in order to finance warfare.

3. The Decline of Serfdom in Western Europe after the Black Death:

a) **Demographic Catastrophes and Economic Crises:**

- i) **As we have already seen, late-medieval Europe experienced unprecedented demographic and economic catastrophes,** during the 14th and 15th centuries, from both
 - (1) the famous Black Death (whether or not bubonic plague as we now know it)
 - (2) and incessant warfare, one that had begun from the 1290s, and extended into the more famous Hundred Years' War (1337-1453),
 - (3) so that Europe lost perhaps a third or more its population.
 - (4) with a continuous decline in population until the early 16th century.
- ii) **A common, indeed prevalent argument in the historical literature,**
 - (1) is that this late-medieval demographic catastrophe rapidly led to a collapse of estate agriculture and a rapid erosion of serfdom in England,

¹⁰ See J.R. Maddicott, *The English Peasantry and the Demands of the Crown, 1294-1341*, Past and Present Supplement no. 1 (Oxford, 1974), 75 pp; reprinted in T.H. Aston, ed., *Landlords, Peasants, and Politics in Medieval England* (Cambridge, 1987); Edward Miller, 'War, Taxation, and the English Economy in the Late Thirteenth and Early Fourteenth Centuries', in J.M. Winter, ed., *War and Economic Development: Essays in Memory of David Joslin* (Cambridge, 1975), pp. 11-32; Bruce M. S. Campbell, 'Ecology versus Economics in Late Thirteenth- and Early Fourteenth-Century English Agriculture', in Del Sweeney, ed., *Agriculture in the Middle Ages: Technology, Practice, and Representation* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1995), pp. 76-108; Bruce Campbell, 'Population Pressure, Inheritance, and the Land Market in a Fourteenth Century Peasant Community', in Richard M. Smith, ed., *Land, Kinship and Life-cycle* (Cambridge, 1984), pp. 87-134; and, for the most recent survey, see Mark Bailey, 'Peasant Welfare in England, 1290 - 1348', *The Economic History Review*, 2nd ser., 51:2 (May 1998), 223-51.

(2) and indeed almost everywhere else in Western Europe

(3) but not in eastern Europe, which did not experience such depopulation as did the West.

iii) **Land:Labour Ratios, Rising Wages, and the ‘Feudal Reaction’:**¹¹

(1) Such severe losses of population drastically altered the land:labour ratios,

- and thus led to drastic labour scarcities on domain lands, especially as surviving peasants took up deserted tenancies at low rentals on conditions of full freedom,
- or sought a better livelihood in depopulated, labour-hungry towns.

(2) **The Ordinance of Labourers (1349) and Statute of Labourers (1350):** immediately after the Black Death, the English crown (government) responded with laws

- that fixed wages at the pre-Black Death level,
- which, as the graph shows, was a period of unusually low money wages.

(3) In England, according to many historians, some manorial lords reacted to this labour scarcity by either strengthening or attempting to restore serfdom: i.e., both

- to conserve their existing labour supply and
- to prevent agricultural wages from rising [as we saw earlier with the Bloch model].

(4) If current estimates of post-Plague declines in labour productivity in arable farming are correct—

- and they are contrary to conventional wisdom and Ricardian economics –
- then landlords would have had an even greater incentive to impose or reimpose servile labour obligations.¹²

(5) One such historian (George Holmes) indeed argued that collectively English manorial lords collectively increased their share of national income at the expense of the peasantry in the quarter century following the

¹¹ See Richard H. Britnell, ‘Feudal Reaction after the Black Death in the Palatinate of Durham’, *Past & Present*, no. 128 (August 1990), pp. 28-47; Rodney Hilton, ‘Peasant Movements in England Before 1381’, *Economic History Review*, 2nd ser. 2 (1949), reprinted in Rodney H. Hilton, *Class Conflict and the Crisis of Feudalism: Essays in Medieval Social History* (London, 1985), pp. 122-38; Rodney H. Hilton, *The Decline of Serfdom in Medieval England*, Studies in Economic History series, 1st edn. (London, 1969); 2nd rev. edn. (London, 1983).

¹² See 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. 207-36, 191-206. But these studies indicate that labour productivity rose in the pastoral (livestock) sector. See also: David Stone, ‘Medieval Farm Management and Technological Mentalities: Hinderclay Before the Black Death’, *The Economic History Review*, 2nd ser., 54:4 (November 2001), 612-38; David Stone, ‘The Productivity of Hired and Customary Labour: Evidence from Wisbech Barton in the Fourteenth Century’, *The Economic History Review*, 2nd ser., 50:4 (November 1997), 640-56; David Stone, ‘The Productivity and Management of Sheep in Late Medieval England’, *Agricultural History Review*, 51:1 (2003), 1-22; David Stone, *Decision-Making in Medieval Agriculture* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2005). The following lecture, on agrarian change in late-medieval England, will consider this problem in greater depth.

