Ancient Economies: The agricultural foundation

Class Description:
In this seminar we will explore the organization of ancient economies at various points in human history. We will investigate this topic from the perspective of ancient agricultural systems and food production. Agriculture and in particular the production of agricultural surplus was the foundation of the economic organization of ancient societies, which constitutes the fundamental difference between ancient and modern economies. The 18th century group of French economists, the physiocrats, considered agricultural production and labor the “wealth of the nation”. Moreover, the seasonality of agriculture production, and the exchange and consumption of agricultural goods fundamentally shaped the organization of ancient economies. We will explore the kinds of agricultural systems (crop and animal packages, agricultural practices, labor organization, etc.) ancient societies developed in different parts of the ancient world to sustain their lifestyle and perpetuate it into the future. We will look at how agricultural goods were distributed, exchanged and consumed to form the economic order of specific ancient societies. We will compare a variety of cases to assess how different environmental settings, historical circumstances and cultural notions shaped ancient economies. Alongside this, we will also discuss past and current theoretical debates on ancient economies (e.g. Francois Quesnay, Pierre Samuel du Pont de Nemours; Karl Marx’s; Karl Polanyi’s; Max Weber; David Graeber; etc.).

Course Format:
The course meets once per week and will follow a discussion seminar format with brief introductory lectures by the instructor. It is absolutely essential to complete the course readings for a stimulating discussion. Instead of having quizzes I will ask students to present the read with 2 discussion points.

Evaluation Activity
Student evaluation will be based on active participation in discussions, this includes the presentation of the readings and formulating discussion points for each week (25%); midterm: abstract, outline, and sample references of the final paper (25%); 5-10 page (double spaced) final paper (50%). The goal of the paper is for you to train yourself in academic writing. I will propose a number of topics but you are welcome to pursue a subject matter of your own choosing. You can rely on the literature discussed in class to support your arguments but you are asked in addition to find relevant sources for the topic of your choosing.

As a matter of class policy, all health-related absences or late assignments require documentation by a physician. All other absences or late assignments will be excused at the discretion of the instructor and with advance notice of at least two weekdays. Late
assignment will be marked down 5% per day; assignments more than 5 days late will not be accepted. **Final Paper due Mai 15th 2018!**

**Defining Ancient Economy:**

**Week 1 (24. January 2018):**
Introduction, class policies, and overview of the course – defining economy and ancient economy


**Week 2 (31. January 2018):**
The academic discourse on ancient economies starting with Karl Polanyi and Moses Finley and some later reflection about their works.

*Readings:*


**The Beginnings:**

**Week 3 (7. February 2018)**
Readings:


Week 4 (14. February 2018)
The economy of first sedentary and agricultural societies (Çatalhöyük, Göbekli Tepe [Turkey])

Definition of agricultural surplus how is it defined, what is its significance in ancient economies, how was produced

Readings


**Economies of the “first” complex civilizations of the Old World**

**Week 5 (21. February 2018)**

Mesopotamia: Economies – prestate (Ubaid) – state (Ur III/ Old Babylonia) – empire (Neo-Assyrian and Neo-Babylonian Empire). Egypt: Economy of Early dynastic period, Old and New Kingdom, Greco-Roman Egypt

**Readings:**

**Mesopotamia:**


**Egypt:**


Week 6 (28. February 2018) – Guest Lecture by Camille

Readings


Week 7 (7. March 2018)
Class Cancelled due to conference participation – outlines of paper with references due Friday, 9. March 2018.

Spring recess - Monday 12. – 18. March 2018

Economies of the first complex societies in the New World

Week 8 (21. March 2018)
Inka and Mayan and Aztec Empire whose economies, contrary to those of the Old World, had considerable differences, which we will explore.

Readings


Economic Constants and Variables

Week 9 (28. March 2018)
Production: Institutional and domestic or household level production.

Readings

Week 10 (4. April 2018)

Labor – access to labor, labor specialization, labor organization, labor markets

Readings


Week 11 (11. April 2018)

Trade – Interregional exchange, international exchange and the role of trade in ancient economies.


Readings

Week 12 (18. April 2018) – guest lecture by Marta Ameri

Administration – tools of administration, function of administration in the economic organization of early states

Readings


Week 13 (25. April 2018)

The question of money /currency in ancient economies

Readings


**Week 14 (2. Mai 2018)**
Discussion - what is similar what is different between ancient and modern