

## **EE406: Project Proposal**

**Topic:** The Black Death and Its Effects on the Manorial System in Western Europe.

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### **Purpose of the Study**

The Black Death was a notorious disease known to emerge in the 14th century in Europe. It dismally affected the European society, politics, economics, and culture. Western Europe was affected more severely, as the reappearance of popular and prosper trade routes just started soon before the outbreak. However, we would like to look at a different side of a coin, and see if the disease also caused or had a result in good consequences in the Western Europe, especially in the long-lasting economic and social unit: manor.

### **Manorial System in Western Europe**

The manorial system or seigniorial system was an essential element of feudal society and was the organizing principle of rural economy that originated in the villa system of the Late Roman Empire. Manorialism is the economic and political system that developed in Europe during the Middle Ages.

After the collapse of Roman Empire, a development of politics and economics changed the life of people. Everything seemed far from easy. People's daily lives were affected. Their life became unsecured and difficult to survive for living. Working harder to have enough food. On top of that, they needed to protect themselves from conquering by raiding barbarians and seizing the neighboring kingdom. Consequently, people were classified as roles and relationships with each other. This relationship is called feudalism or manorialism.

The Early Middle Ages in Europe, the group of people which were not controlled by the Roman Empire were called barbarians because this group did not follow Roman ways. When Rome fell to invading barbarians, Europe had no central government. Throughout Western Europe, many invading groups set up the kingdoms. The most powerful set up the rules to govern the land and had the greatest warrior. One of the most rulers of the early Middle Ages was a man named Clovis in 481 C.E.. He was an ambiguous young warrior and became leader of a powerful group named Franks. Franks had many differences from before because they developed a new style of warfare. The warriors who fought on horseback achieved and held power. The knights were rewarded land and privileges in return from their loyalty. During Clovis' reign, he converted Christianity. He was the first Germanic king to accept the Catholic region.

After he became a Christian he achieved the support from the Pope and the other church. All the citizens in Clovis kingdom practiced in the same region and spoke the same language, French. He extended his rule over France and Western Europe.

In 768 C.E. Charlemagne, Charles the Great, took over as king of the Franks after his father, Pepin, died. He continued the Frank tradition, the reward of warfare by rewarding knights with land and privileges in return for their loyalty and service. He wanted all of western Europe to become Christian. He had created a large empire by conducting a series of wars. Finally, he became the most powerful leader in western Europe. He was associated with church and the government. Both Charles and Pope wanted a new Christian Roman Empire in western Europe. The church was the central part of society during this time. In education, most people could neither read nor write. Therefore, he encouraged education and scholarship. He supported to establish the school and found his scholar named Alcuin. Under Charlemagne, the arts began to bloom again. The talents of painters, sculptors and metalworkers were developed to build palaces and churches around the city. Charlemagne's empire survived many sectors. However, after he died the rulers were much weaker than Charlemagne. Still these kings paved the way for the system of feudalism.

The High Middle Ages, about 1000 CE feudalism provided citizens with protection and safety by establishing stable social order. In western Europe it was flourishing in social structure. Under this system, all the land belonged to the monarch. The church also owned a large amount of land. King was the head of all. The lord became vassal of the king when the lord acted in service of the king such as to supply the king with knights in time of war. Knight was an armed warrior. The empire needed the protection from the knights. The monarch gave the lord fiefs or a high position in return. The lords rented their land to the peasants to work for them as a serf. Serfdom was the status of peasants under feudalism. Serfs who occupied a plot of land were required to work for the lord of the manor who owned that land, and in return were entitled to receive food and to protection from hardship. Serfs could not leave the lord's land without permission and had to farm his fields in exchange for a small plot of their own. Serfs formed the lowest class of feudal society. Most lords and wealthier knights lived on manors. A manor included a castle or manor house, one or more villages, and the surrounding farmland. Manors were far from towns which required peasants to produce everything the people on the manor needed. Only a few goods came from outside the manor, such as salt for preserving meat and iron for making tools. During this period, people were born into a social class for life. They had the same social position, and often the same job, as their parents.

