

РЕЦЕНЗИИ И АННОТАЦИИ

Dual Subordination and Exodus of Farmers¹

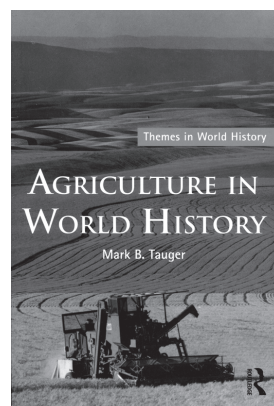
N.M. DRONIN

Moscow State University, Moscow, Russia; ndrionin@gmail.com

Any author who has ever addressed historical themes will instantly recognize the ambitious scope of Mark Tauger's effort to embed agriculture in the matrix of the history of the world from Paleolithic times through the twenty-first century in a scant 200 pages. More precisely, as the title announces, *Agriculture in World History* is not intended as a description of the history of world agriculture but as an analysis of the locus and role of agriculture and farmers in world history. In this Tauger provides a compact study and joins the ranks of a small and growing number of scholars seeking to clarify the common roots and common effects of human social action and environment, and indeed of biology, that have shaped history broadly construed.

Tauger's book is organized chronologically into seven chapters covering in order Paleolithic and Neolithic times, antiquity, medieval or post-classical period, the early modern (1500–1800) epoch, the nineteenth century, the first half of the twentieth, and the years following World War II until the early twenty-first century. Geographical coverage of the book is balanced, with due attention to Third World regions and countries. The most frequently mentioned are China (89 references²), Africa (26), the US (26), Britain (26), India (25), the Roman Empire (25), Russia (23), the USSR (23), Mexico (21), Western Europe (20), Eastern Europe (16), Greece (13), France (11) and Canada (11).

To contain the details and huge diversity of historic and geographical materials Tauger elaborates a storyline which he lays out in the introduction. Farmers in any period of history are found in “dual subordination” to the twin masters of the natural and social environments. The natural environment includes climate, water availability, soils, exposure to weeds, and



¹ Review of the book: *Tauger M.B. Agriculture in World History*. London, New York: Routledge, 2011. 192 p.

² On the base of index presented in the book.

many other factors. Among these, year-to-year variability of harvests is primarily controlled by weather. The locus of social power in the lives of farmers lies outside their villages in urban agencies that have the capacity to design and enforce rules controlling agricultural and economic activities. These rules reflect rulers' efforts to order and regulate the social and political evolution of the populations they control. Thus the focus of the book is not on the evolution of agrotechnological means of food production and distribution but farmers who work their own or rented lands, struggling with natural and social-economic challenges and constraints.

The author's choice of storyline is convenient. On the one hand it allows the author to touch many aspects of the environments in which millions of farmers have lived and worked in the past and still live in modern time. At the same time it gives the reader a roadmap that tracks the author's stories. Each chapter opens with a small introduction in which the author unpacks his vision of how "dual subordination" changed in each period. The author calls attention to occasions where government efforts to support farmers morphed into new forms of suppression. For example, the fifth chapter, details European efforts to reform traditional farming of colonized areas of Africa, Asia and Latin America along European lines, while engaging them in the emerging Europe-centered world economy. "One of the main results of this process is ironic: the same civilization that abolished slavery and serfdom created conditions that drove vast numbers of farmers into debts that oppressed and limited them almost as much as the old servile systems" (p. 81). Tauger characterizes the period 1900–1940 as an historic interval such that "never before in history had so many groups, within and outside of governments, made such consistent efforts to improve farming and farmers' lives. Yet never before had so many farmers abandoned farming to live and work in cities. The old dual subordination was mitigated and changed, but remained in effect" (p. 106). Of the postwar period of the twentieth century the author writes: "at no time in human history have there been such concerted efforts to weaken the dual subordination, to help farmers to overcome environmental difficulties, and empower farmers politically. Yet many of these efforts have ironically relegated farmers to new and different forms of subordination. Consequently, in no previous period have so many farmers left farming" (p. 138).

