

Citation style

Gosline, Sheldon Lee: review of: Ben J. J. Haring / R. de Maaijer (eds.), *Landless and Hungry? Access to Land in Early and Traditional Societies*, Leiden: Research School CNWS, 1998, in: *Journal of Ancient Civilizations*, 14 (1999), p. 156, DOI: 10.21245/rec.ant.1879936770



copyright

This article may be downloaded and/or used within the private copying exemption. Any further use without permission of the rights owner shall be subject to legal licences (§§ 44a-63a UrhG / German Copyright Act).

B. HARING and R. de MAAIJER, editors, *Landless and Hungry?* CNWS Publications, Vol. 67. Leiden: CNWS Publications, 1998. ISBN 90 5789 008 9. Pp. 198. Dfl. 45.

Reviewing a collection of papers, such as this book, can often fall into the trap of becoming a table of contents with commentary, so rather than a review of merits or failings of particular items, I will consider the work as a whole. Ever since the social sciences have invaded traditional bastions of Near Eastern and Classical archaeological and linguistic studies, we have benefited from an increasing number of wide arching theoretical studies concerning human society, past and present.

The collective work, *Landless and Hungry*, and the seminar that fostered it, are examples of this ongoing marriage of ideas. The availability of land is not the only, or even the most important factor in providing food for a population. Land ownership, as understood in the sense of a western, modern, developed economy, is not an applicable tool for measuring the wealth and health of individuals in the past, or even in other parts of the world today. Most of all, we have to consider many factors other than arable land availability, such as water, for the success or failure of a given society.

All these points seem fairly obvious and hardly need a collection of papers to prove. Researchers like Tony Wilkinson and McGuire Gibson, to name two, have already explored the subject. Perhaps it is my own time spent living in non-western societies that makes these points seem so obvious: the worker in any state owned or private company in the People's Republic of China is provided with housing and food, a basic salary, and special rations for festivals, holidays, or just when the director can get a special price on peanuts, cooking oil, or blankets. These extra commodities are evenly distributed to all.

The question of land ownership is no more a part of the thinking than it was for the builders of the Great Wall or the Giza pyramids. In this way, the village elder, the pharaoh, and the company director hold the same position, and hope to be able to demand the same degree of loyalty. Reservations aside, I found many of the papers to be engaging and interesting. I applaud the use of cross-cultural, contemporary, textual, and archaeological data. The book presents some interesting venues for further research. This would be a good introduction to the issues, for someone who has not been introduced to the subject before.

Sheldon Lee Gosline