### **Economy of Western Europe in Medieval Era**

After the demise of the Roman Empire, the social system of Western Europe was adapted to be more resilient and flexible against invasions of the barbarians, for instance, the Vikings. A big and unified city, like one of the Roman Empire, was proven to be vulnerable. So, the manorial system appeared in Western Europe for the first time. Being decentralised by having many small social units scattering throughout the land decreased losses due to the raids. The owners of the manors: the lords, along with their officials, had to protect their peasants. In exchange for protection, they rightfully collected tax from the workers.

However, not only did the system bring a new social structure to the table, but did it also shape the economy of Western Europe.

Humans before the Industrial Revolution lived in the same stage of nature to the animals, as the technological advancement was low. Thus, agriculture was the main economic activity. Unlike many previous civilisations such as Egypt or Ancient China, the agriculture of Medieval Europe, which was blessed by regular rainfalls, did not rely on a river. Accordingly, the central government, as generally needed for irrigation agriculture, was not necessary. On the other hand, local, small, and independent rulers were more suitable in the scene. Thus, the lords and their knights rose.

Another significant effect of the fall of the Roman Empire was the drastic decline in literacy rate in Medieval Europe. The church was responsible for maintaining the knowledge from the past. However, education did not flow to the lower classes. The lords did not interfere with the activities of the peasants, because the labours mainly farmed, and did not involve in any academic activities. Consequently, the farmers relatively had more freedom compared to the peasants from other older civilisations. They could decide to cultivate their crops, keeping their cattle, making their bread, and also improve their equipment, clothing, or cottages.

The surplus of the production, if not directly sent to the lords as taxation or work obligations, could be sold at a nearby market town. The town contained many craftsmen including tailors, blacksmiths, tinkers. These craftsmen went through systematic training by a non-related expert of the same field. After being approved, successful practitioners were allowed to join the guilds, labour unions in the era of that occupation. However, any industrial activities apart from those that were closely related to agriculture were operated on a small scale. Mostly, they were produced just as needed.

Before the fall of the Roman Empire, trade on the sea was blooming as it was less costly compared to the one on land, mainly due to transportation of bulk goods. After the invasion, trade routes were devastated. The people depended on their self-sufficient manors and short-distance trade. However, by the end of the 12th century as a result of the Crusades, commerce, firstly proceeded by Muslim pilgrims then Italian merchants, had again thrived. Many cities such as Genoa, Venice, Cairo, and Syria became important trade hubs of the Mediterranean trade.

Trade also had a result in the rise of banking. In the beginning, it was performed by Jewish moneylenders who used their links in Jewish communities throughout the entire Europe, as the Christian Church considered interest sinful. The banking network tended to be based in Northern Italy as many international trade centres were located there. The Jewish and Italian bankers provided a crucial financial instrument that massively facilitated the growth of trade in the region.

These are the outlook for the economy of Western Europe in the Medieval Era. We can see that the demise of the Roman Empire affected the development and characteristics of the region massively.

The manorial system in Western Europe provided protection and freedom to peasants to some extent. It also contributed to the economy, which would play a crucial role in economic development in Western

Europe later on. However, the system also restrained some economic activities, and consequently, growth in the economy. The drawbacks are elaborated in the following paragraphs.

There are two characteristics of the manorial system that influence the first defect. The first one was the protection, which also came with its marginal cost, of the lords upon their peasants. The second one was the size of a manor. Purposely designed to be decentralised, each manor was considerably huge and far away from each other. Farmlands, where many peasants lived and farmed, were generally located far away from the castle. The increase in the population of peasants led to economies of scale in protection. However, it also enlarged the distance between the castle and the farmlands, which would eventually lead to rising costs of the protection. Thus, the efficient size of a manor is where the marginal cost of providing protection equalled the lord's share of the marginal product of labour, which generally was a tax.

