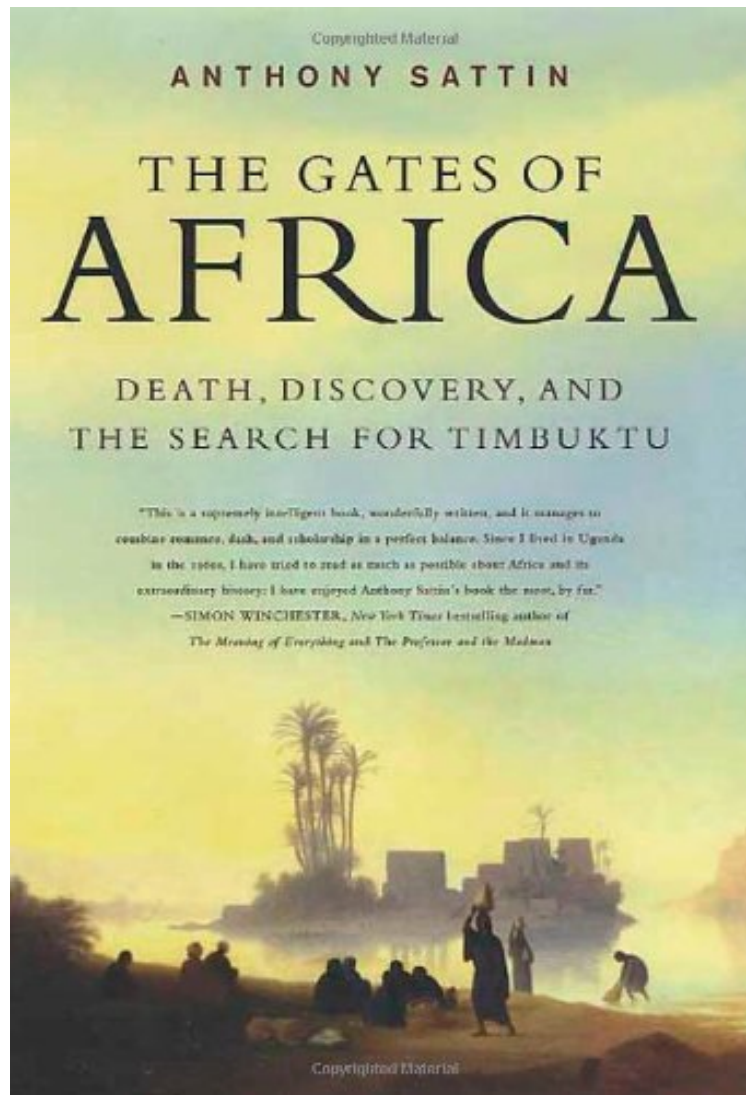


(Read ebook) The Gates of Africa: Death, Discovery, and the Search for Timbuktu

The Gates of Africa: Death, Discovery, and the Search for Timbuktu

Anthony Sattin

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Anthony Sattin : The Gates of Africa: Death, Discovery, and the Search for Timbuktu before purchasing it in order to gauge whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised The Gates of Africa: Death, Discovery, and the Search for Timbuktu:

6 of 6 people found the following review helpful. Exploration of Africa in the late 18th and early 19th century By Utah Blaine It may be surprising to some (it was certainly surprising to me) that less was known about the interior of Africa at the turn of the 18th century than was known about the New World or the South Pacific. The coast around Africa had been heavily explored (and exploited) by Europeans, but virtually nothing was known about the interior. This book details the attempts by individuals and small groups to penetrate, map, and detail truth from reality about the interior

of Africa during the late 18th and early 19th century. Various scholars, adventure seekers, and glory hunters tried to cross the Sahara and penetrate northern Africa to find the legendary city of Timbuktu, the source of the Niger, and new possibilities for trade to bypass the Moorish middlemen. Some tried by starting in Egypt and heading west, others by starting in (or around) Gambia and trekking east. Virtually all of them died in the attempt. There is a lot to like in this book. It uncovers a fascinating and totally unknown (to me at least, probably to many others) era of history. While Bonaparte was stomping around Europe, a small group of scholars was actively engaged in trying to learn more about their world, in spite of the upheaval in Europe. Joseph Banks and some of his wealthy comrades in England would regularly commission various individuals and groups to attempt to penetrate Africa to find Timbuktu and the source of the Niger. The goals were nominally scientific - to ascertain the position of various landmarks, rumored cities, etc., but as the expeditions failed and the situation in Europe changed, the goals evolved to become more economic and geopolitical. Roughly 40% of this book is effectively a travelogue in which the exploits of the various explorers is recounted. In some cases the journals of these explorers has survived and Sattin has reconstructed the tales of their adventures. It would have taken some big cojones to attempt what some of these brave (foolish?) men did. There are several reasons why I only give this work four stars. First, roughly 60% of the book covers the political machinations of Joseph Banks and his cronies. This is important to the story, but I wanted to read more about Africa, not about wealthy Londoners. Too much time is spent in London. I wanted to learn more about the explorers, the people and wildlife and terrain in Africa, etc. and less about Banks and crew. Second, this isn't the kind of book most people are going to need to add to their collection. It is now out of print as I write this review (26JUL09), but I wouldn't spend my money again to buy it. Definitely readable, but as a relatively expensive hardback, not really collectible. I won't be returning to it again and again. Third, the ending is really disappointing. Someone finally makes it across the country, and that's it. There were lots of loose threads that could really have been tied up together, and the narrative could have been taken a bit further. It was almost as if Sattin just got tired of writing and ended the story at a convenient point. Bottom line is that this is a good read for anyone interested in Africa and the age of exploration, but not a uniquely outstanding book.

