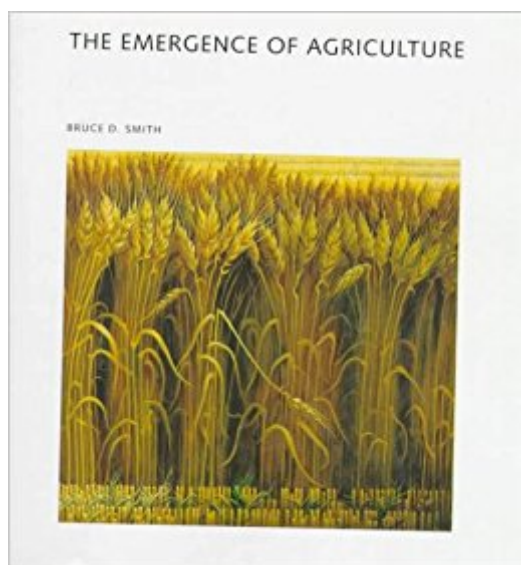


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The Emergence Of Agriculture (Scientific American Library)



Synopsis

In this text, the archaeologist, Bruce Smith, explores the initial emergence and early expansion of agriculture and the transformations in human society that made it possible. He charts the course of the agricultural revolution as it occurred in the Middle East, Europe, China, Africa and the Americas, showing how basic archaeological methods and modern technologies, such as plant analysis, radiocarbon dating and DNA sampling are used to investigate this event. Although in the agricultural mind, the agricultural revolution is often seen as a one-step transition from hunter-gatherer societies to farming ones, Smith shows how truly varied were the patterns of animal and plant domestication in different parts of the world.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

Smith, an archaeologist, presents in plain English the story of the emergence of agriculture worldwide, as hunter-gatherers between 10,000-4500 years ago in different regions independently domesticated certain plants and animals. Smith provides a region-by-region examination, starting with the Fertile Crescent of the Mediterranean approximately 10,000 years ago, followed by Europe, Africa, Asia, Middle and South America, and finally North America, where he relates some of his own archaeological investigations. Color photographs and maps help tell the story. There are really two interwoven stories here: the when, where, how, and why of the transition to agriculture, and the investigations and discoveries of researchers attempting to find the answers. Smith explains how several recent technological developments have aided investigators. Another recent nontechnical

yet intelligent work dealing with the beginnings of agriculture is the beautifully illustrated *People of the Stone Age: Hunter-Gatherers and Early Farmers* (LJ 2/1/94). Libraries collecting in this subject area will want both of these books. William H. Wiese, Iowa State Univ. Lib., Ames Copyright 1995 Reed Business Information, Inc.

Wonderful book in great condition. Thank you!

Definitive on the subject. Easy to understand. Includes more recent knowledge that agriculture was indigenously developed in eastern North America as well as 6 other places around the world.

This book is small and cheap, hence the reason many professors use it for anthropology. I was glad when I received it and found it was a small, short book. The information is very basic, almost too basic for the college level. However, it really did quite little to hold my interest. Although the chapters were short, it was difficult getting through them. Overall, not a terrible reading experience.

I remember when reading this book it seemed like the kind of thing normal people would find boring. Heck, maybe normal people would find it a bit dry, I, however found it fascinating. I have always found domestication and early agriculture fascinating. If you are the same way, this is the book for you. Smith gives a bit of an introduction to the topic at hand by describing how we know what we do about the origins of agriculture, and then goes on to describe the process of domestication for animals and plants. Then the rest of the book is divided into different chapters describing the origins of agriculture in different areas. I loved learning about different plants and animals and how they were domesticated in different areas, and it should be noted that the book is full of fantastic photos and drawings that really help you visualize what Smith is talking about. More than just fascinating I think the ideas presented in this book are essential to understanding civilization itself, not only the ancient civilizations that domesticated the plants and animals, but the modern ones that sprung from those ancient ones and inherited all the domesticated plants and animals. The world as we know it is very much a product of the agricultural revolution(or a series of revolutions in different areas) Smith describes. In short, this book is awesome and there are very few like it, so I would highly recommend buying it.

This book provides a number of revelations most of us are unaware of, from the fact domesticated plants are the way they are due to humans (not nature) imposing selective pressures on their

evolution, to finding the walls of Jericho were not defensive structures, but rather irrigation dikes (in addition to their location on an active fault line). This kind of knowledge, commonly known among scholars, rarely sprinkles on the rest of us. For these gifts, and a few others noted, this book deserves reading but writing, as an art, generally escapes this author more concerned with completeness of data. His most absorbing sections are those relating his own experience in the field where he not only writes with some emotion but with a flair of adventure. We find the current evolutionary state of domesticated seed plants leaves them altogether dependent upon human actions. Not only have humans selected for those with ever more closely bundled seeds (hence dense, productive and easy to pick) but the shells of these seeds have thinned. They cannot survive in the wild for more than a few years without humans as their surfaces erode too early, sprouting in time to be destroyed by winter. Adjustments are also seen in the bodies of domesticated animals. Most know the agriculture revolution - enabling everything we take for granted from cities, nations, wealth and war to ethanol and t-shirts - began about 10,000 years ago in the Levant. The author teaches that agriculture may have been triggered by climate change called the Younger Dryas episode placing selective forces on humans to invent new means of survival. Later, agriculture emerged in six other locations independently, including the eastern US. But we find the revolution is not over. Of all arable land, 80% of Asia and 97% of the Near East and North Africa are already farmed. Satellite data shows we are cultivating about 50 million new acres of tropical rainforest each year alone. We find that archeologists have unearthed villages at the hunter/gatherer-agriculture boundary noting a change in occupation including permanence, population increases and intensified social complexity, so we know when agriculture began but not when/if it ends. As Cicero inherited from Plato the notion that all things in the extreme become their opposite, do we have another example in agriculture? It's an invention we cannot live in such numbers or comfort without and constitutes the planet's strongest selective pressure.

"The Emergence of Agriculture" tells the story of the transition of mankind from a hunter-gatherer existence to agriculture. This transition took place about 10,000 years ago in the Middle East and more recently in the other six areas in which farming and herding are believed to have developed independently. Chapters cover early agriculture in the Middle East, Europe and Africa, East Asia, Middle and South America, and North America. The domestication of wheat, rice, corn, livestock and other crops are discussed. This is a well-produced, well-illustrated book with good color maps, photos, charts, and graphs. Those familiar with "Scientific American" magazine will recognize the reader-friendly style and format. However, I would have to agree with other readers that the prose is

somewhat flat. That being said there's enough good information here to deserve a top rating. What I found most interesting about the book was the discussion of the development of crops no longer significant for agriculture such as Chenopodium (pigweed) in the Americas. Unrecognized by archaeologists as a crop for many decades, the cultivation of Chenopodium pushes the earliest date of agriculture and urbanization in the United States back to about 5,000 years ago. The author's description of the discovery of early agriculture in North America is vivid and personal because he was a participant in the investigation. Likewise, his description of the development of corn (maize) as a crop is very good. The agricultural revolution was one of the most -- if not the most -- important step forward in the development of civilization. This book does an excellent job examining how agriculture became a reality in several different civilizations around the world. Smallchief

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