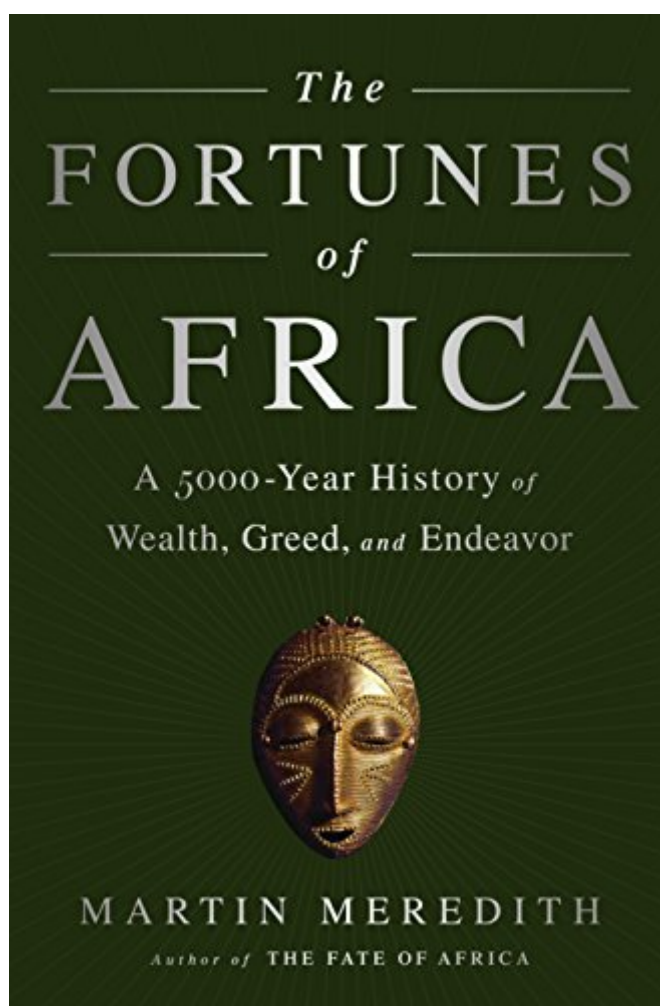


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The Fortunes Of Africa: A 5000-Year History Of Wealth, Greed, And Endeavor



Synopsis

Africa has been coveted for its riches ever since the era of the Pharaohs. In past centuries, it was the lure of gold, ivory, and slaves that drew fortune-seekers, merchant-adventurers, and conquerors from afar. In modern times, the focus of attention is on oil, diamonds, and other valuable minerals. Land was another prize. The Romans relied on their colonies in northern Africa for vital grain shipments to feed the population of Rome. Arab invaders followed in their wake, eventually colonizing the entire region. More recently, foreign corporations have acquired huge tracts of land to secure food supplies needed abroad, just as the Romans did. In this vast and vivid panorama of history, Martin Meredith follows the fortunes of Africa over a period of 5,000 years. With compelling narrative, he traces the rise and fall of ancient kingdoms and empires; the spread of Christianity and Islam; the enduring quest for gold and other riches; the exploits of explorers and missionaries; and the impact of European colonization. He examines, too, the fate of modern African states and concludes with a glimpse of their future. His cast of characters includes religious leaders, mining magnates, warlords, dictators, and many other legendary figures—among them Mansa Musa, ruler of the medieval Mali empire, said to be the richest man the world has ever known. “I speak of Africa,” Shakespeare wrote, “and of golden joys.” This is history on an epic scale.

Book Information

File Size: 7749 KB

Print Length: 784 pages

Publisher: PublicAffairs; Reprint edition (October 14, 2014)

Publication Date: October 14, 2014

Sold by: Hachette Book Group

Language: English

ASIN: B00JZBA9M4

Text-to-Speech: Enabled

X-Ray: Not Enabled

Word Wise: Enabled

Lending: Not Enabled

Enhanced Typesetting: Enabled

Best Sellers Rank: #171,960 Paid in Kindle Store (See Top 100 Paid in Kindle Store) #94

in Books > Politics & Social Sciences > Politics & Government > Specific Topics > Colonialism & Post-Colonialism #148 in Books > Politics & Social Sciences > Politics & Government >

Customer Reviews

Martin Meredith provides an extensive history of Africa for the past 5000 years. It is a grim saga of avarice and greed and more recently of corruption and incompetence. Nevertheless, it is a book that should be read. There are cave paintings in what is believed to be the Bantu homeland in present-day Cameroon dating back 28,000 years and linguistic evidence of a later great migration of these people across southern Africa. In the rocky and now uninhabited Gilf Kebir plateau at the edge of the Sahara desert in southwestern Egypt there are prehistoric paintings of people dancing and swimming and other evidence that the great desert that stretches across Africa was once lush pastureland. The recorded history of Africa encompasses only the past 5000 years and becomes a progressively grimmer tale of the rape of the continent and its people by their own leaders in collaboration with traders and invaders from southeast Asia, then the Levant, later Europe, and since "independence" from colonial rule by native despots interested only in enriching themselves and staying in power by enriching selected others.. Although rich in gold, diamonds, minerals and oil, the main product that has enriched African leaders for the past 2000 years has been slaves, a business only brought to an end in the late 19th century when the British became the major force in Africa. Between 800 and 1900, trans-Saharan slave traffic totaled 7.2 million, Red Sea traffic totaled 2.4 million, and east African trade totaled 2.9 million. Between 1450 and 1900 the trans-Atlantic slave traffic is estimated at 11.3 million. In the 19th century the slave traffic was 4 million trans-Atlantic, 1.2 million trans-Saharan, half a million Red Sea--in all about 6.1 million.

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