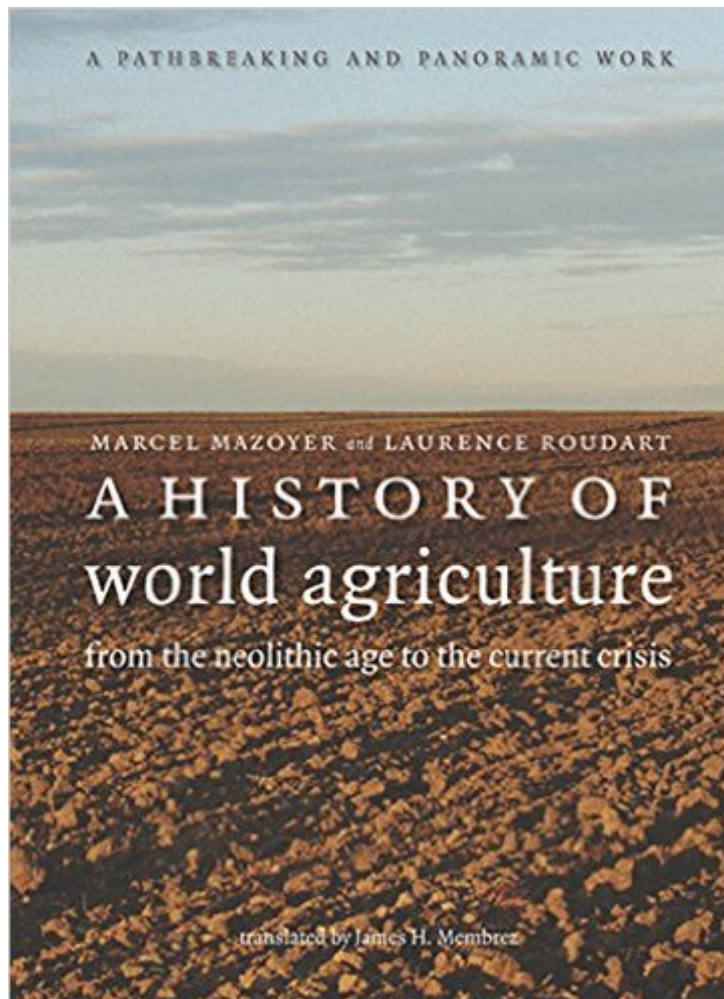


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A History Of World Agriculture: From The Neolithic Age To The Current Crisis



Synopsis

Only once we understand the long history of human efforts to draw sustenance from the land can we grasp the nature of the crisis that faces humankind today, as hundreds of millions of people are faced with famine or flight from the land. From Neolithic times through the earliest civilizations of the ancient Near East, in savannahs, river valleys and the terraces created by the Incas in the Andean mountains, an increasing range of agricultural techniques have developed in response to very different conditions. These developments are recounted in this book, with detailed attention to the ways in which plants, animals, soil, climate, and society have interacted. Mazoyer and Roudart's *A History of World Agriculture* is a path-breaking and panoramic work, beginning with the emergence of agriculture after thousands of years in which human societies had depended on hunting and gathering, showing how agricultural techniques developed in the different regions of the world, and how this extraordinary wealth of knowledge, tradition and natural variety is endangered today by global capitalism, as it forces the unequal agrarian heritages of the world to conform to the norms of profit. During the twentieth century, mechanization, motorization and specialization have brought to a halt the pattern of cultural and environmental responses that characterized the global history of agriculture until then. Today a small number of corporations have the capacity to impose the farming methods on the planet that they find most profitable. Mazoyer and Roudart propose an alternative global strategy that can safeguard the economies of the poor countries, reinvigorate the global economy, and create a livable future for mankind.

