

Swarthmore College

Works

History Faculty Works

History

Winter 1977

From Demesne To World-System: A Critical Review Of The Literature On The Transition From Feudalism To Capitalism

Robert S. DuPlessis

Swarthmore College, rduples1@swarthmore.edu

Follow this and additional works at: <https://works.swarthmore.edu/fac-history>



Part of the [History Commons](#)

[Let us know how access to these works benefits you](#)

Recommended Citation

Robert S. DuPlessis. (1977). "From Demesne To World-System: A Critical Review Of The Literature On The Transition From Feudalism To Capitalism". *Radical History Review*. Volume 1977, Issue 13. 3-41. DOI: 10.1215/1636545-1977-13-3
<https://works.swarthmore.edu/fac-history/442>

This work is brought to you for free by Swarthmore College Libraries' Works. It has been accepted for inclusion in History Faculty Works by an authorized administrator of Works. For more information, please contact myworks@swarthmore.edu.

FROM DEMESNE TO WORLD-SYSTEM: A CRITICAL REVIEW
OF THE LITERATURE ON THE TRANSITION FROM
FEUDALISM TO CAPITALISM

Robert S. DuPlessis

Although economic history has always been regarded as central to the elaboration of a Marxist historiography, relatively little of the radical work done in this country has been concerned with it. Many specific reasons help explain this phenomenon--the neglect of economic history on the undergraduate level; the difficulty in obtaining primary sources for anything outside American history; the severing of any political dimension from the overwhelmingly quantitative economic history which is in vogue; the openly reactionary political and ideological goals of much of bourgeois economic history (like the theory upon which it rests); the (largely unconscious) acceptance of the prevailing hierarchy of historical studies. Among younger radical historians, this remarkable ignorance of economic history also derives from our genesis both as radicals and as historians. For we came of age in a period marked not by economic but by political turmoil--from the Korean War and McCarthyism, through civil rights and Vietnam, up to Watergate and its attendant crisis of legitimacy--during which the capitalist economic structure remained firm and prosperous. The context in which we began our work, therefore, did not present us with economic problems for which we would be stimulated to find the historical roots. Instead, we encountered political issues, and developing an understanding of their origins promised not simply greater knowledge in a scholarly sense but also the possibility of changing them. Marx's injunction to himself and his heirs could best be fulfilled, it seemed, by studies of a predominantly political and social cast.

Recently, however, interest in economic history has been growing on the American left, evidence of the maturing of Marxist scholarship as well as of the festering depression of the past few years. More specifically, a good deal of credit must go to Immanuel Wallerstein's The Modern World-System. Capitalist Agriculture and the Origins of the European World-Economy in the Sixteenth Century (Academic Press, 1974). This book has captured the attention of radicals for several reasons. First, it deals with a subject of fundamental significance for both modern history and the Marxist interpretation of that history, the transition from feudalism to capitalism. But unlike previous studies of the process, which have concentrated on its origins in western Europe between the late fourteenth and seventeenth centuries, Wallerstein's account locates the rise of capitalism in its world setting, exploring the ways in which

European economic development depended on the subjection and exploitation of other areas of the globe. Recognizing moreover, that there remains substantial disagreement regarding the causes of this transformation, Wallerstein carefully surveys many of the important issues, discussing critically a wide range of work by bourgeois and Marxist historians alike while offering a new framework of analysis for the transition and a new interpretation of it. Finally, one of the most attractive and persuasive features of The Modern World-System is the way Wallerstein places economic history in a political context. He sees the evolution of the modern state and the growth of capitalism as two sides of the same coin which can only be understood if examined together.

In short, Wallerstein's book is of great importance to a comprehension of the transition from feudalism to capitalism--even if, as I shall argue below, its thesis is deeply flawed and its analyses often wrong. Its significance--and its problems--can best be grasped by discussing it in light of previous work on the transition. In this review, therefore, I shall begin by summarizing the locus classicus, Marx's definition of feudalism and capitalism and his scattered and even contradictory comments about the causes and characteristics of the change from one to the other mode of production. I shall then turn to later studies and the debate which arose concerning the correct interpretation of the historical and theoretical material, before concluding with a lengthy consideration of The Modern World-System.

I

For Marx, feudalism described a society in which a restricted aristocracy of landlords ruled a mass of peasants. Because the direct producers possessed the means of production, the nobility could extract the surplus necessary to its maintenance only by coercion--originally armed force or the threat of it, later supplemented by custom, courts and ideological-religious institutions. The surplus might be rendered by labor services on the demesne or by monetary payments; in any event, producers were unfree in the sense that they gave personal tribute to overlords. The political structure controlled the economic in this mode of production; that is to say, relations of political dominance allowed the economic surplus to be taken by the non-producing aristocracy. As a result both of these coercive relations of production and of the fact that the bulk of production was for immediate use by the producing and appropriating classes, the forces of production remained underdeveloped in feudalism: the division of labor was relatively primitive and thus productivity was low.¹

Under capitalism, of course, everything is altered. A propertyless proletariat works but no longer controls the means of production, ownership of which now resides in the dominant class of capitalists. Workers can survive only by selling their labor power and getting in return a money wage with which they must purchase everything they need. The economic surplus is appropriated not by forcing producers to render service or payments but by paying them less in wages than the value in the market of the commodities they make, with the difference taken by the capitalist. Hence exchange-value rather than use-value is the goal of production; even labor power has become a commodity which is bought and sold. In contrast with feudalism, economic relations are paramount throughout society; moreover, they are contractual relations without a hint of customary or personal obligation. The expropriation of the direct producers, who as a result must constantly enter the market, promotes the development of productive forces--an extensive division of labor, much greater productivity, technical progress. In this way, demand is created and then supplied in ways which maximize capital accumulation in the hands of the capitalist class, at the same time that the subordinate condition of the proletariat is continually reproduced.

The utter transformation of the relations and forces of production is, of course, the end result of a complex and interdependent series of partial changes. An initial stock of capital must be assembled and concentrated in the hands of those willing and able to invest it productively, rather than consume it. Not only must industry become the most important sector of the economy--which entails the supersession of the simple (or petty) commodity production of handicrafts--but agriculture must improve qualitatively and release labor, resources and capital to the industrial sector. The market has to develop as the instrument of exchange, resource allocation and pricing. Both as cause and consequence of the above, towns are converted from peripheral to central social units, geographical and social mobility increases, and new classes arise and replace the old. The structure of law and convention which organized and protected the previous mode of production must be dismantled and replaced.

These, then, are the historical developments which must be explained if we are to understand the transition. Marx, himself, however, never elaborated a coherent analysis of the internal dynamics of feudalism, nor did he give much of an account of the actual events which occurred during the transformation. But he did contribute a number of insights concerning those material factors which he took to be necessary for the collapse of feudalism and the triumph of capitalism. Before the well-known section in Volume I

of Capital (part VIII on primitive or original accumulation) and the less famous chapters in volume III (ch. XX, XXXVI and XLVII)--to which I shall return shortly--Marx had written on the subject in The German Ideology and the Grundrisse. The relevant passages from the early works, along with additional documentation, can be found in the anthology Pre-Capitalist Economic Formations (International Publishers, 1965), edited with a fine introduction by Eric Hobsbawm.

When he first considered the transition, Marx paid little attention to the countryside under feudalism. Apparently feeling that feudalism was both too strong and too stagnant to collapse from within, Marx (as Hobsbawm notes) postulated only one task for the rural world, the liberation of its residents from the traditional constraints of serfdom and personal obligations when they were needed to form capitalism's workforce.² As Marx put it, the conditions obtaining under serfdom, when "the laborers themselves, the living units of labor power, are still a direct part of the objective conditions of production and are appropriated as such..."³ must be broken. This differentiation, accomplished historically by the flight of serfs into towns, by the end of villeinage, and by lords discharging their retainers, gave rise to free labor, that is to say, to labor power which its possessors had to sell as a commodity in the market. Much later, Engels came to see that the "relations between lords and dependent peasants" under feudalism had strongly affected its evolution, but Engels never wrote about the subject in any detail.⁴

For his part, Marx always emphasized the role of the city, which he saw as basically external and antagonistic to the feudal system. The town was the home of commercial and handicraft activities which at one and the same time undermined feudalism and created the preconditions for the new capitalist mode of production. Engaged in the production and exchange of commodities, merchants and craftsmen promoted trade, first local and then over increasingly long distances. All of this fostered first, the accumulation of monetary wealth; second, the division of labor--between town and country (thereby undermining the primacy of landed property), among the various types and stages of production, between production and commerce, and eventually between towns, third, the development of sophisticated market mechanisms; and finally, the emergence of the bourgeoisie. Because its interests could not be realized under feudalism, this new class was eager for change; because of its ascendancy over the urban economy, it could effectively discharge its mission. Once the restrictions and protections erected around simple commodity production by guild and municipal authorities could safely be disregarded or even destroyed, resources previously acquired through trade, usury, production or even hoarding were employed as capital. By means

of capital, artisans and peasants were expropriated, free labor power purchased, means of production amassed. The modern proletariat joined the bourgeoisie as the leading social classes, as pre-existing classes were broken down and reconstituted. "Capital unites the masses of hands and instruments which are already there."⁵ Without spelling out how their effects operated, Marx mentioned "the extension of commerce" in the 16th century and the diverse forms of state aid usually called mercantilism,⁶ with the implication that both were necessary for the transition to be completed successfully.

