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ECO 301Y1

The Economic History of Later-Medieval and Early Modern Europe, 1250 - 1750

Topic 1 [1]: The Black Death, Late-Medieval Demographic Crises, and the Standard of Living Controversies

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

A. Demographic Changes in Medieval Europe: General Surveys

- * 1. Karl Helleiner, 'The Population of Europe, from the Black Death to the Eve of the Vital Revolution', in E.E. Rich and Charles Wilson, eds., Cambridge Economic History, Vol. IV: The Economy of Expanding Europe in the 16th and 17th Centuries (Cambridge, 1967), pp. 1-95, esp. pp. 5-19, 68-95.
- * 2. Léopold Genicot, 'Crisis: From the Middle Ages to Modern Times', in M.M. Postan, ed., The Cambridge Economic History of Europe, Vol. I: Agrarian Life of the Middle Ages, 2nd edn. (1966), pp. 660-700. Important for the agrarian consequences of plague and depopulation.
- * 3. Jan de Vries, 'Population', 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, 1994), pp. 1 - 50.
4. J. C. Russell, 'Population in Europe, 500 - 1500', in Carlo Cipolla, ed., Fontana Economic History of Europe, Vol. I: Middle Ages (1972), 25-70. With some useful information on plagues.
- * 5. Barbara Harvey, 'Introduction: the "Crisis" of the Early Fourteenth Century', in Bruce Campbell, ed., Before the Black Death: Studies in 'Crisis' of the Early Fourteenth Century (Manchester and New York, 1991) pp. 1 - 24. 1.
6. John Aberth, From the Brink of the Apocalypse: Confronting Famine, War, Plague, and Death in the Later Middle Ages, 2nd edn. (Clifton, NJ., 2009).
- * 7. Lawrence R. Poos, 'The Historical Demography of Northern Europe, 1400 - 1650', in Troels Dohlerup and Per Ingesman, eds., New Approaches to the History of Late Medieval and Early Modern Europe: Selected Proceedings of Two International Conferences at the Royal Danish Academy of Sciences and Letters in Copenhagen in 1997 and 1999, Historisk-filosofiske Meddelelser 104 (Copenhagen: The Royal Danish Academy of Sciences and Letters, 2009), pp. 365-96.
- *8. Steven A. Epstein, An Economic and Social History of Later Medieval Europe, 1000 - 1500 (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 2009), chapter 6: 'The Great Hunger and the Big Death: The Calamitous Fourteenth Century', pp. 159-89.

B. Plagues, and other Demographic Crises in Late-Medieval Europe

- * 1. Samuel K. Cohn, Jr., 'The Black Death: End of a Paradigm', American Historical Review, 107:3 (June 2002), 703-36. Challenges the now traditional orthodoxy that the late-medieval Black Death was bubonic plague – or plague transmitted by rat fleas. See an elaboration of this thesis in his monograph: Samuel K. Cohn, Jr., The Black Death Transformed: Disease and Culture in Early Renaissance Europe (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2002), chapters 1-3, pp. 7-54; and also: Samuel K. Cohn, Jr., 'Epidemiology of the Black Death and Successive Waves of Plague', in Vivian Nutton, ed., Pestilential Complexities: Understanding Medieval Plague, Medical History, Supplement No. 27 (London, 2008), pp. 74-100.
- * 2. Lester K. Little, 'Plague Historians in Lab Coats: A Review Article', Past & Present, no. 213 (November 2011), pp. 267-90. This is the most recent contribution to the controversy, summarizing the now voluminous scientific evidence that both the Justinian Plague (541-750 CE) and the subsequent Black Death (from 1347) were indeed manifestations of true plague, having as its pathogen the bacillus *Yersinia Pestis* (as is indisputably the case for the Third Pandemic, from 1894). But this study also leaves unresolved the method of transmission, in the light of Cohn's observations.
- * 3. John Theilmann and Frances Cate, 'A Plague of Plagues: The Problem of Plague Diagnosis in Medieval England', Journal of Interdisciplinary History, 37:3 (Winter 2007), 371-93: a review article that also provides a serious challenge to Cohn's unorthodox views: also arguing that it was a form of bubonic plague, though different from later mutated versions; but also that the Black Death may have been largely pneumonic plague; and that the death toll was magnified by other factors.
- * 4. John Kelly, The Great Mortality: An Intimate History of the Black Death, the Most Devastating Plague of All Time (New York: Harper Collins, 2005), esp pp. 101-61; and 'Afterword: The Plague Deniers', pp. 295-303. A response to Cohn: also contending that the Black Death was indeed bubonic plague, but in a form very different from the contemporary forms of plague (from the outbreak of the Third Pandemic, in 1897).
- * 5. Ole J. Benedictow, The Black Death, 1346 - 1353: The Complete History (New York: Boydell Press, 2004). Ignores Cohn, and indeed the entire debates, in providing the standard theory of the rat-flea-*Yersinia pestis* bacillus transmission of the Black Death by rat fleas, in the same form as modern bubonic plague. See also Ole J. Benedictow, What Disease was Plague? On the Controversy over the Microbiological Identity of Plague Epidemics of the Past, Brill's Series in the History of the Environment, no. 2 (Leiden: Brill, 2010).
- * 6. Susan Scott and C. J. Duncan, Return of the Black Death: the World's Greatest Serial Killer (Chichester and Hoboken, N.J: Wiley, 2004). They also doubt that the Black Death was bubonic plague. See also; Susan Scott and C. J. Duncan, Biology of Plagues: Evidence from Historical Populations (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 2001).
- * 7. David Herlihy, The Black Death and the Transformation of the West (Cambridge, Mass. 1997). Also cast doubts on the traditional rat-flea transmission of the plague bacillus.
- 8. Gunnar Karlsson, 'Plague Without Rats: The Case of Fifteenth-Century Iceland', Journal of Medieval History, 22:3 (1996), 263-84.
- * 9. Michael McCormick, 'Rats, Communications, and Plague: Toward an Ecological History', Journal of Interdisciplinary History, 34:1 (Summer 2003), 1-25.

