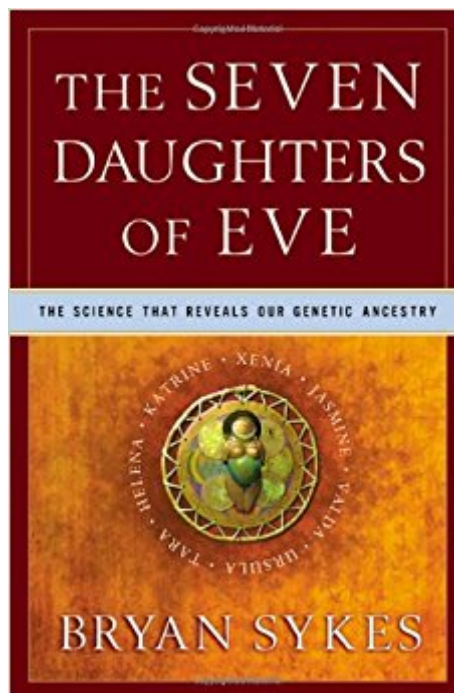




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The Seven Daughters Of Eve: The Science That Reveals Our Genetic Ancestry



Synopsis

The Seven Daughters of Eve is a thrilling work of science that reveals how biological research can enrich our tangled lives. It is a book that chronicles many of the most exciting developments in genetics over the past decade by a man who is not only a brilliant scientist but also a gifted and thoroughly engaging writer. It ultimately demonstrates how much more we still have to discover about the absorbing story of human evolution. One of the most dramatic stories of genetic discovery since James Watson's *The Double Helix*—a work whose scientific and cultural reverberations will be discussed for years to come. In 1994 Professor Bryan Sykes, a leading world authority on DNA and human evolution, was called in to examine the frozen remains of a man trapped in glacial ice in northern Italy. News of both the Ice Man's discovery and his age, which was put at over five thousand years, fascinated scientists and newspapers throughout the world. But what made Sykes's story particularly revelatory was his successful identification of a genetic descendant of the Ice Man, a woman living in Great Britain today. How was Sykes able to locate a living relative of a man who died thousands of years ago? In *The Seven Daughters of Eve*, he gives us a firsthand account of his research into a remarkable gene, which passes undiluted from generation to generation through the maternal line. After plotting thousands of DNA sequences from all over the world, Sykes found that they clustered around a handful of distinct groups. Among Europeans and North American Caucasians, there are, in fact, only seven. This conclusion was staggering: almost everyone of native European descent, wherever they may live throughout the world, can trace their ancestry back to one of seven women, the Seven Daughters of Eve. Naming them Ursula, Xenia, Helena, Velda, Tara, Katrine, and Jasmine, Sykes has created portraits of their disparate worlds by mapping the migratory patterns followed by millions of their ancestors. In reading the stories of these seven women, we learn exactly how our origins can be traced, how and where our ancient genetic ancestors lived, and how we are each living proof of the almost indestructible strands of DNA, which have survived over so many thousands of years. Indeed, *The Seven Daughters of Eve* is filled with dramatic stories: from Sykes's identification, using DNA samples from two living relatives, of the remains of Tsar Nicholas and Tsaress Alexandra, to the Caribbean woman whose family had been sold into slavery centuries before and whose ancestry Sykes was able to trace back to the Eastern coast of central Africa. Ultimately, Sykes's investigation reveals that, as a race, what humans have in common is more deeply embedded than what separates us.

