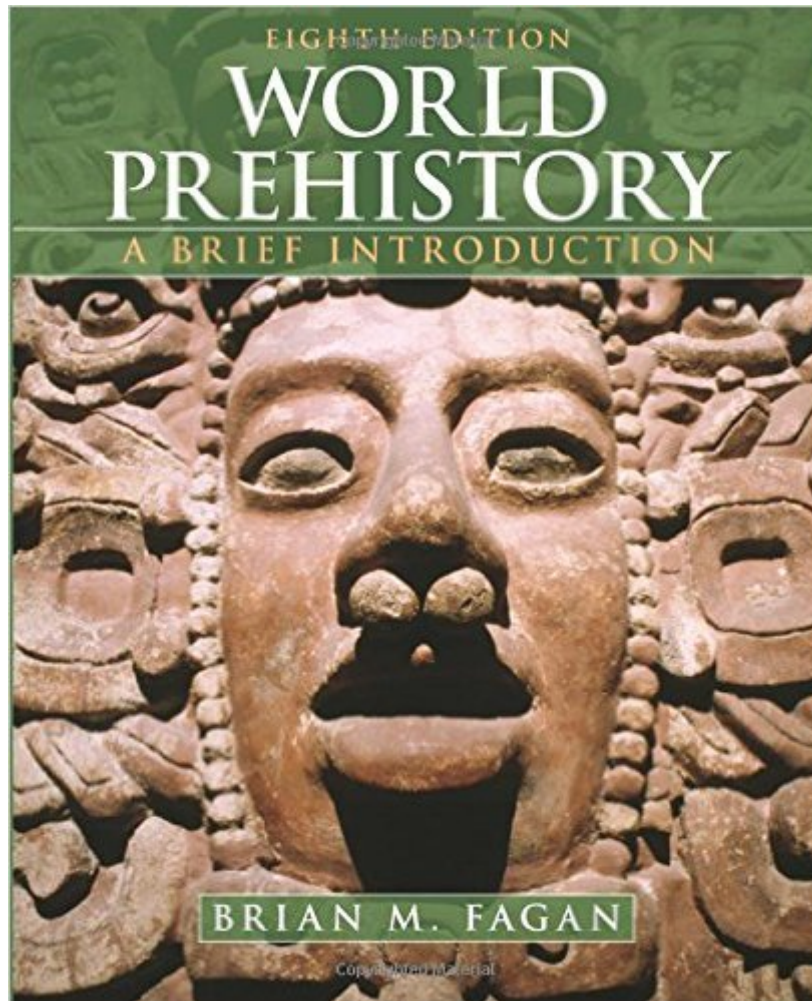


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World Prehistory: A Brief Introduction



Synopsis

For one semester or quarter courses in World Prehistory. Written by one of the leading archaeological writers in the world - in a simple, jargon-free narrative style - this brief, well-illustrated account of the major developments in the human past makes world prehistory uniquely accessible to complete beginners. Written by Brian Fagan, World Prehistory covers the entire world, not just the Americas or Europe, and places major emphasis on both theories and the latest archaeological and multidisciplinary approaches. His focus is on four major developments in world prehistory: 1) The origins of humanity. 2) The appearance and spread of modern humans before and during the late Ice Age- including the first settlement of the Americas. 3) The beginnings of food production. 4) The rise of the first civilizations.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

Man's innate curiosity with their past has given birth to sciences that attempt to satisfy such curiosity. Brian Fagan, an archaeologist himself, outlines brilliantly the major developments of humankind in prehistory, from that scientific perspective. Sophisticated theories and tools from disciplines such archaeology, biology, ecology, geology and even genetics and psychology are elaborated for the general reader. Utilising such diversity of disciplines, World Prehistory introduces to the reader, the developments of humankind- the origins, exodus and migration of man, food production and state formation- from the earliest times especially before written records were available. Even before Fagan gets into details, he outlines the scope of the book and distinguishes the discipline of archaeology insofar as it is scientific, rigorous and it utilises tools and expertise from

other disciplines. Throughout the book, there are scientific archaeological explanations in the form of theories, data and methodologies and at the very onset, the author derides the "romantic world of high adventure and exciting discovery" connected to pseudoarchaeology, which to him belongs to the "realms of religious faith and science fiction". The book is divided into 4 parts in a generally chronological arrangement. The first part introduces to the reader the study of human prehistory with succinct explanations of the concepts of history, culture, space and time. Part 2 outlines scientific approaches to explain the origins of mankind and his relationships with other primates. The author draws evidence from geology, genetics and most importantly, paleoanthropology (the specialized study of human bone remains).

The idea for a standardized "World Prehistory" course covering the time from the evolution & dispersal of Homo sapiens from Africa to recorded history (roughly the Bronze Age) is a great idea. It sets the stage for the more common World History courses that cover the time period from the first Bronze Age cities up to the Industrial Age. However, this particular textbook is only okay. It's nowhere near as interesting as Brian Fagan's more well-known books (e.g. Floods, Famines & Emperors; The Long Summer; The Great Warming) that dealt primarily with the effects of climate change on historical societies and were often as thought-provoking as Jared Diamond's Guns, Germs and Steel. Here's a couple points I was dissatisfied with: 1) The photos are all black & white and rather low quality. Another issue is that we get a lot of photos of ruins but only a few artist reconstructions of what these ancient towns & cities looked like when people actually inhabited them. This makes it difficult for the reader to imagine how sophisticated these societies were and how they managed space & resources. 2) The book is a bit too heavy on data (names, dates) and too light on theory. This leaves the reader with a general idea of what happened where, but not why or how. The discussions of the Neolithic & Urban revolutions seemed quite brief & simplistic. The Upper Paleolithic Revolution that gave rise to behaviorally modern humans wasn't even mentioned. 3) The Upper Paleolithic era when humans dispersed across the globe is presented as rather boring.

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