Black Death: though this estimate has been seriously challenged.¹³

(6) In the view of these same historians, such measures were major factors in provoking peasant rebellions, e.g.,

- the Peasant Revolt of 1381 (Wat Tyler);
- and peasant revolts in France as well, the so-called *Jacqueries* of 1358 and 1382 (aggravated if not caused by the military ravages of the Hundred Years' War in France).

(7) Although these revolts were indeed crushed, the landlords had won only a Pyrrhic victory,¹⁴ because the crown subsequently refused to support feudal landowners in suppressing peasants,

iv) the Reaction of the National Monarchies:

(1) In neither England nor France were the kings willing to see their feudal vassals gain in judicial or economic power;

(2) in both countries, the royal governments were anxious to prevent further peasant unrest.

(3) In France in particular, the monarchy used its own royal powers and royal courts to undermine feudal powers, especially to permit seigniorial court decisions to be appealed to royal courts.

v) Furthermore estate agriculture became unprofitable for many, with the agrarian depression from the later 14th century, one accompanied by a price-cost squeeze for landlords:

(1) with the combination of sharp fall in both grain and wool prices and rising wages and capital costs,

(2) many English landlords soon realized that they would gain a more secure steady income by leasing out their domain lands into rent paying tenancies,

(3) that is, even if rents were lower than before, they would remain fixed and stable for the duration of the lease, while agricultural prices continued to fall.

(4) Conversely, rental incomes exceeded the commercial incomes that most landlords could receive by selling the products (wheat and wool) from their demesne lands: hence a shift from *Gutsherrschaft* to *Grundsherrschaft* – i.e., from a reliance demesne profits to one based peasant rental incomes.

(5) leasing domain (demesne) land meant or provided conditions of virtual freedom for such lease-hold tenants.

¹³ G.A. Holmes, *The Estates of the Higher Nobility in Fourteenth-Century England* (Cambridge, 1957), pp. 85-120. He found that their current, nominal incomes, in the 1370s, were no more than ten percent below that of their nominal income in the 1340s, so that their relative share must have increased if the population had fallen by a third. As Bridbury, has noted however: Holmes' data are based on only one noble estate, and one in the West, outside the traditional Midlands area of classic feudalism. Bridbury also rightly criticizes Holmes for not taking proper account of the post-Black Death inflation, which would have diminished the real value of those nominal incomes. See A.R. Bridbury, 'The Black Death', *Economic History Review*, 2nd ser. 26:4 (1973), 557-92.

¹⁴ Answers.com: a Pyrrhic victory: one achieved at excessive cost; after Pyrrhus, king of Epirus who sustained heavy losses in defeating the Romans. Pyrrhus inherited the throne of Epirus in Northern Greece around 306 BCE, and as a young man proved himself on the battlefield again and again. Pyrrhus apparently had great strategic skills, but he also had the reputation of not knowing when to stop. In 281 he went to Italy and defeated the Romans at Heraclea and Asculum, but suffered bitterly heavy losses. The devastation led to his famous statement, 'One more such victory and I am lost' -- hence the term 'Pyrrhic victory' for any victory so costly as to be ruinous.

(6) though many of them also held servile tenancies, producing some confusion in their status.

(7) Finally, and most important, the continuous contraction in manorial domains, both lay and ecclesiastical, from the 1380s to the 1440s, also meant that

- the manorial lords no longer needed much in the way of labour services from servile tenants
- or, in many cases, none at all
- thus the landlords' incentives to retain serfdom diminished as well

vi) **Those both market and political forces now fully favoured peasants of western Europe:**

(1) tenants could bargain for much lower rents with virtually full freedom;

(2) hired agricultural labourers could win higher wages (though for many, not until after 1410).

(3) As more and more domain land was leased, the need for servile labour fell.

vii) **By the late 15th or early 16th century, serfdom was virtually extinct in western Europe**, with only a few isolated pockets of true serfdom (regions isolated from markets).

viii) **England: the transition from serfdom to copyholders**

(1) For England, note that those descendants of serfs, or those who occupied once servile lands, were henceforth known as 'copyholders': term means 'tenure by copy of the court rolls according to the custom of the manor;' and they were thus also called 'customary tenants.'

(2) For many of these, as you will see, much greater peasant freedom also entailed some sacrifice in the security of their tenure -- some sacrifice of their property rights, often indeed a considerable sacrifice, denying many the *de facto* hereditary tenure that they had enjoyed under serfdom.