10. Robert Woods, 'Ancient and Early Modern Mortality: Experience and Understanding', The Economic History Review, 2nd ser., 60:2 (May 2007), 373-99.
- *11. David C. Mengel, 'A Plague on Bohemia? Mapping the Black Death', Past & Present, no. 211 (May 2011), pp. 3-34.
- *12. Philip Slavin, 'The Great Bovine Pestilence and Its Economic and Environmental Consequences in England and Wales, 1318-50', Economic History Review, 65:4 (November 2012), 1239-1266.

D. The Black Death, Labour, and the Standard of Living Controversies:

- * 1. A. R. Bridbury 'Before the Black Death', Economic History Review, 2nd ser. 30 (1977), 393-410; and A.R. Bridbury, 'The Black Death', Economic History Review, 2nd ser. 26 (1973), 577 - 92.
2. Mark Bailey, 'Peasant Welfare in England, 1290 - 1348', The Economic History Review, 2nd ser., 51:2 (May 1998), 223-51.
- * 3. John Hatcher, 'England in the Aftermath of the Black Death', Past & Present, no. 144 (August 1994), pp. 3 - 35.
4. Nils Hybel, Crisis or Change? The Concept of Crisis in the Light of Agrarian Structural Reorganization in Late Medieval England (London, 1989), pp. 178-90; 228-30; pp. 261-97.
- * 5. Şevket Pamuk, 'The Black Death and the Origins of the "Great Divergence" Across Europe, 1300 - 1600', European Review of Economic History, 11:3 (December 2007), 289-317.
- * 6. John H. Munro, 'Wage-Stickiness, Monetary Changes, and Real Incomes in Late-Medieval England and the Low Countries, 1300 - 1500: Did Money Matter?', Research in Economic History, 21 (2003), 185-298; and see also John Munro, 'Builders' Wages in Southern England and the Southern Low Countries, 1346 - 1500: a Comparative Study of Trends in and Levels of Real Incomes', in Simonetta Caviococchi, ed., L'Edilizia prima della rivoluzione industriale, secc. XIII-XVIII, Atti delle "Settimana di Studi" e altri convegni, no. 36, Istituto Internazionale di Storia Economica "Francesco Datini" (Florence, 2005) pp. 1013-1076. The pdf file for this essay is available on my website, for Working Papers: <http://www.economics.utoronto.ca/munro5/WorkingPapers.htm>
- * 7. John Munro, 'Before and After the Black Death: Money, Prices, and Wages in Fourteenth-Century England', in Troels Dahlerup and Per Ingesman, eds., New Approaches to the History of Late Medieval and Early Modern Europe: Selected Proceedings of Two International Conferences at The Royal Danish Academy of Sciences and Letters in Copenhagen in 1997 and 1999, Historisk-filosofiske Meddelelser, no. 104 (Copenhagen: The Royal Danish Academy of Sciences and Letters, 2009), pp. 335-364.
- * 8. John Langdon and James Masschaele, 'Commercial Activity and Population Growth in Medieval England', Past & Present, no. 190 (February 2006), pp. 35-81.
- * 9. Samuel Cohn, 'After the Black Death: Labour Legislation and Attitudes Towards Labour in Late-Medieval Western Europe', The Economic History Review, 2nd ser., 60:3 (August 2007), 457-485.

