


The White Nile

Alan Moorehead

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Relive all the thrills and adventure of Alan Moorehead's classic bestseller *The White Nile* -- the daring exploration of the Nile River in the second half of the nineteenth century, which was at that time the most mysterious and impenetrable region on earth. Capturing in breathtaking prose the larger-than-life personalities of such notable figures as Stanley, Livingstone, Burton and many others, *The White Nile* remains a seminal work in tales of discovery and escapade, filled with incredible historical detail and compelling stories of heroism and drama.

The White Nile Details

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Author : Alan Moorehead

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From Reader Review The White Nile for online ebook

Steve says

"I am here, like iron.." --Major-General Charles "Chinese" Gordon

Just outstanding, though I think the "White Nile" part of the story fades quickly after the first 75 pages or so. After that, the figure of General Charles "Chinese" Gordon, and the siege of Khartoum dominates the book. And that's rather amazing when you consider Moorhead's book is crammed with a real League of Extraordinary Gentlemen (and at least one remarkable woman: Lady Florence Baker). What a crew! Richard Burton, who comes across as highly competitive, and a bit sinister; John Speke, who would find the source of the Nile, but who would also die tragically (arguably, a suicide) on the eve of a debate with his foe, Burton; the saintly Livingstone; the soldier journalist (and rescuer), Stanley; the determined and charismatic Mahdi, and, of course, Gordon, a Christian mystic, a soldier, a hero, and, to some, a madman. Moorehead wraps all of this in some wonderfully descriptive prose that sounds, at times, like scenes from a Tarzan movie. Pygmies, cannibals, poison darts, jungle battles, quicksand, malaria, a murderous native chief who walks on his toes so he can imitate a lion, and slaves. Lots of slaves, which is really what this book is about. The slave trade was quite healthy in central Africa, and was wrapped up in the lifestyle of the Moslem populace. Breaking the practice of slavery involved a complex mix of Christian missionaries, war, famine, and the deliberate actions of a number of the explorers listed above. Their success was spotty, but still significant given how entrenched the practice was.

Elisard says

A fabulously well-written history of the explorations to find the source of the White Nile in the second half of the 20th century. Burton and Speke and their quarrel on whether or not Lake Victoria was the source of the Nile. The humanitarian Livingstone and the cynical and opportunistic Stanley. Baker and his young Hungarian wife Florence Ninian von Sass, who traveled in Victorian skirts in areas that killed rugged explorers ("She was not a *screamer*" her husband pointed out). "Chinese" Gordon, who had made a name for himself in China in defeating the Taiping Rebellion, and who was on his way to become known as Gordon of Khartoum. A handful of missionaries, usually more busy quarreling among themselves rather than converting people. Local kings and rulers like Mutesa, Rumanika, Kabarega and Barghash of Zanzibar and their fights against the early European expansionism. And my favorite characters, all the Italian explorers whose names I remember from street signs in Italy, but whose stories I had never known: Giovanni Miani, Gaetano Casati and Romolo Gessi (brilliant tactician in guerrilla warfare against Arab slavers in the Sudan, had a stormy relationship with Gordon: "Matters came to a head when Gessi returned from his circumnavigation of Lake Albert and Gordon, delighted with his achievement, was incautious enough to remark, 'What a pity that you are not an Englishman.'"). And everybody exchanging letters (including Gordon under siege in Khartoum with Slatin who was a prisoner of the Mahdi) and making (and keeping) appointments in the middle of uncharted territory.

Some of the writing is dated and reads rather, shall we say, politically incorrect today; but it is a truly engaging story, and a useful background to understand something about what is happening in Sudan today. Recommended reading for George Clooney...

Dylan says

I loved the first third of this book - I picked it up looking for the grand adventure stories of an age of exploration, and that's what the first third gave me. The rest was a more mundane history, lots of information about geopolitics and military campaigns and clashes of culture and personality. (Mostly, it's a catalogue of crimes against humanity. For all the blood spilled, the book might easily be titled *The Red Nile*.)

