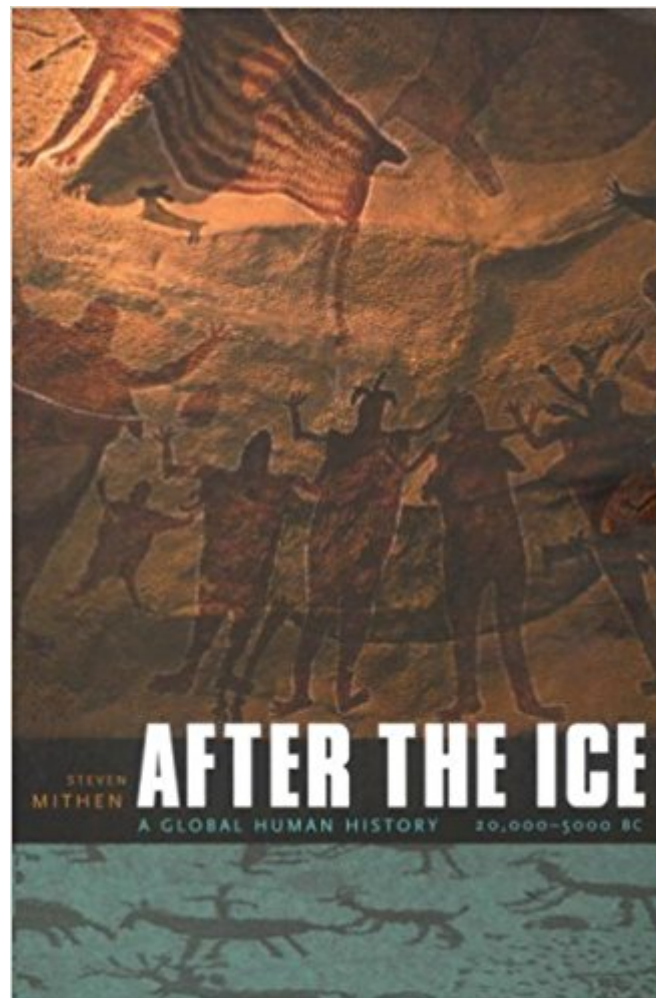




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After The Ice: A Global Human History 20,000-5000 BC



Synopsis

20,000 B.C., the peak of the last ice age--the atmosphere is heavy with dust, deserts, and glaciers span vast regions, and people, if they survive at all, exist in small, mobile groups, facing the threat of extinction. But these people live on the brink of seismic change--10,000 years of climate shifts culminating in abrupt global warming that will usher in a fundamentally changed human world. After the Ice is the story of this momentous period--one in which a seemingly minor alteration in temperature could presage anything from the spread of lush woodland to the coming of apocalyptic floods--and one in which we find the origins of civilization itself. Drawing on the latest research in archaeology, human genetics, and environmental science, After the Ice takes the reader on a sweeping tour of 15,000 years of human history. Steven Mithen brings this world to life through the eyes of an imaginary modern traveler--John Lubbock, namesake of the great Victorian polymath and author of Prehistoric Times. With Lubbock, readers visit and observe communities and landscapes, experiencing prehistoric life--from aboriginal hunting parties in Tasmania, to the corralling of wild sheep in the central Sahara, to the efforts of the Guila Naquitz people in Oaxaca to combat drought with agricultural innovations. Part history, part science, part time travel, After the Ice offers an evocative and uniquely compelling portrayal of diverse cultures, lives, and landscapes that laid the foundations of the modern world.

Book Information

Paperback: 664 pages

Publisher: Harvard University Press; 1st Pbk. Ed edition (April 30, 2006)

Language: English

ISBN-10: 0674019997

ISBN-13: 978-0674019997

Product Dimensions: 6.1 x 1.2 x 9.2 inches

Shipping Weight: 2 pounds (View shipping rates and policies)

Average Customer Review: 3.8 out of 5 stars 85 customer reviews

Best Sellers Rank: #195,621 in Books (See Top 100 in Books) #57 in [Books > History >](#)

