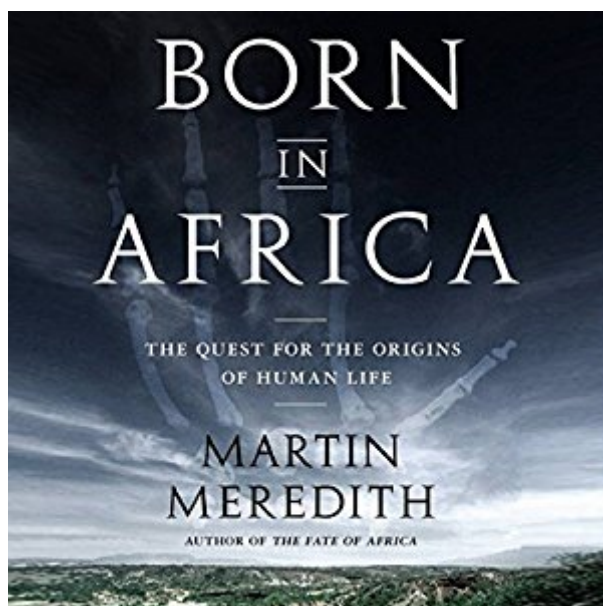


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Born In Africa: The Quest For The Origins Of Human Life



Synopsis

Africa does not give up its secrets easily. Buried there lie answers about the origins of humankind. After a century of investigation, scientists have transformed our understanding about the beginnings of human life. But vital clues still remain hidden. In *Born in Africa*, Martin Meredith follows the trail of discoveries about human origins made by scientists over the last hundred years, recounting their intense rivalry, personal feuds, and fierce controversies, as well as their feats of skill and endurance. The results have been momentous. Scientists have identified more than 20 species of extinct humans. They have firmly established Africa as the birthplace not only of humankind but also of modern humans. They have revealed how early technology, language ability, and artistic endeavour all originated in Africa; and they have shown how small groups of Africans spread out from Africa in an exodus 60,000 years ago to populate the rest of the world. We have all inherited an African past.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

XXXXX"This book follows the endeavours of scientists striving to uncover the mysteries of human origins over the past 100 years...The first part of this book focuses upon the exploits of key field scientists, starting with the pioneer researchers of the early twentieth century. Their task was not only to find significant fossils--the principal evidence of human evolution--but to convince a sceptical scientific establishment of the importance of their discoveries. Some fossil finds remained in dispute for years. Modern researchers pushing back the frontier of human origins to 7 million years ago

have encountered similar hurdles. The second part of [this] book opens at that primordial frontier and moves forward along the trail of discoveries leading to the emergence of our own species, Homo sapiens, and its gradual migration around the world." The above comes from this slim, informative book by Martin Meredith. Meredith is a journalist, biographer, historian, and author. He has written extensively on Africa and its recent history. The pioneer scientists striving to uncover the mystery of human origins, known as the science of palaeoanthropology, were mainly anthropologists and archaeologists. Today we have a many other scientists involved in this science such as molecular biologists, biochemists, geneticists, palaeoclimatologists, geochronologists, and palaeontologists (scientist who studies fossils and the biology of extinct organisms). (More precisely, palaeoanthropology is the "study of the physical and behavioural aspects of humans in prehistory.") The key indicators of humankind's ancient ancestors are fossils.

We all want to know something about our origins! And after reading Martin Meredith's book you will certainly be a little wiser. There are many pieces to the puzzle though. And there is no simple path, where evolution turns a crouching ape into a tall, erect human male over the ages. Instead, the path to Homo Sapiens was very indirect. Along the way, our planet witnessed many variations of the human form, multiple migrations out of Africa. etc. Nevertheless, Martin Meredith gives a good overview: Most of our modern day ideas about evolution comes from Darwin, so it is fitting that Martin Meredith starts his book about the quest for the origins of human life, with a Darwin quote! The most likely birthplace of humankind is Africa, since it is the homeland of gorillas and chimpanzees, apes which he deemed to be our closest living relatives. In Darwin's "The Descent of Man" his precise words are: "The living mammals are closely related to the extinct species of the same region. It is therefore probable that Africa was formerly inhabited by extinct apes closely allied to the gorilla and the chimpanzee; and as these two species are now man's nearest allies, it is somewhat more probable that our earlier progenitors lived on the African continent than elsewhere." That all sounds very logical to the modern reader, but obviously Meredith is right to state that: The implications of Darwin's theory were profound, it opened up the possibility of a world without purpose, or direction, or longterm goal. It stripped humankind of its unique status and was seen to undermine Victorian respect for hierarchy and social order. Sure, it might all be horrible confusion.

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