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The Royal Kingdoms of Ghana, Mali, and Songhay: Life in Medieval Africa

By Patricia McKissack, Fredrick McKissack



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For more than a thousand years, from A.D. 500 to 1700, the medieval kingdoms of Ghana, Mali, and Songhay grew rich on the gold, salt, and slave trade that stretched across Africa. Scraping away hundreds of years of ignorance, prejudice, and mythology, award-winning authors Patricia and Fredrick McKissack reveal the glory of these forgotten empires while inviting us to share in the inspiring process of historical recovery that is taking place today.



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- Sales Rank: #826224 in eBooks
- Published on: 2016-03-01
- Released on: 2016-03-01
- Format: Kindle eBook

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Editorial Review

From Publishers Weekly

The McKissacks (*Sojourner Truth: Ain't I a Woman?*) continue to illuminate aspects of African American heritage with this introduction to three major kingdoms of medieval Africa: Ghana, Mali and Songhay. Based on folklore, contemporaneous accounts and modern scholarly research, their discussion covers the origins, customs, people and political history of these civilizations, which flourished from approximately A.D. 500 to 1700 but which until recently have been neglected by historians. Because much of the available information about medieval Africa is sketchy at best, the narrative is sometimes confusing, especially when the authors combine divergent theories or rely on myth and legend to fill holes in the historical record. Still, their volume contains insightful information about an important period in both African and world history and explores such complicated issues as African involvement in the slave trade and the role of religion in establishing, shaping and destroying bygone kingdoms. A timeline, notes and extensive bibliography encourage further reading. Ages 10-14.

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From School Library Journal

Grade 5-7-The McKissacks describe the West African civilizations that flourished between the years 700 C.E. to 1700 C.E. A chronological account is given of each successive kingdom, and there is also substantial information about the social history of Mali and Songhay, e.g., education, the treatment of women, religion, and arts and crafts. The relationship between Islam and politics, and the interplay between traditional and Islamic customs in Mali and Songhay are highlighted. The authors have attempted something unique with their inclusion of indigenous and contemporaneous historical accounts (by such historians as Leo Africanus and Ibn Battuta), as well as in their substantial use of oral history. While this makes for an interesting perspective, it prevents the line between history and mythology from being clearly drawn. For example, in the story of Sundiata, visits from a powerful king in the magical form of an owl are not distinguished from the factual dates that Sundiata ruled Mali. This might limit the usefulness of the book to situations in which adults are able to help students think critically about the text. Adequate but uninspired photographs of ancient artifacts and modern people with traditional life styles illustrate the text. Unfortunately, the maps do not make clear the geographical relationships among the three kingdoms (they existed at different times, and in each case the territory of the earlier kingdom was wholly or partly subsumed under the later kingdom). The helpful notes discuss the validity of certain bibliographical sources. The informative time line links events in Africa to those in other parts of the world, and the bibliography is impressive. In spite of its limitations, this title will be an important addition to most collections.

Susan Giffard, Midtown Ethical Culture School, New York City

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From [Booklist](#)

Gr. 7-10. This history challenges those old myths of "darkest" Africa waiting to be opened up by the "civilizing" Europeans. While parts of Europe struggled to emerge from the Dark Ages, trade and culture flourished in great cities of West Africa, where artisans crafted sumptuous gold objects and scholars attracted students to centers of learning. The history of medieval Africa, long ignored and distorted, is here given full attention. The McKissacks are careful to distinguish what is known from what is surmised; they draw on the oral tradition, eyewitness accounts, and contemporary scholarship; and chapter source notes discuss various conflicting views of events. Nor is the history all glorious: the authors are candid about widespread slavery in the old African kingdoms and about brutal conditions in the salt and gold mines that provided the wealth

for the cities; they depict even great leaders such as Sundiata, the warrior-king of the Mali, as fully rounded people rather than as mythic heroes. Unfortunately, however, this is not easy reading. The facts are dramatic, but the prose is boring. Parts read like research notes, with little of the strong narrative style that distinguishes the best of the McKissacks' work. Included are a timeline, bibliography, and careful source notes; maps to come. *Hazel Rochman*

Users Review

From reader reviews:

Heidi Fritz:

A lot of people always spent their free time to vacation or maybe go to the outside with them household or their friend. Did you know? Many a lot of people spent many people free time just watching TV, or maybe playing video games all day long. If you wish to try to find a new activity here is look different you can read a book. It is really fun in your case. If you enjoy the book that you read you can spent the entire day to reading a reserve. The book *The Royal Kingdoms of Ghana, Mali, and Songhay: Life in Medieval Africa* it is very good to read. There are a lot of folks that recommended this book. They were enjoying reading this book. In the event you did not have enough space to bring this book you can buy the actual e-book. You can m0ore simply to read this book from a smart phone. The price is not too expensive but this book possesses high quality.

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