



Times of Feast, Times of Famine: A History of Climate Since the Year 1000

Emmanuel Le Roy Ladurie

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First published in 1967 and only slightly updated since, this is a pioneering work on the study of climate by historians. Le Roy Ladurie's main concern is to make a case for the careful and systematic historical investigation of climate evidence; to lay out the kind of sources that a historian could use; and to demonstrate the promise of the method with a few detailed case studies. Throughout, the author firmly rejects any temptation to speculatively attribute human events to climatic causes, pointing out that his predecessors who did so had inadequate information to base such speculations on. Instead, Le Roy Ladurie is concerned to discover which years really were unusually cold, unusually wet, and so forth -- a research program that was just in progress, leaving huge amounts of work yet to be done. Dendrochronological data is one source, but it had (at least at that time) mostly been studied in marginal areas like the US southwest. Historians can add data like records of the date of grape harvest (strongly influenced by the weather in the preceding season), date of the yearly first freezing of a lake or port, evidence of the advance or retreat of glaciers, and so on. This kind of systematic year-by-year series is probably more reliable than documentary comments on striking weather events, although the latter can be valuable too.

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