

Ec 365
Spring 2026

Assignment 3
paper copy due in class, Tuesday, February 17

This assignment should be typed, max 2 pages single space.

One of the goals of this course is to see how economics contributes to the understanding of history. The study of history is worthwhile when it goes beyond the mere account of facts and anecdotes, and uncovers *mechanisms* which are independent of individuals. In this task, economics which emphasizes optimization under constraints is a particularly useful tool. (Such optimization is found in many domains of nature, including the animal world). The analysis of mechanisms has been pursued by historians outside of economics as the following short texts will show. An important historical event, which took place in a late August afternoon in 1346, the battle of Crécy between England and France (in the north of France), was prepared by structural changes in the previous century. The assignment is to illustrate this impact from a nearly contemporary account.

A superb work is *The Welsh Wars of Edward I* published in 1901. It is still a model today and was reprinted in 1996 with the following foreword of Michael Prestwich (possibly the best specialist of Edward I today):

"J.E. Morris' The Welsh Wars of Edward I is a truly pioneering work. It was first published in 1901, and it was not for many years that other scholars began to approach the subject in the way Morris did. Not content to limit himself to the conventional questions of military history, those about battles, strategy and tactics, he first of all examined the structures that underlay the triumphs achieved by Edward I in Wales."

Morris explains himself at the very outset of his preface

"If it be true that the English learnt on the battlefields of Scotland the experience which was destined to make them the victors at Crecy and Poitiers, it is equally true that the preliminary experience had been learnt in Wales. It was precisely because I wanted to trace back the evolution of the typically English combination of knights with archers beyond the battle of Falkirk, which is usually considered to have been the first great victory of the longbow, that I began to study the documents of the Welsh wars. The period, rather more than eighteen years, is of peculiar interest. The rolls are tolerably exhaustive; we have minute details concerning the men in the king's pay in most of his armies, besides evidence which enables us to conjecture the strength of others. Feudal and paid troops are found fighting side by side".

So far in this course, we have seen three main types of public finances, Egypt, the Roman empire and feudalism. In regard to the last one, the lectures emphasized that feudalism is essentially an adaptation of the public finances (always for military purpose before 1815) to the conditions of information and enforcement in the Middle Ages. A statement to which I subscribe wholeheartedly is the following summary by J. Strayer, who was one of the important figures in 20th century medieval studies.

"The basic characteristics of feudalism in Western Europe are a fragmentation of political authority, public power in private hands, and a military system in which an essential part of

the armed forces is secured through private contracts. Feudalism is a method of government, and a way of securing the forces necessary to preserve that method of government.

This is not as narrow a definition as it seems. The possessors of political and military power will naturally model their society to fit their own needs. They will manipulate the economy so that they get the greatest share of production; they will, as wealthy consumers, influence writers and artists; they will establish standards to which their society must conform. Thus, it is perfectly legitimate to speak of feudal society, or a feudal age, if we remember that it was the political-military structure which made the society and the age feudal.

The battle of Crécy is a critical event in feudalism (as defined by Strayer). At the time of the battle, the armies, technologies and strategies were set. Their forms had been shaped for the most part by the public finances in England and France and the evolutions of feudalism on the two sides of the Channel. This issue is the focus on the assignment.

The text below is extracted from the account of the battle by Froissart. He was 9 years old at the time of the battle and wrote his book 13 years after the event.

Make sure you are familiar with the basic historical facts of the time. The short summary of the battle in [Wikipedia](#) is useful but does not address the issues of the assignment.

Have a first reading of the text below. I made minor corrections on a text which is in the public domain on the web. (Some parts are skipped but they may be useful for the understanding of the customs of the time).

After a second reading, answer the following question (Not more than two pages. A good and accurate argument could fit in one page-single space).

Identify the details in the battle (composition of the armies, strategies, individual motivations and decisions, events which seemed random and beyond control that day), which are direct consequences of the different evolutions of feudalism in England and France. A central point is that feudal dues had been more monetized in England, especially during the reign of Edward I, than in France. Be as close to the text as you can. Use, without excess, short quotations to illustrate your argument. The most useful paragraphs are 1 to 7.

Account by Froissart:

1. On Saturday, the French king rose early and attended mass in Abbeville at his lodging in the Abbey of Saint Peter. He then departed after sunrise. Two leagues outside the town, his enemies in sight, some of his lords spoke up: "Sir, it would be wise to organize your troops and let your foot soldiers lead the way. They shouldn't be bothered by the horsemen." The king sent four knights, the Moine of Bazeilles, the lord of Noyers, the lord of Beaujeu, and the lord d'Aubigny, to scout the English host. They rode right up to it and saw everything. The Englishmen saw them and knew exactly what they were up to. They ignored them and didn't give them the time of day, sending them back the way they came. The French king watched the four knights return and waited for them to reach him. When they did, he demanded, "Tell me, what news do you bring?" The four knights looked at each other, waiting for one of them to speak. Finally, the king said to the Moine, who had done so much for him in the past, "Speak, sir." "Sir, I will speak, if it pleases you, under the correction of my fellows." "Sir, we have ridden and seen the behavior of your enemies. Know this:

they are rested in three corps, abiding for you. Rest here and lodge for this night, Sir. It will be very late before your battles are set in good order, and your people will be weary and out of array. Your enemies will be fresh and ready to receive you, so do as I say. Early in the morning you may order your corps with more leisure, and advise your enemies with more deliberation, and consider well in what way you will attack them; for, sir, they will certainly stand by you.