(3) The degree of that sacrifice of inheritance rights depended on the type of form of copyhold tenure:

- defined as copyholders at will: or copyholders for lives
- one, two, or a maximum of three lives: which could have meant up to three generations
- but in many parts of Open Field feudal England, manorial courts determined that the term 'life' itself came to be measured in terms of 7 years per life:
- meaning a maximum tenure of 21 years, though spread over more than one generation:

4. The Spread of Serfdom into Eastern Europe from the later Middle Ages:

a) **In Eastern Europe, however, we see the reverse processes (mirror image of the West):**

i) **The Germanic conquest and colonization of the Slavic and Baltic lands east of the Elbe: the 'Drang Nach Osten' [Drive to the East] from the 12th century:**

(1) From about the 1180s, we find a Germanic colonization movement gathering force, to conquer and or colonize and settle lands east of the Elbe river, largely inhabited by Slavic and Baltic peoples (including the original Prussians, Estonians, etc.);

(2) Though part of this colonisation movement was in the form of conquest -- and wars between Germanic and Slavic people had been going on for centuries before then -- many of those who settled the new eastern lands had been invited to do so by Slavic princes and feudal landlords, and by the Church, because this was still a sparsely settled region.

(3) Only under conditions of complete freedom and secure property rights,

- with low annual cash quit-rents, could Germans and other westerners be encouraged to migrate eastwards

- to settle and farm new lands and populate new towns, most of which were created under German law.

(4) So they established thousands of free-peasant communities and hundreds of new towns in what came to be Mecklenburg, Pomerania, Brandenburg, Prussia, Poland, Lithuania, and Courland (modern day Latvia and Estonia).

(5) admittedly, in this general and expanding settlement of the east, under conditions of peasant and urban freedom, there was still some enserfments of the native Slavic and Baltic populations, though not to any great extent.

ii) But from the later 14th century and more especially during the ensuing 15th, 16th, and early 17th centuries:

(1) we find an almost complete reversal as so many of these peasant communities lose their historic freedoms with a spreading stain of serfdom;

(2) that serfdom becomes far more complete, far more oppressive and far harsher, than any forms of serfdom that had been found in the West, certainly since Carolingian times.

(3) In eastern Germany (Prussia-Brandenburg), that serfdom remains:

- until the abortive Revolution of 1848 and the ensuing Prussian land reforms of 1850;
- and in the Russian Empire (including Poland – except in those districts where serfs had been liberated by Napoleon, ca. 1810-12, etc.), until the formal abolition of serfdom in 1861.

b) But in eastern Europe we do not in fact find any consistent pattern:

i) serfdom seems to spread in various parts of eastern Europe, east of the Elbe: from the 15th to 18th centuries:

(1) in Prussia-Brandenburg (eastern Germany), Bohemia and Moravia (part of the modern Czech Republic), Slovakia, Hungary, Rumania, Poland, Lithuania, Ukraine and Russia

(2) but, at different times, for often quite different economic reasons, over these several centuries, becoming the most complete by about the 18th century.

ii) So, in general terms, as serfdom waned and died out in the West, it expanded and grew in intensity in eastern Europe, with seriously negative consequences for the economic development of eastern Europe and Russia.

c) Theories of Jerome Blum and Robert Brenner:

i) **Jerome Blum:** this eminent Princeton historian was one of the first to highlight this contrast between a declining serfdom in the West and an expanding serfdom in the East, offering these observation about general patterns of serfdom in the East.¹⁵

(1) the virtual absence or only weak presence of any strong centralized monarchical authority

- in Poland, for example, the monarchy was elective

¹⁵ Jerome Blum, 'The Rise of Serfdom in Eastern Europe', *American Historical Review*, 62 (July 1957), 807-36.

- in Prussia-Brandenburg, there was no monarchy, but rule by an elected Hochmeister (High Master) of the quasi-religious Teutonic Order of Knights, which lost power and territory in the face of Polish expansion
 - Russia had both weak and strong Czars (Tsars); but even the strong ones, such as Ivan the Terrible, had to respect and deal with the power of the boyars, or feudal aristocracy
- (2) the economic and political decline of the eastern towns, with the decline of the German Hanseatic League (to be examined further in the topics on International Trade).
- (3) a feudal aristocracy that continued to augment its political, military, judicial, and economic powers at the expense of the monarchy, the towns, and the peasantry: and especially the increasing powers of manorial courts over the peasantry, who became less and less free.
- (4) a shift in the economic orientation and mentality of feudal landlords:
- from a predominantly *Grundherrschaft* system, by which feudal lords lived from rental incomes,
 - to one that became more and more a *Gutsherrschaft* system, by which they increased their incomes from the commercial exploitation of their estates, producing grains, etc. for export
- (5) Thus the increasing resort to extracting labour services from an increasingly servile peasantry to work on their estates, to produce these goods.
- (6) But for Jerome Blum the one common denominator everywhere was the weakness of royal authority.
- ii) **Subsequently the then young American Marxist historian Robert Brenner offered his own views:**
- (1) deeply influenced by Blum, by attacking simplistic economic models of other historians that neglected to consider the dynamics of class relationships and class conflicts.¹⁶
- (2) Brenner noted these contrasting features between the western and eastern agrarian societies, in terms of both feudal aristocracies and dependent peasantries, from the 15th century:

