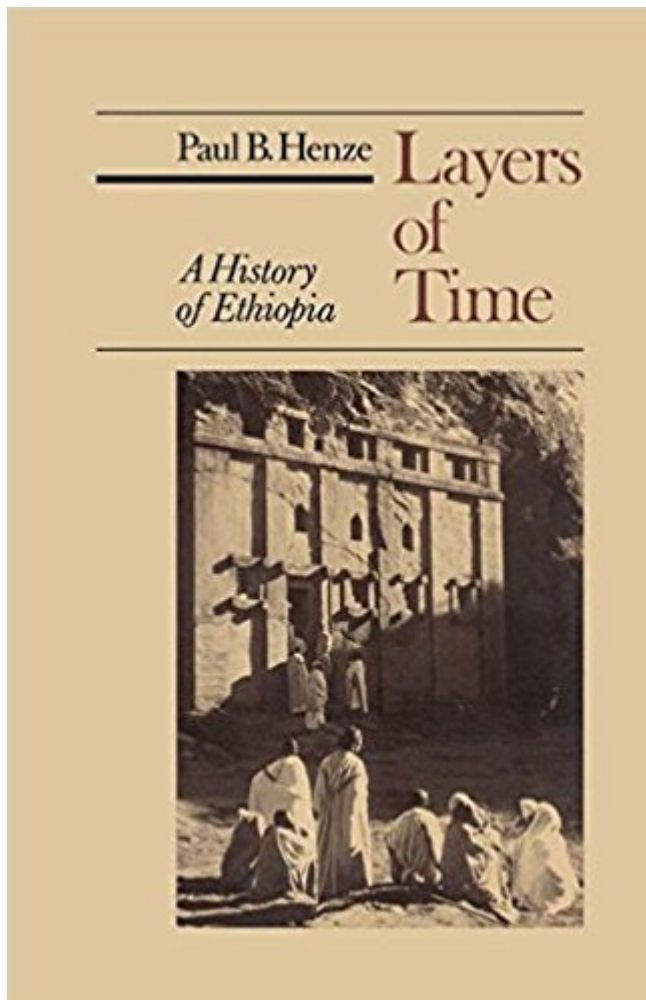


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Layers Of Time: A History Of Ethiopia



Synopsis

Ethiopia is one of the oldest countries in the world. This book traces the country's expansion southward during medieval times, its resistance to Muslim invasion, and, under energetic leaders, its defense of its independence during the European scramble for Africa. The author is concerned not only with kings, princes and politicians but also includes insights on daily life, art, architecture, religion, culture, customs and observations by travelers.

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Customer Reviews

As a Christian island in an Islamic sea, Ethiopia has maintained an allure for Westerners for centuries. With the ouster of the Communist Derg in 1991, Ethiopia is again accessible to scholars and tourists, so interest is likely to intensify. Henze is a seasoned diplomat who has served in Ethiopia and written extensively on this fascinating but still mysterious (to Westerners) land. Thus, this general survey of Ethiopian history should prove invaluable for those with an interest in the region. Henze traces Ethiopia's development from the richness of the Aksumite Empire to its interaction with and resistance to the Arab Empire in the Middle Ages. His examination of Ethiopia's "opening" to the West in the eighteenth century is particularly informative, and he offers rather interesting insights regarding Ethiopia's position during the cold war struggle for influence on the Horn of Africa. This is an easily digested and very useful introduction to an ancient land and people. Jay Freeman

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A comprehensive history of Ethiopia, from a diplomat and former staffer at the National Security

