



Universitetet
i Stavanger

FACULTY OF ARTS AND EDUCATION

BACHELOR'S THESIS

Study programme: History – Bachelor's Degree Programme

Candidate Number: 9509

Supervisor: Tyson Retz

Thesis Title: Progress in the 13th Century Manorial System

Word count: 7763

Appendices/other: N/A

Stavanger, 17.05.2022

Table of Contents

1. Introduction	3
1.1 Topic	3
1.2 Research question and structure	4
1.3 Methodology	5
2. Historiography	6
2.1 Progress and the Long Middle Ages	6
2.2 Capitalism and Industrialization in the Middle Ages	7
2.3 The Manorial System	10
3. Discussion of Agricultural Treatises	13
3.1 Background	13
3.2 Progress in Agricultural Science and Technology	13
3.3 Progress in Accounting and Financial Management	17
4. Conclusion	23
5. Bibliography	25
5.1 Primary sources	25
5.2 Secondary sources	25

Progress in the 13th Century Manorial System

1. Introduction

1.1 Topic

The Industrial Revolution, capitalism and global trade have brought the west exponential economic growth and increase in living standards. This has not, however, been without issues. Global warming and ecological destruction have become a pressing global crisis, and some scientists believe this is already too late to reverse. The effects of this will be many: large areas of the world becoming submerged, desertified or otherwise unliveable; mass extinction of plant and animal species; large refugee crises; food shortages and political instability, to name a few.¹ Many view further scientific and industrial progress as the solution to the crisis, and that maintaining our living standards while adapting to green energy is possible, while others are more sceptical and assert that we must reduce consumption and production immediately.²

In other words: despite this pressing crisis, the view that human society is on a path of continuous improvement is entrenched in our mentalities. The increase in living standards, global reduction in malnutrition, and scientific advancement make the idea very convincing. On the other hand, we have the negative sides of industrialization, scientific progress and modernity, such as the aforementioned climate crisis and the destructive potential of science and technology. In addition, there is the cultural side. In a famous argument, the sociologist Zygmunt Bauman sees the development of scientific racism, eugenics, and genocide, particularly the Holocaust, as something born out of the Enlightenment strive to measure and order the physical world.³ When did the idea of progress, that the human condition has been continuously improving over the course of history and will continue to improve, develop?

In schools we learn about the renaissance as an age of reason and humanistic learning, as opposed to the dogma of the medieval church. The Enlightenment idea of the Middle Ages as the “Dark Ages” where no innovation and reason existed has long been refuted, and there has been an increased interest in the Middle Ages academically, as well as in art, architecture and literature in the roughly last 150 years. Historians today both look at the particularities of the Middle Ages, as well as the continuities between it, Antiquity, the Early Modern Period,

¹ United Nations, ‘The Climate Crisis – A Race We Can Win’.

² Piper, ‘Can We Save the Planet by Shrinking the Economy?’

³ Bauman, *Moderniteten og Holocaust*, 104–11.

and the Modern Period.⁴ The historian Jacques Le Goff states that a chief characteristic of the Middle Ages was the *lack of progress*. This does not mean he viewed the Middle Ages as backwards, quite the opposite; many of the inventions and intellectual movements attributed to the renaissance sprung up during the Middle Ages. What he means is that the *idea* of progress did not develop until the 18th century with the development of capitalism formulated by Adam Smith and the Industrial Revolution.⁵

1.2 Research question and structure

In this thesis I will discuss the research question: “To what extent was the idea of «progress» a driving factor behind manorial treatises from 13th century England?”. To elaborate further I will discuss whether we can discern the idea of “progress” in four treatises on agriculture and manorial management from 13th century England and compare and contrast this with modern notions of progress to both show the differences between the Modern world and the Middle Ages, and to show why the Middle Ages can be relevant today.

After the introduction I will give an account of some of the historiography regarding the manorial system and the debates regarding progress, capitalism and industrialization in the Middle Ages. This is to give context to the analysis and discussion of the primary sources in chapter three. In the discussion I will cover the four primary sources together rather than individually, and instead divide the discussion into two topics. Then, in the fourth and last chapter I will sum up my findings and make a conclusion where I answer my research question.

The scope of this thesis is rather limited chronologically, geographically and thematically; I will discuss a set of treatises all most likely written in 13th century England focusing mostly on the scientific, technological and economic aspects of the idea of progress, which tie into questions regarding capitalism and industrialization. This will naturally give the clearest idea of people’s attitudes towards progress particularly in 13th century England but could also give a general idea of thought in the European Middle Ages. It is worth nothing that by people’s attitudes, this gives the clearest picture of thought among the aristocracy, privileged members of the church, and potentially bourgeoisie, not the common peasants, as these were the groups of society that could read and write, afford books, and had interests in

⁴ Blockmans and Hoppenbrouwers, *Introduction to Medieval Europe 300-1500*, 1–11.

⁵ Le Goff, *Must We Divide History into Periods?*, 110–11; Le Goff, *Money and the Middle Ages*, 148–50.

estate management. Again, this does not mean that attitudes towards progress between the privileged and unprivileged had to be wildly different, but we assume the masses were more sceptical of innovation, as they mostly saw it as benefiting the lord.⁶

1.3 Methodology

As mentioned before I will spend this thesis comparing four 13th century treatises on agriculture and manorial management. I have picked these because I am more interested in the normative rather than descriptive aspect of manorial management, i.e., how *should* manors be managed. These treatises are comparable to modern textbooks or instruction manuals, and Walter of Henley's text served as a standard authority on agriculture for hundreds of years.⁷ They have all been written in the same century, come from the same area, and treat very similar topics. It's therefore natural, I think, to study and compare them all together rather than one by one.

The treatises were all written in Old French, but translated into relatively modern English in the edition used in this thesis. Relying on translations might not give as deep of an understanding as reading the originals, and some meaning might be lost. This is a limit with my thesis but will be remedied by extensive use of historiography. Another issue with my thesis is a general problem of working with historical sources, especially premodern: they often do not explicitly talk about everything we are interested in, and we have to make assumptions based on other evidence.⁸ As these treatises talk quite a lot about management and finances, but less about science and technology, it is easier to estimate the authors views on the former. For both, particularly the latter, we must also make assumptions based on the *lack of* evidence, and view technology in a broader sense than tools and machines. As I have stressed, this thesis will focus mainly on the views of the privileged members of society; an aristocrat or an urban merchant might have had "capitalist mindset", but that does not mean the average peasant did.

