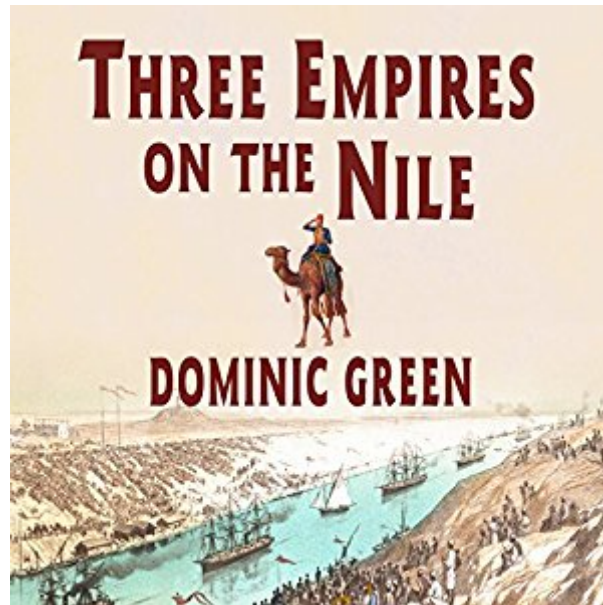


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Three Empires On The Nile: The Victorian Jihad, 1869-1899



Synopsis

A secular regime is toppled by Western intervention, but an Islamic backlash turns the liberators into occupiers. Caught between interventionists at home and fundamentalists abroad, a prime minister flounders as his ministers betray him, alliances fall apart, and a runaway general makes policy in the field. As the media accuse Western soldiers of barbarity and a region slides into chaos, the armies of God clash on an ancient river and an accidental empire arises. This is not the Middle East of the early twenty-first century. It is Africa in the late nineteenth century, when the river Nile became the setting for an extraordinary collision between Europeans, Arabs, and Africans. A human and religious drama, the conflict defined the modern relationship between the West and the Islamic world. The story is not only essential for understanding the modern clash of civilizations but is also a gripping, epic, tragic adventure. *Three Empires on the Nile* tells of the rise of the first modern Islamic state and its fateful encounter with the British Empire of Queen Victoria. Ever since the self-proclaimed Islamic messiah known as the Mahdi gathered an army in the Sudan and besieged and captured Khartoum under its British overlord Charles Gordon, the dream of a new caliphate has haunted modern Islamists. Today, Shiite insurgents call themselves the Mahdi Army, and Sudan remains one of the great fault lines of battle between Muslims and Christians, blacks and Arabs. The nineteenth-century origins of it all were even more dramatic and strange than today's headlines. In the hands of Dominic Green, the story of the Nile's three empires is an epic in the tradition of Kipling, the bard of empire, and Winston Churchill, who fought in the final destruction of the Mahdi's army. It is a sweeping and very modern tale of God and globalization, slavers and strategists, missionaries and messianists. A pro-Western regime collapses from its own corruption, a jihad threatens the global economy, a liberation movement degenerates into a tyrannical cult, military intervention goes wrong, and a temporary occupation lasts for decades. In the rise and fall of empires, we see a parable for our own times and a reminder that, while American military involvement in the Islamic world is the beginning of a new era for America, it is only the latest chapter in an older story for the people of the region. --This text refers to the Audio CD edition.

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Customer Reviews

Truly good popular history should inform, entertain, and provoke further thought. Green's relatively slim (266 pages) volume does all three far more effectively than many a longer tome from better-known, longer established authors. If, like me, your knowledge of European imperialism in the Middle East, Ottoman decay, the stirrings of both Arab nationalism and Islamist reawakening was pretty much framed by movies such as "Khartoum", "Lawrence of Arabia" and the works of H. Rider Haggard, this volume will make sense of a key era of history mainly perceived in the West as a time of quaintly romantic chaos. Green makes his cast of characters, Gladstone, Gordon, the Madhi, et al come alive in ways I never recall from my collegiate history days, and frames their actions, motivations, and the results of their choices in a coherent way that provides the reader with an excellent intelligence brief, not only on the era described, but on the issues topical to the region today. Green shows with great precision how personality often drives public policy, and illustrates the apparent paradoxes of how liberal, anti-imperialist humanitarian impulses can sometimes create empires of misery, and how elitist conservatism can sometimes create social improvements and upward mobility for the masses. Mr. Gladstone, meet Mr. Carter. Green's discussion of the origins of modern Islamism in the odd stew of Western and Eastern ideas bubbling in the dying Ottoman hinterlands is alone worth the price of admission to this book. Without demonizing nor idealizing the iconic figures of Muhammed Ahmad, Chinese Gordon, Winston Churchill, or Herbert Kitchener, we get a better understanding of the Mahdist revolt and a glimpse of how yesterday's news headlines drive those of today. A note to George Clooney and other well-heeled would-be humanitarians who hope to stop genocide in Darfur- READ THIS BOOK! In summary, this is excellent book on a little-known subject that the reader will find very entertaining and enlightening, and I cannot recommend it highly enough. I look forward to more works by Mr. Green.