Council, that is particularly instructive in covering the last 20 years. Beginning with a brief prehistoric overview, Henze goes on to describe the rise of Ethiopia: an ancient civilization, the source of coffee, and one of the most developed and long-lasting empires in Africa. The Aksumite Empire that evolved on the lush Ethiopian highlands was known to the Greeks and the Romans, and its legendary Queen Sheba traveled to Israel to meet with King Solomon (a meeting that produced the first king of the Solomonic dynasty that ended only with the death of Emperor Haile Selassie in 1974). A Persian prophet writing in the third century A.D. described Ethiopia as one of the great kingdoms of the age, and later scholars believed it to be the mysterious Christian empire ruled by Prester John. Henze details the turbulent years that followed the decline of Aksum, the devout adherence to Orthodox Christianity, the failed efforts of Portuguese adventurers to gain a foothold, and the great battle of Adwa in 1898. There the Emperor Menelik (who had begun modernizing what was and still is in some areas a medieval country) decisively defeated an Italian army bent on securing Ethiopia as a colony. Henze offers a persuasive and nuanced portrait of Haile Selassie, who did much to move Ethiopia forward (particularly in the 1960s, which Henze regards as a golden era for Ethiopia). But by 1974 Selassie was old, the succession not clear, and, unable to deal with a fractious country, Selassie was forcibly removed by the brutal and bloodthirsty warlord Mengistu Haile Mariam. His rule led to Ethiopia becoming a war-torn pawn in the Cold War, subject to the worst excesses of Marxism--forced collectivization, untold deaths, and a devastated economy. Though it suffers at times from more information than insights, this is a timely study of a country still much in the news. -- Copyright © 2000 Kirkus Associates, LP. All rights reserved. --This text refers to the Hardcover edition.

I can not get enough of this book!! I did not learn most of the historical events Paul Henze covered in this book in my high school history! I recommend everyone to read this book to have a good grasp of Ethiopian history, particularly Ethiopians!!

Paul Henze was a Political Counsellor at the US Embassy from 1968 to 1972 and has been a Resident at the RAND Corporation since 1982. He has spent most of his adult life involved, one way or another, with Ethiopia. He has written a very comprehensive history of that country going back into the mist of time and bringing it forward to the twenty-first century. For most of the book he does a good job of keeping his opinions to himself but this becomes very difficult when he writes about the trouble of Ethiopia in the twentieth century and especially the last twenty-five years. To his credit, most of Henze's opinions are easy to pick-out and are mostly confined to footnotes. Little of

pre-20th century Ethiopia is known to most of us, even though it was the only territory (beside Liberia) to be 'colonized' at the end of the nineteenth century. It was able to remain independent (minus the Eritrean coastal plain) because Britain, France and Italy couldn't agree on who should take it over, and therefore like Afghanistan it was never swallowed up in the 'Scramble for Africa'. Though it was 'conquered' by Mussolini's Fascist Empire, it was never pacified and caused more trouble than it worth during the five years that it was 'officially' colonized. The Italians never held more than ten percent of the country during any time. For anyone who wants to understand the basis for many of the problems of the 'Horn of Africa', this book is essential. Zeb Kantrowitz

Henze's *Layers of Time* is a narrative history of Ethiopia from earliest times through the first few years following the defeat of the Derg regime. It is well-written, with a solid bibliography that provides a useful starting-point for further research. That being said, it is important to note that Henze writes this history as a diplomat. On one hand, this provides him a storehouse of personal experience which he draws on in discussing the latest chapters of Ethiopian history, from the last years of Emperor Haile Selassie's reign forward. On the other hand, however, it soon becomes clear that Henze has a goal to his judgements on the actors in recent Ethiopian history. For example, about the only individuals who draw his disapproval are the former dictator of Ethiopia, Mengistu Haile Mariam, and his former colleagues in the Derg. He fails to criticize the actions of either the late Emperor Haile Selassie or the Ethiopian Peoples' Revolutionary Democratic Front (the current ruling party in Ethiopia); compare the account in Bahru Zewde's *A Modern History of Ethiopia (1855-1994)*, second edition. Bahru is a trained Ethiopian historian, and his discussion of not only Haile Selassie and the Derg, but of the three important prior Emperors (Tewodros II, Yohannes IV and Menelik II) is notably less laudatory. As long as readers remember to distinguish between the facts and opinions set forth in this book, and that there are reasons to omit details other than lack of space, they will be able to enjoy the strengths of Henze's book.

From what I could find, this is one of the few books on Ethiopian history available. I visited Ethiopia a few months ago and read the book before I left. It is a well-written book, not too long or too short, and it gave me a lot of context for the sites that I visited when there. Buy it if you want a text on Ethiopian history.

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