

Close Ties? The Economic Impacts of 'Feudal' Lordship in the Middle Ages

Call for Papers for a three-day workshop, University of Mannheim, 11.12.2023-13.12.2023

Lordship was indisputably a key, and perhaps defining, part of political, social and economic structures in the Middle Ages. However, the actual impact of lordship, and its centrality to explaining economic development, has long been subject to debate, and even the term 'feudalism' is rejected by some researchers.

Several contributions have stressed the significance of lords' abilities to extract surplus from their tenants and the fact that at times lords could extract surplus beyond the peasant household's ability to reproduce, leading to a 'crisis of feudalism'. More recently, the importance of lordship has been reasserted in a revised theory of the feudal logic of medieval societies, arguing that even though feudal societies could see significant development of market activities and Smithian specialisation, ultimately peasants could rely on subsistence production meaning that economies were limited by the extent of demand by lords.

Conversely, other interpretations have stressed that practical limitations, and the strength of custom, lessened seigniorial exactions. Such approaches have also highlighted the high level of commercialisation in medieval societies, pointing towards a peasantry that was actively involved in a range of product and factor markets. Some researchers have even asserted that lords could be important providers of economic institutions that promoted market exchange and have a paternalistic role in providing commodities in times of crisis.

Therefore, the role of lordship in medieval economies remains a topic which still lacks a real historical consensus despite its importance for understanding long-run economic development. The three-day workshop 'Close Ties? The Economic Impacts of 'Feudal' Lordship in the Middle Ages' at the University of Mannheim aims to bring together scholars from across Europe and beyond to think about this topic. Through engaging in constructive discussion and debate, and comparing different perspectives, we will investigate in more depth the roles of lords in medieval economies and how these varied across time and space.

Potential themes that papers could (but do not have to) engage with include:

- The relationship between exchange through factor and product markets and exchange through non-market feudal obligations
- The role of lords, towns and peasants in creating economic demand
- The nature and levels of the rents and dues paid by tenants to lords
- The institutions present in the medieval countryside and the extent to which these were created by, and served the purposes of, lords and tenants
- The definition of 'feudalism' and 'capitalism' and the application of these terms to societies in the Middle Ages

We welcome 20-minute papers focused on any world region within the time frame of the Middle Ages broadly defined (c.500-c.1600) and using a wide range of methodological approaches from theoretical pieces to case studies of individual estates. Contributions from researchers at all stages of their careers are welcome, and we particularly encourage doctoral students and early career researchers to apply. Funding will be available to support attendance for participants without access to funding from their home institution. The conference language will be English.

Participants at the workshop will be invited to submit revised papers to be published in a themed volume of the *Jahrbuch für Wirtschaftsgeschichte / Economic History Yearbook*.

To apply, please send an abstract of approximately 300 words to Spike Gibbs (alex.spike.gibbs@uni-mannheim.de) and Tanja Skambraks (tanja.skambraks@uni-mannheim.de) by 31.5.23