

Reading questions on Christian, Chapter 8: “Intensification and the Origins of Agriculture”

(Beginning of Part Four, The Holocene, “Few Worlds”)

Read pp. 206-211 carefully (including tables and figures). Make sure you get the big picture of the transition from the Pleistocene to the Holocene, the end of the last ice age, the distinction between “extensification” and “intensification,” and the significance of the Neolithic Revolution (and make sure you can define and date these terms).

What are the three world zones of the early Holocene? (212-215, including figures)

What is domestication? Give some examples of life forms that are domesticated. How is domestication different from agriculture? Is domestication a (bio)technology? (216-218)

When did domestication begin? What did it begin with? Describe in general terms the sequence of places and organisms that were domesticated in the Neolithic Revolution (see table on p. 219 as well as text). (218-222)

What are the relationships among foraging, domestication, and agriculture? Did one lead to the other or did they coexist for long periods? (222)

Christian’s discusses agriculture as an invention (222-224). Is it a simultaneous invention or one that spread from a central source? Is this an invention that can be described as “progress” in the usual meaning of that word? (223-224) What are its costs and benefits?

Was there “resistance to change” in the adoption of agriculture? (223-224) Was this a rational resistance? If so, how was it overcome? Why did so many humans adopt agriculture as the basis of their lives? (224-234; see esp. summaries on 225 and 236) Explain the various roles of preconditions, global triggers

What is sedentism? What is its relation to agriculture? What is its effect on population? (233-236) Did it precede or succeed agriculture? What is the “trap of sedentism”? (235) Can you think of other examples of a similar technological “trap”?

What is horticulture, and how is it different from agriculture? (238-239)

Describe early agrarian communities as an apparently stable and widespread form of human social life. How were they organized, and how did they interact with each other? (239-242) What can we speculate about the consciousness of humans in these communities? What was their effect on the rest of the natural world? (242-43)

Read the summary carefully. What are the main points that Christian makes? What do they imply about “technology in history”? Do you find them convincing? (243)

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