⁶ Le Goff, *Medieval Civilization 400-1500*, 200.

⁷ Cunningham, XVIII.

⁸ Kjeldstadli, *Fortida er ikke hva den en gang var*, 209–13.

2. Historiography

2.1 Progress and the Long Middle Ages

As mentioned before, Le Goff argued that there was no progress in the modern sense during the Middle Ages. There were inventions and improvements, what he calls “novelties”, and there were rediscoveries of “lost” knowledge, but there was no substantial material or intellectual progress until the industrial revolution in 18th century.⁹ He even shows that the word “progress” was probably not employed before in 1757 by Mirabeau, where it gained the meaning “forward movement of civilization toward an ever more flourishing condition”.¹⁰ In an economic sense there might have been an increase of the use of money from the 12th century and onwards, the beginnings of a steady money supply and developments of single markets in the 16th and 17th century, but it is anachronistic to talk about capitalism or even proto-capitalism until the 18th century, Le Goff argued.¹¹ He also stressed that there was no *idea* of capitalism until Adam Smith’s *Wealth of Nations*,¹² and that the mere idea of a political economy first emerged in the 17th century, gradually replacing the Aristotelean definition of economy as household management.¹³

Since, according to Le Goff, progress did not occur until the 18th century, he argues against the Renaissance as a distinction historical period, and instead stresses the continuity between the Middle Ages and Renaissance and the fact that there was many small renaissances during the Middle Ages and the Early Modern period. He suggests instead we extend the Middle Ages to around the middle of the 18th century, coining the term “The Long Middle Ages”.¹⁴ He notes that the Renaissance both as a term and a distinct, bright period of rebirth, creativity and rationality was first coined by the French historian Jules Michelet in the middle of the 19th century and further popularized by the Swiss historian Jacob Burckhardt closely after.¹⁵ This remains a popular view today,¹⁶ and the idea of the Renaissance was in turn influenced by the view of the Middle Ages as a particularly dark time where the reason of antiquity made way for superstition and ignorance.¹⁷

⁹ Le Goff, *Must We Divide History into Periods?*, 110–11.

¹⁰ *Ibid*, 102.

¹¹ Le Goff, *Money and the Middle Ages*, 148–50.

¹² Le Goff, *Must We Divide History into Periods?*, 110–11.

¹³ *Ibid*, 82.

¹⁴ *Ibid*, 105–12.

¹⁵ *Ibid*, 31–43.

¹⁶ *Ibid*, 45.

¹⁷ *Ibid*, 59–61.

Le Goff's main point of discussion regarding periodization rests upon the question of progress, so it is natural that the question of progress and the question of periodization in history ties together. Looking at economics through the lens of progress we can therefore, if we agree with Le Goff, argue for a "pre-capitalist" period until the middle of the 18th century, and a "capitalist" age afterwards. If, for example we can discern a "capitalist" attitude in 13th century England, we might be able to argue for a "proto-capitalist" period from 1300 to 1750, or similar. The question of progress therefore becomes a useful tool for categorizing and periodizing history, which is very difficult as there are always continuities and exceptions, but nevertheless makes it easier to interpret history.

2.2 Capitalism and Industrialization in the Middle Ages

Many historians have argued precisely for discontinuities during the Middle Ages and Early Modern period and hail certain events, inventions, or periods as significant turning points in history, where the idea of the renaissance might be the most famous. In regard to capitalism and industrialization, many historians have argued for capitalist tendencies and what they interpret as industrialization during the Middle Ages and Early Modern Period. The Marxist-influenced historian Robert Brenner, for example, viewed class warfare between peasants and frivolously extracting nobility as the beginnings of capitalist relations in Medieval England, which in turn led to the industrial revolution, downplaying the importance of market forces in this development. After analysing the famous Domesday book however, the historian Graeme Snooks challenged the conventional view that market forces were of limited importance at the time, estimating that as much as 40% of the economy was involved in market activities in late 11th century England.¹⁸ In both of these arguments, the historians look for discontinuities in the past, for the origins of capitalism or proto-capitalism.

Immanuel Wallenstien is another example of an historian looking at market forces as the origin of capitalism. He argued that capitalism emerged during the "crisis of feudalism" in 16th century Europe, replacing Feudalism as an economic system.¹⁹ This argument has been criticised, both for methodological reasons and for the existence of certain "capitalist" tendencies before the 16th century, such as so-called "super-companies", financial investments and profit seeking, long distance trade in both luxury and bulk goods, etc. An important

¹⁸ Mielants, 'Perspectives on the Origins of Merchant Capitalism in Europe', 231–33.

¹⁹ Ibid, 240.

aspect of this criticism is the argument that feudalism and capitalism could exist side-by-side, which Wallenstein denies explicitly in his assertion that capitalism replaced feudalism.²⁰

Regarding industrialization there has been a long debate regarding to which extent this occurred in the Middle Ages. Starting with the works of historians Lewis Mumford and Marc Bloch in 1934/35, a thesis or movement developed which asserted that the European Middle Ages saw a rapid increase in the use of windmills and watermills, and that these were increasingly used in a variety of industrial processes. An important aspect of this thesis, which I will call the IRMA-thesis²¹ for simplicity's sake, is that these developments were rapid and changed Medieval society in such a way that it is justified to speak of an "industrial revolution".²²

In 1941 Eleanora Carus-Wilson built upon this thesis with her empirical study of 13th century England arguing that the country saw a mechanisation of the fulling industry²³ during the period by the rapid increase in the use of wind and water mills for this purpose. Carus-Wilson argued that rural manor lords, were central in development, building and maintaining them while at the same time enforcing monopolies, for example that all cloth made on the manor had to be fulled in the manorial mill and not at home. She argued further than this caused a decline in the urban weaver's guilds.²⁴ An important detail she notes is that the evidence for these fulling mills primarily come from monastic, episcopal and royal estates, which in general have left us with more complete accounts.²⁵

During the post-war period the thesis continues to develop, reaching the general conclusion that the watermill, which was invented during antiquity but never used to power anything more than grain-mills, made possible an industrial revolution in the other half of the Middle Ages, largely spread and supported by monastic orders.²⁶ Different historians have their own points of focus regarding this thesis. Lynn White, for example, states that the increased usage of non-human power from the 12th century and onward was born out of economic necessity, but rather Christian views of human worth and efforts to free man from

²⁰ Ibid, 238–46.

