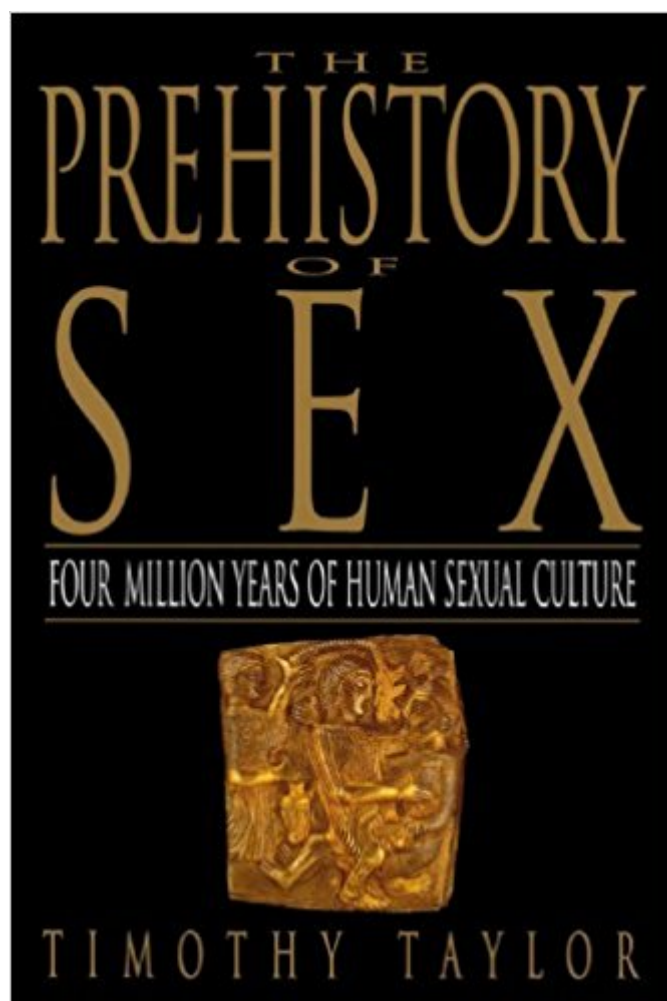


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The Prehistory Of Sex: Four Million Years Of Human Sexual Culture



Synopsis

This lively and provocative book leaves no stone unturned and no taboo untouched as it pieces together evidence from highly controversial artifacts and human remains to decipher the mysteries of Stone Age sex. Archaeologist Timothy Taylor paints a dramatic and startling picture of our sexual evolution as he follows human sexuality from its origins four million years ago to modern times to answer our most titillating questions about this endlessly fascinating and powerful subject. Taylor draws on recent archaeological discoveries such as skeletons of women, golden penis sheaths, the charred remains of aphrodisiac herbs, and a wealth of prehistoric erotic art to trace practices such as contraception, homosexuality, transsexuality, prostitution, sadomasochism, and bestiality back to their ancient origins. He makes the startling claim that although humans have used contraceptives from the very earliest times to separate sex from reproduction, techniques to maximize population growth were developed only when farming began--a revolution involving control of animals' sex lives, widespread oppression of women, and an attitude to nature that continues to have devastating ecological consequences. He draws the radical conclusion that the evolution of our species has been shaped not only by the survival of the fittest but by the very sexual choices our ancestors made. And he links ancient sexuality with our own in a contemporary survey of artificial insemination, surrogate pregnancies, drag queens, brothels, pornography, and the spectre of racial dominance. How has human sexuality changed--and how has it remained the same--over the span of millions of years? How did the ideas of eroticism, ecstasy, immortality, and beauty become linked to sex? Taylor explores these questions and sets out to prove that our sexual behavior is and has always been a matter of choice rather than something genetically determined. He eloquently and accessibly explains how our sexual politics--issues of gender and power, control and exploitation--are not new but are deeply rooted in our prehistory. Surely one of the most illuminating and controversial books on human sexuality ever written, *The Prehistory of Sex* invites readers to become voyeurs into the bizarre--and so far hidden--prehistoric sexual world.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

Taylor, a British archeologist, taps archeological evidence (reproduced in some 50 photographs) that is virtually unknown outside specialist circles?graphic depictions of sex in prehistoric cultures: mammoth ivory phalluses, sculptures of women in childbirth, syphilitic skeletons, charred remains of aphrodisiac herbs. The result is a groundbreaking, riveting survey that strongly suggests that sex and love among prehistoric peoples was less bestial than is commonly assumed. He traces sexual inequality to the invention of farming in the Near East 10,000 years ago, where the availability of animal milk allowed women to raise many children, tying themselves to hearth and home. Disputing feminist claims that Neolithic figurines of the "Great Earth Mother" emerged from a prehistoric matriarchy, he argues that the clay figurines do not symbolize motherhood, but rather suggest that dominant males practiced polygyny. Surveying Eurasian erotic practice in areas ranging from the great city of Mohenjo-Daro in India circa 2000 B.C. to Iron Age Denmark, he documents tremendous variation in human sexuality?homosexuality, prostitution, male and female transvestitism, transsexuality, vigorous interest in contraception, sex as both acrobatic pastime and spiritual discipline?a diversity that went underground with the advent of Christian sexual attitudes. Copyright 1996 Reed Business Information, Inc. --This text refers to the Hardcover edition.