4. Theoretical Models to Explain These Contrary Phenomena: West and East

Economic historians love to use models to explain economic changes; and frequently different economic historians have used similar models to explain apparently contradictory or totally opposite phenomena: in this particular case, the decline of serfdom in the west and its rise in the East.

a) Demographic models:

- i) **indeed, they have used models of both demographic decline and of demographic growth (as suggested earlier)**, the same models, to explain both the rise and the fall of serfdom.
- ii) **As noted above**, most historians have argued that
- (1) population growth in western Europe helped erode the original conditions for serfdom and
 - (2) that population decline accelerated the decline of serfdom:
 - (3) both demographic models, however, obviously cannot provide the key explanatory variable, without

¹⁶ Robert Brenner, 'Agrarian Class Structure and Economic Development in Pre-Industrial Europe', *Past and Present*, no. 70 (February 1976), pp. 30-74, reprinted in T. H. Aston and C. H. E. Philpin, eds., *The Brenner Debate: Agrarian Class Structure and Economic Development in Pre-Industrial Europe* (Cambridge, 1985), pp. 10 - 63.

calling into play other economic and institutional factors.

iii) **In eastern Europe**, though many historians have sought to find the origins of serfdom here, especially in Prussia, and Poland, in terms of the Bloch model of demographic decline and labour scarcity, the historical facts do not sustain these views:

(1) because most or perhaps almost all of Poland was spared from the Black Death, and from any serious depopulation;

(2) indeed, the evidence suggests both demographic and economic growth in Poland during the later Middle Ages.

(3) the evidence for increasing serfdom after the Black Death is very meagre.

iii) **Other historians have noted that**, on the contrary, population growth -- in 13th-century England and in 16th-century Prussia and Poland -- seems to have fostered an increasing or intensified serfdom, in combination with the commercial models.

b) **Commercial or trade models:**

i) **similarly, models based on the commercialization of agriculture, the growth of town markets and a cash-based economy**, have also been used to explain both:

- the decline of serfdom in the west
- or its expansion in 13th century England, as in the Postan thesis discussed above;
- and its rise and spread in the East.

ii) **The most popular model combines demographic growth and increased trade (commercialization) in the following terms:**

(1) population growth across Europe during the 16th century, combined with a disproportionate growth in urbanization, led to a relative rise in the price of grains: wheat and rye

(2) Many landed estates in the Baltic littoral of Brandenburg-Pomerania, Prussia, and Poland, above all the lands serviced the Vistula river, could mass-produce grain at lower cost than could grain-producing areas in western Europe.

(3) West European and even Mediterranean towns became increasingly dependent upon imports of Baltic grains (imports that had begun in the 14th century)

- grains were shipped down the Vistula river to the key port of Danzig (now Gdansk) in Poland (later under Prussian jurisdiction)
- Hanseatic German and then increasingly Dutch merchant ships (merchant marine) then shipped these grains to western Europe, principally to the great emporiums of Antwerp and later Amsterdam, for re-export elsewhere.

(4) Eastern feudal-landlords responded to this new opportunity, the opportunity to reap greater profits from exporting grain, by re-organizing their feudal estates into vast, centrally organized grain farms.

