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978-0-521-10506-4 - Early European Agriculture: Its Foundation and Development

M. R. Jarman, G. N. Bailey and H. N. Jarman

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EARLY EUROPEAN AGRICULTURE

BRITISH ACADEMY MAJOR RESEARCH PROJECT

The Early History of Agriculture

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EARLY EUROPEAN AGRICULTURE

ITS FOUNDATIONS AND DEVELOPMENT

**being the third volume of Papers in Economic Prehistory
by members and associates of the British Academy Major
Research Project in the Early History of Agriculture**

written in honour of ERIC HIGGS

edited by

M. R. JARMAN

G. N. BAILEY and H. N. JARMAN

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INTRODUCTION

This book stems largely from the work of, and is entirely a tribute and memorial to, Eric Higgs. At the time of his sadly lamented death in October 1976 he was in the process of drawing to its conclusion the British Academy Major Research Project on the Early History of Agriculture. He became so intimately associated with the Project's work and the thinking which it represented that the man and institution became synonymous in many peoples' minds, denoting a powerful and individual conception of prehistoric studies. The personality and originality of the man, no less than the force of his arguments, affected generations of his students. It is thus that the present volume remains Eric's book, despite the fact that it existed only as a sketchy outline at the time of his death; for the contributors have a more than ordinary academic debt to acknowledge.

Many people have contributed to the volume in different ways and different degrees. It has been jointly written by a small number of Project members, but over the years we have, of course, drawn data and ideas from a wider circle of friends and colleagues. In the nature of things it has not proved possible to produce a book of this scope and size with total unanimity. Broadly speaking, the general and theoretical chapters, and the outlines of our approach represent the views of the Project as a whole and of all our principal contributors. Such disagreement as has arisen has been confined to specific pieces of data and their interpretation, and the weight and balance given to different points of argument. Where controversy proved intractable, the view represented is that of the senior editor.

The general responsibility for the first three chapters, Chapters 6, 7, and the concluding section lies with M. R. Jarman; that for Chapter 4 with G. N. Bailey, that for Chapter 5 with H. N. Jarman. Within this framework there has been an inextricable degree of cross-fertilisation. These authors aside, we received direct contributions, or access to unpublished original research, from the following: Athol Anderson (Sweden), Paul Bahn (French Pyrenees, megaliths), Jan Bay-Petersen (Northern Poland, French and Italian littoral), Coinneach Maclean (Romania), Nigel Mills (Provence), Margaret Sakellariadis (Switzerland),

Claudio Vita-Finzi (Dordogne), Derrick Webley (penetrometer studies, Britain), Marek Zvelebil (Finland).

Our thanks are due to these and to the many people who assisted in ways less easy to acknowledge. These include Grahame Clark and Sir Joseph Hutchinson who gave generously of their time and encouragement; the large number of people who allowed us on to their excavations and into their museum storerooms; the countless farmers and agricultural labourers who answered our insistent – and often impertinent and incomprehensible – questions concerning modern and historic agriculture; and Michael Young, who tolerantly overlooked our importunities and drew the figures. We are especially grateful to Bill Powell for his concept of the urban caveman, whose absence from these pages results purely from lack of space rather than lack of relevance. We are also glad to acknowledge our indebtedness to the organisations and institutions that supported our work financially. The British Academy has been our major sponsor since the Project's inception in 1967. Generous financial contributions have also been received from the Wenner-Gren Foundation for Anthropological Research, the British Council, and the Deutscher Akademischer Austauschdienst. The Department of Archaeology in the University of Cambridge kindly provided us with rooms in which to work and other necessary services.

The volume is organised in terms of the analysis of three primary exploitation zones: the coastal zone, the lowland zone, and the upland zone. There are alternatives. The two most obvious are either a chronological scheme (in which one would analyse the development of European agriculture as a whole at a series of time horizons) or a geographical scheme (in which one would take the subject country by country or area by area). It was felt that, as the literature abounds with syntheses based on one or both of these latter principles, more might be gained by a different approach. Far more important, as our work progressed we became ever more convinced that these three primary zones embodied potentials and constraints of immense significance in the development and regulation of economic behaviour. These factors, which override chronological

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and national boundaries, encapsulate the crucial determinants which link certain kinds of economy, tending to the existence of observable uniformities. Given our conviction that archaeology must (among other things) seek to recognise and analyse regularities and organising principles, we felt that this was a most appropriate way in which to arrange this volume.

