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Autor: Cunliffe Barry

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Europe is, in world terms, a relatively minor peninsula attached to the Eurasian land mass. Yet it became one of the most innovative regions on the planet, generating restless adventurers who traversed the globe to trade, to explore, and often to settle. By the fifteenth century Europe was a driving world force, but the origins of its success have until now remained obscured in prehistory.

In this magnificent book, distinguished archaeologist Barry Cunliffe views Europe not in terms of states and shifting political land boundaries but as a geographical niche particularly favored in facing many seas. These seas, and Europe's great transpeninsular rivers, ensured a rich diversity of natural resources while also encouraging the dynamic interaction of peoples across networks of communication and exchange. The development of these early Europeans is rooted in complex interplays, shifting balances, and geographic and demographic fluidity.