(5) to secure the labour the operate these vast gain farms they sought to reduce their peasant tenants to servile status,

- requiring them to pay rents in the form of labour services on their grain estates
- often requiring them to work up to three days a week, as supposedly cheap labour

(6) The best and most compact exposition of this thesis can be found in publications of Eric Hobsbawm.¹⁷

(7) In some respects, this thesis is similar to Michael Postan's model to explain a supposed intensification of serfdom in England, ca. 1180 - ca. 1320 based on:

- extensive population growth, also leading to an increase in the relative price of grains and wools.
- the development and growth of lucrative exports trades English wool and grain in this period
- the response of many great English magnates to devote themselves to exploiting their domains for profit, in selling grain and wool on the market (for export)
- the exploitation of their peasantry to provide cheap labour to work their commercial estates

iii) **But serfdom spread into many areas of Prussia, Poland, Russia,** and elsewhere in eastern Europe did not experience such economic conditions:

(1) i.e., that they did not develop an export-oriented grain economy;

(2) or into such regions either before or after they became or had become major grain-exporters.

iv) **So trade models alone (even combined with demographic models):** also cannot explain these contrary phenomena involving serfdom

c) **Legal and institutional models:** must also be called upon.

i) **Especially those involving feudal institutions and the struggle over property and political rights:** the relative powers of feudal aristocrats, monarchies, manorial and royal courts, and town governments.

ii) **In general, serfdom spread the most easily and successfully in those regions where central or monarchical power was either weak;** or, for various political, economic, and social reasons did not seek to challenge the judicial and military power of feudal landlords.

iv) **possibly (if not definitively) the chief reasons were non-economic in nature:** thus, do feudal landlords, with a feudal mentality, instinctively engage in class oppression,

(1) if, as, and when they acquire or maintain the untrammelled power to do so?

(2) and does the exercise of those oppressive powers become a symbol of feudal power?

The Blum-Brenner Model to Explain the Differences between Western and Eastern Feudal-Manorial Power Structures and the Changing Fortunes of Serfdom

Features	Western Europe	Eastern Europe
Villages	divided lordships; thickly settled; peasant charters; and manorial court rolls	single lordships; thinly settled; no, few, or weak peasant charters

¹⁷ Eric Hobsbawm, 'The Crisis of the Seventeenth Century', *Past and Present*, nos. 5 (May 1954), 33-53 & no. 6 (Nov. 1954), 44-65; reprinted in Trevor Aston, ed., *Crisis in Europe, 1560-1660: Essays from Past and Present* (London, 1965), pp. 5-58. See an important critique in Robert Brenner, 'Agrarian Class Structure and Economic Development in Pre-Industrial Europe', *Past and Present*, no. 70 (February 1976), pp. 30-74, reprinted in T. H. Aston and C. H. E. Philpin, eds., *The Brenner Debate: Agrarian Class Structure and Economic Development in Pre-Industrial Europe* (Cambridge, 1985), pp. 10 - 63, including essays attacking or supporting the Brenner thesis.

Features	Western Europe	Eastern Europe
Field Systems	Common/Open Fields with scattered interspersed strips and communal village regulations	Common fields with more consolidated family holdings; weak village authority, subject to feudal-manorial lords
Village governments	peasant villager councils and manorial reeves from the villages govern the village economy.	village government by <i>schultz/schultheiss</i> mayors appointed by feudal lords
Central governments	strong, more centralized national monarchies; or strong territorial princes.	weak monarchical governments; elected monarchies
Aristocracies	weak nobilities, especially at the baronial & knight levels	powerful and increasingly stronger feudal nobilities
Courts	Royal courts expanding their powers at the expense of manorial/seigniorial courts; manorial courts that entrench customary rights of the peasant tenants, fixing rents & entry fines	weak or non existent royal courts; powerful and independent feudal/manorial courts that do not recognize peasant tenancy rights, or conditions of tenures
Rents	customary, fixed rents, increasingly in fixed nominal cash payments	more arbitrary rents, more in labour services and kind
Towns	Strong, independent towns, with vibrant urban economies	Weak and small towns, with dependent economies

d) **A retrospective on the significance of economic factors in manorial incomes: in explaining the divergent histories of western and eastern serfdom**

i) ***Gutsherrschaft* vs. *Grundsherrschaft*: in manorial incomes**

(1) While the relative political and military powers of the feudal land-holding aristocracy, in relation to both the monarchy and the urban bourgeoisie may be the paramount issue, surely there is an equally powerful economic factor: whether the landlord prefers to maximize his incomes

- from the commercial exploitation of this demesne (domain)
- or from the rents derived from peasant tenancies (and other profits of lordship: i.e., justice)
- to recapitulate what was said earlier about 13th century England

(2) *Gutsherrschaft*: a reliance on incomes derived from the commercial exploitation of the demesne holdings requires a sufficient supply of labour that can be exploited by paying less than market wages: that is likely to lead to serfdom, and its continued maintenance.