This scheme has not been without its problems, as will clearly emerge from Chapters 4–6. One most obvious difficulty is that of repetition and duplication. It is a basic tenet that the primary resource zones were interrelated, resources from one area being integrated with those of another by various mechanisms. In our attempt to deal with this within our chosen framework there has been some unavoidable duplication of information. It is also true that within each particular zone we have been frequently forced to the conclusion that the important economic and environmental variables were remarkably similar from area to area: another kind of repetitiveness. In view of our professed preoccupation with regularities in the archaeological record this is, perhaps, to be expected.

In addition to our concern with primary exploitation zones we have developed the concept of *economic niches*, which describe the way in which human populations behave with respect to these zones, and the ways in which the unequal resources they offer are integrated. These are to be seen as elements which together make up the total exploitation of a region; and they comprise the mobile, mobile-cum-sedentary, and sedentary niches. The mobile niche integrates widespread complementary resources by means of transhumance or stock transference (in the case of pastoralism) or by seasonal movements which may on occasion have been less structured among certain hunting and gathering economies. The mobile-cum-sedentary niche incorporates both a mobile and sedentary element; a characteristic example being a lowland agricultural economy with a pastoral element which requires a degree of seasonal mobility for its effective management. The sedentary niche is largely a phenomenon of the lowland resource zone, and typically concerns agricultural economies. In certain rare instances, as we shall see later, coastal economies may also occupy the sedentary economic niche.

We make no apology for including, where it has seemed to us helpful, data from the Mesolithic, Upper Palaeolithic, or even Middle Palaeolithic periods, along with our consideration of Holocene agricultural economies. We are profoundly convinced that a crucial and often overlooked aspect of archaeological data concerns long-term continuity. In Chapter 3 we outline

some of our reasons for recognising long-term regularities in economic forces and organisation. In the later chapters, as was mentioned above, we frequently see these regularities reflected in site locations and territories, and the ways in which the various resources were integrated.

One limitation of all general syntheses is that they cannot be exhaustive in their treatment of the material. This is no less true of the present volume, and it is certain that many will feel its usefulness to be greatly restricted because particular examples and areas are omitted, or because it is felt that undue weight has been placed on a relatively small sample of the total available evidence. Naturally, care has been taken to overcome this problem as far as possible, but a number of significant constraints have limited our coverage. The total permanent staff of the project has never been large, reaching a maximum of seven for a short period, and latterly reduced to one. Of the nine years of active research (the last few months having been entirely devoted to the preparation of this volume) it appears with the benefit of hindsight that the first three were almost entirely given over to ground clearance: to the proposal of objectives and approaches which seemed at once theoretically valid and practically feasible. The results of this initial stage emerged as *Papers in Economic Prehistory* (1972). The second stage, the tentative first development of this theme, was published as a somewhat disparate collection of papers, *Palaeoeconomy* (1975). In attempting the final stage of synthesis, we are only too aware of the degree to which our restricted time and resources have forced us to be selective.

We hope, of course, and believe that we have gone some way to overcoming this limitation by the particular choices we have made as to approach and study area. The central objective has been to arrive at principles of economic behaviour which are stable in the long term, and which have far-reaching evolutionary importance. If we have in any way succeeded, then these ought to apply as much in areas we have been unable to consider as they do in those from which we have a great deal of information.

Be that as it may, many areas are not dealt with here in any detail. We were unable to study much of Scandinavia at first hand. This limitation is to some extent mitigated by the fact that we were fortunate in having access to recent palaeoeconomic work in that area, and also by the region's environment, which places most of it beyond the limits of many systems of farming. Equally it has not proved possible to conduct any field work in European Russia. Other major

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geographical gaps are East Germany, Czechoslovakia, and Yugoslavia.

Another important limitation has been the impossibility of conducting major campaigns of excavation, most of the field work having concentrated on surveys. Shortage of time and resources has precluded any more ambitious field operations, and we have been forced to make use of earlier work, or of cooperative ventures with excavators who frequently had very different archaeological objectives to ours, but who offered the

best opportunity of access to material in certain crucial areas. Many of our hypotheses can only be adequately tested when on-site archaeological data are available that have been collected with those propositions in mind. Thus to a very real degree the success or failure of this volume rests with a future generation of archaeological research. It is satisfying to note that a number of detailed area studies is now being conducted by research students with this objective in mind.

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Free will is for history only an expression connoting what we do not know about the laws of human life.

Leo Tolstoy, *War and Peace*

And in truth, the period of time covered by history is far too short to allow of any perceptible progress in the popular sense of Evolution of the Human Species.

George Bernard Shaw, Notes to *Caesar and Cleopatra*