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Cro-Magnons were the first fully modern Europeans?not only the creators of the stunning cave paintings at Lascaux and elsewhere, but the most adaptable and technologically inventive people that had yet lived on earth. The prolonged encounter between the Cro-Magnons and the archaic Neanderthals and between 45,000 and 30,000 years ago was one of the defining moments of history. The Neanderthals survived for some 15,000 years in the face of the newcomers, but were finally pushed aside by the Cro-Magnons' vastly superior intellectual abilities and cutting-edge technologies, which allowed them to thrive in the intensely challenging climate of the Ice Age.

What do we know about this remarkable takeover? Who were the first modern Europeans and what were they like? How did they manage to thrive in such an extreme environment? And what legacy did they leave behind them after the cold millennia? The age of the Cro-Magnons lasted some 30,000 years?longer than all of recorded history. *Cro-Magnon* is the story of a little known, yet seminal, chapter of human experience.

Cro-Magnon: How the Ice Age Gave Birth to the First Modern Humans Details

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Ron says

While innovation in anthropology and archaeology come as slowly as the creeping glaciers from which core samples are taken, Fagan's latest offers little in the way of new information or radical theory, instead hewing to the status quo with great zealotry. It is written for the layperson on a very simplistic level, and he shows signs of age by engaging in a great deal of repetition and redundancy throughout the text (it could easily have been edited to half the length). Sadly, Fagan's zealotry emphasizes the tired old myth of 'man the mighty hunter', discounting the work of a great many theorists studying modern hunter-gatherer populations who are revising this long cherished theory with evidence that females GATHER 80% of all the calories for their tribes and that their implements are lost to the ravages of time (whereas hunting implements are not). The text is made all the worse by taking a novelistic approach to the writing, giving the author the liberty to run wild with his highly speculative ideas in a way that the average reader will lap up without question. It is a dismal fall from grace for an author who is succumbing to the sands of time and rigid thinking.

Iset says

I always sit up and take notice when a non-fiction book is enjoyable and a pleasure to read; having to read through so many of them as part of what I do, finding those rare few that are enjoyable reads into the bargain are something of a treat. I expected Brian Fagan's work to be authoritative - his name has been mentioned many times in the academic circles I move in as an established, solid professional - but the delight of the read was something unexpected; a real bonus. *Cro-Magnon* is a smooth, easy read, with fluid prose and clearly presented concepts and information, but Fagan also "sets the scene" at the beginning of each chapter, in engaging interludes that paint a real picture of each era he address (as well as being solidly fact-based, though the scenarios are imagined, they undoubtedly occurred). In all seriousness, Fagan's Stone Age story-telling excerpts were more compelling than Jean Auel's fictional Earth's Children series has been for the past few installments, and I can't help but think that Fagan himself would be capable of writing a far more interesting, accurate *and* succinct Stone Age saga than Auel. For my money, the reindeer hunt was the high point of these vividly imagined scenarios.

Cro-Magnon is pretty solid and accurate in terms of its factual grounding, though new discoveries have been made since its publication, which Fagan does take the time to discuss in his prelude to the paperback edition - that said, the book itself is not that old, having been published in 2010, so much of it is still relevant. However, on the down side, occasionally Fagan carries on the style of writing he uses for his story-telling interludes and begins stating certain matters as fact in the information-delivering sections of the book, when in fact they're very much up for discussion - a key example of this is the question that revolves around whether or not Neanderthals were capable of speech and language. Fagan only touches briefly on the alternative views surrounding this issue, but then appears to whole-heartedly lump for the notion that the Neanderthals existed largely without speech, relying on a limited range of sounds and otherwise physical gestures - the "quiet people" he describes in his story-telling. Fagans interpretation is a possibility, but in the face of evidence that Neanderthals were certainly physically capable of speech it's not the interpretation I would go with, and it would have been preferable if there had been more discussion around the controversies. That said, Fagan does take the time, through handy boxes scattered throughout the text, to explain some of the technical and scientific background behind the archaeology and explain why this places some of the archaeology in question - a very handy device for any non-archaeologists out there. However, I

