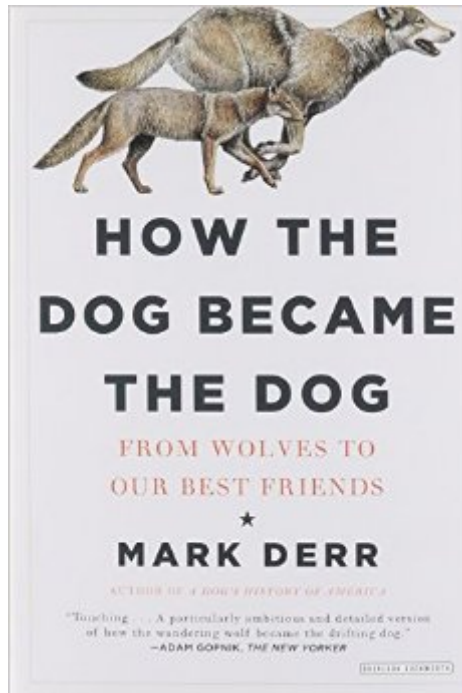


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How The Dog Became The Dog: From Wolves To Our Best Friends



Synopsis

That the dog evolved from the wolf is an accepted fact of evolution and history, but the question of how wolf became dog has remained a mystery, obscured by myth and legend. How the Dog Became the Dog posits that dog was an evolutionary inevitability in the nature of the wolf and its human soul mate. The natural temperament and social structure of humans and wolves are so similar that as soon as they met on the trail they recognized themselves in each other. How the Dog Became the Dog adeptly and engrossingly examines this singular relationship. Combining the most recent scientific research with Mark Derr's original insights, this book shows that dogs made us human just as humans affected the evolution of dogs.

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Customer Reviews

...I think not. The concept is fascinating, but the writing mostly poor. And there is blatant lack of editing. Some sentences are unintelligible even after several tries. The book is almost painful to read as each page seems to have some kind of error ranging from the obvious (e.g. "146,000 to 123 years ago") to awkward wording. I did read the whole thing although parts of it were repetitious. I feel like he went thru the same ice age 20 times. But still, there is a very interesting premise that dogs and humans co-evolved and it certainly is a new idea. I look forward to more research in this area. The description of how dramatically different dogs' lives are now vs. even a few hundred years ago, especially in the first world, is quite enlightening. I had never thought about how we now control every aspect of the dogs' existence whereas before they were much more independent (and still are in poorer countries).

If one wants to understand the nature of dogs, this is a must read. First of all, beware critical reviews that fail to address the specifics of the argument Derr is making, which he backs up with the latest science woven into a logical train of speculation, the connective tissue in any theory, and which is clearly delineated as such. These critics use a vague complaint in lieu of critical argument. Expect a lot of resistance to Derr's thesis due to the current state of political correctness in dogdom which is trying to write the wolf out of the domestic dog's makeup, most especially to counteract the media phenomenon of Cesar Milan. (Ironically several years ago Mark Derr wrote an Op Ed piece in the NY Times entitled: "Pack of Lies" rebutting Milan's approach.) This is straight science by an accomplished scientific journalist and if you're willing to consider a fuller as well as the latest findings on how the dog became the dog, this book should sit right next to Coppinger's "Dogs" in your library. And then let them have at it in your mind.

