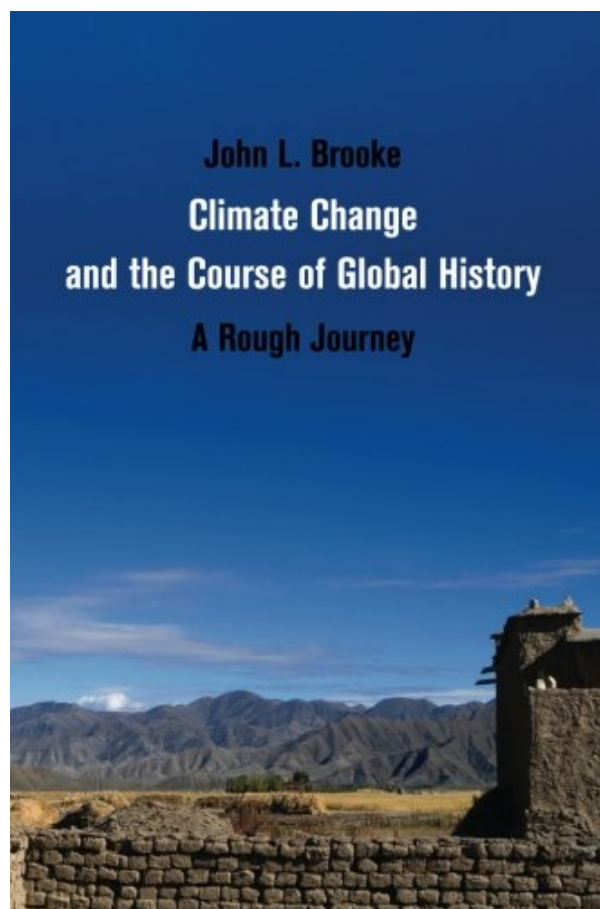


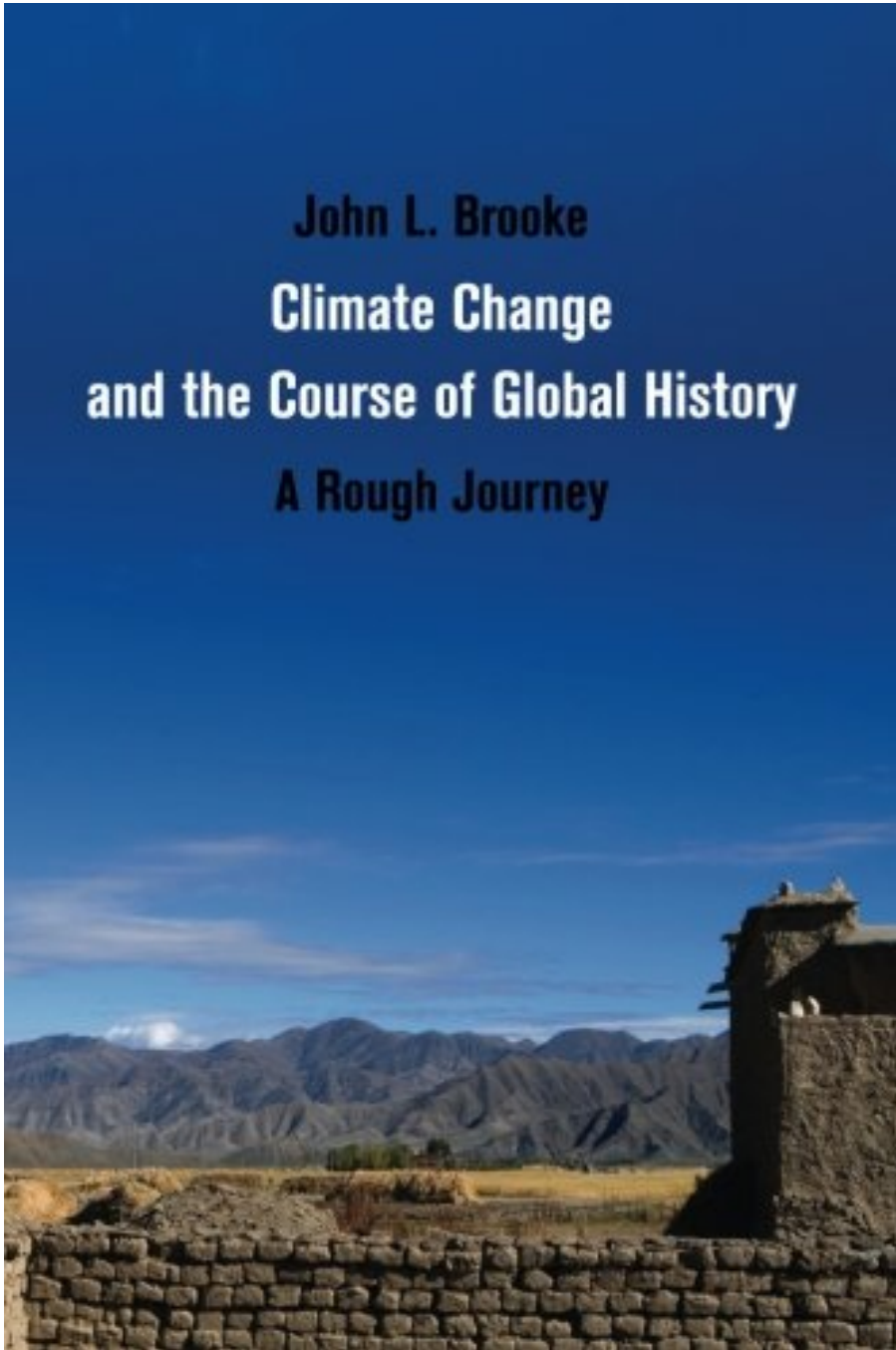
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Climate Change
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Review

