

**Scott, James C. 2017. *Against the Grain: A Deep History of the Earliest States*. New Haven: Yale University Press. xvii + 312 pp. Pb.: \$18.00. ISBN: 9780300240214.**

Although author James Scott modestly describes this work as a ‘trespasser’s reconnaissance report’ (p. ix), it is, in fact, a penetrating and sage analysis of early agricultural and state societies. Like Scott’s previous works, the book is extremely well-written and continually surprises the reader with a brilliant insight or a felicitous turn of phrase. Scott’s modest “trespassing” reflects his position as a non-specialist in many of the topics discussed here. Nevertheless, Scott uses this “outsider” status to force us to see a new forest above old trees. In the *Introduction* to the book, the author’s “ignorance” serves as a useful narrative device to emphasise just how much traditional interpretations of the rise of civilisation have changed in recent years.

Scott’s previous research focused on non-state peoples in Southeast Asia. In *Against the Grain*, the spotlight moves to Mesopotamia, but there is also considerable discussion of China and other regions. Moreover, the reader is continually struck by the implications of Scott’s arguments for other regions—including Japan, which is this reviewer’s area of expertise. Following the *Introduction*, the volume has seven chapters.

*Chapter 1* summarises recent research on the domestication of fire, plants, and animals, and concludes with some observations on human domestication. Recent research by Dorian Fuller and others arguing that domestication was a long process that took several thousand years is used by Scott to argue that Neolithic societies were reluctant ‘to rely on a narrow bandwidth of subsistence resources’ (p. 60).

*Chapter 2* borrows Ian Hodder’s concept of the *domus* to examine the growth of later Neolithic societies. Timothy Morton’s idea of *agrilogistics* is not cited by Scott but might have been used to deepen the argument here. In *Chapter 3*, the focus shifts to one of the major drawbacks of agriculture: zoonotic diseases. The artificial crowding of ever greater numbers of humans with domesticated and commensal animals in what Scott calls ‘multispecies resettlement camps’ led to a ‘perfect epidemiological storm’ (p. 93). This problem has, of course, been known since the pioneering bioarchaeological work of Mark Cohen and others in the 1980s, yet Scott does not fail to mention more recent research that has shown that early farmers nevertheless possessed a significant demographic advantage over hunter-gatherers. This last point has been further developed in archaeological research by Stephen Shennan and others in recent years.

From *Chapter 4*, *Against the Grain* shifts to a wide-ranging analysis of state power and especially of how (early) states attempted to recruit and retain peasants to produce agricultural surpluses. A central topic of Scott’s earlier book *The Art of Not Being Governed* (2009) was how to understand state power when almost all historical records and written by or for the state. This means that all countries with states have deep, unwritten histories that remain difficult to think about let alone research. *Chapters 4 to 7* of *Against the Grain* represent an enormously important attempt to explore this hidden history. Exemplary in this respect is *Chapter 7* titled *The Golden Age of the Barbarians* in which Scott argues that the peripheral areas around states were not simply un-governed but, in fact, constituted their own worlds with significant histories. Here his argument resonates with recent work in ar-

chaeology, for example by Kristian Kristiansen, which has concluded that a new economy of comparative advantage developed in the Bronze Age.

Scott's critical history of the state and "civilisation" is a deeply political exercise, something that I realised in a very personal way while working in Japan. A couple of years ago, I gave a short talk about Mount Fuji and the history of Japanese mountains to a hall full of politicians and bureaucrats in Shizuoka. In preparation, I had been avidly reading Scott's *The Art of Not Being Governed* as a theoretical framework to explore the Japanese sources on mountain societies. In my talk, I suggested that upland areas in Japan were probably also a zone of refuge and escape from state control. This was apparently not a happy message for that particular audience, and several people walked out *in flagrante delicto*. Some time afterwards, I was told that the name of the new institution at which I was then employed would no longer be called the *Mt. Fuji World Heritage Centre for Mountain Research*. Mountains, it seemed, were suddenly perceived by the Shizuoka government as dangerous places of resistance. (The institution in question opened its doors in December 2017 under the lacklustre name *Mt. Fuji World Heritage Centre, Shizuoka*). My re-evaluation of Japanese mountain histories was not only stimulated by James Scott. The well-known folklorist Kunio Yanagita (1875-1962) had anticipated many of these issues before the Second World War, describing Japan's mountain villages as egalitarian "socialist" societies. Scott has been one of the greatest theorists of non-state peoples and *Against the Grain* extends this approach from the highlands of Southeast Asia to an essentially global perspective on history. I thoroughly recommend this book which will, without doubt, become a key reference in history, archaeology and related fields. Experts will perhaps disagree on aspects of Mesopotamian archaeology and other details found here, but the overall significance of *Against the Grain* lies in its exciting new framework for human history since the Neolithic. As my own experiences in Shizuoka suggest, this will not necessarily be an easy journey. Nevertheless, Scott's new book is a wonderful reconnaissance into an exciting re-evaluation of the history of human civilisation.

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