²¹ «Industrial Revolution Middle Ages», a convention used by Adam Lucas.

²² Lucas, *Wind, Water, Work*, 204.

²³ Labour-intensive processing of wool by beating or compressing the cloth in water. This served to cleanse the cloth with various detergents, and to make it stronger with a smoother and softer surface. See Carus-Wilson (1941) p. 39-40.

²⁴ Carus-Wilson, 'An Industrial Revolution of the Thirteenth Century', 51–59.

²⁵ Ibid, 46–47.

²⁶ Lucas, *Wind, Water, Work*, 202–5.

drudgery.²⁷ He also states that by the 14th century this replacement of human power particularly wind and watermills had become widespread.²⁸ Another historian, Jean Gimpel, clearly shows his support of the IRMA-thesis in his usage of words: he talks of watermills as “factories” and Cistercian monks as assembly line workers. He closely connects milling to economic development, and states that these were profitable investments, with a stock-market like institution of buying and selling shares of a mill.²⁹

In these views lies a clear conception of economic and industrial progress on a fundamental level in the Middle Ages, and according to Lynn White, also in an intellectual sense. In many ways, these arguments are precisely what Le Goff argued against in his “Long Middle Ages” thesis. He comments specifically on the development of machinery, stating that there was no real development in the use of machines during the Middle Ages, that many “medieval” inventions had been known in antiquity, and that attitudes generally remained opposed to the concept.³⁰ Many other historians of technology particularly have argued against the IRMA-thesis. Adam Lucas has in newer research argued that industrial milling was more limited than previously thought, and this was not a phenomenon unique to the High Middle Ages, but built upon a longer tradition from antiquity.³¹ Other historians, such as Richard Holt, argues that English fulling mills and other industrial mills were rare and not very profitable.³²

Returning to the question of progress, Adam Lucas wrote of the IRMA-thesis as “an extension into the Middle Ages of the modernist meta-narrative of western progress”.³³ Similarly, Frances and Joseph Gies argued that many proponents of the IRMA-thesis were coloured by presentism, and that we can see a difference in history of technology written between 1925 and 1960, and what came after. This came from the general academic attitudes shifting away from viewing societal and technological progress as self-evidently positive to more attention being drawn towards the negative aspects of technology and ecological destruction. Jean Gimpel did not just see medieval Europa as industrialized, but overindustrialized.³⁴

²⁷ White, ‘Technology and Invention in the Middle Ages’, 156.

²⁸ White, *Medieval Technology and Social Change*, 88–89.

²⁹ Gimpel, *Den industrielle revolution i middelalderen*, 12–31.

³⁰ Le Goff, *Medieval Civilization 400-1500*, 201.

³¹ Lucas, *Wind, Water, Work*, 205–32.

³² Holt, ‘Medieval England’s Water-Related Technologies’, 69–75.

³³ Lucas, *Wind, Water, Work*, 205.

³⁴ Gies, *Cathedral, Forge, and Waterwheel*, 3–4.

2.3 The Manorial System

To discuss the idea of progress in idea of progress in treatises on agricultural and manorial management it is pertinent to give a brief overview of the manorial system and some central questions and debates concerning it to give context to the discussion.

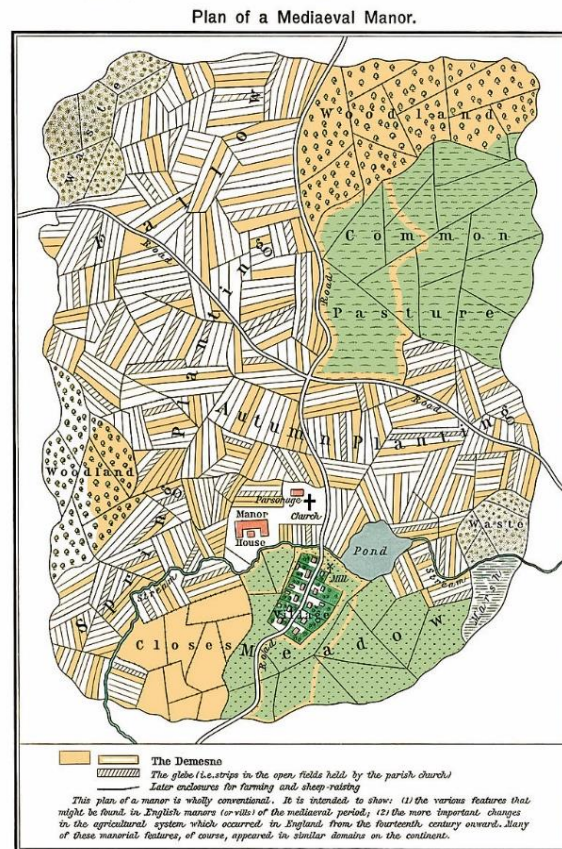


Figure 1. Conventional map of a Medieval English Manor. Taken from Shepherd (1923).

In brief, the manorial system³⁵ refers to a system of estate management in the Middle Ages. This system has its roots in Carolingian France, which in turn draws influence from the Roman aristocratic estates, the *villa*. The manor, or *mansus*, was a large, landed property containing a clear administrative centre where the lord resided. The arable land and meadows followed a bipartite division; it was divided into the lords own land, held *in demesne*, and the land held in hereditary possession by unfree or semi-free tenant peasants. Both the demesne and peasant lands were generally divided into a great number of fragmented parcels, see figure 1. In addition, there was woods, wastelands, and water resources, which peasants held a limited right to. In return for tenancy and protection, peasants mostly provided labour-

³⁵ Also called the Seigneurial system.

services, so-called *corvée* labour, which usually implied cultivating the lord's land.³⁶ Later, however, rents were increasingly paid in cash rather than *corvée* labour.³⁷ Additionally, the lord derived income from charging his tenants for legal procedures and contracts, such as marriage, and for using common services, such as the manorial mill. These incomes typically came in form of produce, and later, money.³⁸