did disagree with yet a couple more of Fagan's interpretations. *Cro-Magnon* appears to assume a rough date for the "Out of Africa" migration of *Homo sapiens* at around c. 55,000 BCE. This seems strange to me as the artefacts on the ground clearly tell a different tale - for example, artefacts demonstrating continued occupation at sites in India both before and after the Toba eruption between 67,000 and 75,000 BCE - and having read geneticist Stephen Oppenheimer's *Out of Eden* the DNA evidence is fairly convincing for an Out of Africa event c. 85,000 BCE. Fagan also appears to suggest that *Homo sapiens* left Africa in anatomically modern form but later underwent some form of mental revolution - resulting in the explosion of culture and art that one finds in Cro-Magnon societies in Europe c. 40,000 BCE... but the "mental revolution" theory is disputed, and close examination of the evidence rather suggests to me that the *Homo sapiens* that migrated out of Africa did so with all the mental faculties and agility that we possess today. But essentially what all that boils down to is that I would advice fellow readers to beware not to take Fagan at his word and support their reading with other works on the subject.

8 out of 10. All in all, a pretty solid work and a rather good read to boot.

Andrea says

Great read. Brought me up to date on lots of new discoveries since my undergraduate days. The author has an engaging narrative style that breaks up the scientific information.

Corinne says

I love early human history, evolution, and culture. This book gave us a wide view of Cro-Magnon, and even bonus about our cousins the Neanderthals. While the book lacked the focus, I enjoyed all the avenues Fagan explored. The only thing that took away were short bits of historical fiction, but by the end it was sometimes interesting to make the connections to the stories and the content.

A must read for Cro-Magnon and Earth's Children fans

Melody says

Rank speculation of the most patriarchal kind. This book gave me a serious case of the heebee-geebies. Gotta run, my man needs me to pee on something for him.

Alex Telander says

One of the most impressive things about history is that it is never static; you could take one event that is well documented, then come back to it a decade later and find the details and actions and reactions on that event to be totally different. One area where the knowledge and thoughts and ideas of what the period was like that is constantly changing is prehistory; our ancestors who lived before any real form of the written word was invented, other than cave paintings. This is approximately 15,000 to 20,000 years ago, when the last ice age came to a close, and the melting pot that was ancestral humanity – Cro-Magnons and Neanderthals (and

perhaps in the future anthropologists and archaeologists will discover another tangent of hominids) – came to a final decision through the evolutionary step of Homo sapiens sapiens.

Brian Fagan is the professor emeritus in anthropology at the University of California, Santa Barbara, and the author of *The Great Warming*, *The Little Ice Age*, and *The Oxford Companion to Archaeology*. In *Cro-Magnon*, Fagan brings readers up to date with all the latest knowledge and evidence on the Cro-Magnons and the Neanderthals. The common perception is that with the end of the ice age, there was the big migration of Cro-Magnons into what would eventually become Europe, as they existed with the Neanderthals, not integrating and living together, but overpowering and superseding them, eventually rendering the Neanderthals extinct. Fagan explores the history of the Neanderthals, discussing and developing ideas and theories of when they migrated into Europe and spread around and how it was quite possible there was coexistence between Neanderthals and Cro-Magnons, with exchanges in trade, habits, tool making, and perhaps even histories. Fagan posits that Neanderthals may not have died out, but become integrated with Cro-Magnons.

Fagan then launches into the main part of the book with the Cro-Magnons, and the general labels that are applied to the different periods and developments of Cro-Magnons: Mousterian, Châtelperronian, Aurignacian, Gravettian, Solutrean, and Magdalenian, exploring each label and what makes it individual. At the end of the book the reader is left understanding a lot more about our ancestors, and perhaps coming to the realization that the Neanderthals, and certainly the Cro-Magnons were a lot more intelligent, creative and developed than the idea of the fur-covered man with the spear hunting the woolly mammoth, while the fur-covered woman remains in the cave with the children, tending to the fire. One can't help but wonder how our knowledge and perceptions of these people may change in ten years time, especially since there is so much more to be learned and discovered; the cave paintings of Grotte de Chauvet, Niaux and Lascaux are merely the tip of the ice berg.