The free market has always been the most effective form of economic organisation as it automatically reflects the desired amount of goods and services exchanged in the economy. More importantly, it gives us the ability to know the appropriate rate of exchange: market price. However, the existence of a concentrated, thick market had not yet emerged in this era. It was more sensible and practical for the lords to directly take goods from labours, as an exchange of the protection, instead of employing other workers. Besides, there was no impartial third party to speculate the exchange. As a result, the action happened unfairly, and the surplus went straight to the ruling class without any kinds of proper allocation. In short, the system allowed the rulers to exploit the labours.

### **The Black Death**

The Black Death is said to be the deadliest disease, out of all other diseases, to ever eradicate mankind, caused by the infection of a bacteria called "Yersinia pestis" with rodents and fleas as carriers. The disease spreads in the air through direct contact or by contaminated food or materials. In the past, there have been 3 outbreaks but, in this writing, we will focus on the second outbreak during the 14th century, as aforementioned, as well as the social response and measures.

In the 14th-century, the outbreak was known as the "Great Pestilence" or "Great Plague", which started in southern India and China, spreading throughout the Silk Road across Asia and brought to Crimea in 1346. Then, commercial ships travelled to Europe by ships carrying black rats from Crimea. Consequently, the spread of plague swept over Mediterranean and Europe; Chinese and Mongol were presumably the cause. Italy's epidemic in 1338 and 1351 resulted in two-thirds of its population to die, known as "Great Mortality". The Great Plague of London accounted for 70% of the population of 450,000, left with only 60,000. The epidemic continued until the 17th century, known as "Black Death," killing an estimated 25 million people.

The immediate social response was to flee. Areas where people evacuated to were isolated mountains since large urban areas had high population density so it was easier for the spread of plague to take place, especially in cities with poor hygiene, filled with parasitic insects such as ticks, fleas, rats. The fear of the plague severely led to the sudden collapse of family institutions. When one family member got infected,

other members jilted the sick so seeing a mother leave her infected child to fight on his own was not peculiar at the time. While some people were convinced that the disease was triggered by corrupted air caused by foul odor, which required city cleanup by water for religious belief. In addition, individuals acted in self-defence by carrying aromatic herbs around their neck or small bottles of vinegar in the belief to combat with the bad-smelling air. This belief was further incorporated in the development of the costume for doctors to prevent the transmission of plague when treating patients.

Officials or the Board of Health were given full legal authority to stop the spread of the plague and to contain it if there was already an outbreak. The measures in coping with the plague which BoH relied on were three major practices : quarantine, lazarettos and sanitary cordons.

Quarantine was the core of the public health measures, having two types which are the maritime quarantine and the land-based quarantine. The maritime quarantine aimed to protect the shore and contained the ongoing epidemic by directing ships that travelled from eastern Mediterranean to islands, controlled by BoH, instead of coming directly to the mainland. Ships were to be delicately cleansed with hygienic solution and passengers were taken to the mainland for quarantine lasting forty days before entering the cities; the period of forty days was actually chosen due to Christian belief and it was medically sufficient to identify the infected ones. Regarding the quarantine, passengers and crew were coerced to stay in lazarettos on islands under quarantine high naval security to halt any escape or undesired visit. Despite weak maritime quarantine in some areas, this measure was successful to a great extent. The second quarantine was land-based which aimed to cope with the existing outbreak. Motivated by fears, the communities decided to use force to violently pause any entry of people and goods. By no means, this required a high level of military supervision and that was how sanitary cordons originated. Sanitary cordons were simply an incredibly long line of barriers stretching from the Adriatic to the mountain of Transylvania. However, its excessively harsh practice shortened the period to which the measure was used.

In the aspect of therapeutic measure, the doctors understood the disease and its effects to a good extent which resulted in two dominant treatments: depletive strategy and internal medicines. For the depletive strategy, they understood that the diseases caused the patients to release the poison through vomit, diarrhea and sweat, therefore the doctors suggested the intake of pills that stimulated the body expel the poison in a large amount. They also suggested the use of hot compresses onto the buboes so that they bursted and poison would be expelled. Little did they know, both methods only worsened the condition of the patients.

