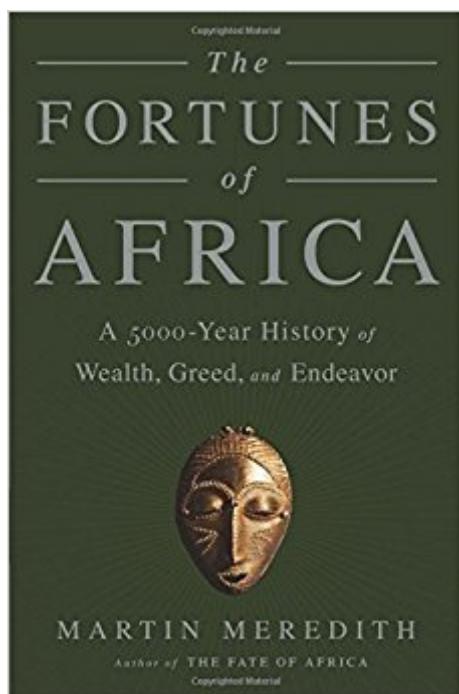


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# The Fortunes Of Africa: A 5000-Year History Of Wealth, Greed, And Endeavor



## 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

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## Customer Reviews

"Even the longtime specialist is likely to learn lots of things because of the extraordinary

amount of ground the author covers. — Howard French, The Wall Street Journal  
Mr Meredith artfully weaves together exploration, trade and geography in a narrative that is both detailed and arresting; [he] leaves the reader bursting with a wealth of facts — The Economist  
This is the new standard against which future histories will be considered. — Publishers Weekly starred review  
A gripping tale of insatiable greed; personal and collective. — Booklist, starred review  
[A] broad-ranging history of Africa from the age of the pharaohs to the present, with a solid emphasis on economics; richly detailed; a useful study. — Kirkus Reviews

Martin Meredith is a journalist, biographer, and historian who has written extensively on Africa and its recent history. His previous books include *Mandela*, *Mugabe*, *Diamonds, Gold, and War*, *Born in Africa*, and *The Fate of Africa*. He lives near Oxford, England.

Great depth in solving the mystery of why things developed into the Africa that we know today. Africa's great wealth has never been fully actualized by its inhabitants and so many others pillaged the resources and abused the people. This book has many of the whys?

Comprehensive, clear, compellingly written. A treasure for those who want to understand today's Africa.

Excellent book.

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. The slave traders bought from local African chieftains who waged war with nearby tribes and imposed the criminal penalty of slavery on their own people in order to provide the slaves. As mentioned the slave trade external to Africa was only ended by the power of the British Royal Navy at the end of the 19th century, but within Africa it continued into the 20th century and beyond. The large-scale extraction of the wealth of the land was carried out in the 19th and 20th centuries by colonial companies--diamonds by the British in southern Africa, rubber by the Belgians in the Congo, etc.--with very little of the wealth remaining in Africa directed for the benefit of the people. Since the end of colonialism, more of the extracted wealth remains in Africa, but to enrich corrupt local despots and their cronies rather than to improve the living standards of the broader African people, and the same fate befalls the new wealth of foreign aid..

The subtitle's reference to a '5,000-year history' is slightly misleading because the bulk of this 700-page book is about the history of Africa from the 19th century. The first couple of chapters provide brief glimpses of Egypt from its ancient civilization a few hundred years BCE but beyond that, there is only history of early man that one has to find from books on evolution and anthropology. This does not detract from the great value of this book. This book covers a vast continent from its discovery by the Western explorers to modern times, including the rise of the Muslim Brotherhood and the fall of Hosni Mubarak. Given its scope, the accounts are brief and general but written in an engaging and accessible style and so provides an excellent overview of the general history of Africa. The serious scholar may find the descriptions a little too sweeping but it is almost impossible to add qualifications and details would have disrupted the flow and harmony of the text. For example, the chapters on diamonds, the British, and the Afrikaners are nothing like the more detailed work in the author's other book, 'Diamonds, Gold and War', 2007 Pocket Books. Another detailed account may be found in Leonard Thomson's 'A History of South Africa', 2001 Yale University Press.

Wow, it really explains how and why African Americans are not further along in acquiring wealth.

Excellent 5000 Year History of Wealth, Greed and Endeavor. the author Martin Meredith researched and wrote many successful stories of Africa.

Excellent Read. Lots of different topics covered in reasonable detail. Also get a feel for how the regional histories fit together.

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