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Stephen says

Cro-Magnon chronicles the arrival and activity of modern humans into Europe during what is popularly known as the Ice Age, and speculates -- based on factual data, inferences drawn from observing the Inuit, and ordinary imagination -- what their lifestyles were like during different phases of the 'ice age'. Although regular readers tend to think of there being a distinct period called The Ice Age, one filled with mammoths and saber and short-faced bears, the evidence of ice cores indicates that during the early human tenure of Europe, cold and warm spells alternated every fifteen hundred years or so, This was good for early Homo Sapiens, as our forebears proved more adaptable to the climate than did the first inhabitants of Europe, the Neanderthals. They seem to have huddled around the rim of the Med, and it was in Spain that the last of them disappear from archaeological records. Humans, meanwhile, built up a diverse kit of tools for surviving -- all manner of stone-and bone-ware for cutting meat, sewing furs into clothes, and creating traps and weapons. Fagan discredits speculation that Neanderthals could use language, and points to their persistent stagnation as evidence: he believes language has had a quickening effect on human populations, allowing for the accumulation of knowledge and the creation of more complex societies. This argument strikes me as weak given that humans had language a long time before the explosion of civilizations around the Fertile Crescent. I enjoyed the passages in which Fagan tried to convey a sense of what it was like to live in ice-age Europe, following reindeer and working in the snow to trap foxes. His sections on Cro-Magnon cave art stir

the imagination.

Jason Koivu says

A heavy-browed, hirsute hunter crouches among the undergrowth frozen still...

...silently observing an encampment of creatures much like himself...

...yet decidedly different in their features, the very shape of their heads, their more intricate tools, sharper and finer weaponry, their almost tailored clothing, the utterly foreign sounds they speak, so different are they in fact that the hunter does not recognize them as kindred beings.

He is Neanderthal, a dying race that survived mostly unchanged for hundreds of thousands of years. And these "others"? They are Cro-magnon, the forefathers of modern man. And DNA evidence suggests there may be no link between the two.

In such a manner begins Brian Fagan's *Cro-Magnon: How the Ice Age Gave Birth to the First Modern Humans*, diving into the face to face meeting of the past and future, of who we could have been descended from and who we did draw our heritage from. Then he goes into the whys, why did this new breed of human survive while the other died out. Many fascinating topics covering our birth as a people are discussed here in, and made possible by recent and ongoing research, new techniques of which are unearthing truths and dashing away old myths.

That last point was my reason for picking up this book. So much of this information is new and replaces a lot of faulty info foisted upon me in school. I wanted to fill in the gaps of my less than stellar educational efforts back in elementary school, as well as to correct some of the misinformation I picked up when I was paying attention.

Fagan provides a great history lesson, using relatively lively scenes depicted now and then between his lectures, and though it's like any other nonfiction book, lectures they essentially are, for lecturing is what Fagan does at the University of California at Santa Barbara, my sort of second home (the town, not the school).

Historians and history lovers are going to gobble this up from cover to cover, but for those with a lower threshold for a dry history lesson there are sections of *Cro-Magnon* that will range from "late August in Arizona" dry to "Sahara desert on a hot tin roof" dry.

I love me some history big time and I really liked this book, however, I feel like I know more now about Cro-magnon man than I'll ever need to know. And it's the kind of knowledge that's probably only going to come in handy at pub quizzes.

