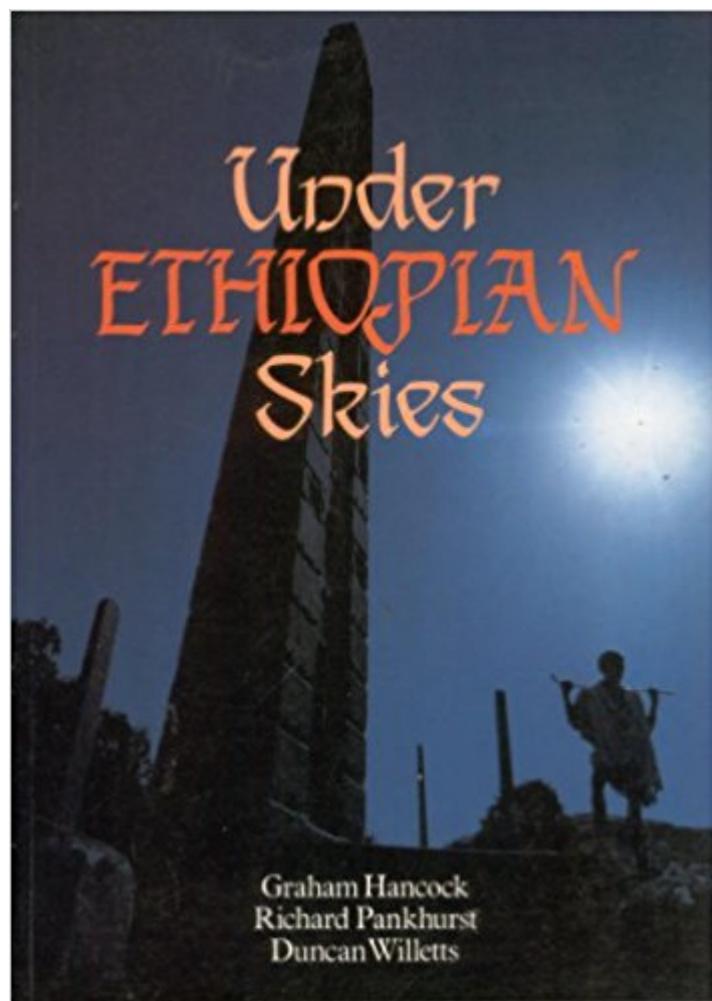


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Under Ethiopian Skies



Synopsis

Book by Hancock, Graham

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Customer Reviews

Book by Hancock, Graham

Under Ethiopian Skies is a collection of absolutely awesome photos of Ethiopian life and history.

Having only a few days to explore Ethiopia while there, I learned much about the details of the people, history and culture by reading this book. You will love it. M. McCarty

I purchased this book when I was in Ethiopia in 1984 (I still retain the quaint currency control sheet indicating the purchase.) is offering the second edition, published in 1987. The first edition (with the same cover) was issued in 1983, and I would assume has the same content. The fact that I was able to purchase the book within the country is a key indicator as to its content - or in one notable case, the lack thereof. In 1984, the country was ruled by the "Derg," a clique of Army officers headed by Mengistu Haile Mariam (who has subsequently been deposed in a coup). The country was nominally communist then, with ubiquitous billboards carrying the pictures of Marx and Lenin. The Derg had overthrown Haile Selaisse in 1974, who had ruled the country since 1930. And that is who is completely missing from the historical account of Ethiopia - "airbrushed" out of history just like one of Stalin's commissars who had fallen into disfavor. (For those interested in an account of Selaisse's final days, I highly recommend The Emperor: Downfall of an Autocrat by Ryszard Kapuscinski. Ethiopia is a fascinating country, unique in many ways, and that is a major draw for the

tourist, either in the proverbial armchair, or with "boots on the ground." Much of the country is relatively cool highlands, but there are also some of the hottest desert areas of the world. It is split in two by the Rift Valley, a deep declivity in the earth's crust that commences on the borders of Syria, runs through the Dead Sea, the Red Sea, and ends in Kenya. The country is relatively equal parts Christian and Muslim. It has distinct, and in some cases unique flora and fauna. And it justifiably lays claim to being the cradle of mankind, or, as we say nowadays, humankind. Ancient history is generally considered less controversial than the rule of Selaisse (unless, of course, you believe the world commenced in 4004 BC). This book contains a good summary of the archeological finds in Ethiopia related to the evolution of the human species, including the finding of "Australopithecus afarensis," by Dr. Donald Johanson, who nicknamed it "Lucy," since he was listening to "Lucy in the Sky with Diamonds" when he found her, a bipedal ape a meter tall, with a 380 cc brain. Ethiopia was one of the outposts of the ancient world, known to the Greeks, and a key waypoint between the Persian and Egyptian empires. Christianity came early to the country, with the rulers of Axum converted in the 4th century. The authors state that the country retains this "primitive" (in the good sense of the word) Christianity. Mohammed's followers, when suffering persecution in their native Arabia, sought and received refuge in Ethiopia. He subsequently admonished his followers to "leave the Ethiopians in peace," which some in the following centuries did not do. Half of the book is reasonably solid text, covering the history, the geography, the flora and fauna, and the ethnographic composition of the country. The other half is pictures, and although not of the artistic quality of, say, Roland and Sabrina Michaud's work on Afghanistan are nonetheless a valuable record, and unique in their own way. The country is difficult to travel in, with a rickety infrastructure, and safety is always a consideration given the numerous rebellious tribes, but the authors clearly had "access," and covered virtually the entire country, including the vast majority that is rarely seen by tourists. Much of the information in the book is difficult to find in other places, and, for example, I learned that the British had been granted a concession and established the river town of Gambela, for trade on the Nile River, in far western Ethiopia. The concession lasted as long as the British retained control of the Sudan. The town is now a sleepy, but rectilinear (!) reminder of that once empire. Of particular interest were the descriptions of the national parks, including the one that constitutes the "roof" of the "roof of Africa," Simien, which ranges between 3,000 and 4,000 meters. And the ones encompassing the lakes of the Rift Valley are equally enticing. (I did an internet search, and tours seem to be available, but there is not much information, which may place it in that wonderful category: for the adventure tourist.) With the Derg looking over the author's shoulder, as it were, it should not be surprising that the text can be marred with such passages: "Not so much a new

society, therefore, but a very old one engaged in the adventure of rediscovering and reinterpreting itself, Ethiopia has about it a tranquility and a certitude that are rare in the modern world." Hum. 6-stars for a unique source of information, and overall, 4-stars for the book.

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