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Europe's First Farmers

Plants and animals originally domesticated in the Near East arrived in Europe between 7000 and 4000 BC. Was the new technology introduced by migrants, or was it an “inside job”? How were the new species adapted to European conditions? What were the immediate and long-term consequences of the transition from hunting and gathering to farming? These central questions in the prehistory of Europe are discussed here by leading specialists, drawing on the latest scholarship in fields as diverse as genetics and Indo-European linguistics. Detailed studies document the differences between European regions, and fresh generalisations are also proposed and debated.

T. DOUGLAS PRICE is Weinstein Professor of European Archaeology and Director of the Laboratory for Archaeological Chemistry at the University of Wisconsin, Madison. He is the author of more than ten books on the subjects of prehistoric hunter-gatherers, the transition to agriculture and the application of chemistry to the study of the past.

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University of Wisconsin, Madison



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Preface

This book is ultimately the product of both enthusiasm and frustration. The enthusiasm comes from the enormous amount of new information about the prehistoric transition to agriculture around the globe and particularly in Europe. There has been a remarkable increase in our knowledge of the Mesolithic and the Neolithic there in the last twenty years and dramatic changes in previous views. The frustration comes from the tenacity of more traditional perspectives among archaeologists who continue to see a continent gradually covered from southeast to northwest by waves of immigrants originating in the Near East. This outdated view continues in vogue; several popular and important theories are firmly based on it. The implications of this concept of continuous colonization for the spread of culture, language, and genes are obvious and strong: newcomers bring new things; change comes from outside. This perspective has significant implications for our perspectives on transformation and interaction. New information that has accumulated in recent years, however, has raised serious questions about how the transition to agriculture took place and, in a larger frame, about the very origins of agriculture and why human society changes at all.

The overture for this publication was a scholarly symposium, held in Minneapolis, Minnesota, in 1995, at the annual meeting of the Society for American Archaeology. This symposium provided an opportunity for the authors of this volume to convene to discuss the ideas and information presented by their colleagues and to collate those facts and views with their own. The participants in the symposium, and the authors of the chapters in this volume, were selected as individuals who were active in field research dealing with the Mesolithic and Neolithic in Europe, and who at the same time were involved in developing revised perspectives for understanding the transition. This combination of hard-won data and new ideas is essential, in my view, for developing a realistic and viable understanding of our human past.

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The symposium provided a means for integrating the individual papers in the volume and linking the major themes that we address. The symposium went well, large numbers of people attended, excellent papers were read, voices and tempers were raised in debate, and interest peaked. It also seems that the enthusiasm from the symposium traveled home with the contributors, who then spent a great deal of effort enhancing and elaborating their papers to deal with questions, comments, and concerns that were raised during the symposium. As a result, the chapters are lengthy and deliberate in treating the themes that define the substance of this volume.

Other aspects of the volume should also be noted. We have tried to be consistent throughout in the use of calibrated radiocarbon dates in order to have a coherent discussion of the spread of agriculture in actual calendar years. We have also provided both chronological charts and maps of site locations and the distribution of archaeological cultures as summaries of information and reference for the reader.

The human past is a thoroughly fascinating subject. I am convinced that archaeology has both a great deal to offer, and a great deal to learn, in the development of our understanding of the evolution of ourselves and our society. The transition to agriculture is without question one of the major events in that evolution, shifting human focus from the wild to the tame, from nature to the constructed, from the landscape to the community, from the horizontal to the hierarchical. In addition, as I believe the information in this volume will convince you, our ancestors played a decisive role in bringing about that transition as demands from social, economic, and ideological realms of ourselves and our societies grew.

These have been many pleasures in organizing and putting together this book. One of the primary pleasures has been the association with the various contributors whose intellect, alacrity, knowledge, and good nature have made this a relatively easy task. Please accept my sincere thanks and admiration for a job well done. Another pleasure has been the connection and correspondence with other scholars concerned with the transition to agriculture who have generously supplied information, off-prints, and other materials to enhance the information presented in the various chapters of this book. A third pleasure has been the association with the publisher, and particularly with the Senior Commissioning Editor for the Social Sciences, Jessica Kuper, who made an effort to put this book in fine form. Thanks also to Frances Brown whose care in copy-editing has made this a cleaner and more accurate book. My appreciation also goes to the two anonymous reviewers who, while perhaps overly opinionated, helped to make this a better book. A final thank you must go to another great pleasure, my colleague, critic, partner, friend, and love, Anne Birgitte Gebauer.

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