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Customer Reviews

Using an unorthodox narrative device, Mithen explores why, how, and where farming displaced hunting and gathering. Mithen conjures John Lubbock, an English author of a once-popular 1865

history of the Stone Age, and sends him back in time to visit dozens of excavation sites around the world as they appeared when inhabited. Lubbock's transcontinental perambulations permit Mithen (a practicing archaeologist who describes his digs in Scotland) to underscore one causal factor in the agricultural revolution: the fluctuations of climate at the end of the last Ice Age. Weather, sea level, and zones of plant and animal life changed dramatically in the 15,000 years of Lubbock's walkabout, and Mithen explains how environmental volatility is scientifically known as he sketches Lubbock observing the various "living" human communities that have been uncovered. A successful marriage of fact and imagination, Mithen's tome establishes a solid knowledge base with full academic references that will be of primary interest to those considering a career in archaeology. Gilbert Taylor Copyright © American Library Association. All rights reserved --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

Mithen did a huge amount of research to produce this curiously encyclopedic work. The book is empirically authoritative but quirkily postmodern...[A] truly provocative and ambitious work...After the Ice is a book that should be read and then exasperatingly argued about...And it does evoke the real excitement of doing Stone Age archaeology (from the digging to the debating the meaning of the finds): the passion to learn that has driven so many prehistorians and dreamers. (Lawrence Guy Straus Science 2004-02-27)Using an unorthodox narrative device, Mithen explores why, how, and where farming displaced hunting and gathering. Mithen conjures John Lubbock, an English author of a once-popular 1865 history of the Stone Age, and sends him back in time to visit dozens of excavation sites around the world as they appeared when inhabited. Lubbock's transcontinental perambulations permit Mithen (a practicing archaeologist who describes his digs in Scotland) to underscore one causal factor in the agricultural revolution: the fluctuations of climate at the end of the last Ice Age. Weather, sea level, and zones of plant and animal life changed dramatically in the 15,000 years of Lubbock's walkabout, and Mithen explains how environmental volatility is scientifically known as he sketches Lubbock observing the various 'living' human communities that have been uncovered. A successful marriage of fact and imagination. (Gilbert Taylor Booklist 2004-09-10)The resulting floods, spread of forests and retreat of the deserts set up the planet we know today. Mithen's exhaustive explanation of how human beings began living in small, mobile groups and then permanent villages and the resultant creation of civilisation is a big tale that's worth staying with. (Brian Hennigan Glasgow Herald 2004-06-05)With the help of a fictional guide dubbed John Lubbock, modeled after a Victorian naturalist who wrote a popular book called Prehistoric Times, Mithen embarks on a vivid tour of the warming world as it emerged from the last ice age. In

the process, he lends a you-are-there immediacy to an era in which humans invented farming, settled in towns, and created civilization as we know it. (Discover 2005-01-01) By the end of this rich and multilayered book, I was dazzled and hungry for more. Mithen has succeeded where other archaeologists have failed: He transports the reader back into the past, showing evocatively how humans adapted to 15,000 years worth of environmental change. (Nina Jablonski Discover 2005-03-01) In an ambitious undertaking, archaeologist Mithen describes 15,000 years of ancient history from 20,000 to 5,000 B.C.... Mithen explores how studying the abrupt transition between the ice age and a period of global warming could provide clues to the effects of climate changes going on today. (Science News 2005-03-05) After the Ice offers a fascinating whirlwind tour of an underappreciated segment of human history... The prose is lively and evocative as Mithen unfolds a compelling story... The cumulative effect of this book should be a profound new appreciation of a largely unknown and crucially important period of our past. If you want to find out what you don't know about the grand sweep of human history, there is not a better place to start. (Douglas K. Charles American Scientist 2005-05-01) The author successfully achieved his goal of presenting a great deal of information about a pivotal point in our history in a thorough and easily digestible manner... This successful compilation of human history from 20,000-5,000 BC should not be overlooked as a key reference and welcome addition to any library of an interested novice, undergraduate student of prehistory, or seasoned archaeologist looking for a well written synthesis. (John D. Risetto Paleoanthropology) This massive and clever book opens modern scholarship about the distant past to nonspecialists. Buyers of this book will get their money's worth. It comes with a generous supply of maps and pictures of artifacts and digs, some of which are in color... Erudite and also quirky, Mithen summarizes the work of contemporary archaeologists, often by recounting his own visits to archaeological sites and drawing on insights from recent research on paleoclimates and human genetics... This impressive book stands out as the new standard work. (David M. Fahey The Historian)