Ray Campbell says

Disappointing. Carbon dating as first used was less accurate than today's methods. Cro Magnon man appears in Africa around 70,000 years ago and coexisted with Neanderthals until the end of the last great ice age when Cro Magnon pushed them out and into extinction. Cro Magnons hunted, gathered, sewed clothing out of animal skins and fur, and painted cave walls - it was fun! The really impressive thing is that this went on over tens of thousands of years. I had imagined this book might spread new light on what changed to transition into modern times. What started the agricultural revolution and the establishment of communities of modern man. While Fagan points to the ebb and flow of climatic changes, there is no revelation here. This is a long winded ramble through early human history.

Fagan clarifies many issues and gives interesting details, but he could have done it in half the time by saying "this was a pattern that we see throughout..." Unfortunately, Fagan needs to repeat the same things about Cro-Magnon man in each place they have been found while emphasizing that we can never know for sure about an alarming amount of conjecture. He does illustrate patterns and explains how archeologists know, but he also creates speculative scenarios to illustrate how things might have been which are just silly. I'll paraphrase: Imagine, a stream. A father looks lovingly at his child. The child is confused. "What is that giant woolly mammoth daddy?" The father fits an arrow, he forgot his sharpened throwing sticks. "Will we eat tonight?" the boy says. The father says "yes - Mommy will be busy cooking"... I know Fagan was trying to make a story and help us imagine scenes that were likely, but it made the book seem speculative rather than scientific.

Again, some interesting insight, but did I mention it was repetitive?

L Timmel says

This is an embarrassingly bad book. The last sentence of the book sums up the whole sorry mess: "My [white European] DNA tells me I'm one of them, and I'm proud of it." The book is laden with the author's romantic adolescent male fantasies about what it was like being a cro-magnon man-- emphasis on "man." His typical fantasy involves a young man shooting birds with arrows while his "sister" (Fagan's choice of word) retrieves them. Another: "The man paddling in the bow, his wife in the stern..." My favorite is his assertion that all the women remained in the camp while the men are off hunting, a place redolent of the smell of urine, used to tan hides (which he believes the women spent all day crouched on their haunches, bent over pelts, tirelessly toiling the livelong day to keep the family in shoes & furs). Basically, he assumes a 1950s sit-com set of family & gender relations prevailed during the Paleolithic. (I kept thinking his imagination didn't rise much above the Flinstones.) All the wise elders are, of course, men, handing down their accumulated knowledge & wisdom to the boys. Apart from that, the author is unable to talk about technology without using modern anachronisms-- his favorite being the "swiss army knife" the men all possessed for undertaking their sophisticated feats of hunting. Seriously, give this one a miss if you're really interested in the Paleolithic.

Nikki says

Cro-Magnon is reasonably informative, albeit perhaps a little out of date and about as focused on the

Neanderthals as on the Cro-Magnons. It had fairly similar information to a lot of other books I've read about human evolution, not really managing to make the Cro-Magnons stand out as a specific group worth a whole book. The recreations were mostly pretty uninspired, and the assumption that gender roles would be something straight out of a 50s sitcom (as someone else put it) was pretty eyeroll inducing.

There is some interesting info here, but in the end... I got a little bored, I guess. Not much of it is sticking with me, except my eyerolling at the idea that women were subordinate to men from the start.

Reviewed for The Bibliophibian.

Captain Sir Roddy, R.N. (Ret.) says

I love history, and this was a grand tour of over nearly 200,000 years of human history from the small bands of anatomically modern humans that roamed about Africa and then slowly spread across Eurasia and finally into the heart of western Europe. Professor Fagan is a great writer that brings to life these hardy peoples that most of us are descended from. Fagan carefully explains and puts into context all of the latest archaeological and climatological data as he tells this amazing story. There's lots of good stuff in this book too about the potential interactions between modern humans and our close cousins, the Neanderthals.