(3) *Grundsherrschaft*: conversely, a shift to, and a preference for rental incomes from peasant tenancies, free and servile.

ii) **the behaviour of relative commercial prices and wages:**

(1) Those prices and economic factors promoting *Grundherrschaft*: if commercial prices for the chief agricultural products of the domain (e.g., wheat and wool) are falling and if real wages were rising, along with other factor costs,

- the consequent price-cost squeeze would likely lead the manorial lord to abandon (or seriously contract) commercial domain farming, and thus to lease out more and more of the domain in the form of new, and generally free, peasant tenancies (even if some are held by serfs)
- the landlord's advantage in relying on *Grundherrschaft* with continued falling agricultural prices and/or rising wages: the peasant tenant bears the adverse economic consequences in having to pay fixed rents – fixed for the duration of the lease.
- thus the lord's income is or becomes far more stable than with a regime of *Gutsherrschaft*
- to the extent that landlords shifted to a *Grundsherrschaft* regime, one requiring little if any demesne labour and one favouring free leasehold tenancies, the more likely the landlords were to convert servile tenancies into freer copyhold tenancies (as in England), thus eliminating most of the real conditions of serfdom.

(2) Those prices and economic factors promoting *Gutsherrschaft*: rising agricultural product prices, or inflation in general, with and stable or falling real wages, and fixed, nominal money-of-account rental payments.

- under such conditions, the landlord relying on *Grundsherrschaft* will now suffer adverse economic consequences, to the extent that rents from peasant tenancies are fixed in money-of account terms (i.e., in terms of the current accounting system of pounds, shillings, and pence)
- in western Europe especially, most servile and customary tenures, when hereditary, specified rents in fixed-money-of account terms, so that the peasant tenant, and not the landlord, reaped the increases in economic rent that accrued from rising prices
- even freehold, leasehold contracts, specified a fixed annual (or monthly) rent for a specific number of years: sometimes as much as 25 years.
- consequently, such conditions of steadily rising agricultural prices would have encouraged feudal landlords (those with rational expectations, at least) to convert to *Gutsherrschaft*, in order to exploit the domain lands for their increased profitability, for market production
- even if such conditions, especially if accompanied by population growth, also led to falling wages, some landlords might expect to achieve further gains from serfdom, by suppressing real wage costs below market labour costs (note: servile labour is never free).
- but whether or not that is fully rational, is open to argument: when free, wage-earning labour is less likely to shirk in its quantity of labour supplied, in comparison with serfs (whose prime motivation to shirk is obvious – provided the consequence is not physical violence
- Another alternative for the landlord, and one found in early-modern England, was to abolish manorial and common-field patterns of landholding, by engaging in enclosures (often leasing enclosed lands to capitalistically-motivated leasehold tenants).

(3) Why feudal landlords choose to impose and enforce serfdom, when the conditions of the Bloch-Domar model (on labour scarcity) to not apply are not always readily apparent, as rational choices

(4) Note that this model accords with those put forward by both Postan and Hobsbawm.

iii) In my view, this pattern of changes to and from *Gutsherrschaft* to *Grundsherrschaft* (and back) help to explain the decline of serfdom in the West and its rise in the East

(1) Note that in later-medieval western Europe, the principal and most dramatic phase in the decline of serfdom took place from the later 14th and early 15th centuries,

- when a combination of depopulation, economic depression, deflation, and other factors promoting a decline in prices (with wage stickiness) led to a serious contraction in the demesnes of feudal manors (almost disappearing in 15th century France)
- the decline of serfdom, with the lack of demand for demesne labour, and other factors, was also the most apparent in this very period
- note: when the demesne becomes small, there is no longer any incentive to extract servile labour services as part of the tenants' rents to the manorial lord.

(2) Note, conversely, that the expansion of serfdom in eastern Europe, especially from the 16th century,

- took place when feudal landlords, for a variety of reasons, sought to increase the size of and the to increase the commercial exploitation of their demesne holdings
- certainly concomitant factors of inflation and general price instability, with often drastic coinage debasements (worse in the 17th century), made the preference for incomes from *Gutsherrschaft* over rental incomes from *Grundsherrschaft* all the more obvious (when rents were specified in fixed money-of-account terms).

Table 1. Estimated Revenues of English Landlords, ca. 1310

Social Group	Number of Households	Mean Annual Landed Income per Household in £ sterling	Total Landed Income per Group in £ sterling	Percentage of Total Landed Incomes
LAY LANDLORDS				
Crown	1	13,500	13,500	2.5%
Nobility				
Earls	13	1,600	20,800	3.8%
Barons	114	260	29,650	5.5%
Noble Women	22	255	5,600	1.0%
Gentry				
Knights	925	40	3,700	6.8%
Lesser Gentry	8,500	15	127,500	23.6%
Gentry Women	1,675	11	18,300	3.4%
Total Lay Landlords	11,250	22	252,350	46.6%
ECCLESIASTICAL LORDS				
Archbishops, bishops	17	1,590	27,000	5.0%
Religious Houses	826	194	16,000	29.6%
Parish Clergy	8,500	12	102,000	18.8%
Total Ecclesiastical	9,343	31	289,000	53.4%
ALL LANDLORDS	20,593	26	541,350	100.0%
Summary				
Crown	1	13,500	13,500	2.5%
Nobility	149	376	56,050	10.4%
Greater Clergy	843	222	187,000	34.5%
Gentry	11,100	16	182,800	33.8%
Lesser Clergy	8,500	12	102,000	18.8%

Bruce Campbell, 'The Agrarian Problem in the Early Fourteenth Century', *Past & Present*, no. 188 (August 2005), Table 1, p. 12.