I've only just started reading it, but already I am so thankful that there is a book on pleistocene and early holocene (pre-agricultural) humanities that is **ACTUALLY READABLE**. A lot of books I've gotten on the subject become so academically obtuse that they seem to require a Master's in Paleolithic Anthropology to really understand. In as far as that goes, I've already seen a few inconsistencies with some of the other points. The author asserts that marriage seems to be an eternal "human condition" - but with the book *Sex at Dawn*, it's readily apparent that marriage (at least how we and the author seem to define it) is a very recent invention. A small point perhaps, but

it destabilized some of my trust in the already dubious accuracy of prehistorical human life. But, I understand the point here isn't 100% accuracy, but rather to give a "feeling" of a life any of us would have lived over the tens of thousands of years we've been behaviorally modern humans. In that sense I feel that - so far - it's working. EDIT: I recently finished this behemoth of a book. It was one of those books that reveals the depth of my ignorance and fills it with some knowledge. HIGHLY RECOMMEND. Modern human beings have been around for at least 200,000 years. Freedom, strong social ties, fresh local foods, worthwhile work and unrestricted play - that's what it means to be human. We've explored the deepest wilderness. We stood up to Saber-toothed Tigers, giant bears, and all manner of huge monsters - we made steak dinner of "Bison antiquus" armed with nothing but sticks with sharp rocks on them, and we survived well. We witnessed glaciers come and go and come and go, global droughts and extreme temperature swings, and survived well. We've fought for scarce resources and gave generously when we had surplus - and we've fought when we had surplus and gave generously when things were scarce. Over 200,000 we've lived better than we do today - and we've lived worse. Civilization may not survive long, but I have great faith that humanity will survive another 200,000 years. Many more adventures lie ahead.

Kudo's to all the excellent reviewers that cover the book from a number of angles. If you are using reviews to decide your purchase, you have plenty of info to press the 'buy me' button. My 2 cents: 1. While I was reading 'After the Ice Age', Science announced the Israel/Jordan evidence from a 200,000 year old communal site. That would push Mithin's origins premise back 100,000 years. Doubling the age of H. Sap. in the ME might have an effect on the author's baseline premises. Then, a 400K year old grave in an Israeli cave becomes the oldest H. Sap. discovered. As I write this there's a premise floating that H.Sap. may have evolved out of the ME instead of Africa. Things are changing fast in the past. 2. The authorial criticism regarding the use of the 'fictional character' John Lubbock is deserved. It adds a level of unnecessary gobbledygook to the story. I couldn't keep from thinking poorly of the surrogate John Lubbock's lack of observational prowess ... as in "if I was there, I'd have ..." Exciting or vaguely interesting, the Lubbock character is not. 3. The 15,000 year snippet provides a great story backdrop. I was looking for a paleontological readers digest couched on both sides of the Younger Dryas. The topic hit the mark and left me with an 'image' to consider in context. 4. It's a hefty read at over 600 pages, made easy. Mithin has mastered the art of concise chapters in technical writing. This reader appreciates the style. 5. Mithin is not convincing in his over concern for humanity in the speculative AGW future. 'After the Ice Age' is a success story after all! I don't think I could write 600 pages about the adaptability and resilience of H.Sap. surviving with his

brain, stone knives and antler picks in the face of sudden and enormous climatic variation evidences. We've got more potential to weather climate change that will most surely happen."6" stars on reader enjoyment ... 1 star deduction for the terribly lame John Lubbock.

Not sure that I know enough about what Mithen is talking about to be in a position to agree or disagree with what he's saying, but he says it very clearly and in a way that the layperson can understand and I knew a whole lot more when I'd finished the book than when I started it. There are two big BUTs, though, that, for me, shave off the stars. The first BUT is that it's unclear for whom this book is intended. There is lots of science and there are copious references and sometimes the text seems aimed at the specialist audience, which is fine by me because, as I said, it's written in a pretty accessible way and if you weren't really interested in the subject matter and didn't have a smattering of knowledge in the area, you probably wouldn't read it anyway. The second BUT stems from the first: being undecided for whom the book is intended, Mithen covers his bets by employing the annoying device of inserting a fictional character into the proceedings - which he no doubt thought would make the book more appealing to the lay reader. This fictional dude (FD) pops up from time to time, meandering across the landscape and sticking his oar in (literally, in some places), which adds precisely nothing and in fact considerably detracts from the book: the appearances of the FD are annoying, interrupt the flow of information and argument and, which is worse, give proceedings an air of fakery that a book with serious intent surely doesn't need. It also allows Mithen to pop in some highly speculative assertions which, he might have thought, coming as they do from the FD, would be more palatable and allow the author some wriggle room if challenged. Whatever the reason, Mithen's editors and/or any colleagues who read the book should have told him to can the 'John Lubbock' character and get on with the science. All that said, though, I'd probably give it another half star and recommend it to anyone with an intelligent curiosity about human pre-history.

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