It is worth noting that this system was not the only form of agricultural organization and was rare in more peripheral parts of Europe. There was a great deal of variation in terms of tenancy and estate organization, both inside and outside the Carolingian Empire. Though, in the context of Medieval England, Anglo-Saxon estate management was very similar to the Carolingian manor and was most likely modelled on it.³⁹ After the Norman conquest, the essence of the system largely remained the same, but there was a large reorganization concerning ownership, centralization, and standardization of tenurial principles.⁴⁰

The question regarding to what degree peasants were free also remain complex. After the Norman conquest the institution of *villeinage* developed in England, which can be compared to serfdom. There was a clear legal concept of a difference between free peasants and *villeins*, which generally depended on personal status rather than land tenure, although these were often related. In mixed marriages legitimate children typically inherited their status from their father, *villeins* could be bought and sold, and their property was legally considered their lords.⁴¹ Again, it is worth nothing that despite the formulation of this legal doctrine the actual reality was more complex. In many manors, *villeins* were not bought and sold, owned personal property, and had freedom of movement.⁴²

The questions important to this thesis how the manorial system impacted economic and technological progress and to what degree manorial lords, both lay and ecclesiastical, consciously innovated, sought profits and re-invested these into their holdings and other ventures. As shown before, Carus-Wilson argued that manorial lords played a central role in the mechanization of the fulling industry in 13th century England, where aristocratic prerogatives to enforce monopolies, for example, made sure peasants fullled their wool at the manorial mill, instead of at home, even if it might not have been economically viable. We can

³⁶ Blockmans and Hoppenbrouwers, *Introduction to Medieval Europe 300-1500*, 97.

³⁷ Miller and Hatcher, *Medieval England*, 124.

³⁸ Postan, *The Medieval Economy and Society*, 82–83, 223.

³⁹ Blockmans and Hoppenbrouwers, *Introduction to Medieval Europe 300-1500*, 98.

⁴⁰ Postan, *The Medieval Economy and Society*, 86–87.

⁴¹ Miller and Hatcher, *Medieval England*, 112–17.

⁴² *Ibid*, 118–19.

further ask the question: was this purely to seek income for himself, or was this a conscious effort to invest at a loss into a technological process which he believed would be profitable long term?

As shown previously, manorial lords mainly derived income from the profits of their demesne and tenant rents⁴³, including quasi-rents⁴⁴. In the 13th century these were increasingly paid in cash, as mentioned before, and the ratio between demesne profits and tenant rents could vary substantially. From a select amount of sources from the middle to late 13th century, the share of tenant contributions varied from 60% to 28% of the total income.⁴⁵ This, however, gives a limited picture of the situation, as the market economy was still limited. The primary and most important income of manorial lords was produce and goods for their own family and retinue, where the latter could encompass a great number of domestic staff, and administrative officers, both for specific manors and for the lords estate as a whole.⁴⁶ At the turn of the 13th century, the real incomes of many manorial lords fell due to inflation, which, according to Edward Miller and John Hatcher prompted them to seek more opportunities to exploit their tenants. This we can see in the purchase and clearing of new land as well as increased attempts to “rationalize” manorial management through stricter accounting, intensification of agriculture, and development of agricultural practices and technology seen in a number of agricultural treatises, some of which I will analyse in this thesis.⁴⁷ In several examples we can also see that market forces and transport cost did play an important role in the choice of investments and specialization, even though the ecological incentives might have been different.⁴⁸

⁴³ If paid in produce or cash rather than corvée labour.

⁴⁴ Legal fees, fines, and income from manorial monopolies.

⁴⁵ Miller and Hatcher, *Medieval England*, 201.

⁴⁶ *Ibid*, 179–80, 189–204.

⁴⁷ Miller and Hatcher, 210–14.

⁴⁸ Campbell, ‘Ecology Versus Economics’, 88–94.

3. Discussion of Agricultural Treatises

3.1 Background

I will begin with giving a brief background of the four treatises on agriculture and manorial management I intend to discuss. These were all originally written in Old French,⁴⁹ and have been pieced together from multiple surviving manuscripts which might contain errors, new additions, or be translated. Then, they were translated into modern English and published in an 1890 source book, which also contains the original texts and an introduction.⁵⁰ This is generally made possible through philological and comparative methods, where the texts are studied critically and analysed through the lens of language, style, and cultural meaning.⁵¹

Henley's *Husbandry* is a treatise on agricultural management and economics, and have, as mentioned before, been used as a standard reference work until the Early Modern Period, probably having had the most influence of them all. The anonymous *Husbandry* goes deeper into estate accounting rather than practical farming methods, and *Seneschaucie* covers the different offices an estate might consist of, such as the seneschal, bailiff, and provost. Lastly Grosseteste's *Rules* is quite practical like Henley, but also contain information which are not covered in the other treatises, like noble customs and etiquette. In addition, this work was specifically intended to assist a widowed Countess. As mentioned before, we know little about Henley, other than that he served as a bailiff. Grosseteste was a famous bishop and scientist, and the others are unknown, but were probably of similar status.⁵² As these treatises were written in close proximity to each other geographically and temporally, they are natural to compare, and the difference in sub-topics make an interesting point of discussion.

3.2 Progress in Agricultural Science and Technology

I will continue with discussing the topic of progress relating to science and technological development. In other words: to what degree was there an idea of continually improving and optimizing technology through the use of science and experimentation in these treatises? The question of whether or not the explanations and advice given actually are scientific goes outside the scope of this thesis; I will simply focus on trying to gauge the *intent* behind the

⁴⁹ Often called Anglo-Norman in this context.

⁵⁰ Cunningham, 'Introduction'.

⁵¹ Kelly, 'Philology and History', 233, 237.

⁵² Cunningham, 'Introduction'.

treatises. Agricultural science and technology as a term is broad, and this discussion will touch upon technological artifacts, systems, and the “science” behind agriculture.

One important technique outlined in the treatises is regular land surveys. Henley advises the lord to inquire about the land, resources, animals, and men on his estate, as well as to quantify how much each profits his demesne brings and the rents of his tenants. One important part of this is to know exactly the quantity of grains which needs to be sown and how many acres need to be ploughed depending on the form of crop rotation.⁵³ In the anonymous *Husbandry*, the unknown author advises on how exactly to measure and manage the land. He mentions that measures of feet and acres varies from place to place, giving the example that a perch⁵⁴ can be anywhere from 18 to 24 feet. He advises further on how to convert these measures to acres in each situation.⁵⁵

These are bold ambitions in a pre-industrial system but show at least the desire to establish efficient methods to quantify the manor, which is a prerequisite to accounting and financial management. To have an idea of improvement, you must also have an idea of what you already have. Though, while this can be seen as a prerequisite to progress, it does not necessarily lead to it. One key component is missing for technological progress regarding the methods and systems for quantifying the manor: a notion of progress both in the methods themselves and in the reasons behind them. The authors tell the reader *what* to do, but to a lesser extent *how* and *why*. The main reason for quantifying the estate, is at least in Henley’s text, security against bad times and to avoid having to borrow money.⁵⁶ There is, in general, little notion that technology and organizational system could be substantially improved, but rather that there exists a best way to do things, and that is how it ought to be done.