These are stimulating propositions, but they remained very sketchy in the early works. In Capital, Marx expanded on some of them, notably primitive accumulation. He discussed both aspects of the process at some length: concentration--the amassing of capital in a few hands--and expropriation--the separation of direct producers from the means of production. As in his previous writings, Marx recognized that monetary wealth alone could not bring about the transition to capitalism (hence merchants were at best proto-capitalists as long as they simply made profits by selling scarce goods turned out by the existing mode of production); capital had to seize hold of production and transform it. Now he suggested that this had happened in two ways. Either merchants --the major possessors of capital both under feudalism and in conditions of original accumulation--had taken over the commercial functions of artisans, thereby subordinating them through "putting-out" or the domestic system, and eventually turning them into wage-earners, dispossessed of their tools. Or artisans had managed to accumulate a little capital, hire workers and branch out into trade, eventually building up large workshops.

This latter way, argued Marx, was the most revolutionary, for not only were artisans subordinated to capital, but the entrepreneur was stimulated to remake production--combining stages, modifying the division of labor, and finally introducing new technical procedures--all in order to capture more of the market. The merchant capitalist, on the contrary, was satisfied to leave productive methods largely untouched, since his profits came from monopolies and other restrictive means which kept output down and profits per unit up. Also in connection with original accumulation, Marx made more specific the way in which money had acted as a solvent of feudalism in the countryside through the medium of money rents. These, which in western Europe had increasingly replaced labor services as the Middle Ages drew to a close, had hastened the stratification of the populace, enabling wealthier and luckier peasants to stockpile resources while their hapless neighbors fell behind and were despoiled. Thus in country as in city, labor power and the means of

production became commodities which could be acquired by the restricted group which was coincidentally accumulating money capital.

Marx also amplified somewhat his account of the collapse of feudalism. In Capital, Vol. I, where he focused on the gathering and deploying of capital, he reiterated his hypothesis that since capitalism is a system of commodity production and exchange, then trade--the circulation of commodities--must have been a crucial factor in breaking down the previous mode of production. In particular, the development of the world market aided the triumph of capitalism by promoting a wider division of labor and manufactures independent of gilds and towns. State power, which created a "systematical combination" of colonies, national debts, taxation, and "mercantilist" systems of protection, also played a role in capitalist development. But Marx insisted that force could only "hasten, hothouse fashion, the process of transformation...;" it did not set the process going in the first place.⁷ Later in volume III, he qualified this stress, noting that the effects of commerce on the feudal order hinged on the nature of that order when trade developed. Specifically, feudalism has been modified by peasant struggles over the relative share of the surplus which they were to retain or the lord was to preempt. This never-ending contest did serve to weaken the position of the nobility, making it impossible for the old forms of surplus appropriation to continue. Yet in the long run it proved even more harmful to the mass of the peasantry than to the aristocracy. For the replacement of serfdom by monetarized relations opened the way for the creation of capital and the dissolution of the traditional agrarian community of petty producers.

In his brief but pregnant observations, Marx raised the central issues regarding the transition from one mode of production to another. He laid great weight on the concurrent processes of expropriation and concentration which not merely eroded the relations of production and appropriation obtaining under feudalism but provided some of the critical preconditions of capitalism. To account for the change, he pointed to the interaction of several new circumstances: greatly expanded commercial capital in the hands of an enterprising bourgeoisie, the freeing of simple commodity production from old restraints so that it might work for and be modified by the world market, social polarization and class formation, the conduct of the growing central state. Notwithstanding the value--heuristic as much as substantive --of Marx's comments, like all partial analyses they raised as many questions as they answered. This was even more the case because what he did write seemed to suggest that feudalism required external causes--urban and commercial developments--in order to be transformed and he played down

the contradictions internal to that mode of production, a departure from his usual interpretation of historical change. This difficulty may have come from his treatment of feudalism as a generally monolithic and static whole, as well as from the inadequate empirical studies on which he had to rely.

Because its inner dynamics were virtually ignored, not only were shifts in class relations slighted but the place of towns and their craftsmen and merchants within feudalism was viewed as considerably more extrinsic than was in fact the case. As a further result, the complexity of the transition period and its various outcomes was underestimated and the evolution of industry inadequately explained. This tendency was reinforced by heavy reliance on materials pertaining to England, whose experiences during the transition differed quite a bit from other nations'. Finally, apart from a few sentences on the world market, Marx remained resolutely Euro-centric. In short, his suggestions needed to be fleshed out and tested in two dimensions, the historical and the theoretical.

II

Although some work was done during the intervening decades, the first extended Marxist survey and analysis of the transition problem in the English language was Maurice Dobb's Studies in the Development of Capitalism (1946; revised edition, 1963). Despite its limitations, which I shall address presently, the book has stood the test of time remarkably well and can still be recommended as the best introduction to the topic. Like Marx, Dobb concentrated on England, with some attention devoted to France and the Low Countries. Nonetheless, he read widely and critically in the existing literature and consciously raised thorny problems of interpretation even when the answers he furnished were less than satisfactory.

Dobb defined feudalism as a mode of production "virtually identical" with serfdom: "an obligation laid on the producer by force and independently of his own volition to fulfill certain economic demands of an overlord."⁸ It differed from slavery in that the direct producer was "in possession" of the means of production, and from capitalism in that s/he was not free in relations with the employer.

Taking a hint from Marx's statement that "what new mode of production will take the place of the old does not depend on commerce but on the character of the old mode of production itself,"⁹ Dobb broke new ground in explaining the eventual decay of feudalism. In contrast to those who held that trade was the major solvent of the old order--

a position which, as we have seen, can be traced right back to Marx's writings--Dobb showed that the growth of commerce and the consequent emergence of an economy based on money frequently led to harsher rather than decadent serfdom; that commodities could easily be produced for sale in the market by other types of labor than wage-labor; and that the divergent outcomes cannot be understood only by reference to external factors like trade. In other words, the decline of feudalism--like change in or from every other mode of production--had to be accounted for primarily by contradictions internal to it. And for Dobb, the central contradiction of feudalism lay in its "inefficiency ... as a system of production, coupled with the growing needs of the ruling class for revenue ... [which] promoted an increase in the pressure on the producer to a point where this pressure became literally unendurable" (p. 42).

The questions naturally arise, why did the ruling class require more income and why could these demands no longer be met? Dobb suggests growth in the numbers and expenditures of lords and vassals, coupled with an increase in war and brigandage. While such impositions could initially be met by demographic growth among the producers and by the opening of new land, this was no longer possible when after 1300 population declined drastically, largely due to exhaustion induced by ever-rising exactions. Crisis and revolt ensued throughout Europe.

By pointing to the contradiction set up between inherently coercive relations of production and changing forms and degrees of exploitation, Dobb contributed substantially to our understanding of the evolution and history of feudalism itself. He also clarified the origins of the breakdown of this mode of production by showing that Europe passed through a sustained crisis during the 14th and 15th centuries--that is to say, before the world market had any impact. Besides, he recognized that the results of this experience were extremely varied, and he constructed a brief typology of agrarian development. Eastern European lords, he observed, succeeded in reintroducing serfdom in order to obtain sufficient labor to work their estates, but in the west impressive concessions which struck at the foundations of feudalism (commutation of labor services into money payments, lightening of all obligations) had to be granted to the peasantry in return for their staying on the land.

What factors accounted for the different effects of the same general economic forces? While continuing to insist on the primacy of internal causes, Dobb explicitly rejected all claims for the primacy of politics. To be sure, peasant resistance, aristocratic power and royal authority influenced the upshot of the crisis, which was fought out largely

in political terms and in the political arena. The basic causes were, however, economic: the existing type of cultivation (labor-intensive arable or pasture) and, more important still, the abundance or scarcity--and thus cheapness or dearness--of hired labor. Lately, the first proposition has been getting a good deal of attention, particularly as it refers to the early period of capitalism,¹⁰ and it is becoming accepted that types of cultivation, rooted in the physical geography of different regions, at least established limits to the range of possible evolution. The specific agrarian structure arrived at in any given locality was, nevertheless, by no means determined by physical circumstances; they created potentialities not certainties. The second, and in Dobb's eyes more weighty, explanation is somewhat surprising to encounter in his book. On the one hand, it assumes the existence of a well-developed labor market, an unlikely feature of a feudal economy defined by an extensive web of coercive social relations and controls on producers; on the other, it minimizes the role of human agents in favor of the operation of an impersonal mechanism.

Following Marx's example, Dobb devoted a large part of the Studies to the roles of commerce and towns (as the home of merchants and craftsmen) in the transition. Here three stages of development can be distinguished: 1) when towns began to grow in size, wealth and complexity without altering the feudal mode of production; 2) when changes inside towns promoted the emergence of proto-capitalist forms; 3) when the nascent bourgeoisie took control of and transformed production. In the first period, urban markets were still "half servants of and half parasites upon the body of feudal economy" (p. 71)--fostering the slow accumulation of capital among merchants but at the same time nurturing simple commodity production.

Only during the second stage--which took a long time to be reached and completed and thus occurred at widely differing times in different places--can the outlines of new economic conditions be discerned. Now towns began to win their autonomy from feudal overlords and evolve internally towards a stratified class society in which a mercantile elite predominated on the basis of wealth gathered through monopoly and plunder and protected by oligarchic control of guilds and urban governments. Merchants further consolidated their economic primacy as the home market expanded both in the cities and in the country and as foreign trade grew. Simultaneously, the other element of the embryonic capitalist bourgeoisie was emerging, formed of artisans who restricted access to mastership, thereby concentrating production and wealth in their own hands, and took over the buying and selling of raw materials and finished goods from their poorer fellows. However, as yet the bourgeoisie was ready --nay, eager--to compromise with feudalism. Able to purchase

upward mobility into the dominant classes, it accepted traditional social values and political structures and continued to derive its profits from purveying small amounts of scarce goods to the upper classes rather than bulk products to the masses.

