Basil Davidson

The Lost Cities of Africa

Revised Edition

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Combining archeological evidence and scholarly research, Davidson traces the exciting development of the rich kingdoms of the lost cities of Africa, fifteen hundred years before European ships first came to African shores.

The Lost Cities of Africa Details

Date : Published November 28th 1988 by Back Bay Books (first published 1959)
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From Reader Review The Lost Cities of Africa for online ebook

Becca says

Basil Davidson was the first person in the West to publicly suggest that Africa had a history and a culture.

Jonathan02px2022sasstudent.Org says

The book details the advances and cultures of the many empires and countries in Africa and zooms in on the origin of the fall of these empires and how we view Africa as a whole today.

Anna says

I was fascinated with Great Zimbabwe in high school. I think it might have been what got me hooked on anthropology - the realization that I'd heard so much about most of the Great Civilizations in Asia, Europe and Latin America and nothing about the ones in pre-colonial Africa.

Max Carmichael says

Grabbed a copy of this to replace the one I remembered enjoying many years ago. Davidson was a good writer and really admirable in his advocacy of Africans, but unfortunately his advocacy was based on the dominant paradigms of "civilization," technology and political organization: Africans are just as good as Europeans because they developed city-states and mastered metallurgy. Only at the very end of the book does he suggest that they might also have cultivated admirable and durable ethical practices in their daily lives.

The problem with judging people as civilized vs. uncivilized is that civilization means whatever you want it to mean. To Davidson it means technology and politics; to humanists it means the arts; at its root it simply means urbanized. If you praise people for their technology and politics, it means you're praising them for their technologists and politicians, the kinds of people who start wars, build weapons of mass destruction in secret, and tell us we need nuclear power. And sure enough, these metal-working African city-states all collapsed. Pyramids and space stations are not measures of greatness.

There have been plenty of insightful historians and anthropologists all along who have avoided the great and powerful and focused on the way societies take care of their poorest members and their natural habitats - unfortunately Davidson was not one of them.

Paul says

There is a lot of information in this book, especially for a complete newbie to the ancient history of Africa. I

wish there had been a few more maps and a couple time lines to help me orient myself. Overall, though, this is a very well research book, even though it is and "outline" as the author wrote. This edition was published in the early 60s. There must be an updated version, which would be exciting to read. Throughout the book, Davidson mentions how more research and exploration was needed. His later books must cover much of that information.

Dennis Greene says

An overview of African History written from a British colonial perspective.

Sandra says

Had high hopes for this book, thought it might give more in depth on African civilizations. Unfortunately, very dated with little solid info. Oh well.

James says

Got this book for Christmas a dozen years ago and finally got around to reading it. This is a survey of African archealogy and written records (mostly by Arabs and Portuguese) of Iron Age African Civilizations and Cities. Anyone interested in Archeaology, history, cultural exchange and the medieval period will like this. Despite being 50 years old, it is a well written, quick read..

Kelly Anderson says

Exceptionally and respectively researched, I found this book informative and interesting. Considering it's publication date, I would welcome any suggestions as to a follow-up. Is there a similar book with a recent perspective?

Tito Quiling, Jr. says

After getting through the history of African-Americans and their migration tracks, I went straight into reading this book as a supplementary material to the previous one. Although, from the onset I sort of perceived that the study is a bit dated and the tone, quite clinical despite the narrative structure of the work. Until I found out that most of the data are from the 1960s. Perhaps it would have been more powerful if there were more information regarding the way that people lived and how some of the cultures could have interacted instead of what they have merely left.

Still, Davidson was able to lay down the historiography of ancient cities in the African continent--from Uganda to Sudan, parts of Namibia, Zambia, and delves into the similarities and differences between East, West, and North Africa. Davidson can also be commended on the fact that he championed the fact that prior

to the coming of the Europeans, African cultures have mastered metallurgy as a primary means of trade, aesthetic, among others and more importantly, had developed city-states, codes of structures, and above all, had rich traditions.