- *10. Samuel K. Cohn, Jr, 'Popular Insurrection and the Black Death: A Comparative View', in Christopher Dyer, Peter Coss, and Chris Wickham, eds., Rodney Hilton's Middle Ages: An Exploration of Historical Themes, Past & Present, no. 195: Supplement no. 2 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), pp. 188-204.

D. Regional Studies: Italy, the Low Countries, England

- * 1. David Herlihy, Medieval and Renaissance Pistoia, 1200 - 1430 (1967), pp. 55-120; and pp. 271-82. See also Herlihy, Tuscans and Their Families (1985), pp. 60-92.
- * 2. Willem Blockmans, 'The Social and Economic Effects of Plague in the Low Countries, 1349 - 1500', Revue belge de philologie et d'histoire, 58 (1980), 833 - 63.
- ** 3. John Hatcher, Plague, Population, and the English Economy, 1348 - 1530 (London, 1977), pp. 11-73. Still the best survey. See also, below, his later articles.
- * 4. Andrew Hinde, England's Population: A History Since the Domesday Survey (London, 2003).
- * 5. Mark Bailey, 'Demographic Decline in Late-Medieval England: Some Thoughts on Recent Research', The Economic History Review, 2nd ser., 49:1 (February 1996), 1-19.
- * 6. Richard M. Smith, 'Demographic Developments in Rural England, 1300-48: A Survey,' in Bruce M.S. Campbell, ed., Before the Black Death: Studies in 'Crisis' of the Early Fourteenth Century (Manchester and New York, 1991) pp. 25-78.
7. John Hatcher, 'Mortality in the Fifteenth Century: Some New Evidence', Economic History Review, 2nd ser. 39 (Feb. 1986), 19 - 38.
- * 8. Pamela Nightingale, 'Some New Evidence of Crises and Trends of Mortality in Late Medieval England', Past and Present, no. 187 (2005), pp. 33-68.
9. Colin Platt, King Death: The Black Death and Its Aftermath in Late-Medieval England (London and Toronto: 1996), chapters 1-3 (pp. 1-47) and 10 (pp. 177-92). More of a popular survey
- * 10. Mark Ormrod and Phillip Lindley, eds., The Black Death in England (Stamford: Paul Watkins, 1996): especially, J. L. Bolton, 'Plague as an Agent of Economic and Social Change,' pp. 17-78.
11. J.L. Bolton, The Medieval English Economy, 1150-1500 (London, 1980), pp. 82-118; pp. 180-206.
12. Zvi Razi, Life, Marriage and Death in a Medieval Parish: Economy, Society, and Demography in Halesowen, 1270-1400 (London, 1980), pp. 99-113; pp. 114-51.
13. L. R. Poos, A Rural Society after the Black Death: Essex, 1350 - 1525 (1991), chapters 5 & 6.
- *14. Stephen H. Rigby, 'Urban Population in Late Medieval England: the Evidence of the Lay Subsidies', The Economic History Review, 2nd ser., 63:2 (May 2010), 393-417.

QUESTIONS:

1. There are essentially three major issues in this debate:
 - a) what were the essential and most important causes of late-medieval population decline?
 - b) What was the late-medieval Black Death? Was it truly bubonic plague; and if so, how did it spread so far, so rapidly, and with such enormous, unprecedented mortalities?
 - c) what were primary economic and social consequences of late-medieval population decline: did it lead to a rising in living standards, indeed to the 'Golden Age of the Artisan' by the mid fifteenth century?
2. Were the essential causes of later medieval population decline *endogenous* or *exogenous* to the European economy?
3. What were the causes of the Great Famine of 1315-1322? Was Europe the victim of a Malthusian crisis of overpopulation from the early 14th century? Did such conditions increase the mortality from both the Great Famine, and then, subsequently, from the Black Death itself?
4. What is the current debate about the biological and epidemiological nature of the Black Death and of the modes of its transmission. Was it in fact bubonic plague, and was it caused by rat fleas that carried the bacillus *Yersinia pestis*?
5. What havoc did the Black Death inflict? How did it spread? What were the particular economic and social consequences of the Black Death and subsequent plagues: what were the regional differences?
6. Did plague and depopulation lead to a rise in real wages and living standards in late-medieval Europe. If so, whose living standards in particular? If not, why not?
7. Why was demographic decline and/or stagnation so prolonged in late-medieval Europe: why did it last until the later 15th century? When and why did population decline come to an end -- finally? How, when, where, and why did European demographic recovery recommence?