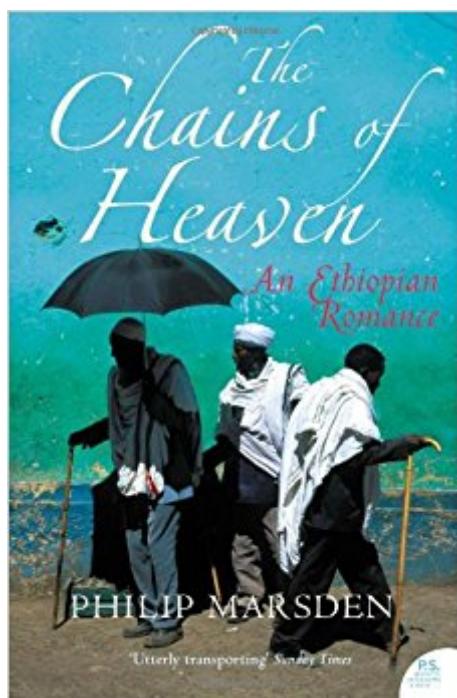


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The Chains Of Heaven: An Ethiopian Adventure



Synopsis

Paperback. Pub Date :2006-08-21 Pages: 310 Language: English Publisher: HarperCollins UK
Philip Marsden returns to the remote, fiercely beautiful landscape that has exercised a powerful mythic appeal over him since his first encounter with it over twenty years ago. Ethiopia bred in me the conviction that if there is a wider purpose to our life, it is to understand the world, to seek out its diversity, to celebrate its heroes and its wonders - in short, to witness it. When Philip Marsden first went to Ethiopia in 1982, it changed the direction of his life. What he saw of its stunning antiquity, its raw Christianity, its extremes of brutality and grace prompted his curiosity, and made him a writer. But Ethiopia at that time was torn apart by ... civil war. The north, the ancient heartland of the country, was closed off. Twenty years later, Marsden returned. The result is this book ...

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Customer Reviews

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A lot of readers are coming to this book because Lonely Planet Ethiopia says it is the one book to read if one is planning a visit. This is an account of Marsden's travels on foot (with mules and guides) around Northern Ethiopia. He first went to Ethiopia when he was 21 years old, but had to leave because the Derg had made the place too dangerous for young backpackers. He returns to Ethiopia a few times after that, but most of this account is based on the trip he made 21 years after his first trip, when he was 42 years old. As a reader, you get a sense of how tedious and difficult the trip was - constant heat every day, high altitude, interviewing older peasants about their Derg resistance as young men - these are simple people who give him simple answers without any analysis of the role they played. Then there is the Ethiopian food that doesn't agree with him, the immense weariness of the dry season, the semi-starvation of Ethiopian Lent, etc... Marsden is a great prose stylist - he makes a tedious trip interesting, and his research into Ethiopian lore is fascinating - he includes wonderful vignettes on Prester John and The Book of Enoch. Lonely Planet Ethiopia borrowed heavily from this book. The book has the same slow, gracious, almost worn-out pace that I imagine he encountered in many of the people. (NOTE: I am reviewing after reading only 150 pages, and I have not been to Ethiopia myself.) Marsden also does a great job of exploring Ethiopian Christianity, whose believers put a far heavier emphasis on demons and demonic possession than do most western Christians. Mary is heavily venerated in Ethiopia - not at all surprising in an atavistic Christianity full of demons. For a reader in the right mood, this book can take you away to a completely different time and place. But I will say that this is a slowly moving story, and I found it a good book to skip around in. The stories that give the reader a break from the main travel account offer some of the most entertaining reading - check out the part where Emperor Menelik learns to drive. One other thing I will note is that this is not an account of modern Ethiopia today - this book was originally published only a decade ago, but it feels older. There is no description of upscale eco-lodges, or the Aid Parade run amok in Addis Ababa, or the legion of well-meaning white folk descending to take home an Ethiopian orphan. It is just a simple tale of a seemingly endless journey on foot from one church to the next monastery, with a backwards glance at the people he met along the way, and the way in which Marsden remembered them, or let them tell a bit of their own story.

Finally Mr. Marsden returns to Ethiopia and gets to travel to the places denied him on his first visit 20 years ago in his first memoir "A FAR COUNTRY: TRAVELS IN ETHIOPIA (CENTURY TRAVELLERS)". He journeys from Lalibela all the way up to Axum stopping at a multitude of

villages and churches along the way. In typical Marsden fashion, what makes the book a gem is the historical information about the country he mixes into his memoir; as well as the popular myths and legends surrounding the locations. I'd also highly recommend Marsden's historical biography of Emperor Tewodros, "The Barefoot Emperor: An Ethiopian Tragedy".

Wonderful book to read before my trip to Ethiopia! These are a beautiful people that have had a very hard life.

This book was delivered on timely basis and in good condition. The book is not something that I find to be interesting or eye-opener.

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