Moorehead's biases are in clear evidence (or perhaps they're simply the biases he anticipated in his audience). He's far more concerned with the activities of British explorers and leaders than with anyone else's, to an extent not entirely justified by the central role of the British in the story. He also assumes a greater degree of familiarity with the primary actors than anyone not educated in British history could be expected to have, and he's probably a bit too charitable in analyzing many of the motives and personalities involved. Still, he does a good enough job sketching out the basics that it's a readable history even to someone totally unfamiliar with the subject, and if it's not quite up to a scholarly standard, it's still engaging and incredibly well-researched. I learned a lot, and I'll seek out more of Moorehead's work in the future.

Jeffrey says

Fascinating, adventurous, gripping narrative and so very racist! Moorhead penned this over 50 years ago, and it shows! It's hard to read some passages. For example:

"Normally in central Africa it was the fate of such people to remain in a state of arrested development. In a mysterious way the light of human ambition was extinguished, the villas stayed chained to the Stone Age, and from century to century life revolved in an endless ant-like cycle of crude customs and traditions. There was no curiosity to explore, no desire for change or improvement. Every new generation have way to the same passive fatalistic acceptance of things as they were, and reason was suffocated by habit and superstition."

It jumped around between explorers a fair amount, such that I'm now jumbling up the details. But it was good writing, and a page turner. The blatant racism is a bit jarring though. Also the first half, "the exploration" is far stronger and more interesting than the second part "the exploitation" which really gets into the colonialization process. Overall, I liked it, but have found other books on Victorian era exploration to be more consistent.

Philip says

The cover blurb from *The Baltimore Sun* calls **The White Nile** "a truly great work - massive, monumental...a wonderful story of heroism, a superb feat of research...the best book of it's kind," and they are right on all counts.

This is the best kind of history, fleshing out what we thought we already knew and introducing new stories so wonderful and important we can't understand how we'd never heard them before. Beginning with the first major exploration in 1856 and running through the end of the century, it includes all the great pairings of Africa - Burton and Speke, Stanley and Livingstone, Gordon and the Mahdi - and ties them into a

surprisingly cohesive whole. Along the way, it also brings in such other relevant events and characters as the Suez Canal, the American Civil War, the "White Rajah of Sarawak," the Dreyfus Affair, Major (later General then Lord) Kitchener and a very young Churchill; and introduces a full cast of important and colorful players I'd never heard of before, but will never now forget - the Europeans Emin, Slatin, Baring, Gessi and Baker; the Arabs Zobeir, Tippu Tib, the Khalifa Abdullah, Sultan Barghash and Khedive Ismaili; the Africans Mutesa, Mwanga, Kabarega and Rumanika...

And of course, there's the endless geography lesson - the Mountains of the Moon; the explorations and ultimate understanding of Lakes Victoria, Edward and Tanganyika; the history and importance of Zanzibar; the slow transition from Equatoria and the always-warring kingdoms of Bunyoro, Karagwe and Buganda into today's Kenya, Tanzania and Uganda; the deadly desolation of the endless Sudd; and so much more.

This is a long, dense book - "massive and monumental" indeed - best taken in small chunks. And while the writing is excellent throughout, I found the second half less interesting simply because it was largely a repeat of the Gordon/Mahdi struggle that was covered in more depth in **The First Jihad**, which I read a few months ago - although this is obviously not the author's fault.

The book was written in 1960, and so Moorehead's epilogue is interesting for his surprisingly relevant and timely comments and predictions on the confrontation between Arabs/Europeans and Islam/Christianity in general. He notes that at the beginning of the period, the Western explorers and African Arabs got along quite well, and highlights how expeditions like Speke's and Livingstone's in fact would never have succeeded without the generous support and hospitality of the region's Arabs (mostly slavers). However, this deteriorated over time, culminating in the siege of Khartoum and battles of Omdurman and Um Diwaykarat; and with no irony, the author concludes that "no prudent man, however, would venture to say that this is the final end of the matter."

I will definitely take a breather now and enjoy some lighter fare before tackling Moorehead's sequel, **The Blue Nile**; but I look forward to it at some point as this was just an excellent, educational and thoroughly enjoyable experience.

Howard says

Reread.

Published in 1960, this is still the most comprehensive, thoroughly researched, elegantly written study of the search for the great river's origins and the struggles and conflicts between nations and native peoples to control it and its hinterland.