In the introduction to the source book, William Cunningham notes that that these treatises were born out of distinctly English, practical agricultural wisdom, and the authors do not make reference to any agricultural writers from antiquity like Cato the Elder or Varro, nor attempt to apply their principles.⁵⁷ This can both be viewed as an attempt at innovation, and as a measure to conserve long established knowledge. In light of the fact that there is little notion of improvement or innovation in the treatises, I would argue that these still follow the Medieval formula of scientific and technological research, that is to always heavily ground

⁵³ of Henley, ‘Husbandry’, 7-9.

⁵⁴ Acres were divided into roods, which were further divided into perches.

⁵⁵ Lamond, ‘Husbandry’, 69-71.

⁵⁶ of Henley, ‘Husbandry’, 3-5.

⁵⁷ Cunningham, ‘Introduction’, XIX.

research in the *auctoritas*; the already established authorities, firstly the Bible, and secondly the classical authors.⁵⁸ Henley was no theologian, but he still grounds his *why*, largely in old proverbs on the importance of prudence, honesty and compassion, and in a general respect for and praise of God.⁵⁹ Interestingly, we see a similar approach in the bishop Robert Grosseteste, who does not either reference the Bible or any classical authors specifically but still grounds his advice in praise of God. His *Rules* were most likely intended as advice for the widowed Countess of Lincoln,⁶⁰ so it is likely that the audience for this treatise was the reason behind this choice and not a deliberate attempt to detach from classical authorities. Though, it is worth noting that Grosseteste has been described as a central figure in the development of the scientific method and empirical testing.⁶¹

Relating to the advice regarding surveying the estate, there is a great amount of focus on making labour and production more efficient. Henley, for example, spends time demonstrating how a plough can work eight or nine score acres⁶² a year, where the main advice is keeping the plough well maintained, making sure the ploughmen are not neglecting their work, and keeping the horse or ox well fed. Additionally he goes into detail on which situations it is better to use to use each animal, and when and under what conditions it is best to plough.⁶³

In the anonymous *Seneschaucie*, the author goes deeper into the different offices and occupations on a manor; what their roles, obligations and ideal qualities are. Like in Henley's *Husbandry* and the anonymous treatise with the same name, there is a focus on quantifying the estate and effective management. The author starts with outlining the responsibilities of the seneschal, who serves as a manager for the lord's estate, which might contain multiple manors. He does not have absolute power over his junior officers and workers on the estate but serves as more of an advisor for the lord. The seneschal visits each manor and inquires about its management and production. There is a specific mention of *improvement*, which in this context is the seneschals responsible to make sure there is a bettering of the general situation in the manor, that processes are done more efficiently, that more money is made and less lost, and that mistakes are fixed, and profitless endeavours are stopped.⁶⁴ The bailiff and

⁵⁸ Blockmans and Hoppenbrouwers, *Introduction to Medieval Europe 300-1500*, 266–67.

⁵⁹ of Henley, 'Husbandry', 3–7.

⁶⁰ Cunningham, 'Introduction', XLIII-XLIII

⁶¹ Encyclopedia Britannica, 'Western Philosophy - Robert Grosseteste and Roger Bacon'.

⁶² Eightscore = 160 acres, ninescore = 180 acres.

⁶³ of Henley, 'Husbandry', 9–15.

⁶⁴ Lamond, 'Seneschaucie', 85–89.

provost also bore the same responsibility of continuous improvement, according to the author, but on smaller and more practical scale.⁶⁵

To many, this might give a strong parallel to modern technological entrepreneurship and management principles, but it is important to avoid anachronisms. A notion of improvement might have been important to lords and their officers, but it was still a period in which economic growth remained very slow and improvement in worker conditions made very small ebbs and flows. Le Goff did not deny improvements, which he often called novelties, but argued that innovation in technology was generally considered a sin and would mostly meet disinterest or violent opposition. He also comments on the two *Husbandry* treatises and *Seneschaucy*, stating that these were merely works of practical advice, not technological or scientific treatises.⁶⁶

The fact that the treatises make no mention of any of the inventions or conditions lauded by the proponents of the IRMA-thesis supports this. Henley goes into detail about how long a cow should be left to nurse her calf⁶⁷, but make no mention of fulling mills. If these were as ubiquitous as insinuated by Carus-Wilson, would it not be natural to assume they would be mentioned in at least one of these treatises? In terms of technology and organizational techniques, these treatises still remain very practical. Improvement in this case is making sure a horse is properly shod, that labourers do not neglect their labour, and that ploughing time is not wasted, not the drive for constant and exponential technological innovation we have seen since the industrial revolution and still see today.

Though, it is worth repeating that technology is much more than complex machines, it is also how we use them and how we organize society.⁶⁸ While not exponential, we can still discern *some* notion of progress in these treatises. The authors clearly wrote for a purpose, to retain and spread the practical wisdom of agricultural management, which was deemed important enough to be put into words during in area in which written works largely remained theology and church history. Their intents regarding improving manorial management might not have been forward movement of the manorial system toward an ever more flourishing condition like Mirabeau put it, but there was still the idea that conditions were not as good as they could be. The state of a manor where the livestock is ill-treated, farmland is wasted and

⁶⁵ Ibid, 89–103.

⁶⁶ Le Goff, *Medieval Civilization 400-1500*, 196–200.

⁶⁷ of Henley, 'Husbandry', 25.

