Topics in economic history

Fall 2019
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Office hours: 401, Wednesday, 2-5pm
(Call before to make an appointment)

The course provides an introduction to economic history. The main thread will be the evolution of the public finances from the antique Mediterranean world to Western Europe up the 19th century (with detours in the US and Asia). The course should provide an introduction to

- interactions between economics and history,
- relations between current and past issues in economics,
- some examples of current research in economic history.

A central feature in this course is to develop your own outlook at history. Use the work of others for their information, but make up your own mind. What you will most remember is not what others said about a particular event but how you looked at it. An essential task in this course is to develop your own critical thinking. For this, going through the filter of academic work and accessing historical documents are essential.

There is no pre-chewed material as in a textbook, and in any case, there is no textbook that would fit with the material of the course. You have been warned: do not complain about the absence of textbook. A number of readings are in professional journals. Economic history requires more reading than other courses in economics. If you are not prepared to do some extra reading, you should not take the course.

All readings will be either provided with a URL (requiring a BU connection), or downloadable directly from the web site of the course. Some indications will be given on the readings. The list of readings will be updated during the semester to fit the need of this specific class.

Some technical tools in economics will be used, especially in macroeconomics and possibly game theory, but they tools will be explained from first principles. Be prepared to occasionally use some elementary algebra. There is no pre-requisite of historical knowledge but you will have to learn historical facts and rough dates. In general, I don't care about particular years, but you should not place Julius Caesar in the 18th century. Basic knowledge of Stata is required. If you don’t have it, you can acquire it during the semester.

For some parts of the course, there will be lecture notes. In many cases, slides will be provided on the web site, although past experience has shown that classroom discussions are often more fruitful than lecturing with slides.

If you have a strong interest in history and put the effort, the course will be rewarding, I can assure you. If you don't, you will not be very happy in this course.
Assignments
Weekly assignments will be given. They will be graded on the scale from 0 to 4. Some summary of a reading (with specific questions to be answered) may be required. Discussions between students on the assignments are fruitful and encouraged. All submitted work for the assignments is personal however, and you know the standards of ethical conduct. In order to facilitate the grading, all assignments are to be submitted with a format that will be specified. Assignments that are late or do not follow the format will not be accepted.

Exams and grades
The final grade will be an average of class participation (10%), assignments (20%), the mid-terms (20%) the final (30%). This weighting may be revised before the middle of the semester. Students who perform for the first 6 weeks of the course may substitute a paper for the final exam (same weight).

Web site
The material and information for the course (assignments, changes of schedule, additional remarks and comments, readings, some course slides and lecture notes), will be posted on a course web site. Check it frequently.

Syllabus
The following list of readings is provided as an indication of the topics in the course. It is not a list of required readings. The web site of the course will be the reference for the required/optional readings, and all the assignments in the course. The schedule, the order of the topics and the time devoted to each topic may be altered in the semester, depending on the constraints of the term, exams and holidays.

1. Mesopotamia
Garfinkle, Steven J. "Public versus Private in the Ancient near East".
Algaze, Guillermo. "The Sumerian Takeoff".

2. Egypt
Butzer, Karl, W. "Long-Term Nile Flood Variation and Political Discontinuities in Pharaonic Egypt".
Warburton, David (2000), "Before the IMF: the Economic Implications of Unintentional Structural Adjustment in Ancient Egypt."
3. The Roman empire

Hopkins "On the Political Economy of the Roman Empire". Sections 9, 13, 22, 26
Hopkins (1980) "Trade and Taxes in the Roman Empire".

4. Feudalism

An interview of Ed Green. Read only the part on "Private Information and Democracy"
Harriss, G. L. "War and the Emergence of the Emergence of the English Parliament 1297-1360".
Chapter 1 (1000-1300), pages 1-56.
Chapter 2 (1300-1450), pages 57-88.

5. City States

Pezzolo, Luciano (2007). "Government debts and credit markets in Renaissance Italy."
6. Spain 16th -17th century


Flynn, Dennis O. (1982). "Fiscal Crisis and the Decline of Spain (Castille)," Journal of Economic History, 42, 139-47. (JSTOR)


7. The Netherlands


8. Government institutions


9. France 17th and 18th century


10. England, 18th century


11. France XVIII and the Revolution


12. 19th century


