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For Clare and Lucy
A version of the past for two of the future

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Preface

I have always had a deeply felt conviction that the range of geographical concepts and ideas can be greatly enriched by drawing on the experience of the past. This conviction is founded on the belief that the principles which govern the organisation of human spatial order have changed in step with the substantive or qualitative changes that have occurred in the organisation of society itself. The aim of this book is to prompt a greater interest in this historical phasing of human spatial order over the very long term and also in the means by which one system gave way to another. I want to stress that I do not see the study of such high-order problems as a substitute for the basic task of reconstructing past landscapes. What I am suggesting is that a healthy and vibrant historical geography needs to pursue both levels of approach, the one nourishing the other. My early thoughts on a history of spatial systems in the very long term took shape during the late 1970s partly through the stimulus of my interest in the institutional forms of early Celtic landscape, and their manifest differences with those of more recent landscapes, and partly through the stimulus of reading through the work of scholars like K. Polanyi, E. L. Jones, D. C. North and C. Renfrew. These thoughts matured through a specialist course which I have put on at Aberystwyth since the academic year, 1979–80, a course which has constantly served to remind me that any debate over the way that spatial systems have evolved in the very long term must strive to see the problem at its own level and in its own terms.

I have no doubt that some will see any attempt to produce such high-order generalisations as a fruitless exercise. For this reason, it has been of some reassurance to find that the pool of relevant ideas on societal evolution has expanded impressively in recent years. This eruption of interest, though, has made the process of producing an 'interim' history of spatial systems a slower, more laborious affair. I am extremely grateful to my editors and publisher for their patience and tolerance during the book's gestation. Special thanks are due to Derek Gregory and two anonymous referees for their

helpful comments on the manuscript. Written without the benefit of study-leave, its demands have also placed a greater than usual burden on my wife, Katherine, and daughters, Clare and Lucy. Struggling to produce an acceptable draft was a case of spurning delights and living laborious days as much for them as for me. At the cost of another trip to the rich delights of Trasqua, they generously funded the electronic fun-machine on which the second and third drafts were produced. Although I am acutely conscious of the gaps and flaws in my text, I have chosen to dedicate it to my daughters in the hope that they will accept it as a product of honest labour. Being a mild determinist at heart, I have often reflected on whether working from a study that looks out across Cardigan Bay has encouraged me in my abstractions about the broader horizons of historical geography. It would be a source of satisfaction if my daughters too, found pleasure in moving between the busy detail of close, Brueghelian landscapes and those which, as in the paintings of Caspar David Friedrich, lead to higher, mistier planes or out to far horizons.

Aberystwyth

ROBERT A. DODGSHON