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The Gates of Africa: Death, Discovery, and the Search for Timbuktu

Anthony Sattin

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London, 1788: a group of British gentlemen---geographers, scholars, politicians, humanitarians, and traders---decide it is time to solve the mysteries of Africa's unknown interior regions. Inspired by the Enlightenment quest for knowledge, they consider it a slur on the age that the interior of Africa still remains a mystery, that maps of the "dark continent" are populated with mythical beasts, imaginary landmarks, and fabled empires. As well, they hoped that more accurate knowledge of Africa would aid in the abolition of the slave trade.

These men, a mixed group of soldiers and gentlemen, ex-convicts, and social outcasts, form the African Association, the world's first geographical society, and over several decades send hardened, grizzled adventurers to replace speculation with facts and remove the beasts from the maps. The explorers who ventured forth included Mungo Park, whose account of his travels would be a bestseller for more than a century; American John Ledyard; and Jean Louis Burckhardt, the discoverer of Petra and Abu Simbel. Their exploits would include grueling crossings of the Sahara, the exploration of the Nile, and---most dramatically---the search for the great River Niger and its legendary city of gold: Timbuktu.

Anthony Sattin weaves the plotting of the London gentlemen and the experiences of their extraordinary explorers into a gripping account of high adventure, international intrigue, and geographical discovery. *The Gates of Africa* is a story of human courage and fatal ambition, a groundbreaking insight into the struggle to reveal the secrets of Africa.

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