I am not surprised that this book has both strongly positive and strongly negative reviews. There is a lot of information in this book, much of it firmly backed up with the latest scientific research, but I have to agree with the reviewers who questioned the editing: the book is poorly organized and the same facts, anecdotes, and theories appear over and over again. Having been a student of Mark Derr's in a graduate-level class on the history of dog breeds, I know that he has a lot of knowledge but is often disorganized in presenting it. This is why authors have editors; the editors did not come through here. What I like most about Mark Derr's presentation of the history of the dog's evolution is that he juxtaposes the various theories and points out where they overlap, where they contradict, and where they must obviously be incorrect. He does say that the theories are only scientists' best guesses based on the archaeological and anthropological evidence available at the time they were generated -- so the critics who question the scientific / factual basis of the book are, I think, just being petty. I also enjoy Derr's attempts to look at domestication from the dog/wolf's viewpoint. As humans, we tend to look at things in the way that is most beneficial or complimentary to humans, but anyone who's spent time with dogs knows that dogs are just as good at (or better at) "training" humans to behave in ways that benefit them as humans are at training dogs. Derr points out that domestication was a choice made by both parties and that benefits both -- a partnership view of the human-dog relationship that seems more fair and honest than only looking at what humans can and do gain from living and working with the dog. Much of the information in this book can be found in other books, but this book pulls it together and critically analyzes it in a new and interesting way. I recommend it as a resource for anyone who is seriously interested in studying and understanding

dogs.

I found this to be a disappointing book. (I had eagerly anticipated it.) It starts out by discussing the tracks of a boy and a wolf or "dogwolf" found in association in the famous Chauvet Cave. The author sets much store on this supposed association. He completely disregards the possibilities mentioned in Werner Herzog's recent documentary on the cave that wolf might have been stalking the boy...or that the tracks were made thousands of years apart. I am not a trained paleontologist or paleoanthropologist, so I do not feel fully qualified to critique the major hypothesis of his book--that dogs arose from a very ancient hunting partnership between wolves and humans or even pre-humans. However, when I find numerous errors of fact in things I do know about, I tend to be distrustful of an author's assertions about matters where I can't claim expertise. For instance, on page 68 among the animals mentioned as part of the massive dying off of megafauna at the end of the Pleistocene, he includes the aurochs. In point of fact, the aurochs made it through that period just fine. Some were tamed by our Neolithic ancestors to become our domestic cattle. In their wild form, they were familiar to the ancient Hebrews, Greeks and Romans (they were favorites of the Roman arena) and only became extinct in A.D. 1627. On the same page, the author evinces an old-fashioned prejudice against hyenas. In point of fact, hyenas can be very tame and affectionate if raised from cubs and can do almost anything a dog can as well or better. Although author Derr states, "There is no evidence that any human group tried to befriend them," in fact the ancient Egyptians did try domesticating them. The hyena's downfall as a human partner is their enormous appetite--they simply eat too much. Again, on page 196, he mentions among the New World megafauna that were wiped out around the time of the arrival of humans, "giant rhinos" and "flightless rheas." There were no rhinos, giant or otherwise, in North America in the Pleistocene. The rheas still seem to be thriving over a large part of South America. As I said, I am not a paleontologist. However, I do have a Ph.D. in ancient history, and I have studied the matter of dogs in antiquity somewhat intensely. On page 230, he says, "By the sixth century BC the Greeks recognized four groups of dogs: strong Laconian, or Spartan, hunting dogs; slow, powerful Molossian guard dogs; Crete dogs, crosses of Laconian and Molossian; and Melitan, a small, long-haired, short-legged dog." Now how do we know this? There is nothing notable on dogs in Greek literature before the fourth century. Since the Molossian dog was used for running down hares, it could not have been a "slow, powerful guard dog." This misidentification of the ancient Molossus dog with the mastiffs was the work of Renaissance humanists. Much of the rest of what he says about dogs in the Greek and Roman world is a mere regurgitation of 19th century romantic nonsense. I have been able to find no

evidence that the Romans practiced dogfighting or used dogs against large carnivores in the arena. In all, the book strikes me sloppily researched and poorly documented. A final bit of evidence of the pervasive sloppiness of this book can be found on page 230, where the author attempts a sort of paraphrase of Homer and refers to "Emmaus, the swineherd for Odysseus." The faithful swineherd's name can be transliterated as "Eumaeus" or "Eumaios." Emmaus is a village in Judea mentioned in the Gospel of St. Luke! This may be nit-picky of me, but if the man is going to paraphrase Homer, he ought at least to get the names right! I have to wonder if the copy editor was also asleep at the wheel!

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