Although Dobb did not put it in such terms, the foregoing phases were preliminary--they engendered proto-capitalist elements but did not assure their triumph. The transition properly speaking only materialized during the third stage, when merchants established domestic systems and craftsmen reorganized production outside gild confines. The former acted because increasing competition lowered speculative profits, the latter in order to take advantage of cheap labor resulting from the wage-lag produced by rapid inflation during the 16th century. This, then, was the critical phase. Yet it was not always successfully concluded: the development of the new mode of production could be and was balked. On the one hand, a "second serfdom" emerged in eastern Europe, in which feudal lords used wholly dependent labor to produce specialized agricultural commodities (principally grain) for sale to the West, thus entering into capitalist exchange relations which concurrently strengthened feudal relations of production. On the other, in many places artisans used political revolt and gild regulations to resist the dominance of commercial capital.

More important was the attitude of the merchants themselves: even when responsible for large putting-out arrangements, they might continue to seek their fortunes--and therefore make their investments--in trade and finance. For all these reasons, the cities of Renaissance Italy and late medieval Flanders and Germany never progressed beyond commercial capitalism.¹¹ Thus Marx's perception that artisan-founded manufactory was the really revolutionary source of the capitalist mode of production was validated historically. As the English experience showed, it was the entrepreneur risen from the ranks of the producers who was forced to carry through the transformation to its conclusion. In the process, trading monopolies had to be swept aside and the hegemony of merchant capital destroyed by means of political action. Hence England's development as the first capitalist nation was a direct consequence of her having the first bourgeois revolution.

Beyond the rise of a capitalist class, the completion of the transition depended on the dual process of original accumulation making all forms of capital, along with free labor power, available to would-be entrepreneurs. Dobb devoted separate chapters to the amassing of resources and the growth of a proletariat. As he saw it, the acquisition and concentration of capital involved both "the ownership of

assets, and ... a transfer of ownership..." (p. 178) and took place in two steps. 1) Purchase at low cost of "titles to wealth" (debt claims, bullion, land) from the old ruling class, aided by state banks and borrowing; from foreign (essentially colonial) areas, through the policies of mercantilist commercial exploitation; and by the dispossession of small peasant and artisanal producers. 2) Realization or sale of these assets at higher prices in order to buy industrial equipment and labor power.

The emergence of the proletariat was the final ingredient in the mix which yielded capitalism. It resulted in part from the inherent instability of an economy of small producers--whether rural or urban--once political and corporate protections were weakened or removed and monopoly, usury and exclusiveness were allowed free rein. But as it also represented the other side of the coin of primitive accumulation, it could proceed only by dispossessing a multitude of formerly autonomous producers. Because of these mutually reinforcing trends, the birth of the capitalist bourgeoisie necessarily meant the simultaneous birth of the proletariat. Much of the history of 16th and 17th century Europe--inflation, political, social and religious revolt, boom and bust--can be understood as the violent working out of the dialectic accumulation/expropriation.

The industrial revolution carried out under capitalist auspices was, as it were, the synthesis, in which all the elements were fused together: unprecedented technical development was built on the new economic and social relations engendered during the previous centuries. When the industrial revolution gave capitalism its own specific technique in the form of the large mechanized factory, the transition was finished.

Dobb's contributions to clarifying the transition were substantial. He provided an impressive amount of historical material to corroborate many of Marx's central insights. At the same time, he laid greater stress on the internal evolution of feudalism in producing the contradictions which led to its disintegration. Similarly, he constructed a more dynamic and complex view of the transition. Not only did he postulate several stages to the process, noting that it could always be arrested or diverted, but he explained the difficulties encountered in gathering together all the necessary factors of production (labor, capital, land) in the hands of an enterprising bourgeoisie. He gave particular attention to developments within crafts and the ways in which industry did--or, in many cases, did not--grow out of them. He urged the importance of political behavior in influencing the course of economic history. Finally, his concern for the variegated texture of the transformation led

Dobb to emphasize the range of outcomes which emerged historically in the commercial and industrial spheres as well as in the agrarian sector.



III

Studies in the Development of Capitalism presented controversial interpretations of a number of issues and left many others unresolved. As a result, although given scant notice by the bourgeois journals, it provoked a valuable debate among Marxists, in the course of which several of his points were clarified and others still needing attention were distinguished. The articles in which the discussion was conducted for the most part initially appeared in the pages of Science and Society (1950, 1952, 1953). Supplemented by additional pieces, and excellently introduced by Rodney Hilton,¹² they have now been collected under the title The Transition from Feudalism to Capitalism (New Left Books/Humanities Press, 1976).¹³ A review of the key topics raised in these articles enables us not only to see how far Dobb's account can be accepted and where it must be corrected, but indicates the present state of Marxist scholarship concerning the transition.

As we have seen, the question of what set afoot the replacement of one mode of production by the other has been problematic ever since Marx. Dobb came out firmly on the side of an internal contradiction, the over-exploitation of the labor force which triggered revolt. Paul Sweezy, on the contrary, relying not only on Marx but on the well-known historian Henri Pirenne, asserted that feudalism was conservative and resistant to change, for in it production was for immediate use rather than exchange. Hence something external--namely trade, which stimulated production for the market--was required to unleash the forces which would transform it.

This position has been losing support ever since Marx's time. For his part, Dobb defended his interpretation by reformulating it. He continued to maintain that because feudalism was a mode of production defined by coercive extraction of the surplus, "the basic conflict" was "between the direct producers and their feudal overlords who made exactions of their surplus labour-time or surplus product by dint of feudal right and feudal power." The end of the specific form of feudal exploitation came therefore, as a result of the "revolt among the petty producers" (Dobb in Transition, p. 166). However, peasant struggle did not lead directly to capitalism. Rather, it modified the dependence of petty producers on feudal overlordship and allowed the growth of social

differentiation among them. Eventually, after the drawn-out but thorough processes of primitive accumulation had done their work, capitalism was born. To be sure, this internal conflict interacted with trade. Yet however much commerce stimulated capital accumulation, commodity production and social stratification, it remained a secondary contradiction. Human agents at the point of production were necessary to break the pattern of feudal domination and change the relations which underlay the mode of production. By their very nature, exchange relations could not do this.

Kohachiro Takahashi, in his contribution to the debate, lent theoretical support to Dobb by reaffirming the role of coercion in getting commodities produced under feudalism, as against capitalism, where capital serves this mediating function. Hilton, drawing on his own and others' work, offered empirical backing to the same conclusions. He argued that commerce helped to accumulate money in feudal society but left petty-commodity production untouched. Some dynamic within feudalism was necessary if merchants' money were to be employable as capital. According to Hilton, the force for change resided in the dialectic of pressure on the part of the lord so he could maintain or improve the political power which alone allowed him to extract the surplus, and peasant opposition, which proved explosive and victorious towards the end of the Middle Ages. Demographic circumstances (the pressure of population on resources) and the internal composition of peasant families played a role in the outcome of the transition, but only insofar as they stimulated or checked peasant revolt. Even the fact that success in throwing off exploitation by the feudal lord did not prevent a new yoke being imposed by a landlord, capitalist farmer or entrepreneur does not negate the primacy of struggle in unleashing the transformation.

Dobb's version of the transition has been modified in several respects. His twofold conception of original accumulation has been attacked by Sweezy as empirically untenable--there is no evidence of the sales of assets hypothesized in the second part nor any class which could have bought them--and unnecessarily complicated, since in the first stage the bourgeoisie had already acquired the things it required in order to begin capitalist development. Other commentators have agreed with this criticism and Dobb himself has largely abandoned the formulation, acknowledging that his main point concerned the despoiling of laborers who later formed a wage-earning class. The only sense in which he has retained the second step is to denote a shift in bourgeois investment from real estate, trade, usury and so forth to means of production and labor.

The depiction of feudalism before it entered into its prolonged period of crisis has also come under fire for being too immobile. Takahashi insisted long ago that the peasantry had begun to differentiate under serfdom, not merely after it had begun to throw off feudal constraints, as Dobb believed. A more comprehensive reevaluation is proposed by Hilton. As he writes in his introduction to the Transition book, many bourgeois historians have narrowed the meaning of feudalism to cover just vassals' holding of landed fiefs from lords to whom they owed services, while Marxists continue to employ it to signify an entire mode of production in which an "enforced transfer, either of surplus labor or of the product of surplus labor" takes place (p. 14). This latter and more comprehensive usage is justified, Hilton asserts, as long as it is realized both that feudalism (including its labor form, serfdom) was clothes in a variety of legal and institutional dress, and that it was dynamic, evolving from at least the ninth or tenth century and passing through a number of stages, each marked by distinctive features and types of social stratification. From an early date, serfdom began to consist less of labor service than of money payments. Now this change did not itself spell the doom of feudalism, since coercive political relationships still underlay the appropriation of the surplus. But it was important because of what it set in motion: accumulation of money and other resources by peasants, nobles, merchants, usurers and craftsmen; the tendency to treat all economic factors--including labor--as commodities even when production remained petty in scale and non-capitalist in structure; and disintegration of the peasantry. Despite their somewhat different emphases, these modifications all embody Dobb's central perception that feudalism decayed due to internal causes, "not as the result of the assault upon it of an incipient 'Capitalism' in the guise of 'merchant capital' wedded to 'money economy'..." (Dobb in Transition, p. 100).

