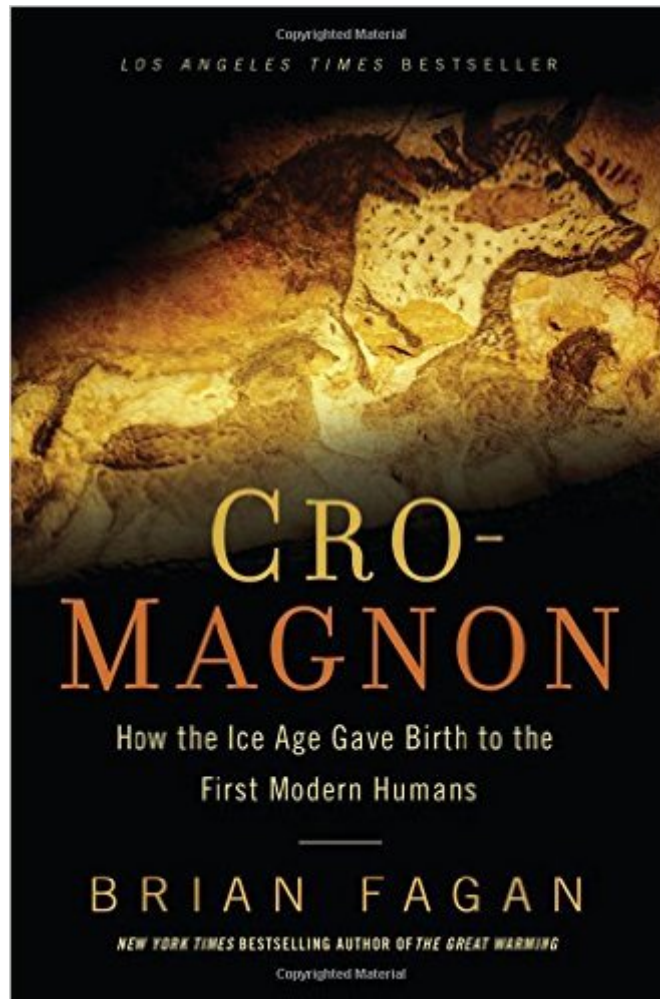


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Cro-Magnon: How The Ice Age Gave Birth To The First Modern Humans



Synopsis

They survived by their wits in a snowbound world, hunting, and sometimes being hunted by, animals many times their size. By flickering firelight, they drew bison, deer, and mammoths on cavern walls- vibrant images that seize our imaginations after thirty thousand years. They are known to archaeologists as the Cro-Magnons-but who were they? Simply put, these people were among the first anatomically modern humans. For millennia, their hunter-gatherer culture flourished in small pockets across Ice Age Europe, the distant forerunner to the civilization we live in now. Bestselling author Brian Fagan brings these early humans out of the deep freeze with his trademark mix of erudition, cutting-edge science, and vivid storytelling. Cro-Magnon reveals human society in its infancy, facing enormous environmental challenges from glaciers, predators, and a rival species of humans-the Neanderthals. Cro-Magnon captures the adaptability that has made humans an unmatched success as a species. Living on a frozen continent with only crude tools, Ice Age humans survived and thrived. In these pages, we meet our most remarkable ancestors.

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Customer Reviews

Brian Fagan is one of my favorite authors. I was first introduced to his books in college. They were the text books in the prehistory courses I took for my major in archeology. More recently, he has been writing about the effects of climate change on human history. He has a talent for writing about complex subjects like climate change so that they are comprehensible for the lay reader without "dumbing down" the material. With his most recent book, he has returned to the subject of prehistory with a comprehensive overview of the first anatomically modern humans, who he refers to as "Cro-

Magnon" after the rock shelter where the first remains were discovered. Cro-Magnons are best known as the people who created the magnificent cave paintings in Europe. When Cro-Magnons migrated into Europe from the Near East, it was already inhabited by the Neanderthals, relatives but not direct ancestors. Dr. Fagan refers to the Neanderthals as the "Quiet People" because they lacked fluent speech. They also lacked symbolism, religion, art and innovation. Their way of life was unchanged for hundreds of thousands of years. Unable to compete with their more advanced cousins, the Cro-Magnons, the Neanderthals gradually died out. The Ice Age was not uniformly cold. There were periods of warmth when vegetation and animal populations changed. The Cro-Magnons were experts at adapting to the changing conditions, hunting large game when it was cold and smaller game when it was warm. The tools they left behind reflect the constant innovations that made them so successful. Their art, musical instruments and burials reveal their rich spiritual life.

Brian Fagan deliberately uses the term "Cro-Magnon" even though it is out of current academic fashion, but it is widely and immediately recognized as meaning those anatomically modern humans who came into Europe 40000-plus years ago to eventually supplant the Neanderthal population already there and become, genetically speaking, the ancestors of modern Europeans. The author thoroughly grounds his narrative in the fruits of archaeological studies, although a good deal of well-informed speculation is necessary where the archaeological record is nonexistent. Much of this speculation derives from close observations made of comparatively modern hunter-gatherer peoples, especially Inuits who faced many of the same climatic challenges met by the Cro-Magnons. Fagan typically begins each chapter with a vignette highlighting particular characteristics of life at some particular period, as circumstances changed and cultures evolved. The author does not neglect the Neanderthals, and a large part of the book examines how and why the Cro-Magnons came to replace them throughout Europe. Fagan is careful to avoid traditional negative stereotypes concerning the Neanderthals and presents them as intelligent, agile, adaptable people, but whose mental processes ultimately could not match those of Cro-Magnons, whose skills at innovation proved superior at adapting to changing environmental conditions. For the most part Fagan sidesteps the perennial question of whether Neanderthals and Cro-Magnons interbred, but it is plain that the author considers any genetic contribution from the earlier humans to modern Europeans to be inconsequential (if any exists at all). And he quite plainly rejects any scenario of major violent interaction between Neanderthals and Cro-Magnons.

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