

systems of cultivation.”¹²⁶

Related to this is the systems approach used by sociologists and social anthropologists who conceive of rural societies as “systems of interdependent socioeconomic elements geared to the dictates of the farming calendar and with built-in mechanisms to ensure [their] survival in the face of recurrent natural hazards.”¹²⁷ Harriss comments:

The difficulty with such approaches to the study of agrarian societies is that because they emphasize the systematic quality of the local community, regulated by values, they can only really explain change as something which comes about as the result of “external” forces acting upon the local society. It is an approach which both ignores the relationship of mutual determination between locality and state—and neglects the processes of change which may be “internal” to peasant society.¹²⁸

In general terms, Kamen’s study falls within the systems approach, although he also stresses the lack of resources available to the peasantry needed for more intensive cultivation.

Finally, there is the structural/historical approach. Like the systems approach, it considers environmental, technological, and demographic factors but goes beyond that. The production process and the property relationships between classes are at the center of analysis and are seen as critical in understanding conflict and change within societies. In its Marxist variant (not all studies that use this approach are necessarily Marxist), an understanding of property relationships

¹²⁶Ibid.

¹²⁷S. D. Biggs and C. Burns as quoted in Harriss, 19.

¹²⁸Harriss, 20-1.