Along with greater appreciation of the fact that feudalism was not a static closed agrarian system have come renewed efforts to reinterpret the place of towns, crafts and commerce under feudalism and in the transition, specifically the precise ways by which the city abetted the transformation of the country. Paul Sweezy elevated commerce to the status of a primary cause: the rise of the urban-centered market, which was fundamentally foreign to feudalism, nonetheless was necessary to change it. The market altered production, he maintained, prompting greater specialization, efficiency and division of labor, greater profits, emigration from the land. Rejecting these claims, Dobb pointed out that the feudal economy was not self-sufficient and thus needed trade which naturally stimulated production. But, he reiterated, commerce under feudalism could only encourage petty commodity production and was insufficient

to alter the mode of production. Dobb's explanation, however, still envisioned urban functions as essentially outside feudalism, conceived of as an agrarian system, to which crafts were peripheral. Interaction between city and country was not functionally necessary and cannot help account for the onset of the transition.

In a recent article, included in the Transition volume, John Merrington has reopened the subject on the basis of the argument that towns and their activities were intrinsic to feudalism, not parasitic on it. Aided by monopolies regarding craft production and trade, he contends, productive forces developed within the cities. Their favored position --which they fought bitterly to maintain--permitted towns to accumulate wealth siphoned off from the rural population. Towns initially had a dynamic impact on feudal society; in the long run, however, their effects were circumscribed by reliance on exclusivism and restrictive practices for reproduction of the surplus. Instead of reorganizing their methods of fabrication and widening the market, city merchants and artisans tried to cling to the gild restraints and market limits of petty commodity production. Nevertheless, Merrington affirms, craftsmen and traders, like peasants, could not avoid the process of internal differentiation born of the production and exchange of commodities even on the local level, much as corporate regulations and municipal political institutions tried to hinder the process. Thus the prerequisites for capitalism in the form of human agents--prosperous merchants and craftsmen on the one hand, ruined artisans on the other--and material requirements--capital and concentrated means of production--were slowly generated in the urban interstices of the old mode and as it were against its will, parallel to the phenomena which Dobb had described in the countryside. Yet these preconditions could actually serve as the elements of capitalist production only when the old restrictions had lost their hold, whether through circumvention (e.g., ignoring gild rules or moving industry to the countryside) or extension of the market beyond what the cities could effectively control. The economic activities conducted in and by the corporately-organized towns were necessary for capitalism but were not its immediate causes, Merrington has concluded, for in their structures and goals they remained too much a part of the feudal world.

Other questions remain to be settled. Despite Dobb's attempt to give an historical basis to Marx's hypothesis of two routes to capitalist reorganization of production --mercantile and artisanal--explanations of the subject are not very satisfactory. Dobb himself admitted that the two paths are difficult to trace empirically. This is

particularly true since many early capitalists were hybrid merchant-manufacturers who carried out both production and commerce. In addition, many early workshops look much like putting-out arrangements. Marx's writings on this point are also not free from ambiguity. His reading of Capital led Sweezy to deny that many entrepreneurs rose from the ranks; on the contrary, he declared, large capitalist manufacturing in new industries had been the most innovative means from the very start. Merchant-run putting-out systems formed a slower, though feasible, way towards capitalist production, but enlarged craftsmen's workshops did not. In response, Dobb stuck to his original contention that small and parvenu types of merchant-manufacturers had been the most important historically. In this he was seconded by Takahashi, Hilton and Giuliano Procacci, although the latter felt that Dobb had erred by conflating conservatively-managed putting-out controlled by merchants with small artisan-directed domestic systems which were the forerunners of capitalist factories. As Procacci admitted, however, there was simply not enough data to test his (or anyone else's) propositions.

A quarter-century later, the matter has not been clarified on either the theoretical or the factual level. Our understanding both of the handicraft production which was carried on in towns and rural areas and of its evolution falls far short of what we need. It seems to fit the definition neither of feudalism nor of capitalism. This being so, what were its basic contradictions and how were they mediated and resolved? Because our empirical knowledge has advanced so little, the questions of what kind of capital actually led to capitalism, who its agents were, and whether it grew out of the gild economy or was a new creation remain undecided. Why the bourgeoisie changed from parasitical on feudalism to modernizing and entrepreneurial is obscure. According to Dobb, there was "a growth in the resources of the small man ... [and] a gradual shift of attention away from purely speculative gains..." (Studies, p. 126); but he does not really tell us why the new attitudes cropped up nor does he ground them in the political and social history of the period. Takahashi adopts the notion of a "capitalist spirit" from Max Weber; surely, however, this puts the cart before the horse and fails to reveal the reasons for the unequal distribution of the new spirit between greedy merchants and usurers on the one side and enterprising yeomen and small and medium industrialists on the other. We still have few studies about the social and professional origins of early entrepreneurs or about the organization and functioning of their businesses. Even such mundane issues as the size of units of production, the nature of the workforce and the techniques involved are largely terra incognita.¹⁴

Due to its ubiquity, extensive division of labor and precocious class formation and conflict, the textile craft has received much attention, probably too much. In fact, it represents just one path to capitalism, that of industries which were not capital-intensive and therefore allowed artisans to build up large shops with relative ease. As Sweezy (and earlier Marx)¹⁵ indicated, only merchants and landowners would have had the resources for buying labor, materials and means of production on the scale required for the new heavy industries such as mining, glassmaking, brewing and shipbuilding. Georges Lefebvre suggested yet another alternative, characterized by direct state aid to merchants. Not only did governments seek to establish protected markets which would aid economic growth as well as foster state power, but they gave grants to industry along with huge military contracts which called forth mass production in order to fill them.¹⁶

Not surprisingly in view of all the issues which remain open, the nature of the transition period itself continues to be the subject of much debate, concerning particularly the mode of production and the role of the state and politics during the process. Referring back to a number of passages in Marx and Engels, Paul Sweezy proposed to treat this as a distinct era in which pre-capitalist commodity production had undermined feudalism but had not yet engendered a new mode of production. In his opinion, the endemic struggles of the times were caused by the attempts of several ruling classes--each based on a different type of property--to seize control of the state which, by virtue of the contest, was able for a long time to remain apart from the fray and arbitrate it. Only when the bourgeoisie took power (as in England after the civil wars during the 17th century) and acquired definitive ascendancy was the triumph of capitalism assured.

Supported by Procacci, who stressed that merchant capitalism cannot define a mode of production because it focuses on exchange, Dobb objected to any explanation of the transition as a separate intermediate period. Even though petty production existed, it continued to do so as a part of feudal society. As Procacci expressed it, feudalism was the prevalent mode of production, albeit with capitalist germs. While it frequently allied with merchants to do so, the old feudal aristocracy managed to perpetuate its sway, Dobb noted; thus this was a late form of feudal exploitation, though now occurring in a context of centralized state power. In his book Lineages of the Absolutist State (New Left Books/Humanities Press, 1974), Perry Anderson comes to the same conclusion, finding that absolutism, the political structure which developed in the course of the transition, was "a redeployed and recharged apparatus

of feudal domination" (p. 18) rather than the political form of an intermediate mode.

To be sure, all participants in the controversy agree that the old mode of production proved remarkably resilient. As Hilton has insisted, this persistence of feudal structures provided the economic foundation for the continuation of traditional relations of domination and subordination. Capitalism only prevailed when and where political revolution overthrew the ruling aristocracy.

Despite the confidence with which they are made, these assertions far from settle these questions one way or the other. Even a superficial consideration of the American South before the Civil War or pre-industrial commodity production in early modern Europe and the United States will suffice to show that treating intermediate socio-economic formations as wholly feudal or wholly capitalist tends to obscure exactly what needs to be explained, the transitional nature of the transition. The earlier suggestions of Marx and Engels were more nuanced than many later and more extended analyses; they deserve to be looked at anew for the insights they can provide for future interpretations. Likewise, much remains unclear about the political context of the transition. Take the early bourgeois revolutions. Did they represent the opening of the way to capitalism by breaking the hegemony of feudal classes? Or did they stand for the victory of capitalism, which now had but to mature? How, in short, can they help explain the transition? Also in need of reconsideration is "normal" politics: that is, the constant negotiation and quotidian struggle by which both the old consciousness and the old order were slowly altered by the human beings who accomplished--or prevented--the rise of capitalism.

IV

Two strategies for understanding the problem of the transition can be distinguished in the historical literature.¹⁷ The first entails intensive investigation of a city or region over an extended period of time. While not unknown in the English-speaking world, such studies are the specialty of the informal school of historians associated with the French journal Annales: Economies, Sociétés, Civilisations and its predecessors. Notable examples are works by Pierre Goubert, Beauvais et le Beauvaisis de 1600 à 1730, which may be sampled in a synthetic article, "The French Peasantry in the Seventeenth Century: A Regional Example," Past and Present, no. 10 (1956)¹⁸ and Emmanuel Le Roy Ladurie, Les Paysans de Languedoc, a two-volume masterpiece now available in an abridged translation (University of Illinois Press,

1974)--though both can be adequately appreciated only by referring to the original texts with their extensive supporting documentation. Other works which testify to the concerns of historians working in this tradition include Pierre Deyon, Etude sur la société urbaine au 17^e siècle. Amiens, capitale provinciale; Richard Gascon, Grand commerce et vie urbaine au XVI^e siècle. Lyon et ses marchands (environs de 1520-environs de 1580); Jean Jacquart, La crise rurale en Ile-de-France (1550-1670); Robert Boutruche, La crise d'une société. Seigneurs et paysans du Bordelais pendant la Guerre de Cent Ans. These scholars and their brethren are justly respected for their comprehensiveness, imagination, precision, and use of a wide range of sources to gather an enormous amount of empirical data--something on which the performance of Marxist historians has often been inadequate.