"Think of this as travel writing of the highest order. A rough journey for mankind becomes a stimulating armchair adventure for the reader. This is big history, framed by big ideas but anchored in the very recent explosion of knowledge about climate through the ages and about our history and prehistory. Brooke skillfully navigates the interpretive hazards of proxy paleoclimate data. In Brooke's persuasive account, our evolution to modernity is not absolutely determined by climate and disease, but it has been substantially influenced by them. Our new knowledge shows that quite often these influences abruptly change course, and Brooke shows that much of our history is a consequence of societies scrambling to adjust."

Mark A. Cane, G. Unger Vetlesen Professor of Earth and Climate Sciences, Lamont-Doherty Earth Observatory, Columbia University

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"Readers with advanced degrees in meteorology, archaeology, economics and world environmental history will easily comprehend Brooke's magisterial survey-synthesis. For others, it poses an interesting challenge. The author's mastery and referencing of the vast technical literature in different disciplines is remarkable. ... The author also explains seven phases of climate history since 3000 BCE and three industrial revolutions. The consequence is a fundamental change from a lightly populated world controlled by nature to a heavily populated world controlled by both nature and human agency. Summing up: highly recommended."

F. N. Egerton, Choice

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Climate Change and the Course of Global History presents the first global study by a historian to fully integrate the earth-system approach of the new climate science with the material history of humanity. Part I argues that geological, environmental, and climatic history explain the pattern and pace of biological and human evolution. Part II explores the environmental circumstances of the rise of agriculture and the state in the Early and Mid-Holocene, and presents an analysis of human health from the Paleolithic through the rise of the state. Part III introduces the problem of economic growth and examines the human condition in the Late Holocene from the Bronze Age through the Black Death. Part IV explores the move to modernity, stressing the emerging role of human economic and energy systems as earth-system agents in the Anthropocene. Supported by climatic, demographic, and economic data, this provides a pathbreaking model for historians of the environment, the world, and science.

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9 of 10 people found the following review helpful.

Excellent history

By Mansel G. Blackford

This volume is "big history" and "global history" at its best. Fully versed in both biological and hard sciences, historian John Brooke presents a masterful overview of the history of humankind from its beginning several million years ago to the present day. Throughout, Brooke illustrates the importance of climate changes in bringing about (indeed forcing) basic alterations in how people worldwide have lived. In very readable prose Brooke discusses how specific climate alterations deeply influenced the development of different types of human cultures over time. Part 1 of this volume analyzes the evolution of earth systems from the formation of Earth about 4.6 billion years ago, and what those systems meant for living plants and creatures, through the development and global spread modern humankind. Part 2 examines the domestication of plants and animals, the development of agriculture, and the rise of state governments. Part 3 looks at ancient and medieval societies, and Part 4 examines human societies since about 1400 AD. Brooke stresses that climate changes and variabilities shaped human cultures until very recently. Only since the onset of industrialization has the relationship, Brooke shows, been reversed, with human actions shaping climate. Brooke's volume is essential for anyone interested in the course of history and current events--an enjoyable and valuable read.

5 of 5 people found the following review helpful.

