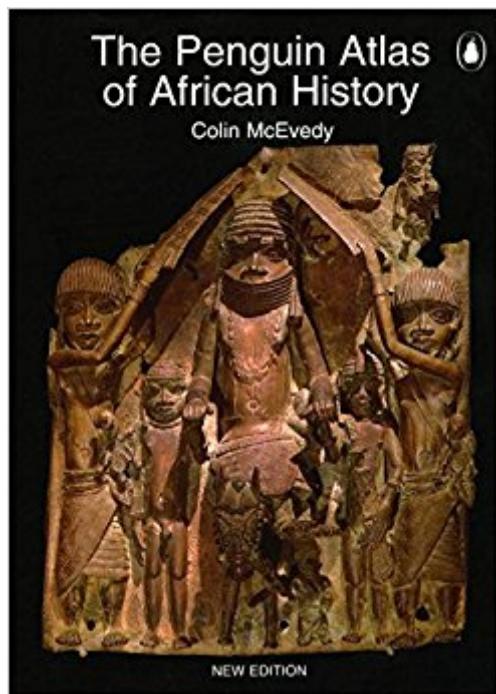


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The Penguin Atlas Of African History: Revised Edition



Synopsis

This invaluable reference work provides an account of the development of African society from 175 million years ago, through the first appearance of humans to the complex polity of the twentieth century. Colin McEvedy tracks the development of modern man, the differentiation and spread of languages, the first crossings of the Sahara, the exploration of the Niger, and the search for the 'fountains of the Nile'. Gold and ivory lure traders from far away; Christendom and Islam compete for African attention. Names from the distant past become nation-states with aspirations appropriate to the modern world. With sixty maps and a clear, concise text, this synthesis is especially useful to African studies and history teachers, but is also a fascinating guide for the general reader.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

The Penguin Atlases of Ancient, Medieval and Modern History covered only the history of Europe. This offering gives a bit more balance to the series and has a better claim to be the "Penguin Atlas of Human History" since it begins with maps of the oldest known hominid fossil finds. As with the other books in the series, the maps are very well laid out and will be irresistible to history buffs like myself. The emphasis is definitely on political history, but there are a few maps of population densities and trade routes. The text that accompanies the maps is not bad, but is definitely not up to the same standard. Some of the information is even a little dubious (especially in the discussion of human evolution). There is also a tendency to see things from a European point of view, and I would have preferred a little less on the "exploration" of the continent and a little more on cultural history. The Penguin Atlas of African History is a reference work that should be on everyone's

shelves, but it should probably be backed up with a more detailed history of the continent.

The maps in this book provide an excellent visual history for anyone who has read a plethora of books involving different peoples and locations in Africa. Now one can compare the locations (and times) at which these different events occur! While acknowledging that the African slave trade (both intra-African & Trans-Saharan) existed long before the Europeans arrived on the scene and accepting the historical accuracy of Berbers and Moriscos such as Ibn Battuta and Leo Africanus as well as of Westerners like Mungo Park and Dr. Livingstone, McEvedy attempts to maintain a neutral position throughout. The work is not without flaw, for McEvedy could have left out pages 8 - 19 and actually improved the work. More importantly, he fails to give any sources or references. This limits the usefulness of the book's text and indicates that this is just an outline for use with more scholarly texts. Still, the book provides a decent consideration of the early ethnic groups of Africa from the Afro-Asiatics (Hamito-Semitic), Niger-Congolese ("Negro") and Nilo-Saharan to the Pygmies & San. It also gives a clear picture of the expansion of the Nilo-Saharan toward the west and of the Niger-Congolese (especially the Bantu peoples) to the south and east and the growth and expansion of Egypt, Carthage, the Roman Empire, the Vandals, Byzantine Empire and the Arab Caliphate. We also get a clear picture of the break-up of the old Caliphate and the establishment of independent and virtually independent kingdoms of Arabs (and Moors in Morocco & Spain) and their expansion (as well as that of Islam to the south with the development of the Trans-Saharan trade routes around 900 A.D.). The rise of the Ottoman control of eastern North Africa, the beginnings of the relatively small Portuguese (and Afro-Portuguese) settlements at the Angolan and Mozambique coasts and the beginnings of Cape Colony. The French slowly begin to establish colonies in Algiers and Senegal, the expansion of the Boers and the beginnings of the "scramble" (see Packenham's *THE SCRAMBLE FOR AFRICA*) which resulted in almost all of Africa being made into colonies of the different European empires. Of special interest are the maps showing the routes taken by the various Muslim and Western explorers and the growth of different parts of the population such that the Afro-Asiatics went from being the majority of peoples in Africa to the Niger-Congolese (along with the Nilo-Saharan) making up the vast majority of the African population. McEvedy does an excellent job of explaining why, despite the very large number of slaves which were taken from sub-Saharan Africa, the local populations managed to actually increase in size (the number of people sold, captured or kidnapped into slavery was less than 1/2 the expected rate of increase and most were males thus only making minor reductions in the number of local women able to reproduce). Again, an excellent introduction to African history and

reference, but it should not be - and was not intended to be - a scholarly work. Indeed, the author even eschews the term "reference" in support of the idea that it is just an outline.

This entire series is superb and is absolutely essential for any lover of historical atlases. I have been an owner of virtually all of them for at ten years and I can honestly say that they are most read books of all that I own. The reason is their unique portability and scope. Most historical atlas are huge, heavy and expensive. They are difficult to read unless you are sitting at a table and very difficult to carry. This limits their utility (even though I still love them). Most history books have lots of dense detail about one nation or one period. Virtually none cover the broad sweep of an entire region over centuries. This atlas covers Africa and a bit of the Middle East as well. It starts in 175 million years ago and finishes in 1994. In all, it has 60 maps. Unlike most of the other Penguin Historical Atlas, there is a quite a bit of focus on pre-history and ethnicity. Like all Penguin Historical Atlases, it is small, light, reasonably priced and incredibly broad in scope. These atlases offer a unique perspective on history than is otherwise impossible to achieve. Their size and weight make them perfect for travelling. Whenever I go on a trip, I take the most relevant ones with me. That way I can brush up on my history of the region. The format is extremely useful. Each two-page layout represents a specific time period. On the right is a historical map. On the left is a very brief overview of the important events that happened since the previous map. Each event usually consists of one paragraph or at most a few paragraphs, just enough to peak the interest. Most of the maps document boundaries and note a few key cities or battlegrounds. Occasionally, the maps focus on population, religion or economics. What is most fun for me is to trace the history of one nation, province or sub-region through the entire atlas. In just a few minutes I can learn as much as spending days reading an entire book. You can also see how individual nations interact with each other, a subject often left out of typical history books.

This is a very good book even if it has become out of date due to recent finding. I love maps. I guess the visual aspects help me understand history through the changing borders. This is the cause of so much strife in world in our modern world. So it applies to the why of events that take place. This book starts with the "birth" of man and moves forward fine their. I purchased it originally because I wanted to understand the outcome of the colonial period. But once I started looking at it, I couldn't get my nose out. Each map delineates important changes and why they occurred. It is an evocative way to learn history. I recommend this book for anyone from grade school on up as a way to explore history in a visual and memorable way. It puts events into an order and context.

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