The interpretative framework which informs studies by Annales school historians is that of modernization theory. Thus they stress demography (which is seen as the basic factor affecting supply and demand and thereby the market), technological development, urbanization, industrialization, and the transformation of "mentalités" or worldviews, especially the emergence of more "rational" attitudes. Conversely, they slight not only class struggle but changes in the mode of production as well. In what is certainly the best work to have emerged from this tradition, Le Roy Ladurie traces a great agrarian cycle made up of recurrent Malthusian cycles: rising standard of living, increasing population, pressure on and parcellization of the land, subsistence crisis, population decline, renewed equilibrium and the recommencement of the same round, broken finally by the introduction of new crops and technology. Why these latter were ultimately adopted is not entirely clear but seems to rest on a changed outlook, the source of which is obscure. In short, these studies have much less to say about the general issue of the transition as Marxists define it than about specific aspects of it.

The other strategy involves rethinking the entire process, often from a Marxist perspective. The most exciting work in this field, as in the Annales-inspired studies from which much data is drawn, has occurred in agrarian history, whether to make up for earlier neglect or because of the growing awareness of the central importance of rural experience for any revolutionary transformation. In a recently published article,¹⁹ Robert Brenner argues against the view that the transition can be interpreted by purely economic forces and gives a cogent critique of the prevalent demographic and commercial models. He maintains that these are of secondary consequence. Building on but extending Dobb and Hilton's thesis about the breakdown of feudalism, Brenner contends that "it is the structure of class relations, of class power, which will determine the manner and degree to which particu-

lar demographic and commercial changes will affect long-run trends in the distribution of income and economic growth--and not vice versa" (p. 31), and he shows that only in this way can divergent outcomes be explained.

In eastern Europe, a low level of rural solidarity and struggle allowed the seigniorial reaction of the late Middle Ages to be victorious to such a degree that landlords felt no compulsion to pursue improvements. As a further result of renewed aristocratic hegemony, only a small home market and industrial labor force came into existence, further short-cutting the possibility of either capitalism or industrialization. In western Europe, on the contrary, peasant resistance was much more effective, and it precluded the re-imposition of serfdom. Yet in England, landlords in partnership with entrepreneurial-minded tenants eventually were able to retain control of agriculture, setting the stage for capitalist farming and, ultimately, self-sustaining industrial advance. Rather different was the upshot of successful peasant defiance in France, where it was associated with the evolution of "absolute" monarchy. With this backing, the peasantry was able to block capitalist reorganization of farming but--since the state intended to curb though not to smash the aristocracy--could not achieve a decisive victory on its own terms. Thus a structure of petty proprietorship and traditional patterns of exploitation which in the long run blocked rural transformation were maintained.²⁰

V

Immanuel Wallerstein's Modern World-System belongs to the latter strategy, for it involves a reformulation of the transition problem. It should be said at once that the book is the most ambitious attempt yet to explain the transition by recasting the terms of the debate. Wallerstein contends that capitalism emerged only because both political and economic structures were transformed, and therefore he has much of interest to say about the reciprocal influences of economy and politics in a wide range of countries. In his interpretation, political development and economic development--or the lack of both--had to go hand in hand; one was not conceivable without the other. And in his central reformulation (from which the work takes its title), Wallerstein maintains that the transition occurred outside as well as within conventional frameworks, and he attempts to overcome the parochialism which often characterized the earlier debate. Apart from these considerable virtues of audacity and scope, the book is based on wide reading in the secondary literature, sets out at length its reasoning and (usually) its judgments,

and has a refreshingly undogmatic, even chatty, tone. It has extensive footnotes and a most useful bibliography in the original edition, although the new paperback version eliminates them. In short, it is impossible to read the book and not be greatly stimulated by it.

Because the analysis is so extensive, it needs to be sketched out before being critically discussed. Wallerstein begins by defining what he means by a world system, which he differentiates from an empire. It is "an economic but not a political entity, ... larger than any juridically defined political unit," in which "the basic linkage between the parts of the system" is economic, later reinforced by cultural and political relationships (p. 15). Since there is no overarching political structure to maintain, the world-system is cheaper and more efficient than an empire, not to mention more flexible in responding to and benefitting from new initiatives.²¹ Moreover, the world-system has to be organized capitalistically, for unlike feudalism, in which as we have seen the surplus is appropriated by political means, capitalism uses market mechanisms for that purpose and the world-system is, more than anything else, a market. Wallerstein hastens to point out that state machinery is of course necessary to establish and sustain a market situation which redounds to the advantage of only a few of its participants, but the role of the state is normally indirect and economic relations function on their own.

Although the entire world-system is capitalist, three divisions can be distinguished within it--core, periphery and semiperiphery--each differing from the others according to economic, political, social and cultural factors. According to Wallerstein, such a system could only arise after the general crisis of feudalism in the later Middle Ages. Following Dobb and Hilton, he defines this as a period of long-term structural crisis due to rising political and social costs of an expanding ruling class which, because not accompanied by any increase in productivity, placed a greater burden on the peasantry and eventuated in generalized class war. But he goes further in spelling out why the troubles which led to the simultaneous collapse and rebuilding of feudalism in different parts of Europe broke out when they did, noting short-term or conjunctural problems: a cyclical crisis and climatological shift reinforced the effects of the deeper-rooted difficulties.

Drawing largely on the Polish scholar Marian Malowist, Wallerstein claims that European elites were able to resolve the ruinous conflicts at home in such a way as to perpetuate their political hegemony (and, as an entirely unforeseen consequence, open the way for the new world-system); this was accomplished by territorial and

commercial expansion, which greatly increased the amount of population and land for Europe to exploit. A further dynamic factor in the feudal crisis and in its resolution was the growth of the central state, hastened by the weakening of individual lords (who themselves wanted more protection than their own resources could provide), changes in the art of war, and increases in tax monies which allowed bureaucracies and mercenaries to be hired. States consolidated these initial advantages by the creation of legitimacy--in the form of an ideology which Wallerstein calls "statism" (a nice refinement of the overworked and, for the sixteenth century, incorrect term "nationalism")--and by the homogenization of the home population, achieved by expelling ethnic and religious minorities. Thus a powerful dialectic was set up within the maturing core states: monarchs wanting to restore order realized that they had to promote economic growth in order to finance their states, while the rise of strong government was an inescapable prerequisite to the genesis of capitalism, for it provided a resilient framework in which class formation with its inevitable conflict could occur without derailing economic development.

The specific agent setting in motion the forces which eventually brought into existence the capitalist world-economy was, however, neither located in the central area of feudalism nor was it one of the main beneficiaries of the new system. Rather, a special case--Portugal--opened the era of exploration and thereby showed the way to solve the feudal crisis. Portugal already had what the other states would acquire in the process of transition--a strong state, a monetized economy and relatively urbanized population, plenty of capital, a vigorous mercantile class whose self-interest converged with that of the nobility--plus a favorable geographical position, and these were deployed to advantage. As a result of the initial Portuguese voyages and Spanish emulation, Europe was supplied with raw materials, food, bullion--and an equilibrating outlet for internal tensions.

By means of conquest or, as in eastern Europe, commercial penetration, the area subject to western European economic or political control, or both, was enormously enlarged by the sixteenth century. But this circumstance led to a fundamental transformation only because this entire new "world" was organized in such a way that economic flows benefitted some parts more than others, thereby permitting the unequal accumulation of wealth necessary for economic development. Hence, too, political organisms of varying power evolved in the different regions of the world-economy: not all of equal strength, as that would block the inequitable distribution of economic goods required for capitalism, nor all of equal weakness, as in that case the new

capitalist classes would lack sufficient protections to allow them to carry out their entrepreneurial role. Yet it was not to happen that those states which had carried out political conquest would gain the upper hand and largest share; as the case of China indicated, empires involved too many overheads which impeded growth. Portugal and Spain, in other words, would do the dirty work, get the glory--and forego the ultimate profits. Thus a new form of economic dominance matured. It was based partly on a new "world market mechanism" centered in England, the Low Countries, western Germany and northern France, reinforced by the effects of the secular inflation of the sixteenth century, which forced capital accumulation by the uneven reallocation of profits into that same segment of northwest Europe.

More important to the organization of new economic relations was an emerging worldwide division of labor. This slowly articulated the world-economy into three parts--core, semi-periphery and periphery--in each of which different types of labor control, economic specialization and state structure obtained. Coterminous with northwest Europe, the core had the strongest states, able to keep order and defend the economy, but not so powerful as to interfere with economic development by the pursuit of economically non-functional goals which simply led to burdensome tasks. Whatever the variations from one to another, the core states had in common a greater degree of strength as compared with the other areas, as a result of which the former got a disproportionate share of the surplus generated by the entire world-system. The core also specialized in skilled and high-profit uses of labor (crafts and industry, pastoral activities, the raising of certain lucrative crops) and employed the loosest, cheapest and most efficient kinds of labor control available--wage labor and peasant proprietorship. The reason for this state of affairs, Wallerstein contends, is not to be found in peasant resistance, although he does not make clear why he rejects this explanation (see his puzzling remarks on p. 104). Instead, he points to a high density of population resulting in cheap labor, the relative strength of towns, and the evolving world market, which enforced a division of labor and terms of trade which proved advantageous for west European peasants and capitalists alike.

In the semiperiphery (never precisely defined, but apparently including the Iberian peninsula, southern France, northern Italy, southern Germany), states were feebler, a process of deindustrialization and return to agrarian self-sufficiency was occurring, and sharecropping--a sort of second-best way of minimizing risks in a period of inflation--was adopted. In this segment--substantially the Hapsburg empire of Charles V and his successors--

monarchs chased after imperial dreams, thus getting in the way of nascent capitalism, for which they could open the way and pay the costs but not reap the rewards.