Matters of sexual conduct are usually glossed over in popular accounts of archaeological discovery, but it is impossible to gain any deep understanding of a culture, no matter how ancient it is, without some grasp of its sexual practices and attitudes, a fact British archaeologist Taylor tackles head on. Young, hip, energetically articulate, and extremely knowledgeable, Taylor brings prehistoric society to life in his detailed and revelatory discussion of Stone Age sex. He quickly dispenses with old theories about our ancestors' ignorance of the connection between intercourse and pregnancy, presenting artifacts that support his claims that "most prehistoric communities were in control of their fertility and fully able to separate sex from reproduction." Taylor goes on to portray prehistoric family configurations, propose the origins for sexual inequality and prostitution, and discuss Stone Age

taboos, sexual rituals, eroticism, and the long history of homosexuality, sadomasochism, and transsexuality. Simultaneously, Taylor's history shows us how similar we are to our ancestors and how different. Donna Seaman --This text refers to the Hardcover edition.

This book makes a number of good points, but they are overshadowed by the author's political agenda. The fact that a book about prehistoric sex feels obligated to go on an extended analysis of Nazi racism (pp. 237-243) pretty much sums up how far it veers from its stated topic. The author does his best work when he focuses, oddly enough, on what we *don't* know. His discussion of the ancient "Venus" figures is interesting because he offers a range of possible interpretations and cautions against drawing any hasty conclusions about their original meaning(s). His discussion of the difficulty in "sexing" skeletons is interesting, as I had presumed that that was fairly easy to do and that DNA analysis was routinely used to clarify the identity of badly damaged remains. Further, I liked his explanation of how sexually-charged artifacts get buried in museum basements and this distort our understanding of our ancestors. Unfortunately, Taylor's bias builds steam as the book progresses. He is willing to accept almost any evidence that ancients were more liberal than modern West in their sexual attitudes, especially when it comes to homosexuality and transgendered individuals. He draws selectively from primate behaviors after cautioning that it's wrong to do precisely that. The book goes far past the physical evidence to paint a particular picture of *natural* human sexuality, a sexuality that the West has denied and buried. Even if his assertions are correct (which I doubt), his evidence simply doesn't support his assertions.

This book gathers some facts and observations that are quite useful if you are interested in understanding human sexuality. I found the author's personal opinions and conclusions drawn from those facts and observations less useful. Quite worth the price and the investment in reading the book if you take the author's theories with a grain of salt.

Great book that complements the new research within evolutionary biology on the prehistoric origins of modern human sexuality.

Item arrived on time, as described. Perfect service, thank you!

Interesting book with interesting facts. Would give it a good rating. I needed information for a lecture i was giving on sex. Got some relevant info.

This book takes you back in time to before the beginning of sex as we know it today. Fun to think about how we got HERE!

Arrived on time and was as promised

Archaeology is ultimately an act of the imagination and Prof. Taylor does a brave job in trying to reconstruct sexual behaviors that have had only the most indirect effects on the archaeological record. Many of his hypotheses are stimulating; a few may even be correct. He is adept at pointing out prejudices and assumptions that are so ingrained that we do not even realize we are making them. He certainly changed my opinion on a number of issues. His reinterpretation of passages in classical history is also most helpful. The topic is extremely exciting and underresearched in an accessible form. However, perhaps because he didn't really identify his intended audience or because of the limited amount of material strictly relevant to his subject, he has padded the book with a rather routine run through human palaeontology and spends a lot of time demolishing straw men in the field like the aquatic ape hypothesis. I often wished he had spent more time dealing (even speculatively) with sex. In several places I was surprised that he avoided or abbreviated discussions when I knew there was more material to present. The result is scattershot and repetitious and the narrative structure falls apart at the end just when the amount of source material increases. I felt genuinely disappointed that he wouldn't follow his speculations through. More a draft or outline for a book than a finished work. Prof. Taylor's nonjudgemental pleas for a tolerant approach to sexual behavior both in practice and in academic study and his mapping of the broad range of sexual behavior in primates are admirable. In this context the book should be required reading for all psychologists and psychiatrists (I ordered quite a few copies this year for all the therapists I know). His list of sources is wide and furnished me with a great deal of interesting reading, though some evaluation of the reliability of the works he cites would be extremely valuable since some of the works are scholarly and some fringe. Additionally, a great deal of his source material consists of popular presentations rather than primary scholarly sources. All in all a near miss, but still a worthy effort and well worth reading.

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