⁶⁸ Headrick, *Technology*, 1–4.

peasants and higher officers both neglect their work could transition into a manor where all the practical wisdom is followed and what tools, equipment and knowledge they had were used to their optimal effect. As there was a focus on continuous surveys and improvements, it is not completely unlikely that a notion of progress could exist regarding technology, science, and organization during the Middle Ages, but it would have been mostly limited to optimizing existing forms of these. In addition, this form of progress would not contain the same connotations of improvement in material and cultural conditions for the average man like we see in modern times. This was still a time where the Augustinian view of chronology prevailed; life on earth was viewed as but a bleak precursor to eternal life in the city of God.⁶⁹

3.3 Progress in Accounting and Financial Management

After having discussed the idea of progress in regard to science and technology, I will now continue the discussion focusing more on the financial side, which I have touched upon a little bit with the discussion of land surveys and manorial management. The important question here is to what degree there is a notion of economic progress in these treatises. In other words, can we see the origins of capitalism in the 13th century manorial system? Can we see Snooks' market economy,⁷⁰ or Brenners class warfare between peasants and nobles? In addition, I will also discuss the concept of accounting and financial management relating to the treatises. It is difficult to imagine a capitalist system without concepts such as risk sharing and financial instruments like loans, stocks, and bonds, which is again difficult to imagine without accurate financial records. One can then ask the question: did the lord or his officers record accurate financial records, or at least attempt to do so?

We can begin with the question of market economy. As the treatises do not contain statistical data, we cannot easily answer the question of: did the manorial system in 13th century England exist in a market economy? Though, we can attempt to discern if market practices were considered normal, or ideal. The lords and officers in 13th century England clearly engaged in a market to some degree. There are multiple references to buying and selling produce, animals and equipment in all the treatises, and the authors have a clear idea of what various agricultural wares cost or should cost. Henley, for examples, notes that that one should always buy and sell cattle in season, and that buying in particular is a good idea

⁶⁹ Melve, *Historie*, 43.

⁷⁰ Snooks estimate, as mentioned before, concerns the economy over 100 years before the scope of this thesis, but there is little reason to assume the economy was less of a market economy in the 13th century.

between Easter and Whitsuntide.⁷¹ He elaborates further that animals not intended to be kept should be fattened and sold, and that it is worth changing out draught animals who are old or in otherwise bad condition.⁷²

This gives the impression that the authors were quite occupied with teaching their readers to use the market to their benefit, but was this the ideal? In the Anonymous *Husbandry*, the author also talks quite a lot about buying, selling, and making profit, as well as how to pay your labourers, but still recommends that the lords estate remain as self-sufficient as possible. Using resources and labourers that already exist on the manor is preferable but buying on the market is a necessary evil. There are many references to selling wares, but it comes secondary to providing for the manor itself.⁷³ In modern terms, this gives more of an image of a protectionist economy, where own production is encouraged, and imports limited. The manor interacts with the market, but there is no free trade; the trade balance must remain positive. Grosseteste words this even more explicitly in his fourth rule. The aim of surveying the estate is so that the lord or lady can live off their own estate. The bread and ale are to be locally produced, and if there is a surplus of grain it should primarily be stored for later, and sold only if you already have a sizable stock.⁷⁴

Though, we cannot disregard the importance of the market economy in 13th century England. It was clearly viewed as a necessity seen by the number of references to buying and selling produce in the treatises. There are many mentions of buying and selling at the right prices or in the right season, which indicates that there was a conception of fluctuating prices and profit-seeking. As shown before, in many cases production choices were according to market forces lords took factors such as transportation costs into consideration, rather than purely ordering production after the ecological conditions on the manor. Despite this, we see no real capitalist mindset among the authors. Little of what was produced was intended for the market, and there are no mentions of investments in a financial sense. As mentioned before, we see a vague idea of *improving* the manor and making sure it is run smoothly, but there is no mention of reinvesting the profits into anything other than consumption.

A central part of Adam Smiths theory of economics in the late 18th century was that human pursuit of self-interest in a free market coupled with a division of labour would bring

⁷¹ Pentecost.

⁷² of Henley, 'Husbandry', 23.

⁷³ Lamond, 'Husbandry'.

⁷⁴ Grosseteste, 'Grosseteste's Rules', 127–29.

stability and prosperity.⁷⁵ In Henley's *Husbandry*, the anonymous *Husbandry and Seneschaucie* in particular, we see numerous references to the different offices and occupations on the manor, some of which being very specialized, for example the waggoner, which was responsible for the work horses on the manor.⁷⁶ This was a big responsibility and commitment, in the way Henley describes it. Though, it is unclear to what degree this could be considered a job in the modern sense, and not just a role one of the farmers on the manor had to fill in addition to the farm work. There is the idea that different men should fill different roles, and that certain qualities were necessary to accomplish this, but it is difficult to see this as true specialization on a mass scale like we saw during the Industrial Revolution.

One important side of the authors view of occupations and specialization is that there was a clear idea of separation of power, to some degree also an idea of "checks and balances", which both are ideas we often attribute to modern political thought born out of the Enlightenment. As mentioned before, the Seneschal does not hold absolute power, but rather served as more of an advisor for the lord's estate. He could not remove bailiffs or other offices and servants of the lord and could not free villeins nor sell marriages. Further on he should not involve himself with the details of the commands, improvements, fines, and punishments on each manor, but rely on their own accounts.⁷⁷ The author sums this up with the proverb: "no man can or ought to be judge or justice of his own doings".⁷⁸

There is somewhat of a contradiction in the way the treatise is worded, as the author also writes that the seneschal should make sure all unnecessary and unproductive servants are removed.⁷⁹ This is despite the explicit assertion that the seneschal should not hold this power. Though, this could still simply mean in an advisory sense, i.e., the seneschal makes the recommendation, and the lord makes the command. There is overall a clear idea of separation of powers, and the author states that even the lord should listen to his advisors and elders, and that he should base his decisions on the work of his officers. Additionally, there is an overarching focus on the lord as a judge; that complaints regarding the lord's officers shall be heard by him, and that his tenants shall be treated fairly.⁸⁰ Grosseteste also stresses the importance of treating your officers and servants well and respecting their expertise.⁸¹

⁷⁵ Investopedia, 'Adam Smith and "The Wealth of Nations"'.
⁷⁶ of Henley, 'Husbandry', 112–13.

⁷⁷ Lamond, 'Seneschaucie', 87.

⁷⁸ Ibid, 87.

⁷⁹ Ibid, 89.

⁸⁰ Ibid, 106–7.

⁸¹ Grosseteste, 'Grosseteste's Rules', 141.