Finally, in the periphery governments were extremely weak, often no more than adjuncts of west European regimes, whose interests they served either under direct compulsion or due to the workings of the world market. Though this arrangement bolstered the narrow political elite of the peripheral lands, it spelled ever-growing misery for the mass of the population. This area provided bullion for the money and capital western Europe needed, as well as exotic foods and materials (Latin America) and bulky raw materials and grain (eastern Europe), all of which allowed more remunerative specialization in the core.²² For this to be possible, of course, these commodities had to be produced cheaply by means of unskilled labor power. Hence harsh methods of organization were required, whether slavery or serfdom, which together Wallerstein calls "coerced cash-crop labor."²³

As even this bare summary indicates, Wallerstein's book provides a provocative thesis with which to interpret the transition. It attempts to give theoretical as well as historical content to Marx's comment (Capital, I, ch. IV) that "The modern history of capital dates from the creation in the sixteenth century of a world-embracing commerce and a world-embracing market." Synthesizing earlier work, Wallerstein presents a nuanced view of feudalism, describing how trade was intrinsic to it, and of its final crisis. Even more than Dobb, he stresses the many differences as well as the similarities in capitalist economic development. Likewise, his treatment of the evolution of the state in western Europe during the transition goes well beyond anything in the earlier literature.

Notwithstanding these accomplishments, the work has a number of deficiencies. Some are to be expected in light of its impressive reach, and affect only matters of detail and emphasis. But there are several which strike at the heart of its argument and which therefore deserve to be examined at some length: the categories Wallerstein employs, his definition of capitalism, and a strongly ahistorical tendency in the book's thesis and presentation. In each of these closely linked cases, there are problems both with the basic conception and with the fit between the theoretical framework and the data marshalled in support of it. Very likely this difficulty in pinning down the proof of the points advanced in the book is what makes reading it so often frustrating.

1. Categories. Although it has a certain elegance as a hypothesis, the tripartite model of the world-economy does

not work very well. The importance of the dialectic between development and underdevelopment in capitalism, first noted by Marx and elaborated by André Gunder Frank (on whom Wallerstein draws), has been well documented. The phenomenon was not, indeed, limited to relations between emerging capitalist nations and colonized areas. Even within the capitalist lands a trend towards specialization originated at least as early as the sixteenth century, with the result that each ended up by reproducing domestically the overall pattern of advanced and backward areas. But if the interdependence of periphery (no matter where located geographically) and core in the capitalist economy can be accepted as proven, its application by Wallerstein to the historical material cannot be endorsed without significant exception. The formation of advanced and backward regions was not, to begin with, simply a function of the world-system, being found within the capitalist core as well as between it and the periphery. Perhaps this fact explains why the world-system is invoked in this book as both cause and effect of the emerging worldwide division of labor. Nor was the trend to specialization very far advanced in the sixteenth century: even the periphery remained largely outside the world-system and contributed more supply than demand.

Further, the discussion of the core itself is confusing. As it stands, this area includes a number of lands at the end of the Middle Ages (most of northwest Europe and even some of Germany and Italy) but only England by the later seventeenth century. While this corresponds with the history of capitalism, just England and to a lesser degree France get much attention for their success and near-miss respectively; the other areas simply disappear. This is rather surprising, given Wallerstein's stress elsewhere on the significance of the Netherlands. But instead of an explanation for the Netherlands' failure to remain one of the core states, we are merely told that she eventually got pushed out of the market (p. 214), something which appears to be more a result than a cause of other developments. Even less is indicated about the fate of the other regions. Hence the potentially exciting subject of the formation of a capitalist core in western Europe comes down to the old topic of why England became the first capitalist nation even though France had seemed the most likely candidate. And as we shall see, the explication offered--success in dominating the world market--is unsatisfactory. In any case, the discussion of the core needs to be broadened, to make provision for a greater variety of outcomes and for the stages of the transition which would explain these results. After all, capitalism was built in different ways and at different rates of speed.

Wallerstein's refinement of the core-periphery model is, moreover, open to serious objection, for the notion of the semiperiphery which he introduces is unpersuasive both conceptually and empirically. It works neither as an analytic nor as a descriptive category. Basically, he assigns the semiperiphery the task of providing a dynamic dimension to the rather static core-periphery polarization (which once it is insituted in the sixteenth century continues right up to the present) without having recourse to the idea of stages or phases of development: the semiperiphery is made up of rising former peripheral areas and declining core states. Despite disclaimers (pp. 349-50), the semiperiphery seems little more than a post-hoc catch-all for odd cases, especially those disconcerting parts of Europe which did not break through to capitalism although they had capital, skills and industry (Italy), or land and labor (Spain), or all of these and more (Portugal). Creating this sort of holding basin serves, however, to obscure not illuminate the internal dynamics of the world-system.

Nor is any other function of the semiperiphery advanced by Wallerstein convincing. He further defines it as a mediator, where "vital skills that are often politically unpopular" were collected (p. 350). Even if we overlook the vagueness of this explanation, are we really to believe that entrepreneurship and business skills, which were matured in semiperipheral Italy, were actually politically unpopular in the Netherlands? Or that state-formation, which the Spanish government pursued relentlessly, was not also to the taste of that Henry VIII who referred to himself as "emperor in his own realm"? Similarly, it is hard to understand the place of the semiperiphery in the international division of labor. Its separate conceptual existence could be justified if it had a special role. Yet if, as Wallerstein claims, it were actually taking the route of deindustrialization and agrarian self-sufficiency, it was economically external to the world-economy; if not, it was providing core and/or peripheral goods and services and need not be treated separately.

Other evidence also indicates the incoherent nature of the semiperiphery. For one thing, the units within it were extremely heterogeneous--which is perhaps why we never get a concrete definition of what composed it: parts of France and Germany, Italy, Spain, presumably Portugal. Then, too, it is by no means plain that all the places Wallerstein puts in the semiperiphery were turning to self-sufficiency. Not only were there large capitalist farms throughout, but sharecropping itself was capitalistic, as at least one of Wallerstein's authorities remarks (see p. 107, n. 148), and was not limited to semiperipheral regions (see p. 105, n. 141).

In dealing with France, that hybrid of core and semiperiphery, the problems with the latter emerge directly. By pointing to her schizophrenia--a state at once too strong and too weak, an orientation to land and to sea, and so forth--Wallerstein reminds us of the curious blend of immobilism and action which was the French absolutist state. However, these contradictions within France had little to do with emerging semiperipheral factors; instead, they resulted from the continued regionalism of economic and political structures, a point which even Wallerstein comes close to conceding (see p. 294). Regional disparities were emphasized by the unequal development inherent in capitalism, but they had prior causes; besides, internal variations were powerfully reinforced by popular movements all across the late medieval and early modern periods, ranging from peasant risings to less dramatic action in town and country. Since Wallerstein regards these as results of France's position rather than as central causes, he ends up explaining hybrid and vacillating behavior as a result of its hybrid and vacillating position in the world-economy. Unfortunately, this sort of circular argument functions no better here than in regard to the formation of the world-system and its division of labor. Finally, the areas of southern France which Wallerstein treats as semiperipheral from an economic point of view turn out to be the allies of core provinces on the Atlantic coast when political movements are discussed. In the case of France, semiperiphery serves no explanatory purpose; it just confuses the issue.

It might be thought that a better case could be made for semiperiphery if it were restricted to the Hapsburg territories. Yet even here it is both distorting and superfluous. For one thing, in important parts of that territory capitalism did in fact flourish: not only in the Rhineland but also in Catalonia, as Pierre Vilar has shown. In addition, Wallerstein himself focuses on the Hapsburg lands as demonstrating how political factors--in the event, imperial "overextension"--could undermine economic development. Like France, therefore, much of Spain, Italy and Germany (not to mention Portugal and the Netherlands), can more sensibly be discussed as countries which despite numerous advantages were unable to complete the transition. Such an explanation would avoid the logical dilemma of using position in the world-system to account for position in the world-system, as Wallerstein is repeatedly forced to do in order to make his theory work. It would as well incorporate dynamic elements directly into the core-periphery dialectic, both in terms of the evolution of capitalism (something Wallerstein ignores) and in terms of the regional variations which were endemic throughout Europe before and after the transition or its failure. On the whole, then, the semiperiphery is unnecessary; in terms of economic

development, political organization and social structure, its constituent parts were rather strata of the two basic structural components of the world-system than a separate class.

2. Definition of Capitalism. Wallerstein's account of the origins of the "world-embracing" market which Marx had remarked on is also disappointing. His interpretation of the history of overseas expansion is in the end puzzling, fascinating as his explanation of many individual features is. Portugal, we are told, led off because she had largely surmounted her feudal crisis and therefore enjoyed distinctive attributes. However, the central reasons adduced for her voyaging seem contingent (need for spices, Genoese capital) or fortuitous (geographic position, internal class harmony), while Europe's problems were structural, rooted in the mode of production. In short, as Wallerstein himself admits (p. 48), it is difficult to link the circumstances of Portuguese exploration with Europe's general crisis. To put it another way, there is no real reason why Portugal should have ventured forth in order to solve those European problems she did not have. It is also hard to understand why Spain rather than another country followed and then replaced Portugal in expansion, since Spain does not seem to have met the criteria for success in this endeavor--social solidarity at home and the ability to use distant cheap labor (p. 86)--any better than anyone else. In The Modern World System, expansion functions as a deus ex machina.

But Wallerstein's emphasis on the vast growth of the European-centered economic system does not derive simply from his reading of the history of exploration and therefore cannot be refuted just by showing the incoherence of this part of his account. He asserts as well that expansion promoted a new pattern of specialization and new forms of labor control which assured that the surplus flowed mainly into the core. While booty was of some consequence in this process, the crucial factor was a sharp rise in prices during the sixteenth century, the effect of an influx of gold and silver from the New World "in the context of a capitalist world-economy..." (p. 74). Together with a related wage lag, inflation distributed income inequitably, forcing savings and thus investment.