2. So the king ordered it to be done. Then his two marshals, one in front and the other behind, rode out, saying to every banner, 'Tarry and abide here in the name of God and Saint Denis. Those who were in front stayed, but those who were behind would not stay, but rode on, saying that they would not stay until they were as far ahead as those who were in front; and when they saw them coming up behind, they rode on again, so that neither the king nor his marshals could control them. So they rode without order or good array, until they came in sight of their enemies: and as soon as the foremost saw them, they retreated without good array, whereupon the foremost were astonished and ashamed, and thought that the foremost had fought. Then they might have had leisure and room to go forward, if they had had list: some went forth, and some abode still. The common people, of whom all the roads between Abbeville and Cressy were full, when they saw that they were near their enemies, took their swords and cried, "Down with them! let us slay them all. There is no man, though he was present on the journey, who could conceive or show the truth of the evil order that existed among the French party, and yet they were a marvelous great number. What I write in this book I learned especially from the Englishmen, who saw them well; and also certain knights of Sir John of Hainault, who was always with King Philip, showed me as they knew it.
3. The Englishmen, who were in three corps lying on the ground to rest them, as soon as they saw the Frenchmen approach, they rose upon their feet fair and easily without any haste and arranged their groups. The first, which was the prince's battle, the archers there stood in manner of a herse and the men of arms in the bottom of the battle. The earl of Northampton and the earl of Arundel with the second battle were on a wing in good order, ready to comfort the prince's battle, if need were.
4. The lords and knights of France came not to the assembly together in good order, for some came before and some came after in such haste and evil order, that one of them did trouble another. When the French king saw the Englishmen, his blood changed, and said to his marshals: 'Make the Genoese go on before and begin the battle in the name of God and Saint Denis.' There were of the Genoese cross-bows about six thousand.
5. But they were so tired of going six leagues [*about 15 miles*] that day, armed with their crossbows, that they said to their constables, "We are not well ordered to fight this day, for we are not in the case to do any great deed of arms: we have more need of rest. These words came to the Earl of Alencon, who said: 'It is well that a man should be charged with such a sort of rascal, to be weak and to fail now at the most needful time.'

6. Also, at about the same time, there fell a great rain and a flash of lightning with a terrible thunder, and before the rain there came flying over both battles a great number of crows for fear of the coming storm. Then the air began to clear again, and the sun began to shine fair and bright, which was right in the eyes of the French and on the backs of the English. [*It was in the late afternoon*].
7. When the Genoese were gathered together and began to approach, they began to utter cries so loud that it was wonderful. They did this to frighten the Englishmen, but the Englishmen stood still and did not move in spite of this: then the Genoese made another cry the second time, and stepped forward a little, and the Englishmen did not move a foot: thirdly, they jumped again and cried, and went forward until they were within range; then they shot fiercely with their crossbows. Then the English archers stepped out a step and let their arrows fly so completely and so thickly that it seemed like snow. When the Genoese felt the arrows pierce their heads, arms, and breasts, many of them threw down their crossbows, cut their strings, and returned in discomfort. When the king of France saw them flying away, he said, "Slay these rascals, for they are making us suffer for no reason. Then you would have seen how the men of arms rushed in among them and killed a great number of them; and still the English fired while they saw the thickest crowd; the sharp arrows ran into the men of arms and into their horses, and many fell, horses and men, among the Genoese, and when they had fallen they could not get up again, for the crowd was so thick that one fell over the other. And also among the English there were certain rascals who went about with great knives, and they went among the men of arms, and slew and murdered many as they lay on the ground, both earls, barons, knights, and squires, after whom the king of England was displeased, for he would rather have taken them prisoners.
8. ...
9. The Earl of Alençon came to the battle and fought with the English, and the Earl of Flanders did the same. These two lords, with their companies, overtook the English archers and came to the prince's battle, where they fought bravely for a long time. The French king would have liked to come there when he saw their banners, but there was a great hedge of archers before him.
10. ...
11. In another place the Earl of Alençon and the Earl of Flanders fought bravely, each lord under his own banner; but in the end they could not resist the power of the English, and so they were slain there also, and several other knights and squires. Also the Earl Louis of Blois, nephew of the French king, and the Duke of Lorraine fought under their banners, but at last they were closed in by a company of English and Welsh, and there were slain for all their prowess. The Earl of Auxerre, the Earl of Saint-Pol, and many others were also slain.

12. In the evening the king of France, who had left about him no more than five dozens people, among whom was Sir John of Hainault, who had once helped the king, for his horse had been slain by an arrow, said to the king: "Sir, depart, for it is time; lose not thyself wilfully: if ye have loss now, ye shall recover it another season. So he took the king's horse by the bridle and led him away in a way that was necessary. Then the king rode until he came to the castle of Broye. Then the king called the captain of the guard, who came to the walls and said, "Who is it that calls at this hour of the night? Then the king said, 'Open your gate quickly, for this is the unhappy king of France. Then the captain, knowing that it was the king, opened the gate and let down the bridge. Then the king came in, and he had with him only five barons, Sir John of Hainault, Sir Charles of Montmorency, the Lord of Beaujeu, the Lord of Aubigny, and the Lord of Montsault. The king would not stay there, but drank and left there about midnight, and so rode with such guides as knew the country, until he came to Amiens in the morning, and rested there.