As a professional historian, Tauger deals confidently with social aspects of farming. For all that, he does not neglect the natural component of the "dual subordination". For example, the period of "early modern agriculture and European agricultural dominance" (1500–1800) is introduced by the author as an historic interval when "farmers lived under worse environmental conditions than in previous centuries. The Little Ice Age brought extreme cold weather with breaks of warmer periods. Environmental factors created recurrent crises, especially in the northern hemisphere: cold summers, freezing winters, serious crop failures, and famines" (p. 54). In the chapter devoted to the first half of the twentieth century, unlike many contemporary authors who locate the beginnings of climate change in the 1970s, the author correctly notes that world agriculture since 1900 has had to contend with global climate change that began much earlier, already in the nineteenth century. Global warming caused high risk of intense droughts around the world. For example, China passed through 20 severe droughts, India had serious droughts in 1941–1943, 1951, 1956–1966, while during the 1930s the US faced the driest weather in its history.

Each individual chapter presents quite diverse topics. To accommodate this diversity, the material of each chapter is organized into subchapters, and further into still smaller sections devoted to distinct regions or topics. In this way the author compresses considerable detail succinctly into few pages. By way of example, the seventh chapter treats such diverse historical topics as the reduction of food consumption to subsistence levels in Nazi Germany toward the end of the war; the two million victims of the devastating drought of 1946 in Russia; the role of the Marshall Plan in preventing food crises and the expansion of communist regimes in postwar Europe; the failure Khrushchev's virgin lands campaign in the early 1960s; the role of McCartism in the prevention

of land reform in the Philippines; the EU CAP policy discriminating against Spanish producers of cheap milk; the unanticipated Sahel drought of 1968–1974 following on the heels of the unusually wet 1950s; the delayed response to mad cow disease in Britain in 1980s; the controversial record of GMO technology in regard to crop productivity and environmental impact; the high rate of disease and suicide among farmers in developing, and even developed, countries; growing dependence of even US farmers on standards imposed by big food corporations; and foreign leasing of agricultural lands in Africa, mostly by Chinese and South Korean farmers.

The author's main challenge in the effort to cover so many periods, regions, and topics is to avoid the tedium such a catalog might induce. Tauger rises to the challenge in the sense that *Agriculture in World History* is a readable, engaging book, although it does occasionally sacrifice strict chronological ordering to story and links that echo with particular themes. For example, in the chapter covering the period 1945 to 2000 the reader finds a discussion of Chinese agriculture from the Boxer Rebellion (1899–1900) through the revolution of 1911. Unsurprisingly, the chapters vary considerably in the length of historical interval covered, Chapter Six deals with just 40 years (1900–1940) while the fifth chapter treats the entire nineteenth century and the fourth treats agriculture over the course of three centuries (1500–1800). Conceivably the author had good reasons to divide the twentieth century into two epochs, preceding and following World War II, however the logic of this decision in terms of the book's theme is not obvious. Notice that the anomaly mentioned above would not occur had the two periods been treated as one.

Specialists in particular topics, regions, or periods will inevitably question many of Tauger's claims, statements, and numbers. As an example of the latter, the author cites 30 million acres of new cropland added to the USSR's crop area in the course of the virgin lands campaign (1954–1964). The correct figure is 75 million acres or more. Possibly, the author intended 30 million hectares.

More generally and more significantly, the author is well aware that his attribution of a central, causative role for the massive crop failure and famine in parts of the USSR in the early 1930s to fungal disease (rust) does not reflect the consensus view. Most scholars fault Stalin's policies that not only reduced yield but diverted it to areas of the country that better suited his industrial policies.

To summarize this review: it is easy for me to recommend to have this book on your bookshelves.

Сад в «полуденной части Крыма»

А.К. СЫТИН

Ботанический институт им. В.Л. Комарова РАН, Санкт-Петербург, Россия;
astragalus@mail.ru

Автор этого издания¹ — Ирина Вадимовна Крюкова — ботаник-систематик, известный знаток флоры Крыма. Книга, увидевшая свет в год 200-летнего юбилея Сада, украшена превосходными иллюстрациями — жанровыми и пейзажными фотографиями, репродукциями рукописных текстов и, конечно, многочисленными портретами

¹ Крюкова И.В. Никитский ботанический сад. История и судьбы. Симферополь: Изд-во Н. Орианда, 2011. 416 с.