Although the phenomena he describes were both real and important, Wallerstein's explanation and application of them is unconvincing. First, he relies heavily (though somewhat unclearly) on the work of the economic historian Earl Hamilton, whose data as well as conclusions have been largely modified, when not rejected, by later research.²⁴ Moreover, once again Wallerstein begs the question by assuming the existence of a capitalist world-system when he is trying to discover its origins. Further, we are never

shown whether the wealth generated was in fact either transferred from some groups and parts of the world-economy to others. Most important, the information he presents (see pp. 69-84, especially Table I) strongly suggests that bullion was of minor significance in setting off inflation. Rather, it was rising economic activity in the context of the expropriation of direct producers who were forced into the market which explains both inflation and the fall in wages. Bullion could have effects, in other words, only because the artisans and peasants of Europe were being dispossessed. In short, Wallerstein focuses on the gathering of money, while neglecting the process of primitive accumulation which alone reveals how the conditions developed which permitted money to function as capital.

The difficulties with Wallerstein's exposition of the genesis of capitalism arise in part from his interpretation of the historical material. Over and above this, they come from his understanding of capitalism. As we have seen, capitalism is a unique system of production and appropriation of the surplus produced. It is not, as Marx long ago pointed out (and Dobb patiently restated in chapter 1 of *Studies*), a system of exchange, even though the circulation of commodities is intrinsic to it. For Wallerstein, however, what matters are market regulations. Repeating and defending Gunder Frank, he sees "capitalism as production for market in which the profit does not go to the direct producer..." (p. 126).

There is no doubt that the market is important in the evolution and structure of capitalism. It promotes the development of productive forces as well as differentiation among producers, thereby permitting the continued reproduction of capitalist relations. It is the place where labor power is purchased, where other commodities circulate, and where surplus value is realized and then appropriated to the advantage of one class and the detriment of another. Its workings augment the amount of money available for investment, as is evident from the fact that merchants were among the first to accumulate and deploy capital on a large scale. But if the market can do all this, it alone cannot begin the process of bringing capitalism into existence, as we have seen. After all, the exchange of commodities existed under feudalism; while the volume of exchanges increases under capitalism, the capitalist market is not a new development in the sense that capitalist production is, as is clear when we recall that the "commercial revolution" occurred during the High Middle Ages.²⁵ Moreover, since medieval trade yielded high profits (and thus an unequal accumulation of capital) to the lands of the Mediterranean and further east without engendering capitalism, we should be wary of attributing too much weight to this mechanism in early modern western Europe.

In any case, the markets which mattered to the sustenance of early capitalist development were less those newly opened by recent exploration and settlement than those within western Europe. De Vries' study of Holland reveals that agrarian reorganization was a function not of distant world but of nearby markets. Economic growth ensued because of regional specialization and rationalization, not to mention changes within village and family structure. In the case of England, too, the trade patterns which fostered rural industry and capitalist agriculture were interregional or with the Continent; they had little to do with the new world market until well into the seventeenth century. Even the evidence cited by Wallerstein supports the point that it was not the recently-opened areas of the world which helped English commerce and industry grow, but the old.²⁶

While as Wallerstein notes (p. 129), Marx did write that "the capitalistic era dates from the sixteenth century" (*Capital*, I, ch. XXVI), this was not done to demonstrate the existence of a world-economy. Instead, the assertion was made in the context of a discussion of original accumulation, which forced people to enter the market, to produce for it and to buy in it. Wallerstein rightly sees the market as a place for amassing capital, but he disregards those aspects which were equally central to capitalism: the enforced sale of labor power and the circulation of commodities made under the new relations of production.

Once it is grasped that the results of primitive accumulation created the world market rather than the other way around, it becomes possible to make sense of two related matters which are confused in Wallerstein's presentation. First, the fact that territorial and commercial expansion during the sixteenth century--unlike that which had occurred in the ninth and tenth and again in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries--did not revitalize feudalism but marked its demise. Second, his treatment of the second serfdom in the East as an offshoot of trade, despite evidence that the market led to the abolition of serfdom in many places.²⁷ In short, as these and other examples indicate--Spain's abortive development is a particularly outstanding instance--the market was a variable which had different effects depending on what Marx called the "internal articulation" of the existing economic structure.

To be sure, Wallerstein is aware that a labor force is required by any mode of production; one of his central--and most interesting--theses concerns the several forms of control devised under capitalism to manage labor. In order to explain these differences, he relies on demography. Thus a higher density of population in the core countries led to greater specialization and productivity, which in

turn meant workers were more amenable to market discipline and required less coercion than in the less populous periphery and semiperiphery. This reasoning seems, however, to undercut his argument about the effects of the expanded market: if demographic factors affected economic evolution even before the world-system came into existence, then the latter seems to serve no explanatory purpose. Aside from this, emphasis on population underplays the role of social conflict not only in bringing about change but in determining relations of production, which at bottom is what labor control is all about. Wallerstein explains commutation of feudal dues to money rents during the crisis of the later Middle Ages in terms of population decline rather than class struggle. Or, as he puts his general conclusion about variations in forms of labor control, "The difference [in types of labor regimentation] was less in the peasant's alternatives, though this played a role, than in the landowner's alternatives" (p. 111). Most important of all, a stress on population movements can explain quantitative change within a given structure, as the monographs of the Annales school have shown, but only an explication of the way contradictions within a mode of production were worked out can account for its supersession.

Attention must be given, that is to say, to the interplay between changing market forces and the conflicts within the existing socio-economic structure. Then several of the intriguing but unanswered questions raised at least implicitly by Wallerstein's book could be resolved. For example, why did Portugal not develop capitalistically, endowed as she was with a strong but not oppressive state, cooperating bourgeoisie and nobility, a relatively high degree of urbanization, plentiful but not disorderly semi-proletariat, a lot of capital, and first position in the scramble? An even more notable anomaly which could be cleared up is that the countries in which the feudal crisis was strongest--e.g., England and France--did not get into the business of expansion for a long time after the Iberian nations had shown the way. England and France, of course, were also the countries which later formed the capitalist core.

Pace Wallerstein, then, there is no proof that it was a market capitalism born of commercial and demographic expansion which allowed Europe to get out of "decimation and stagnation." On the contrary, it seems that capitalism only developed where "old" and "new" forces had no choice but to contend with one another until the latter won out. In England, class struggle continued until the victory of proto-capitalist landlords and entrepreneurs; in France, strife continued as a result of social deadlock; in Spain, feudal groups won. Initial deep

involvement in the emerging world-system was a hindrance to economic progress rather than a help. Those areas which actually had subjected parts of the periphery which they could exploit did not evolve in a capitalist direction because they were not thrust in upon themselves and forced to. If expansion were a viable option, the struggle at home was decided in favor of the dominant feudal groups, but economic transformation was precluded.

3. Ahistorical Theory and Presentation. In order to incorporate the dialectic between the market and social relations into his explanation of the rise of capitalism, Wallerstein would have to do more than pay closer attention to the productive aspect of the economy, to the contradictions born within it and to the structure and evolution of commodity production. Aided by the growing corpus of detailed local studies, which are for the most part ignored in The Modern World-System, he would have to cast his investigation in historical terms. This means first of all recognizing that capitalism and its core-periphery dichotomy were historical developments which had barely begun in the early modern period. At that time, most of both areas was entirely outside of the still-rudimentary world system and not subject to its exigencies. Even in those portions which were affected by new economic conditions, traditional modes of production, classes and forms of behavior persisted for centuries.

Just as it has been shown that treating feudalism as a monolith makes it impossible to comprehend its adaptations and collapse, so capitalism cannot be understood if its evolving phases are overlooked. Specifically, an early mercantile stage needs to be distinguished from a later industrial one. In the first--which is in fact the subject of Wallerstein's book--capital played a much larger role than before; however, neither the relations nor the forces of production had changed much. Even though they increasingly set the terms, merchants still bought from petty producers, who on their side continued to work in the old ways and enjoyed many traditional privileges and protections. Even artisan-run workshops were small and required the physical labor of the owner if they were to provide him a living. This phase was transitional in the truest sense of the word: economic development could and did go forward and back. Capitalism's victory was not assured anywhere.

If anything else, his reading of the transition debate should have indicated to Wallerstein that while the system he outlines was not feudal, neither was it yet capitalist. Unfortunately, the static way in which he regards economic formations causes him to miss the opportunity to redefine the transition in a manner which would go beyond the either-or terms of earlier contributions.

Were Wallerstein's explication historical--if, in other words, it interpreted the economic structure of the sixteenth century for what it was (a transitional form) rather than for what it might become (a fully developed mode of production)--a number of outstanding issues could begin to be elucidated. Take the surprising economic history of the Netherlands, which showed a type of evolution within the early core states which fell short of self-sustaining industrial capitalism. Even with a strong but flexible state in which the bourgeoisie was hegemonic, nearly free access to the empires created by the Iberian nations, first-rate technique, among many other advantages, the Netherlands only rose to temporary commercial predominance: it did not complete the economic transformation until much later. Besides throwing light on this and other examples of commercial growth without capitalist development, an historical interpretation could suggest answers to the many remaining questions about labor organization. For example, the core employed both wage labor and peasant proprietorship. Yet these are very different forms of labor organization, and accounting for their success (*vide* Brenner) goes a long way towards solving the puzzle of why Britain took off first and France stumbled. Then, too, the way that eastern Europe was incorporated into the periphery might be rescued from the logical and historical circularity to which Wallerstein has consigned it. As he tells the story, the outcome seems to depend on the existence of the world economy and its division of labor, to the building of which, however, eastern Europe's coerced cash-crop labor was a primary contributor. Finally, the insuperable confusion engendered by the concept of the semiperiphery would vanish if its component parts were seen not as part of a system which was completely articulated from its day of birth but as going through stages--whether progressive or regressive--of the transition.

