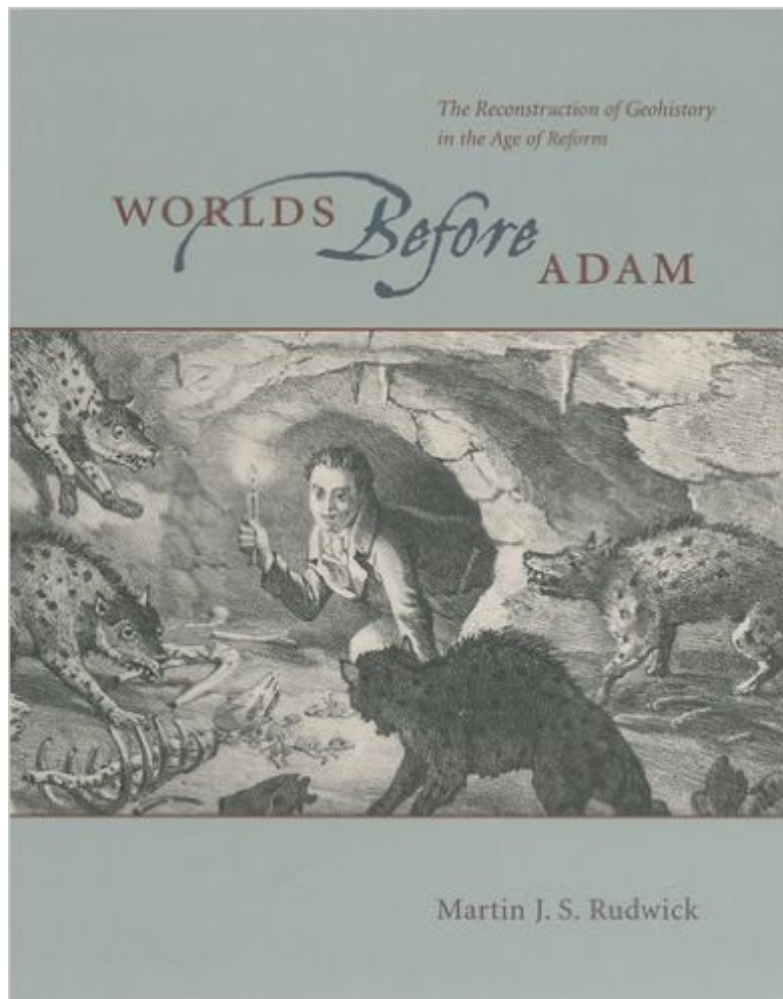


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Worlds Before Adam: The Reconstruction Of Geohistory In The Age Of Reform



Synopsis

In the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, scientists reconstructed the immensely long history of the earth and the relatively recent arrival of human life. The geologists of the period, many of whom were devout believers, agreed about this vast timescale. But despite this apparent harmony between geology and Genesis, these scientists still debated a great many questions: Had the earth cooled from its origin as a fiery ball in space, or had it always been the same kind of place as it is now? Was prehuman life marked by mass extinctions, or had fauna and flora changed slowly over time? The first detailed account of the reconstruction of prehuman geohistory, Martin J. S. Rudwick's *Worlds Before Adam* picks up where his celebrated *Bursting the Limits of Time* leaves off. Here, Rudwick takes readers from the post-Napoleonic Restoration in Europe to the early years of Britain's Victorian age, chronicling the staggering discoveries geologists made during the period: the unearthing of the first dinosaur fossils, the glacial theory of the last ice age, and the meaning of igneous rocks, among others. Ultimately, Rudwick reveals geology to be the first of the sciences to investigate the historical dimension of nature, a model that Charles Darwin used in developing his evolutionary theory. Featuring an international cast of colorful characters, with Georges Cuvier and Charles Lyell playing major roles and Darwin appearing as a young geologist, *Worlds Before Adam* is a worthy successor to Rudwick's magisterial first volume. Completing the highly readable narrative of one of the most momentous changes in human understanding of our place in the natural world, *Worlds Before Adam* is a capstone to the career of one of the world's leading historians of science.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

These two books are a magisterial reconstruction of the emergence of modern geology in the late 18th and early 19th century. Rudwick concentrates on geology as geohistory, the effort to reconstruct the history of the earth and with it, the history of life. Rudwick begins in the last quarter of the 18th century with a concise but revealing survey of the basic institutional structure of 18th century science, the international Republic of Letters constituted by the multinational network of scholarly savants (to avoid anachronism, Rudwick uses this contemporary term throughout both books) interested in the earth and other sciences. This followed by a survey of the 4 major components of the 18th century earth sciences; mineralogy, physical geography, geognosy, and earth physics. The first 3 were essentially descriptive disciplines. Mineralogy was an effort to describe objects, including both minerals in the modern sense, rocks, and fossils, obtained from the earth. It was essentially an office activity. Physical geography, clearly related to cartography was the description of major topographical features. Geognosy, which came primarily from the mining communities of central Europe was description of 3 dimensional structure of rock masses. Earth physics was the effort to understand the causal mechanisms driving the structure of the earth. Emerging from it was geothory, not something like modern geophysics but rather a series of efforts to derive models of the development of the earth from first principles in the way that Newton derived the structure of the solar system. Against this background, Rudwick lays out a narrative of how pioneering savants developed the basic geohistory we now accept as the basis of modern geology. In *Bursting the Limits...*

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