0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. Engrossing read
By Donald R. Chance
This is a great book on early exploration (18th and 19th centuries) of the northern half of Africa. I did not know we knew so little about Africa not too long ago. The men who explored this area were real adventurers. Unfortunately their efforts and sacrifices cost them all their lives. It was an eye opener to learn slavery trade was an African staple.

0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. Must read
By JJA
very well researched non-fiction book that reads like a fictional story of heroic adventurers and their dangerous (often fatal) journeys to discover a new land. I'm currently a Peace Corps volunteer in Senegal, so it was exciting to learn about the first adventurers in the region that I am currently living

London, 1788: a group of British gentlemen---geographers, scholars, politicians, humanitarians, and traders---decide it is time to solve the mysteries of Africa's unknown interior regions. Inspired by the Enlightenment quest for knowledge, they consider it a slur on the age that the interior of Africa still remains a mystery, that maps of the "dark continent" are populated with mythical beasts, imaginary landmarks, and fabled empires. As well, they hoped that more accurate knowledge of Africa would aid in the abolition of the slave trade. These men, a mixed group of soldiers and gentlemen, ex-convicts, and social outcasts, form the African Association, the world's first geographical society, and over several decades send hardened, grizzled adventurers to replace speculation with facts and remove the beasts from the maps. The explorers who ventured forth included Mungo Park, whose account of his travels would be a bestseller for more than a century; American John Ledyard; and Jean Louis Burckhardt, the discoverer of Petra and Abu Simbel. Their exploits would include grueling crossings of the Sahara, the exploration of the Nile, and---most dramatically---the search for the great River Niger and its legendary city of gold: Timbuktu. Anthony Sattin weaves the plotting of the London gentlemen and the experiences of their extraordinary explorers into a gripping account of high adventure, international intrigue, and geographical discovery. *The Gates of Africa* is a story of human courage and fatal ambition, a groundbreaking insight into the struggle to reveal the secrets of Africa.

From Publishers Weekly
Journalist and travel writer Sattin (*The Pharaoh's Shadow*, etc.) pens a remarkable history of the African Association, the world's first geographical society. Formed in London in 1788 by wealthy patrons who believed that Africa needed to be explored and mapped more fully, the Association aimed to find the fabled city of Timbuktu, discover the course of the Niger and locate the source of the Nile. Using a wealth of historical and biographical materials, Sattin provides exciting--and sometimes ironic--accounts of the amazing and often doomed travels of extraordinary adventurers supported by the Association, including Mungo Park, the first European to find the Niger; Gordon Laing, who reached Timbuktu after being shot by a local tribesman only to find that the city was in shambles; and Jean Louis Burckhardt, who became fluent in Arabic and who, disguised as Ibrahim ibn Abdullah, became one of the first Europeans to journey to Mecca and the first since the Crusades to see the ancient city of Petra. Sattin delivers a lively and fascinating study of the Association, about which little has been previously written, and shows how the achievements of the men and their missions not only expanded the knowledge of Africa, but also left a

"lasting legacy" in the fields of exploration and geographical investigation. Copyright Reed Business Information, a division of Reed Elsevier Inc. All rights reserved. From Booklist As the predecessor of the distinguished and internationally renowned Royal Geographic Society, the African Association's significance has been minimized in the annals of African exploration and geography. Founded in 1788 by a handful of scientists, explorers, and entrepreneurs, the African Association was responsible for commissioning expeditions to investigate heretofore-uncharted sectors of the African interior. This fascinating narrative reaches back in time, breathing new life into the forward-thinking men who established the association and the intrepid adventurers who undertook a series of dangerous, exhilarating missions in the name of progress. As an interesting sidebar, the African Association's staunch opposition to the slave trade is also documented. Historians, geographers, and armchair travelers will be captivated by this irresistible combination of adventure, intrigue, and heroism. Margaret Flanagan Copyright American Library Association. All rights reserved "An extraordinary panorama of adventure, scholarship, and intellectual enterprise." - Jan Morris, author of Venice and Manhattan '45 "Elegantly told, richly researched, and profoundly moving." - Adam Nicolson, The Daily Telegraph "Absorbing, highly readable and in places ironically humorous... A well-rounded and definitive study." - Martin Booth, The Sunday Times "An important, pioneering, and extremely entertaining contribution to the history of travel." - Justin Marozzi, Literary "Sattin has excelled himself." - Cond Nast Traveller "This is the stuff of which ripping yarns are made---and Anthony Sattin has certainly written one here." - Geographical Magazine "The Gates of Africa tells a story that has never been adequately told before and does so with style and scholarship. A remarkable story told remarkably well." - Andrew Gouldie, The Times Higher Education Supplement