This is a well documented, yet very readable, recitation of British involvement in Sudan and Egypt in the years leading up to WWI, and the reverberations down to the present day. While many are

aware of the actions of Kitchener and the hysterical reaction back home in England to Gordon's fate (thank you Charlton Heston), few have a clear view of the deeper objectives and consequent military and economic policies that drove England's actions. This history is a useful reminder of the importance of deeply held worldviews of two cultures riven by much, but especially religion.

I really enjoyed this book. This is a book about British involvement in Egypt and Sudan between 1869 and 1899. Much of the policies undertaken then by the British parliament echo present day policies in the Middle East. If you are interested in the history of the Middle East, read this book!!

I most enjoyed the chapters on the Mahdi. According to Islamic traditions, the Mahdi will come to save Muslims from their imminent collapse in society and deliver them from the hands of the unbelievers (the non-Muslims). His name will be Mohammad, like the prophet be peace upon him, and his father will likewise be named Abdullah, like the prophet's father. His appearance will signal the end of days, or the coming of the Day of Judgment. During the Mahdi's lifetime, Jesus Christ will also return to rule the world, according to Islam. It is quite clear that the self-proclaimed Sudanese Mahdi was not the awaited Mahdi Moslems all over the world are waiting for. Yet he was able to save his people from British rule, and successfully retook Khartoum and killed General Gordon after a 300 days siege. Gordon's body was mutilated, and his head severed and taken to the Mahdi. Yet in the process hundreds of thousands of Sudanese died. Was the price worth the freedom from British rule? Interestingly, the Mahdi at first refused to use guns and rifles to fight the British armies, believing that since God was on his side, guns and rifles would be unnecessary. He soon realized though that this was foolishness at its best, not to mention suicide. Another suicidal strategy was to run in masses towards the armed British forces, equipped with rifles and cannons. Thousands of Sudanese died this way, their bodies piled on top of each other. Since any Muslim who dies in Jihad goes straight to Heaven, the Sudanese army was keener of dying in battle and going to Heaven than actually winning the battle. This attitude is clearly shown today in unnecessary terrorist attacks. The Mahdi died quite young, in his early forties and shortly after defeating the British forces. His dreams were of conquering Egypt and then the Gulf states (Middle East), thus cutting the British forces from their Empire in the East (mainly India) and defeating the Ottoman Empire. But right after his death, chaos erupted between the Sudanese and civil war arose between them. The British forces, seeing an opportunity, re-conquered Sudan. The Mahdi's dream was destroyed. Interestingly, during the Sudanese Mahdi's time, another self-proclaimed Mahdi appeared in Libya. However, the Libyan Mahdi did not want anything to do with the Sudanese Mahdi. This demonstrates how religion is used for political ambitions. None of them was the true awaited Mahdi,

yet both believed they were. The chapters on General Gordon (Chinese Gordon) and Mr. Gladstone were also very interesting. It is really amazing to read that Gordon was abandoned by the British during the siege of Khartoum. If only the British sent reinforcements to Gordon, the city would never have fallen and the Mahdi would have been defeated. But politicians back in London, mainly Mr. Gladstone, thought that Gordon was not in need of reinforcements, despite his repeated insistence. Politics! Politicians! Being behind a desk thousands of miles away is much different than being under the line of fire, and this is as true today as ever. It is interesting that some in the British parliament thought that the Sudanese have a right to rule their own country and that the British forces should leave Sudan. Debates actually arose on this point, and this was one of the reasons the British forces were delayed in coming to Gordon's aid. When they finally arrived, it was too late. Gordon was dead and Khartoum had fallen. Another reason for the delay in troop deployment was that Sudan was a burden on the British economy, with more money being invested than actual returns. Sudan was not financially attractive, but rather a financial drain. The chapters on the ruling Egyptian khedive (viceroy) Ismail Pasha were also interesting. Ismail Pasha was westernized, having been educated in Paris, and he liked living the life of an aristocrat. He spent a lot of money for his self entertainment and on acquiring land. But he also borrowed a lot of money from the British to build his country; money that he couldn't pay back. It was Ismail Pasha, together with a French engineer, who built the Suez Canal, separating the Continent of Africa from the Middle East and turning it into an island! His administrative policies, notably the accumulation of an enormous foreign debt, were instrumental in leading to British occupation of Egypt in 1882. When he assumed power, the Egyptian national debt stood at £7,000,000; by 1876 this debt had increased to almost £100,000,000. Eventually Ismail was exiled from his country after bankrupting it and left with all his personal belongings and his personal harem (probably his most important asset) aboard a ship headed for Sicily. He never returned, yet his legacy lives on today by the city named after him, Ismailia. He died on March 2, 1895, in Istanbul. This book reads like a novel, and apart from being informative, is very entertaining. I highly recommend it.

This book was one of the best history books I've ever read (I actually listened to it while commuting to NYC and while finishing chores). I have no idea what one of the other reviewers was referring to when they said it was generally hard to follow. I was able to follow it nearly in its entirety even when listening to it as a disjointed audio book. I highly recommend this amazing historical account, that reads as smoothly as even the best historical fiction I've read.

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