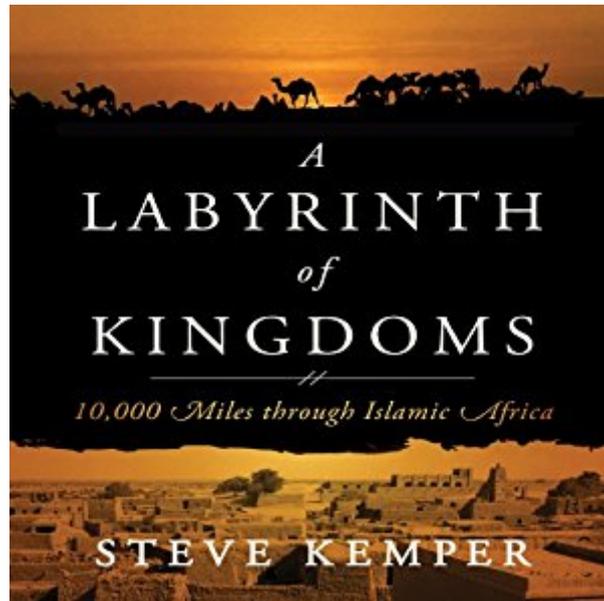


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Labyrinth Of Kingdoms: 10,000 Miles Through Islamic Africa



Synopsis

A true story that rivals the travels of Burton or Stanley for excitement, and surpasses them in scientific achievements. In 1849 Heinrich Barth joined a small British expedition into unexplored regions of Islamic North and Central Africa. One by one his companions died, but he carried on alone, eventually reaching the fabled city of gold, Timbuktu. His five-and-a-half-year, 10,000-mile adventure ranks among the greatest journeys in the annals of exploration, and his discoveries are considered indispensable by modern scholars of Africa. Yet because of shifting politics, European preconceptions about Africa, and his own thorny personality, Barth has been almost forgotten. The general public has never heard of him, his epic journey, or his still-pertinent observations about Africa and Islam; and his monumental five-volume *Travels and Discoveries in North and Central Africa* is rare even in libraries. Though he made his journey for the British government, he has never had a biography in English. Barth and his achievements have fallen through a crack in history.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

Wow. This is a fascinating, carefully researched biography of a mid-nineteenth century German explorer who is quite likely the greatest explorer you've never heard of. I've long been an admirer of Richard Francis Burton, and am acquainted with the most famous of the explorers of Africa, but I hadn't heard of Barth. The book is almost entirely focused on his epic 5+ year journey and seemingly has it all: desert caravans, slave raids, treacherous/opportunistic guides, hostile tribes, robbers and thieves, exotic disease, forced marches through brutal climates and punishing terrain, trade centers,

rebellions, bungled communications, political intrigue, suspicious chieftains, eunuchs, harems, etc. You get the idea- it more than holds its own as an adventure story. Considering the many dangers and frequent setbacks, it's incredible he survived. But what sets Barth apart from other explorers, especially considering the time he lived in, is that he was insatiably curious about, and respectful of, the many cultures he came into contact with as he navigated through several African Kingdoms and many different spheres of political influence. He was a Christian, but was well versed in Islam. He became intimate with sheiks, emirs and other rulers, as well as many ordinary Africans; and as a result he found scholarship, an esteem for learning, complex politics, and probably most surprisingly to Europeans of the time- a history. And he meticulously recorded it all. He was fluent in Arabic, and literally collected African languages as he went along. His treatment of Africans as fellow human beings went a long way in adding to the immense amount of knowledge he came away with.

Most folks today, if they think about Africa at all, believe it to be the Africa you would see in movies or the old television show "Ramar of the Jungle", a place populated exclusively by natives in loincloths carrying spears and speaking almost unintelligibly. This book shows that these ideas are not the realities that existed before the coming of the European colonial era in the second half of the 19th century. In the pages of this excellent work, the reader will find the tale of a tenacious German explorer who was part of an expedition to central Africa sponsored by the British government. He spent almost 5 years roaming throughout the middle of Africa, and seeing many kingdoms and "empires" populated by educated and quite learned folks. He was not your usual explorer, for he took the time and the effort to learn the local languages, and also Arabic, which was used in many places because of the establishment of Islam there. Copious notes were taken and drawings and maps created to aid him in describing the area to the world when he returned. Perhaps the part of the book that may be the most fascinating to readers is his journey to, and stay in, the fabled city of Timbuktu, the "Holy Grail" of all African explorers, along with the search for the source of the Nile. Dr. Barth immersed himself in the local culture, and held educated discussions with both the rulers and learned men of the places where he visited. He went through some ghastly experiences and survived, but his book was not really well received because he downplayed his dangers and concentrated on relating his geographical and linguistic findings. The people at that time, and probably today, were more interested in stories of thrills and adventure, such as those written by Burton and Livingstone.

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