I have to say that I loved this book as much as Jean Auel's wonderful *Earth's Children* series (i.e., *Clan of the Cave Bear* through the *Land of the Painted Caves*). In fact, before you read (or re-read) Auel's books, I highly recommend reading Fagan's *Cro-Magnon: How the Ice Age Gave Birth to the First Modern Humans*, as it really does provide a ton of background information that helps to put Auel's Ice Age world in context for the average reader. I really enjoyed reading Professor Fagan's book, and found it to be eminently readable, interesting, informative, and quite entertaining. There's a lot in this book for the serious student of human origins and archaeology as well as for the layperson just wanting to better understand our rich human history.

Richard Reese says

Once upon a time, long, long ago, musicians Stephen Stills and Judy Collins enjoyed a romance. Then, Judy sailed away and broke his heart. Stephen wrote *Suite: Judy Blue Eyes*, which I recently heard again. One line made my head spin: "Don't let the past remind us of what we are not now." Why not? Remembering the past sounds like an excellent idea. What we are not now is wild and free human beings — normal & authentic.

I just finished Brian Fagan's book, *Cro-Magnon*, which describes an important segment of my family history. The happy news is that there have been three studies of the mitochondrial DNA of modern Europeans, and their genes are primarily indigenous. The invading farmers from the Fertile Crescent did not exterminate the natives. The genes of the eastern immigrants are somewhere between 15% and 28% of the modern European DNA.

It staggers the imagination to contemplate the astonishing wildness, beauty, and vitality of Ice Age Europe. It's heartbreaking — and illuminating — when these grand memories remind us of what we are not now. After reading the book, I feel a much stronger connection to the ancient cave paintings. Those artists were my ancestors, and their images belong in the family album. My people once lived in lands inhabited by woolly mammoths, aurochs, bison, and vast herds of reindeer. They lived beside streams that thundered during salmon runs. This gave me a sense of homecoming, a powerful remembering.

Fagan does a nice job of describing the world of the Ice Age, and the wild swings of the climate — growing glaciers & melting glaciers. When the climate warmed, the hunters and their game moved north, and when frigid times returned, they moved south. The hunters followed the meat, and the meat followed the grass.

“There were at least fifteen to twenty short-term events when temperatures were up to 44.5 degrees Fahrenheit (7 degrees Celsius) warmer than during the intervening colder intervals.” The climate could swing from pleasant to freezing over the course of a lifetime. Siberia was once a tropical forest, the Sahara once had lakes and grasslands, and there was a time when you could walk from France to England.

The sad news is that the hunting tribes of Europe became farmers. This may have been similar to the spread of corn from Mexico to the tribes of the north — an amazing innovation that bit us on the ass, and cast wicked shadows on the unborn generations. Fagan helped me to better understand the transition to agriculture, in which ongoing innovation in hunting technology played a leading role.

All hominids have African ancestors. Some of them migrated to Asia, where Neanderthals first walked onto the stage. Some Neanderthals moved to Europe maybe 300,000 years ago, where they hung out in cool temperate forests. Their primary weapon was a heavy thrusting spear with a sharp fire-hardened tip. These were great for killing large slow-moving animals.

Fagan believes that the Neanderthals were luckless dullards, because they displayed almost no innovative cleverness over vast spans of time. They were simple and stable, and their dance on this planet may have been far longer than ours will turn out to be — and they didn't destroy paradise. What dreary boors!

“Cro-Magnon” refers only to the Homo sapiens clans that inhabited Europe, but our species originally emerged in Africa, maybe 170,000 years ago. Around 45,000 years ago, some moved into Europe, and within 5,000 years, they lightly inhabited much of the continent. Cro-Magnons left us the gorgeous painted caves, magic peepholes into fairyland. Neanderthals went extinct about 30,000 years ago, for unknown reasons.

The trademark weapon of Cro-Magnons was the lightweight throwing spear, tipped with stone or antler. It was excellent for hunting on open land, and it could kill from a distance. It made it easier to kill a wider variety of prey, like deer and reindeer. Thus, there was more meat on the table, more bambinos in the nursery, and more spear-chuckers running around the bloody countryside. Even during warm eras, European summers were short, and plant foods were limited, so meat was the core source of nourishment. Homo sapiens have been purebred hunters since day one in Africa.