Impressive and Important Book; 4.5 Stars

By R. Albin

This very impressive and very ambitious book is a strong and largely successful effort to demonstrate the decisive role of climate fluctuations in human history. A measure of Brooke's ambition is the very broad frame of the book. Brooke literally begins with the formation of the solar system and early history of the Earth and finishes with our contemporary confrontation with human-induced climate change. In the early chapters, Brooke discusses the emergence of the basic features of terrestrial geology and the emergence of life, the evolutionary history of hominins, and the nature of the major features of the present climate system. This is followed by chapters on human prehistory following the end of the last major glaciation, the development of agriculture and the emergence of early states, the development of early empires, the collapse

of early empires across many parts of the globe, the rise and fall of a variety of successor states-empires, the impact of true globalization with the exploitation of the western hemisphere, the early modern period, and the explosive development of scientific-industrial society.

Brooke's scholarship is remarkable as this book integrates geology, climatology, archaeology, and historical scholarship proper across many, many millenia. The major theme is the essentially determinate impact of climate changes, and to a lesser degree, epidemic disease, on human history. This is true for both major transitions, such as the end of the last glacial epoch creating the conditions for agriculture and sedentism, and the impact of less dramatic changes on the history of specific civilizations and societies. Examples of the latter include the impact of global cooling and epidemic disease on the Roman Empire, the demise of the classic Maya, the Black Death and the end of Medieval Europe, and the traumatic Little Ice Age centered on the 17th century. Brooke consistently contrasts the impact of these exogenous shocks with a naive Malthusian view of the fate of civilizations and societies being determined by endogenous overshoot of carrying capacity. Brooke has an interesting view of preindustrial societies. He views them as more resilient, better adjusted to their environments, and over the longer term, more creative than suggested by naive Malthusian views. Brooke explicitly states repeatedly that absent exogenous shocks, premodern societies would be stable over very long periods. In an interesting, and in my view, very well justified analysis, Brooke sees our industrial civilization, which has liberated us from many traditional environmental constraints, as producing greater danger of a disastrous Malthusian overshoot.

Brooke amply demonstrates his basic thesis. The sheer volume and detail of Brooke's analyses leave no doubt as to the critical and in many cases, determinate effects of climate fluctuations on human history. I have to stress that this is not a schematic presentation. Brooke includes many detailed analyses drawing on a remarkably wide range of sources and clearly demonstrating the reality of his thesis in many contexts. In this respect, I think this book will be a landmark in historical scholarship and the point of departure for much, much future work.

This book is not, however, without some flaws, both in analysis and presentation. Some of these are unavoidable. Paleoclimatology is a dynamic discipline and some of the facts accepted when Brooke was writing are now wrong or incomplete. The role of solar changes in the Little Ice Age has been controversial and newer data suggest it was driven mainly by volcanism. Brooke ties the rapid emergence and collapse of Cahokia to climate changes, which is justified but very recent analyses tie the history of Cahokia specifically to the frequency massive floods in the Mississippi valley. I think a bigger problem is Brooke's consistent contrast of his view of exogenous climate and epidemiologic shocks with naive Malthusianism. As he admits in some of his detailed analyses, there are commonly important interactions between these shocks, and population growth and environmental degradation. To some extent, his description of Malthusianism is a bit of a straw man as a fluctuating environment can easily be accommodated in a Malthusian model by specifying that the critical limits must be below the range of significant fluctuations. In addition, as he sometimes acknowledges, epidemic disease is density and interaction dependent, so it inevitably has a somewhat Malthusian component.

While I respect Brooke's really impressive effort to present the whole story in the broadest sense possible, the initial chapters on early Earth history are not crucial to his main argument and detract from the presentation of the main story. These pages would have been better spent on clearer exposition the recent climate system. They also contain some errors and misunderstandings. Eukaryotes were not, for example, responsible for the great oxygenation event. Brooke also makes too much of the punctuated equilibrium concept. Brooke has also been served poorly by this publisher. There a lot of important figures, charts, and tables in this book but their reproduction quality is mediocre at best. Even worse, they are not placed at the appropriate points in the text but packed together at the beginnings of each major section. This makes more

work for readers and a book of this importance deserves better.

6 of 7 people found the following review helpful.

Brave attempt to cover a huge range in a smart but accessible way.

By Leif Jerram

I'm a history professor (lecturer in the UK!), and I really appreciated this book. First of all, it's scientific, but readable. The prose carries you along. Secondly, it masters a huge amount of scholarship and digests it for you. Most historians deal with tiny fragments of time, and tiny areas of geography, so this was really good to see! I learnt a lot, and it was the opposite of painful reading.

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