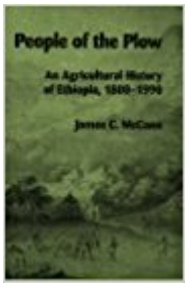
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People Of The Plow: An Agricultural History Of Ethiopia, 1800–1990



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Synopsis

For more than two thousand years, EthiopiaÃ¢â ¬â„¢s ox-plow agricultural system was the most efficient and innovative in Africa, but has been afflicted in the recent past by a series of crises: famine, declining productivity, and losses in biodiversity. James C. McCann analyzes the last two hundred years of agricultural history in Ethiopia to determine whether the ox-plow agricultural system has adapted to population growth, new crops, and the challenges of a modern political economy based in urban centers.Ã Â Ã Â Ã Â This agricultural history is set in the context of the larger environmental and landscape history of Ethiopia, showing how farmers have integrated crops, tools, and labor with natural cycles of rainfall and soil fertility, as well as with the social vagaries of changing political systems. McCann traces characteristic features of Ethiopian farming, such as the single-tine scratch plow, which has retained a remarkably consistent design over two millennia, and a crop repertoire that is among the most genetically diverse in the world.Ã Â Ã Â Ã Â People of the Plow provides detailed documentation of Ethiopian agricultural practices since the early nineteenth century by examining travel narratives, early agricultural surveys, photographs and engravings, modern farming systems research, and the testimony of farmers themselves, collected during McCannÃ¢â ¬â„¢s five years of fieldwork. He then traces the ways those practices have evolved in the twentieth century in response to population growth, urban markets, and the presence of new technologies.

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Customer Reviews

Ã¢â ¬Å“Those interested in the history of one of the centers of crop origin and genetic diversity will

find this book an invaluable reference.Ã¢â ¬Â•Ã¢â ¬â •Brhane Gebrekidan, Virginia Tech

James C. McCann is associate professor of history and director of the African Studies Center at Boston University. He is the author of From Poverty to Famine in Northeast Ethiopia: A Rural History, 1900Ã¢â ¬â œ1935 and has worked with many international aid and agricultural organizations on issues of agriculture and land use in northeastern Africa.

Historical evidence in cave paintings shows that the Ethiopian farmer has been using oxen and long-beam plows to till the land for at least two thousand years. Author James C. McCann uses his thorough research into archival evidence and current oral history to demonstrate the persistence of these farming methods to the present time. McCann's easy writing style takes farmers' narrative tales and translates them into social science language.McCann clearly shows how Ethiopian farmers have been moved, in this century, from self-reliance to dependence upon political whims. Farmers now rely upon the state to provide seed and fertilizer, and so are forced into growing crops from those seeds, whether the environmental conditions cooperate or not.McCann's writing style holds the reader's interest because he includes so many first person narratives and examples to illustrate his points. More detailed maps that show locations of old and new trade and market centers would be appreciated. McCann often talks about these changes, so maps could have acted to clarify the text if he had placed them near to the specific locations under discussion. His book is meticulously researched. This book is an excellent introduction to the general interaction of government and agriculture and its specific interplay in Ethiopia.

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