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Customer Reviews

I must say in brief that I disagree with the comment that denigrates the book because it does not cover the history of world agriculture in a complete matter. Though I am only a student of the subject, I would say this book is a systematic overview of the development of agriculture. To quote from the book (p. 21) "...one is not able to analyze a given agricultural system, formulate a diagnostic, and propose projects and policies of development without being grounded in a systematic knowledge of the organization, functioning, and dynamics of different sorts of agricultural systems. This book attempts to build this type of knowledge, under the synthesized form of a theory of historical transformations and geographical differentiations of agrarian systems. ..."The book covers agriculture as agricultural systems and not necessarily as specific manifestations. The chapters are roughly (and not completely) described as follows (p. 25): the second chapter recounts the origins of agriculture in the Neolithic epoch, third systems of slash and burn, fourth hydraulic agrarian systems in arid regions, fifth Inca (terraced) agrarian system, sixth animal drawn systems based on the ard, fallowing & accompanying animal herding in temperate regions of Europe, seventh animal drawn cultivation based on plow, fallowing, and accompanying animal herding in the cold temperate regions, eighth animal drawn cultivation using plow and without fallowing, ninth mechanization of animal traction and transport and ten being the motorized, mechanized specialized systems using mineral fertilizers. Not being an expert in the subject, there may be other systems of agriculture not included that I don't know about. But it is a well-written book and is systematic. If one likes that approach, it is well worth to at least look it through if you can get access to it. Also of note, there is a recommendation on the back of the book by Samir Amin, and, if you are appreciative of Amin's writings, then I think that you would like this book.

This book is not a history of "world" agriculture. It is rather an idiosyncratic history of agriculture in Western Europe, with a few peripheral discussions of some odd non-European topics. It has a chapter on Inca agriculture and political structure, but extremely minimal discussion of any other precolumbian American systems (Aztecs, North American, etc.) It has a chapter on Egypt - which strictly speaking in antiquity is part of the West - but this chapter goes all the way up to the late 20th century! Yet he does not have any discussion of the Arab agricultural revolution, which has been well documented by American and other scholars. Most problematic is that the book does not have any significant discussion of the history of the main agrarian societies in world history -- China and India. China at least needed a chapter, all it gets is a few passages or mentions, and India even less. In general, the few sources he cites are almost all French. While there are certainly good scholars in France, this author's source base is clearly too narrow to allow him to be aware of recent

developments in scholarship outside his own country and language and the new directions and priorities in research. The way the book was written is also problematic. The author issues judgments about particular periods as though his evaluations of them are final and obvious, when in fact scholarly views about the conditions and social relations he describes are by no means definite and remain matters of dispute. In such a large book he should have been able to find some space to acknowledge uncertainties and alternative viewpoints. The book is long and does have some valuable information on many points. But it is definitely not the book that its title claims it to be.

A fascinating book and a timely one. I think agriculture is going to become more and more important as we increase population, and deal with pollution, pesticides, genetic modification, and other issues far too numerous to mention here. I will not even start on the issue of global warming and what that might end up doing - both good and bad depending perhaps on where you live. I also think agriculture is going to emerge as a huge career field again. If I was a young man just starting out I would seriously consider some kind of agricultural career. As far as the other two reviews, I am only the third so far, I find much to agree with both of them about. However, I did not find the shortcomings of the book as damning as the one reviewer who rated this work rather low, and tend to agree with the other reviewer that was more positive. It is a great piece of scholarship, but does indeed fall short of being a comprehensive "world" history of agriculture. That would take one or two other volumes. How about we nickname this: A History of World Agriculture, Volume I? Overall? My compliments to Marcel Mazoyer and Laurence Roudart for their impressive tome. Well played.

An excellent overview of agricultural systems from the Neolithic to today. Particularly helpful for understanding the challenges faced by peasant farmers today.

The best agricultural history out there in my opinion. The text is historical, but it connects to the modern day. There are facts, but the text is not preachy at all. Interesting and informative.

It's an eye opening experience of reading the book. In a world of global economy, farmers in developing countries are struggling very hard

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