Sarah says

I read this while I was in Tanzania and it provided great background of the history of colonial "discovery" and development of the region. Moorehead did a great job of bringing the story to life and making the history feel like it was personal. He weaves the explorers journals into the text so that they are often telling their own story. He has a great sense of who his characters are and is really perceptive about their motivations.

The book was written in 1960 and there are parts that are dated and Moorehead is at his worse when he is passing judgement on the societies that the explorers discover. I want to dismiss his remarks as being a product of the time, but I don't know if I can. The best I can do is ignore them.

Those parts aside, the book was delightful. Exactly what history should be. Personal. Engaging. Exciting. I learned a ton.

Bob says

The description is accurate. I picked this book up off of a friend's bookshelf and was captivated. The world described is so foreign to our own that it is often difficult to comprehend. Not only is the physical environment alluring, but the cultures encountered by these adventurers are often wild beyond expectation. What is especially striking though is the determination and will exhibited by these explorers to complete their chosen mission at whatever the costs. One of the most interesting non-fiction books I have ever read.

Bettie? says

To Freya Stark

Opening: **The Zanzibar that Burton and Speke first saw at the end of 1856 was a much more important place than it is today; indeed, it was almost the only centre of overseas commerce worth the name along the whole East Africa seaboard.**

Mutesa of Buganda

Ripon Falls

Murchison falls

Lady Baker

The Sudd

Summer 2013 Egyptian Encounters:

Cleopatra (1963)

3* The Mummy Curse

2* Alexandria: The Last Nights of Cleopatra

4* The Complete Valley of the Kings

1* Ancient Egypt by George Rawlinson

4* Tutankhamen: Life and death of a Pharaoh
2* The Luxor Museum
3* Tutankhamen's Treasure
3* The Black Pharaoh\
3* Nubian Twilight.../ complimentary reading!
4* River God
4* House of Eternity
The Egyptian (1954)
Agora (2009)
CR Justine
Death on the Nile (1978)
2* Nefer the Silent
5* The Seventh Scroll
5* The White Nile
CR An Evil Spirit out of the West
Nefertiti Resurrected
CR Warlock
Queen Pharaoh - Hatshepsut
TR: The Albert N'Yanza, Great Basin of the Nile and Explorations of the Nile Sources

03-07-2013: Egyptian army suspends constitution and removes President Morsi.

Additional reading that flows from the above, much like a great river:

TR Through the Dark Continent

Rosemary says

Australian journalist Alan Morehead wrote this classic on the search for the source of the Nile and the explorations that traced its course to the Mediterranean in 1960 and as a comprehensive and densely detailed story it has yet to be surpassed. Africa has changed but this history, the good, the bad, and the sometimes very ugly, shows the foundation of Arab and European power on the continent.

The Arabs ran a massive and horrifying slave trade through Zanzibar and, for a while, so did the Europeans, supplying slaves to the Caribbean and the American South, as well as European countries. The anti-slavery movement took hold and there began a struggle between Christians, Muslims, and African chieftains regarding the very lucrative traffic in human beings. This is a backdrop for much of the exploring and fighting that goes on.

The book begins with Richard Burton and John Speke, the two great British rivals who disagreed about the source of the Nile. It covers Dr. David Livingstone, the missionary explorer and Henry Morton Stanley, the newspaperman and publicity hound who went in search of him (and later other explorers). Sir Samuel Baker and his wife Lady Baker (just as intrepid as her husband), General Charles "Chinese" Gordon who fell at Khartoum, Emin (original name Eduard Schnitzer, a German-speaking scholar), the Mahdi (Muslim warrior and spiritual leader), Evelyn Baring, Herbert Kitchener, the great African chief Mutesa, and a host of other famous and infamous figures put in an appearance. Some came for the thrill of exploration, some came for fame and the money they could make writing books, some came as missionaries or to stop the slave trade,

some were curious about Africa itself, some were sent by their governments, or any combination of the above. All suffered unbelievable hardships, physical and mental, yet none gave up. Their persistence and their writing--letters, journals, books--provide what we know about this era of African conquest and exploitation. It's not pretty, but it is fascinating.

Morehead has another book, *The Blue Nile*, which complements *The White Nile*. The two parts of the river, which are actually different colors, converge at Khartoum and flow north to Egypt. I think after a breather I may read the *Blue Nile*. Morehouse is an engaging writer and I enjoy his material.