Greater regard to both the historical dimension and the inner dynamics of the transition would illuminate its political context. The formation of strong national states and economic development is a point on which Wallerstein understandably lays great stress: "The capitalist world-economy seems to have required and facilitated this secular process of increased centralization and internal control, at least within the core states" (p. 136). Upon consideration, however, the validity of this insight is not at all apparent, and in fact the entire discussion of the relationship between economic and political evolution is most inadequate. At root, of course, the argument is circular: economic growth was required for the emergence of a strong state machinery, which in turn was necessary if capitalism were to arise. Even if we disregard this recurrent logical problem, empirical ones remain. Except for homogenization of population, the features of the new state spelled out in

chapter 3 are not made specific to particular states. All we know is that "some kings" implemented them. Moreover, the state-building described does not fit merely, or even best, the core countries. It applies to Spain, some of the Italian princedoms, and parts of Germany as well as to England and France, and better to all of them than to the Netherlands. Furthermore, it was not the case that Wallerstein's core states were the strongest either internationally or in the face of internal opposition, his criteria for a powerful state (p. 355). Indeed, as he elsewhere suggests, England and the Netherlands had governments which were not so forceful or expensive as to thwart economic development, though otherwise they were extremely different. It should also be remembered that in England prolonged revolution broke out.

The most disappointing aspect of this part of his discussion is Wallerstein's narrow view of early modern politics. To be sure, the activities of monarchs and established landed elites were important, but they were only half the dialectic. Regarding politics from the top down, as in this book, implies that policies finally implemented derived from well-planned rational decisions, thereby distorting the interaction of historical forces, notably class struggle, by ignoring them. To take just one instance: due to his concentration on the nobility and its concerns, Wallerstein overlooks the central dynamic of the Netherlands Revolution, the vacillating behavior of the various strata of the bourgeoisie and artisans.²⁸ As a further consequence of his restrictive notion of politics, the significance of the new Dutch republic for European economic and political development is disregarded or, rather, relegated to a quotation in a footnote. In this book, discussion of "state-building" substitutes for political analysis.

The scope of Wallerstein's inquiry is broader, but in the end his treatment of the genesis of capitalism gets us no further than Dobb and the earlier transition debate. Indeed, Wallerstein's explanation of the issues of peasant struggle, petty commodity production, urban-rural relations, and primitive accumulation is inferior to the level achieved in previous contributions. He discusses the final crisis of feudalism, but since he wants to define the rise of a world-system, not a mode of production, he addresses himself not to contradictions but to trade, to demography, to the calculating behavior of the political elite. His mentor is not Karl Marx, the student of class struggle, but Fernand Braudel, the *Annales*-school patriarch of biologically and geographically determined modernization.

What Wallerstein has done is to describe the formation of a greatly enlarged trading unit; he shows the transition from one market system to another. Hence the importance of Amsterdam: not because it had any effect on expansion, labor

control, or state formation, but because it served as the center of world trade. Yet as the rapid elimination of Amsterdam (or, for that matter, Antwerp) from the leading position showed, being the keystone of even the biggest commercial arena meant little when not backed up by domestic structural change. The world system outlined by Wallerstein was a commercial network, more sizeable than but not yet fundamentally different from earlier world systems found around the Mediterranean and in northern Europe. Eventually, it was transformed into a capitalist economy firmly dominated by a small number of western European nations. But while the system created the periphery and its peculiar relations with the core, it did not create capitalism in the core states. That was the result of the interaction between the market and internal developments. The modern capitalist world-system was the child not the parent of European capitalism.



FROM BOCCACCIO, DE CLARIS MULIERIUS.

(ULM, JOHANN ZAINER, 1473.)

NOTES

I would like to thank Molly Nolan for her help in revising this essay.

1. For a highly theoretical discussion, defiantly but not really anti-historical, see Barry Hindess and Paul Q. Hirst, Pre-Capitalist Modes of Production (London, 1975).
2. For Hobsbawm's comments, see p. 42.
3. Marx, in Pre-Capitalist Economic Formations, p. 98. Emphasis in the original.
4. This is Hobsbawm's comment in ibid., p. 56. For Engels' remarks, see ibid., pp. 145-48.
5. Marx in ibid., p. 111.
6. Marx in ibid., pp. 135-38.
7. For all of this, see Capital, volume I, ch. XXXI.
8. Studies, p. 35. The entire first chapter is an excellent discussion of various definitions of capitalism and their deficiencies as compared to the Marxist.
9. Marx, Capital, Volume III, p. 390, quoted in Dobb, Studies, p. 42.
10. See, for example, the work of Joan Thirsk: "Seventeenth-Century Agriculture and Social Change" (1970), in Paul S. Seaver, ed., Seventeenth-Century England (New York, 1975), pp. 71-110; "Industries in the Countryside," in Fritz J. Fisher, ed., Essays in the Economic and Social History of Tudor and Stuart England (Cambridge, 1961), pp. 70-88; and her articles in H.P.R. Finberg, ed., The Agrarian History of England and Wales. Volume IV, 1500-1640, ed. Joan Thirsk (Cambridge, 1967).
11. The failure of the transition is now beginning to attract systematic attention. A symposium held in Montreal in 1974 contains interesting suggestions, though little agreement, and a very good working bibliography. See Frederick Krantz and Paul M. Hohenberg, eds., Failed Transitions to Modern Industrial Society: Renaissance Italy and Seventeenth Century Holland (Montreal, 1975). Eric Hobsbawm earlier described the last stage in the transition--including its failures--in his "The Crisis of the Seventeenth Century," originally published in Past and Present, nos. 5 and 6 (1954). It has since been reprinted with additional comments in Trevor Aston,

- ed., Crisis in Europe 1560-1660 (New York, 1967), pp. 5-62.
12. This piece has also been printed in History Workshop, vol. I, no. 1 (Spring 1976).
 13. An earlier collection consisting of just the articles from Science and Society was published sometime around 1956 under the same title.
 14. The best book in English remains George Unwin, Industrial Organization in the 16th and 17th Centuries (London, 1904; reprinted 1957 and later), which concentrates on England and France. See also Raymond de Roover, "A Florentine Firm of Cloth Manufacturers: Management and Organization of a Sixteenth-Century Business," Speculum, XVI (1941), pp. 1-33; and Florence Edler de Roover, "Andrea Banchi, Florentine Silk Manufacturer and Merchant in the Fifteenth Century," Studies in Medieval and Renaissance History, III (1966), pp. 221-85.
 15. See Paul Sweezy, "A Critique," in Transition, p. 55 and Marx, in Pre-Capitalist Economic Formations, p. 116.
 16. See Georges Lefebvre, "Some Observations," in Transition, pp. 125-26.
 17. I do not mean to imply that many useful monographs dealing with one aspect or another of the topic should be ignored; it is merely that they speak indirectly if at all to the larger issue.
 18. The article has been reprinted in Aston, ed., Crisis in Europe, pp. 150-76.
 19. "Agrarian Class Structure and Economic Development in Pre-Industrial Europe," Past and Present, no. 70 (1976), pp. 30-74.
 20. Though not Marxist, the recent book of Jan De Vries, The Dutch Rural Economy in the Golden Age 1500-1700 (New Haven, 1974), should be mentioned. It shows yet another path of agrarian evolution: one that led to striking improvements in productivity without bringing a breakthrough to capitalist industrialization. Rural growth in Holland resulted from the change from peasant self-sufficiency to a high degree of specialization and the building of strong trading links with towns, thus stimulating demand for the commodities produced by both the urban and rural sectors. Predatory capitalists and noble landlords alike were excluded from this type of economic development. This meant, however, not only that capital-

ist agriculture of a certain form would not get established, but also that the rural industries which loomed so large elsewhere in Europe were precluded in the Netherlands, since there was no class of un- or underemployed landless proletarians to provide the labor force. Besides, the lack of competing rural industry allowed traditional guild-dominated urban crafts to survive, rather than being undermined or forced to adopt more capitalistic practices.

21. Wallerstein devotes some pages to the counter-example of China, an empire which neither expanded geographically overseas nor developed capitalistically--an illuminating contrast, even though the reasons he adduces, tied up with the diversions caused by already possessing an empire, are somewhat circular and inconclusive.
22. Wallerstein explains in chapter 6 why Asia and Russia were outside the European world-economy rather than in its periphery: the former because it produced luxuries not necessities and therefore was not intrinsic to the new world market; the latter because it had its own version of a world-economy; both because they were not at all transformed by European contact at that time.
23. Dobb had also pointed out that the second serfdom differed from the first in that under it production was oriented towards the capitalist world market. On his side, Wallerstein, while rejecting the term feudalism in this context, ignores the fact that the method of surplus appropriation--non-economic compulsion--was the same now as under feudalism, as were relations of production and the structure of domination and subjection. Only market orientation, in fact, seems to have changed.
24. There is a vast literature on this subject. Pierre Vilar, "Problems of the Formation of Capitalism," Past and Present, no. 10 (1956), pp. 15-38, is a good introduction to many of them.
25. Cf. Robert S. Lopez, The Commercial Revolution of the Middle Ages, 950-1350 (Englewood Cliffs, N.J., 1971).
26. Cf. the conquest of the Spanish and Mediterranean markets in the 17th century by English "new draperies," as summarized in Wallerstein, p. 280.
27. Brenner, "Agrarian Class Structure," pp. 52-60.
28. Wallerstein never gets to the English Revolution, besides a few preliminary remarks about Court and Country which, like his comments about the French wars of religion and subsequent internal conflict, are limited to the view from the top.