Later, the bow and arrow arrived. Bows may have been used 18,000 years ago, based on circumstantial evidence, but the oldest bow found so far was from 10,800 BC. The bow was an awesomely powerful weapon. It could be fired from any angle, and quickly reloaded. It could kill critters large and small from a long distance. It was great for forest hunting. Nets, traps, and barbed fish spears also came into use. Rabbits, birds, and rodents now appeared on the menu — more meat, bambinos, and hunters — and less and less wildlife. Our consumption of plant foods and shellfish increased.

Around 12,900 years ago, the Younger Dryas period brought frigid weather back again, for a thousand years. It brought severe droughts to the Near East, and the humans adapted by harvesting and planting grass seeds. And the rest, as they say, is history. The combination of excess cleverness, deficient family planning, and climate change put us on a bullet train to global catastrophe.

“Within a surprisingly few generations, the people of the Near East and southeastern Turkey were entirely dependent on farming. When wetter conditions returned at the end of the Younger Dryas, the new economies spread like wildfire across Anatolia and into southeast Europe, where they were well established before eight thousand years ago.”

What we know about human evolution and Ice Age Europe is quite fragmentary. Time, glaciers, rising sea levels, and civilization have taken a big toll on the meager evidence. The timeline is full of holes, the dates are controversial, the theories are controversial, and the research continues.

Annoyingly, Fagan inserted a number of ideas unsupported by hard evidence, based on speculation. For example, Neanderthals probably didn't have complex language because they persisted in living in a simple manner. Their primitive brains may have lacked the advanced neural circuits necessary for feverish innovation and pathological ecocide.

Fagan is the captain of the Homo sapiens cheerleading squad. He gushes with praise for our unbelievably clever species. "Effective technology, an acute self-awareness, and an intimate relationship with the environment made the Cro-Magnon personality practically invincible." In frigid regions of Europe, they "adapted effortlessly to the ever-colder conditions."

I'm glad that I read this book, because I learned a lot from it, and I will not forget it. The entire era of civilization has existed during an unusually long period of warm and stable weather. Our food production system is fine-tuned for this climate, and it's going to have tremendous problems as the planet gets hotter and hotter. Fagan helps us remember the scary patterns of climate history, and how it mercilessly hammered the unlucky, over and over again, big brains and all.

Given the fact that we're currently beating the stuffing out Big Mama Nature, the gushing praise for human intelligence and innovation emits a noxious cloud of stinky funk. Where is the line between brilliant innovation and idiotic self-destruction? Are they the same? Is it possible that simple and stable does not mean stupid? These questions should not be swept under the rug. We really, really need to remember what we are not now. We need to discover the long lost treasure.

Megan says

I didn't think this one was as good as his one on climate change in history (the only other book of his I've read). It concentrated almost entirely on hunting, which is understandable since that's pretty much the evidence left behind, but got a little boring. And there were made up scenes which were so conjectured I didn't think that they added much, and just served as filler to make the book long.

Most annoyingly, he ascribes rather modern traditions and gender roles without any sort of discussion as to why he assumes the men did all the hunting/the women did all the cooking and sewing. That division of labor may very well have existed, and there's plenty of anthropological evidence about how women traditionally do roles that allow them to be closer to home, but there's no discussion about any of this. But he just seemed to take it for granted, with no discussion at all. Similarly he made a few references to marriage and to nuclear family living arrangements that I don't see how there's any way to really know about... he just kind of seems to assume things with no discussion about that assumption... and then another 20 pages about hunting.

Dianne says

While some of the information in this book is out of date (ex. we know now that Neanderthals did mate with Cro Magnons and were apparently smarter than we had given them credit for), it was still a worthwhile read.

He paints a good picture of the daily lives of the prehistoric peoples in Europe. They faced amazingly difficult climactic changes and managed to survive for thousands of years.
