

Geography 109 : Prehistoric Agriculture

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109 McCone Hall
Office Hours: M 2:00 - 3:30 or by appointment

Introduction

The purpose of this course is to provide a comparative review of prehistoric agriculture on a global scale. Special attention will be given to the origins problem and to the diffusion of agriculture out of the early centers, the Near East, Mesoamerica, China, etc. We will also consider the question as to what extent prehistoric agriculture was self-sustaining. Most authorities have assumed that it was; the alternative viewpoint is that balanced systems were the exception rather than the rule. Relevant case studies here include the Lowland Maya, the Anasazi, and the Sumerians.

During the course we will cover a wide range of topics and will review many different kinds of evidence (archaeological, ethnographic, biological, and paleoenvironmental). The approach is therefore an interdisciplinary one. There are no formal prerequisites, but some background in cultural geography, anthropology and/or the relevant natural sciences is assumed. Geography majors may use this course to fulfill either the physical or the cultural requirement. depending upon what type of term paper topic is submitted.

Lecture Topics

- I The Pre-Agricultural Situation (4 lectures)
Why bother with agriculture? A comparative review of several hunting and gathering groups.
- II The Origins Problem (6 lectures)
Some theoretical reconstructions: Childe, Vavilov, Sauer, Harlan, Rindos.
- III Domestication and Early Agriculture (6 lectures)
The process of domestication and the nature of the evidence. What is a crop? What is a weed? The domestication of animals.
- IV The Primary Centers of Early Agriculture (14 lectures)
Where? When? What? Why? And, How?
Archaeological and biological evidence; the environmental context.
Near East, China, Mesoamerica, South America.

V Diffusion into Higher and Lower Latitudes (14 lectures)

The movement of peoples or ideas?

Agriculture and Language.

Self-sufficiency or environmental disruption ?

Mesopotamia, Nile Valley, sub-Saharan Africa, Northwest Europe, Central Asia, Korea and Japan, Lowland Mesoamerica, Lowland South America, Northeastern U.S. and Canada, The Pacific Islands.

VI Importance of Traditional Agriculture in the 21st Century (2 lectures)

Maintenance of genetic diversity in crop plants and their wild relatives.

Textbooks and Readings

The basic textbook for the course is *Crops and Man* by Jack R. Harlan. It is an excellent text, inspite of the sexist title. Harlan, who died in 1998, was a recognized authority on the evolution of crop plants. He obtained his doctorate (Botany) here at Berkeley in the early fifties. The other required text is *The Emergence of Agriculture* by Bruce Smith. Smith is an anthropologist at the Smithsonian in Washington, DC. He is the author of several books and many articles on prehistoric agriculture. This book is a readable overview of the subject.

Harlan, Jack

1992 *Crops and Man* (Second edition). American Society of Agronomy, Madison, Wisconsin.

Smith, Bruce

1994 *The Emergence of Agriculture*. Freeman and Company, New York.

Course Requirements

As this is a 4 unit course, a term paper is not required but optional. The course grade will be determined as follows:

EITHER A Term paper (50%) or two Term Papers (25%+25%) and the Final (50%)

OR Mid-term (33%) and Final (67%)

The mid-term will be given in class during the 7th week of the semester. Students wishing to write a term paper must hand in a proposed outline and discuss the topic with me before the midterm. If you need advice on possible term paper topics please see me during office hours during the next 3 to 4 weeks. The term papers are due on the Friday of the last week of lectures.