The question then remains whether or not this constitutes a break in a continuity regarding division of labour and governance. The idea of consciously dividing power to avoid certain citizens or groups becoming too strong goes back to Aristotle, who interestingly also argues for wariness regarding social progress, as it can undermine citizens' habit of following the law.⁸² Additionally there is an entrenched conservatism in the treatises; one should listen to his elders, established authorities, and above all God. There is an idea that roles and power should be separated to some degree, but no notion of progress in this system. There lacks the idea that increased division of labour would bring specialization, which in turn would bring greater efficiency and more profits for the lord.

Continuing on the discussion regarding division of power, responsibility and accountability in the manorial system, I will now discuss the concepts of accounting and auditing in this context. There is, as mentioned before, an idea of supervision in the different occupations. The seneschal checks on the bailiff, which in turn checks on the provost and so on in a hierarchical process. There was also the role of the auditor, which checked on the seneschal, bailiff and provost and acted as the superior in the auditing process. It is also mentioned that these should be as knowledgeable about the process as to not need any assistance.⁸³ This gives the view of the auditor as a purely supervisory role as compared to the seneschal, for example, which held a supervisory, advisory, and managerial role. Though, he could sanction the lord's officers for mistakes. Interestingly, it is mentioned that the bailiff should be punished in matters pertaining to both the provost and bailiff, as the bailiff was a free man in the lords employ, and should know better than the provost, who was a peasant elected by the township.⁸⁴

What was then the reason behind these auditing and supervisory processes? Was it to continuously improve the state of affairs, or simply to lessen mistakes, bribes and theft? Relating to the discussion regarding improvement in management techniques in 3.2, I argue that there is an idea of improvement in the policy behind auditing and supervision, but not continuous improvement, or progress. The reason behind these procedures was to make sure instructions are followed, that waste, theft, and such was minimized, for example making sure

⁸² Miller, 'Aristotle's Political Theory'.

⁸³ Lamond, 'Seneschaucie', 108–9.

⁸⁴ Ibid, 97–103, 108–11.

that all grain is measured correctly, and that animals are not put down without reason, which should be accounted for.⁸⁵

In regard to progress, there is a notion of a two-step process rather than continuous improvement, relating to the previously mentioned discussion in 3.2. The manor has a current state, which is lacking, and could be brought to a second, ideal state. The conditions for this secondary state is that the lord and his officers follow the treatises wisdom, and respect God, not continuous improvement through scientific research and experimentation. This is a notion of improvement, but not progress as Mirabeau or Le Goff would phrase it and is nothing new; the Bible and other religious texts, for example, are full of commands regarding what people should and should not do. Though, some progress could inevitably occur during these processes. New inventions and better systems were created, of course, but to what degree the supervisory and auditing processes described in these treatises fostered innovation goes outside the scope of this thesis, but it is worth mentioned that these treatises make no mention of innovation as a goal.

Finishing the discussion, we can ask what drove these treatises. Why were they written down and preserved? As mentioned multiple times before, there is little notion of economic progress in the modern, capitalist sense, but quite a focus making profits and cutting costs. This was so the lord could afford the expensive upkeep of his buildings, fortifications, military and civilian retinue, and the luxuries and consumption expected of a noble and his family. Though, the virtue of frugality is stressed in these treatises. Henley, for example, explicitly states that the lord should be careful to not live above his means.⁸⁶

Returning to Le Goff, he argues that we cannot look simply look at economics in the sense of the money economy, which was little developed in the Middle Ages, but must also consider the importance of the concept *caritas*, meaning charity. Gift giving was central in the Middle Ages, and this also included social values such as love and friendship, which had theological significance.⁸⁷ Grosseteste focuses most on this, stressing the importance of table manners, proper speech, social hierarchies and fostering good relationships with your retinue, visitors, and above all God. He additionally mentions putting aside grain for alms⁸⁸, which the other authors might have taken for granted. This then leaves the interesting question: was

⁸⁵ Ibid, 109.

⁸⁶ Lamond, 'Husbandry', 2.

⁸⁷ Le Goff, *Money and the Middle Ages*, 144–47.

⁸⁸ Grosseteste, 'Grosseteste's Rules'.

there an idea of progress, not in a monetary way, but in a social and theological perspective, where society would become ever better and more Christian? It is a difficult question to answer. As mentioned, Lynn White argued for this regarding the usage and development of mechanical power in the Middle Ages. He argued that there was a theological rather than financial reasoning behind this, and that there truly was a significant growth in the use of wind and water mills, and that this made a clear impact on society. Though, as mentioned before, we should not forget that people in the Middle Ages still saw the present and future as gloomy, waiting for God's final judgement and eternal life in heaven.

4. Conclusion

In this thesis I have discussed the idea of progress in 13th century English treatises on manorial management, focusing mostly on two aspects of the concept: science and technology, and economics. To accomplish this, I have discussed four different treatises in light of some relevant historiography on the idea of progress, capitalism and industrialization in the Middle Ages, and the manorial system in general. The main argument I considered in the treatise was Le Goff's argument that the *lack of* progress was a chief characteristic of the Middle Ages, which he also argued held true for the Renaissance and Early Modern Period, coining the term "the long Middle Ages" which lasted until the Industrial Revolution.

To conclude I argue that there was little to no notion of progress in the modern sense, that is, forward movement towards a continually better condition. There was nothing in the four treatises that indicate that this was the aim of better manorial management, but a small case could be made for progress in managerial technology, as there was a focus on continuous surveys, follow-ups, and audits, but it is difficult to compare this to anything near what we see today. Despite the lack of progress, there was quite a clear idea of improvement, but this was rather a two-step process rather than continuous; the manor could improve from the current state, which could be lacking, to a better state where little resources, manpower or time was wasted, and the manor generally ran well. To accomplish this the authors gave concrete, practical advice. In addition, there was a clear notion of profit seen by the many references to cutting costs, reducing waste, and buying and selling at the right prices. The authors were clearly occupied with showing how one could extract as many resources as possible from the manor, but the goal was not reinvestment and continually increasing the lord's assets, but rather to manage well what God had already given him, so that he could pay for his own expenses.

This rejects the argument that a case could be made for an industrial revolution in the Middle Ages, like for example Carus-Wilson argued, and strengthens Le Goff's thesis regarding progress and periodization in the Middle Ages; 13th century England sits firmly in the Middle Ages, not in some proto-capitalist, or proto-industrial era. This helps us frame the Middle Ages as a period fundamentally different of our own, where people held different attitudes forwards ideas such as progress, improvement, and innovation.