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Customer Reviews

The first 200 pages of this book exemplify the best of scientific journalism: the author describes a difficult subject matter clearly and succinctly for those who don't know much about genetics, he presents each scientific investigation as if it were a detective story, and he conveys his excitement and enthusiasm for his work. Anyone who reads this book will come away with enough knowledge about mitochondrial DNA and prehistoric humans to understand today's headlines. Sykes explains how DNA testing identified the bodies of the Romanovs (laying to rest fanciful stories about how they survived the Russian Revolution), he rebuts Thor Heyerdahl's theories of migration, and he presents a convincing case that all humans of European ancestry are descended from seven women. (He also discusses the possible ancestries of non-Europeans, for which--so far--there is far less evidence.) Given how compelling and fun the majority of the book is, nothing prepares the reader for what comes next: seven chapters containing fanciful and completely fictional reconstructions of each of the "daughters of Eve." Sykes admits he cannot even be sure of where or when each of these women may have lived, but he reconstructs little soap operas out of the nonexistent facts of their lives; these New Age-inspired outtakes from "Clan of the Cave Bear" do not succeed even as good fiction. "Xenia was born in the wind and snow of late spring." "This year Helena's father was going to try a spear-thrower and detachable point for the first time." "Velda had a strong artistic streak." "Tara had always been a fast runner and her father, fit though he was, was gaining on her slowly." (Tara even "invents" a boat.

Many scientists have things to say, but few know how to say them. The Stephen Hawkings (A Brief History of Time) and Brian Fagans (Famines, Floods and Emperors) of the world are rare creatures,

indeed. In *The Seven Daughters of Eve* Bryan Sykes proves he belongs in that small but fortunate club. This work is a remarkably well written narrative of Sykes' cutting edge research into the ancestry of modern humans using mitochondrial DNA. Unlike the DNA in the chromosomes of cell nuclei, which we inherit from both of our parents, mitochondrial DNA is inherited only from our mothers. It is also highly stable over time, which permits geneticists to determine with almost mathematical certainty the matrilineal genealogy of any human being on earth. To students of history, prehistory, archaeology and linguistics the conclusions he draws from his research are absolutely stunning. First, he concludes that all modern humans (beyond reasonable mathematical certainty) are descended from a single woman - Sykes calls her, perhaps tongue in cheek, "Mitochondrial Eve." Second, every person on earth is, in turn, the descendant of one of only 33 women, who were the matrilineal descendants of "Eve." The book focuses on seven of these women who are the matrilineal ancestors of virtually every native European. These seven he calls, again perhaps tongue in cheek, "The Daughters of Eve." Third, the oldest of the "daughters of Eve" lived only about 45,000 years ago, the youngest within the past 10,000 years. Some additional thoughts: 1. As with all knowledge, take this with a little grain of salt. Today's axioms in science may be disproved or reevaluated in a month, a year or a century. This is cutting edge stuff, and there are likely many surprises to come. 2.

Oxford geneticist Bryan Sykes, author of *The Seven Daughters Of Eve: The Science That Reveals Our Genetic Ancestry* just might have what it takes to become another Carl Sagan or Louis Leakey - that rare scientist with both the scientific skills and genius for self-promotion needed to make himself a household name. Sykes has many talents, as well as some useful vices. As this book shows, he's a fine popular science writer. He also has a sizable ego and a flair for self-dramatization that annoys other scientists but appeals to the public. He often tends to portray himself in *The Seven Daughters* as a Galileo single-handedly doing battle with the benighted masses of anthropologists and geneticists like Stanford's distinguished L.L. Cavalli-Sforza, who, according to Sykes' not exactly neutral account, just didn't want to admit the importance of his mitochondrial DNA research. Most importantly, though, Sykes has grasped a simple fact about population genetics that resounds emotionally with the average person, yet has largely eluded most learned commentators. Namely, genes are the stuff of genealogy. Each individual's genes are descended from some people, but not from some other people. Thus, Sykes discovered, people often feel a sense of family pride and loyalty to others, living and dead, with whom they share some DNA. Further, if you read between his lines, you can readily understand why - despite all the propaganda that "race does not exist" -

humanity will never get over its obsession with race: Race is Family. A racial group is an extremely extended family that is inbred to some degree. In fact, people are so interested in tracing their family connections that Sykes has gone into business for himself. He started a for-profit firm OxfordAncestors.com.

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