

Harlan, J.R.: **Crops and Man**. Second Edition. - American Society of Agronomy, Crop Science Society of America, Madison 1992.. 284 + XIII pp.

The author, professor emeritus of plant genetics at the University of Illinois, has written a fascinating report on the "taming" of wild plants, where he explains the concepts, how the activities of human societies have shaped the evolution of crops. The first edition of this interesting book appeared in 1975, this new edition has been updated so that it may include various new features of crop evolution. New information have come primarily from archeology, which has changed many traditional views of the origin and the evolution of crop plants. The author calls attention to the fact, that gene centres or centres of diversity are disappearing before our eyes, that the amount of landrace populations are being abandoned in favour of modern, high-yielding cultivars and some old crops are being completely eliminated, though the pace of these changes is slowing.

In spite of an enormous amount of scientific knowledge, you will find this book to be a historical novel or a detective story rather than a professional handbook in many aspects. You will get a deeper insight into the life of ancient hunters and gatherers and you will follow the early history of plant domestication. You will realize what is a crop and a weed and appreciate their interrelations view of co-evolution. In addition to it you will be given some information of the cultivated plants, their domestication. The closing chapters deal with the history of plant domestication in the most important centres of ancient agriculture: the Far East, African savannas, the Near East and the Americas.

The publication is complemented with numerous figures, maps and tables, and author and subject indexes are of much help to the reader. I would recommend this book not only to the botanists, plant genetists and agronomists, but to anybody who is interested in the history of Man and the future of mankind.

J. JIRÁTKO (*Praha*)