**Table 2. Free and Villein Rents and Services on Lay Manors, 1300 - 1349:
Estimated Percentage of Rents and Services by Value**

Type of Manorial Rent	Small Manors worth under £10 per year	Large Manors worth more than £50 per year	All Manors
Free Rents	24.6	15.8	18.4
Free Assize Rents	7.9	6.2	6.5
Unspecified Assizes	18.6	12.1	14.2
Unspecified Rents	3.9	3.8	3.8
TOTAL FREE RENTS	55	37.9	42.9
Villein Rents	26.3	30.1	29.1
Villein Assize Rents	1.7	3.6	3.2
Unspecified Assizes	4.6	8.1	7.1
Unspecified Rents	4.8	7.5	5.8
TOTAL VILLEIN RENTS	37.4	49.3	45.2
Unspecified Villein Services	7.5	12.9	12
TOTAL VILLEIN RENTS & SERVICES	44.9	62.2	57.2
no. of manors	1910	334	4090
Mean value of rents & services	£2.3	£38.2	£9.3
Mean Value of manor	£4.8	£85.5	£19.1
Percentage free land	70	55	60
Percentage villein land	30	45	40

Bruce Campbell, 'The Agrarian Problem in the Early Fourteenth Century', *Past & Present*, no. 188 (August 2005), Table 4, p. 27

Table 3.**Estimated Composition of Seigniorial Incomes in Early Fourteenth-Century England**

Type of Manorial Landlord	Income from Demesne Lands: percent	Income from Tenancy Rents: per cent	Profits from Lordship (Banalités): per cent	Income from Tithes: per cent	Total Revenues in £ Sterling
Crown and Nobility	27	49	24	0	69,550
Greater Clergy	22	39	19	20	187,000
Greater Landlords	24	42	20	14	187,500
Gentry	45	47	9	0	182,000
Lesser Clergy	20	5	3	72	102,000
Lesser Landlords	36	32	7	26	284,800
ALL LANDLORDS	30	37	13	20	541,350

Bruce Campbell, 'The Agrarian Problem in the Early Fourteenth Century', *Past & Present*, no. 188 (August 2005), Table 3, p. 19.

Table 4.**Estimated Seigniorial Landlord Income as Shares of National and Rural Incomes,
1086 - 1801**

Year	Estimated Population in millions	Estimated Seigniorial Income in £ sterling	Estimated National Income in £ sterling	Estimated Rural Income in £ sterling	Seigniorial Income as percent of National Income	Seigniorial Income as per cent of Rural Incomes
1086	2.25	0.10	0.40	0.38	25%	27%
1300	4.25	0.54	3.85	3.03	14%	18%
1688	4.90	9.46	54.44	28.02	17%	34%
1759	6.00	12.39	66.84	40.68	19%	30%
1801	8.70	29.35	198.58	83.84	15%	35%

Bruce Campbell, 'The Agrarian Problem in the Early Fourteenth Century', *Past & Present*, no. 188 (August 2005), Table 2, p. 15.

Table 5.

Official Money Wages for Building Craftsmen for the Kingdom of England and the City of London: by Parliamentary Statute or Ordinance, for the Summer and Winter Seasons, in pence sterling, 1290 - 1495

Summer Season: Easter to Michaelmas (29 September), ‘without meat and drink’

Winter Season: Michaelmas to Easter, ‘without meat and drink’

Year	LONDON Summer	LONDON Winter	NATIONAL Summer	NATIONAL Winter
c.1290	5d ^a 4d ^b	3d ^a 4d ^b		
1349-51	6d	5d	3d 4d ^c	^c
1360			4d ^d	[not stated]
1362	6d	5d		
1372	6d	5d		
1378	6d	5d		
1382	6d	5d		
1444			5½d ^e	4½d ^e
1495			6d ^f 7d ^g	5d ^f 7d ^g