Why is this relevant today? In an age where science and technology has brought an ever-greater improvement in the material conditions of humans, we can have a hard time

detaching from the mindset that also brought us major issues such as climate change, weapons of mass destructions, and the cultural issues born out of the Enlightenment like scientific racism, as Bauman argued. Maybe we can then look to the past and study a civilization where continuous exponential growth was not the focus, but rather to preserve what you already have? This also provides a chance to discuss what *kind* of progress we should aim for as a society. Maybe instead of merely looking at economic growth and technological progress, we should see the value of non-material goods, such as friendship, love, and moral good. Maybe we can reconsider the value of *caritas* over capitalism, albeit in a more secular sense?

5. Bibliography

5.1 Primary sources

- Grosseteste, Robert. 'Grosseteste's Rules'. In *Walter of Henley's Husbandry: Together with an Anonymous Husbandry, Seneschaucie, and Robert Grosseteste's Rules*, translated by Elizabeth Lamond. London: Longmans, Green, and CO., 1890.
- Henley, Walter of. 'Husbandry'. In *Walter of Henley's Husbandry: Together with an Anonymous Husbandry, Seneschaucie, and Robert Grosseteste's Rules*. Translated by Elizabeth Lamond. London: Longmans, Green, and CO., 1890.
- Lamond, Elizabeth, trans. 'Husbandry'. In *Walter of Henley's Husbandry: Together with an Anonymous Husbandry, Seneschaucie, and Robert Grosseteste's Rules*. London: Longmans, Green, and CO., 1890.
- Lamond, Elizabeth, trans. 'Seneschaucie'. In *Walter of Henley's Husbandry: Together with an Anonymous Husbandry, Seneschaucie, and Robert Grosseteste's Rules*. London: Longmans, Green, and CO., 1890.

5.2 Secondary sources

- Bauman, Zygmunt. *Moderniteten og Holocaust*. Translated by Mette Nygård. Oslo: Vidarforlaget, 1997.
- Blockmans, Wim, and Peter Hoppenbrouwers. *Introduction to Medieval Europe 300-1500*. 3rd ed. London, New York: Routledge, Taylor & Francis Group, 2018.
- Campbell, Bruce M. S. 'Ecology Versus Economics'. In *Agriculture in the Middle Ages: Technology, Practice, and Representation*, edited by Del Sweeney. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1995.
- Carus-Wilson, Elanora Mary. 'An Industrial Revolution of the Thirteenth Century'. *The Economic History Review* 11, no. 1 (1941): 39–60. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1468-0289.1941.tb01589.x>.
- Cunningham, William. 'Introduction'. In *Walter of Henley's Husbandry: Together with an Anonymous Husbandry, Seneschaucie, and Robert Grosseteste's Rules*. London: Longmans, Green, and CO., 1890.
- Encyclopedia Britannica. 'Western Philosophy - Robert Grosseteste and Roger Bacon'. Accessed 2 May 2022. <https://www.britannica.com/topic/Western-philosophy/The-age-of-the-Schoolmen>.

- Gies, Frances. *Cathedral, Forge, and Waterwheel: Technology and Invention in the Middle Ages*. New York: HarperCollins, 1994.
- Gimpel, Jean. *Den industrielle revolution i middelalderen*. Translated by Hanne Amiri. København: Gyldendal, 1978.
- Headrick, Daniel R. *Technology: A World History*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009.
- Holt, Richard. 'Medieval England's Water-Related Technologies'. In *Working with Water in Medieval Europe: Technology and Resource-Use*, edited by Paolo Squatriti. Leiden: Brill, 2000.
- Investopedia. 'Adam Smith and "The Wealth of Nations"'. Accessed 12 May 2022. <https://www.investopedia.com/updates/adam-smith-wealth-of-nations/>.
- Kelly, Donald R. 'Philology and History'. In *The Oxford History of Historical Writing, Volume 3: 1400-1800*, edited by José Rabasa, Sato Masayuki, Edoardo Tortarolo, and Daniel Woolf, 233–44. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011.
- Kjeldstadli, Knut. *Fortida er ikke hva den en gang var: en innføring i historiefaget*. 2nd ed. Oslo: Universitetsforlaget, 1999.
- Le Goff, Jacques. *Medieval Civilization 400-1500*. Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1988.
- Le Goff, Jacques. *Money and the Middle Ages: An Essay in Historical Anthropology*. Cambridge: Polity, 2012.
- Le Goff, Jacques. *Must We Divide History into Periods?* New York: Columbia University Press, 2015.
- Lucas, Adam. *Wind, Water, Work: Ancient and Medieval Milling Technology*. Leiden: Brill, 2006.
- Melve, Leidulf. *Historie: historieskriving frå antikken til i dag*. Oslo: Dreyers forlag, 2010.
- Mielants, Eric. 'Perspectives on the Origins of Merchant Capitalism in Europe'. *Review (Fernand Braudel Center)* 23, no. 2 (2000): 229–92. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/40241485>.
- Miller, Edward, and John Hatcher. *Medieval England: Rural Society and Economic Change 1086-1348*. London: Longman, 1978.
- Miller, Fred. 'Aristotle's Political Theory'. In *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, edited by Edward N. Zalta. Stanford: Metaphysics Research Lab, Stanford University, 2017. <https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/win2017/entries/aristotle-politics/>.
- Piper, Kelsey. 'Can We Save the Planet by Shrinking the Economy?' *Vox*, 3 August 2021. <https://www.vox.com/future-perfect/22408556/save-planet-shrink-economy-degrowth>.

Postan, Michael Moissey. *The Medieval Economy and Society: An Economic History of Britain in the Middle Ages*. Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1975.

Shepherd, William R. *Historical Atlas*. New York: Henry Holt and Company. 1923.

United Nations. 'The Climate Crisis – A Race We Can Win'. Accessed 16 May 2022.

<https://www.un.org/en/un75/climate-crisis-race-we-can-win>.

White, Lynn. *Medieval Technology and Social Change*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1962.

White, Lynn. 'Technology and Invention in the Middle Ages'. *Speculum* 15, no. 2 (1940): 141–59. <https://doi.org/10.2307/2849046>.