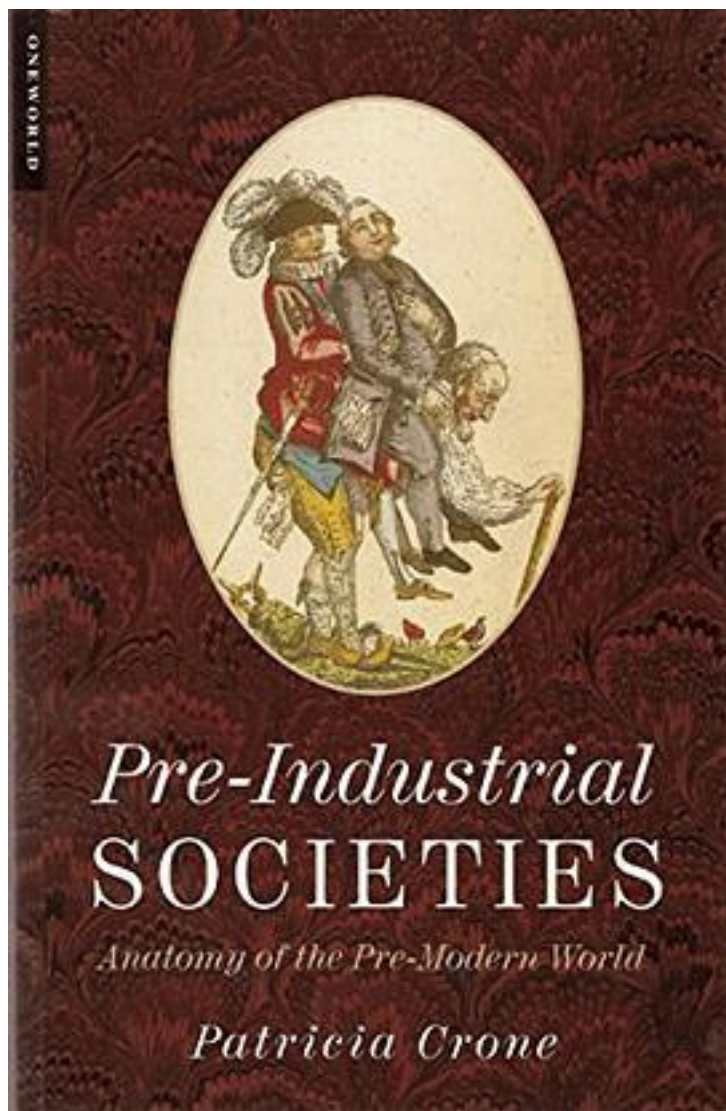


Pre-Industrial Societies



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One would not normally expect students of biology to dissect frogs without prior knowledge of frog anatomy; yet students of history are regularly expected to analyse pre-modern institutions and events without any prior knowledge whatsoever of the general anatomy of pre-industrial societies. Gifted students will often acquire considerable knowledge of their particular areas - own individual frogs, so to speak - but the extent to which these conform to or depart from a common pattern remains unknown to them, a fact which seriously limits their capacity for interpretation.

What goes for students goes for non-academic readers too. They have at their disposal a mountain of historical works written at every conceivable level of popularization and specialization. But most of these works are devoted to specific historical phenomena, or at most to a comparison between two or three; and those which attempt more general surveys tend to be either inordinately long or else inordinately abstract. Where does one turn for a brief summary of the ground-rules? A bluffer's guide to the behaviour of pre-modern societies does not seem to be available.

What this book attempts is precisely that: to offer a bluffer's guide to the nature of pre-industrial societies, or more precisely to pre-industrial societies of the complex type (omitting primitive societies whose nature, again, is different). It sketches out the general anatomy of all such societies without attempting a full description of any one; and it is neither excessively long nor (it is hoped) excessively abstract. Armed with this book, the reader ought to find the specific cultures, societies, institutions and events of pre-industrial history considerable less puzzling than they are when approached directly.

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评论

very bad print, some part of it reads like unedited class notes.

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