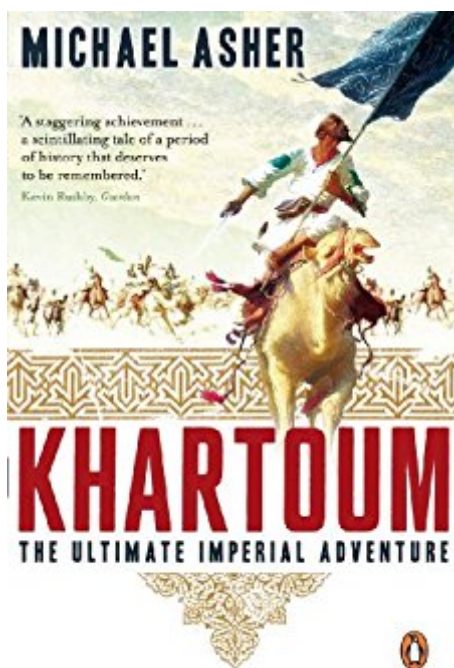


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Khartoum: The Ultimate Imperial Adventure



Synopsis

The British campaign in the Sudan in Queen Victoria's reign is an epic tale of adventure more thrilling than any fiction. The story begins with the massacre of the 11,000 strong Hicks Pasha column in 1883. Sent to evacuate the country, British hero General Gordon was surrounded and murdered in Khartoum by an army of dervishes led by the Mahdi. The relief mission arrived 2 days too late. The result was a national scandal that shocked the Queen and led to the fall of the British government. Twelve years later it was the brilliant Herbert Kitchener who struck back. Achieving the impossible he built a railway across the desert to transport his troops to the final devastating confrontation at Omdurman in 1898. Desert explorer and author Michael Asher has reconstructed this classic tale in vivid detail. Having covered every inch of the ground and examined all eyewitness reports, he brings to bear new evidence questioning several accepted aspects of the story. The result is an account that sheds new light on the most riveting tale of honour, courage, revenge and savagery of late Victorian times.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

Outside of a confusing initial chapter or two compounded by incomplete maps for the disastrous

Hicks campaign, this is a fine book that provides considerable insight into British imperialism in Egypt and subsequent entanglement in the Sudan. There is a real effort to portray personalities on all sides of the Sudan crisis stretching over the better part of two decades in the 1880s and 90s. This was the great era and perhaps the greatest event of Victorian imperialism. Bonus treatment comes through Charles 'Chinese' Gordon, launched into prominence via his role in China before heading to the Sudan and then the conclusion bringing out a link between the Mahdi uprising and the education of Osama bin Laden. This a very balanced study and the author brings out the nuances of the Sudan shaped by deserts and the Nile where water holes, terrain and tribes.

This is the story of the rise of a Mahdi religious leader in Sudan and his attack on General Gordon in Khartoum. It describes in detail the attempts to rescue General Gordon and after his death to exact vengeance. It is not an easy read. It requires concentration. There are foreign words used where a translation might help. The details of battles and marches are not digested in a few hours at the beach. In other words, this is a serious and masterly account of a turbulent, violent epoch in African history. Mr. Asher is a serious historian. Michael Asher displays his mastery of the subject and his strong, vivid style when he describes the battles that pitted hordes of natives against foreign troops. The disastrous battle at Tokar resulted in the massacre of two thousand Egyptian and European soldiers with their British officers. The natives, "Fuzzie-Wuzzies" clad in loin-cloths and armed mostly with sabers, displayed fanatical determination and courage. Within hours they had slaughtered two-thirds of the foreigners. When British reinforcements reached the site days later, they found only traumatized survivors. The author outdoes himself again, later in the book in Section 5, Part 4, when describing the battle at Tanai. His style here is superlative -- strong, incisive, detailed and moving...in short, a powerful narrative of horror, blood, and death. It is the finest and most thorough battle scene I have ever read. The gradual crumbling of British influence in Egypt is sometimes under-emphasized by writers focusing on Gordon's service in Khartoum. This author makes it clear that England was no longer able to govern those ungovernable desert tribes once the Mahdi had proclaimed himself. In the end, the reinforcements sent to rescue General Gordon were not intended to enable him to hold on in Khartoum; they were sent to evacuate him if that was possible. But, in any case, he would not have left his post, and outside help reached him far too late. The death of Gordon is poignantly told, the circumstances fearful, his courage unquestionable. Whether he fought to defend himself on the upper floor of his official residence, his pistol against a dozen sabers, or he was cut down on the outside staircase, will never be certain, but the author does full justice to that terrible, futile struggle. After Gordon's head was hacked off and stuffed into a

leather bag, his body was probably tossed into the Nile. Kitchener's return twelve years later to exact a fearful vengeance on the Sudan is an exciting story magnificently told. The young war correspondent Winston Churchill figures in those pages as he would in so many pages of so many history books. I highly recommend this vivid account of the struggles, the savagery, the casual cruelty, and the indifference to others' suffering and death that are all part of the bloody history of Saharan Africa.

A tremendous account of the events leading up to Gordon's fall at Khartoum. The book doesn't lack detail, and it has no problem describing the men of the era and imbuing them with personality, which is an obstacle for some history-based books. The details of the fall of Khartoum are outstanding for a siege that left few survivors in the city. The author also does an outstanding job of following up after Khartoum with the events that led the British to slowly rally in The Sudan. One final note -- the author's description of the tribes that fought for the Mahdi, and the British, are excellent. It helps the reader glean the motivations, which were not always about religion ... or money. It also provides a basis for some of the characters in the book. I love that the author devoted time not just to the British but to their opponents, something that is lacking often when reading about wars involving colonial Britain.

An interesting look at one of imperial England's last conquests and the politics behind it. Many were sacrificed and others ride to prominence in this war against the Mahdi and his fanatical followers. Well worth reading.

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