On the other hand, theriac, an internal medicine, acted as an antidote to plague poison but the process of producing such medicine took a long time and the recipe was indeed complex. Thus, it could be seen that even though the medicines were discovered, they were not effective in saving lives. Along with the ineffectiveness of these medicines, hospitals and lazarettos also ran in short supply due to the overload of patients, therefore not all of the patients had an access to the medicine and the worst case scenario was that families were forced to quarantine with their ill members (the excess patients) at home without any further medical aid from the state.

## The Economic Impacts of the Black Death

The Black Death turned the economy in Medieval society upside-down. It had killed one-third of the European population. The remaining upper classes were unskilled in labour works. Thus, massive numbers of workforce were reduced. As people died, it became harder to find workers to plow fields, harvest the crops, and produce goods and services. It led to a high demand for workers and an increase in wages from peasants' demands respectively.

Before the plague, peasants did not go to their villages to find work somewhere. They were tied and expected to fulfill their duties by completing tasks given by their lords. The plague, however, allowed the workers to receive wages. In addition, economic interactions also changed afterward. Payment in kinds such as grains or mazes were altered to payment in cash. Decrease in the number of the peasants also provided them the ability to bargain. Peasants demanded for higher wages and better conditions. Also, the lords realised they had less authority to control over their workers. Many lords began to change from harvest to raise sheep instead due to lower worker required. There were more customers for the meat and for woolen clothing. As peasant's income increased they became free to move away from property owned by lords. Some workers were able to buy their own land.

The wage increase impacted the price of daily products. Because of increased labor costs to manufacture goods, there was abrupt price inflation. As less laborers work for the raw materials, the costs of the needed materials to produce increased.

Commonly, the lord did not desire to pay for a higher price of goods, nor higher wages for jobs. The English Parliament under King Edward III enacted the Statute of Labourers in 1351 in regards to a labour shortage. The law was created in order to prohibit a wage required higher than pre-Plague which was set the maximum wage by the statute in the year 1346 and limiting the movement for better conditions. In addition, the English Parliament supplemented taxation that everyone over age 14 had to pay. The tax supported the Hundred Years' War between France and England. The tax was designed to take the money from the majority of the population which is the poor. Many peasants had to sell their belongings to pay their tax. This made it strongly divided in society. The upper class could provide free labour flow. They gradually began to force the peasantry back into what they thought was in the right place for the lower class. However, the peasants had to accept a lower economic status.

John Ball, who was an English priest, was one of the leaders of the peasants' revolt in England. He believed it was wrong that some people in England were very rich while others were very poor. He became a traveling priest and gave sermons. There were a few people ready to listen. He would pour words against particularly the sins of the rich. Influenced by Ball, several peasant villages rebelled against tax collectors. The Peasants' Revolt of 1381 began at Essex and spread to Kent, where Wat Tyler was chosen as a leader. Wat Tyler marched a group of rebels from Canterbury to London. The number of peasant revolts increased from his enthusiasm in their cause and his persuasive nature encouraged the peasants into London. Tyler tried unsuccessfully to talk with the King. King Richard II ordered the gates to be closed. However, the Londoners comprehended the rebels and left the gate open. The King agreed from requiring a meeting with King Richard II by the numerous rebels and he would meet the rebels

outside the gates. The peasants hoped these revolutionary demands to end the feudal system. Thus, the strongly rigid class system would be disintegrated. Peasants had the same rights to nobles. However, King Richard II disagreed with their requests. This altercation ended when two leaders, Wat Tyler and John Ball, were killed and their heads stuck on poles to be paraded around London.

Although the peasants were quickly dispersed after the leaders died and also the peasants' requests rejected, the Peasants' Revolt did not fail. This outburst of rebellion and violence could stop the regulated peasant wages by King Richard II and the Parliament. The increased economic power of the laborers could stop function profitability in the manorial system. The surviving peasants triumphed over the manorial system leading to the feudal system declined.

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