- a. 1290: 2d daily in the summer with food in drink; 1d daily in the winter with food and drink
- b. 1290: 4d daily or 1.5d with food and drink, from Michaelmas (29 September) to Martinmas (12 November), and from Candlemas (Purificatio: 2 February) to Easter
- c. 1350-51: 25 Ed III stat. 2 c. 3: rates of 4d for master free-masons; 3d for other master masons and carpenters; for all, from Michaelmas ‘less according to the rate and discretion of the justices’.
- d. For the chief master masons and carpenters; but 3d or 2d for the others ‘according as they be worth’
- e. 1444-45: 23 Henry VI c. 12: 4d daily with food and drink in the summer and 3d daily with food and drink in the winter.
- f. 1495: 11 Henry VII c. 22: 4d daily with food and drink.
- g. 7d daily, summer and winter, for those master masons and master carpenters having charge of six or more men; and 5d daily with food and drink.

Sources: *Statutes of the Realm*, I, 311-12; II, 337-39, 585-87; H. T. Riley, ed., *Munimenta Gildhallae Londoniensis*: Vol. II: *Liber Custumarum* (London, 1860), I, 99-100; ii, 541-43; H. T. Riley, ed., *Memorials of London and London Life, in the XIIIth, XIVth, and XVth Centuries: From the Archives of the City of London, A.D. 1276-1419* (London, 1868), pp. 253-55; R. R. Sharpe, ed., *Calendar of Letter-Books Preserved Among the Archives of the City of London at the Guildhall: Letter-Book G., c.A.D. 1352-1374* (London, 1905), pp. 148, 301; *Letter Book H., c.A.D. 1375-1399* (London, 1907), p. 184.

Table 6.

The Blum-Brenner Model to Explain the Differences between Western and Eastern Feudal-Manorial Power Structures and the Changing Fortunes of Serfdom

FEATURES	Western Europe	Eastern Europe
Villages	divided lordships; thickly settled; peasant charters; and manorial court rolls	single lordships; thinly settled; no, few, or weak peasant charters
Field Systems	Common/Open Fields with scattered interspersed strips and communal village regulations	Common fields with more consolidated family holdings; weak village authority, subject to feudal-manorial lords
Village governments	peasant villager councils and manorial reeves from the villages govern the village economy.	village government by <i>schultz/schultheiss</i> mayors appointed by feudal lords
Central governments	strong, more centralized national monarchies; or strong territorial princes.	weak monarchical governments; elected monarchies
Aristocracies	weak nobilities, especially at the baronial & knight levels	powerful and increasingly stronger feudal nobilities
Courts	Royal courts expanding their powers at the expense of manorial/seigniorial courts; manorial courts that entrench customary rights of the peasant tenants, fixing rents & entry fines	weak or non existent royal courts; powerful and independent feudal/manorial courts that do not recognize peasant tenancy rights, or conditions of tenures
Rents	customary, fixed rents, increasingly in fixed nominal cash payments	more arbitrary rents, more in labour services and kind
Towns	Strong, independent towns, with vibrant urban economies	Weak and small towns, with dependent economies

**Table 7. Composition of the Capitalized Market Value
of the Stavenow Manorial Estates in Brandenburg (East Germany)
in 1601**

ASSETS	Value in Gulden	Percent Subtotal	Value in Gulden	Percent of Total
Manor: House and Demesne Farm			5,813	8.66%
Buildings				
Manorial Forest: Income from			15,552	23.16%
Demesne Production				
Grain Sales: income from	12,104	45.44%		
Livestock Production: income from sales	10,917	40.99%		
Fisheries and Gardens: income from	3,615	13.57%		
Sub-total of Demesne incomes	26,636	100.00%	26,636	39.66%
Manorial Jurisdictions and Properties				
Manorial Courts and Jurisdictional Fees	4,400	72.74%		
Manorial Mills: rental incomes	1,649	27.26%		
Sub-total of Manorial Jurisdictions	6,049	100.00%	6,049	9.01%
Peasant Rents: Servile Tenancies				
Labour Services	8,454	79.06%		
Rents in kind: in grain	1,375	12.86%		
Rents in cash: money payments	864	8.08%		
Sub-total of Peasant Rents	10,693	100.00%	10,693	15.92%
Foreign Peasants': Short Term Rents				
Labour Services	1,609	66.68%		
Rents in kind: in grain	804	33.32%		
Sub-total of 'Foreign Peasants' Rents	2,413	100.00%	2,413	3.59%
TOTAL VALUES			67,156	100.00%

Source:

William Hagen, 'How Mighty the Junkers? Peasant Rents and Seigniorial Profits in Sixteenth-Century Brandenburg', *Past & Present*, no. 108 (August 1985), p. 100.