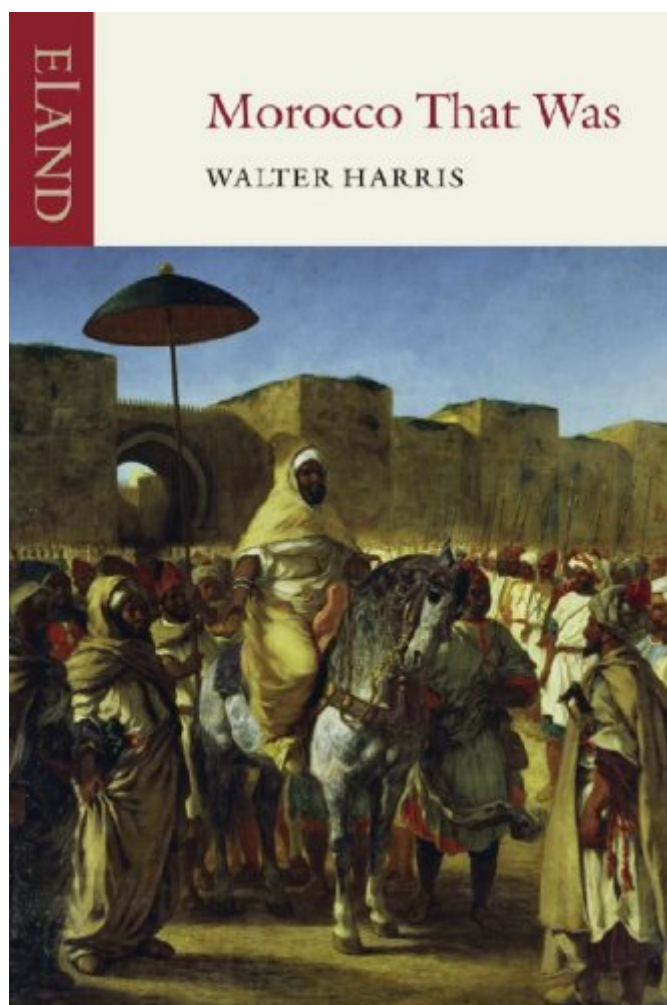


The book was found

Morocco That Was



Synopsis

Until 1912 Morocco had never suffered foreign domination, and its mountainous interior was as closed to foreigners as Tibet. Walter Harris was the exception. He lived in the country for more than thirty-five years, and as The Times correspondent he observed every aspect of its life. He describes the unfettered Sultanate in all its dark, melodramatic splendour. Harris was an intimate of at least three of the ruling Sultans and a man capable of befriending even his kidnapper. Included in this volume is his account of his most audacious expedition. Only three Christians had ever visited the walled city of Sheshouan: one was poisoned, one came for an hour disguised as a rabbi – the other was Walter Harris.

Book Information

File Size: 985 KB

Print Length: 246 pages

Publisher: Eland Publishing (July 31, 2012)

Publication Date: July 31, 2012

Sold by: Amazon Digital Services LLC

Language: English

ASIN: B009IMS33W

Text-to-Speech: Enabled

X-Ray: Not Enabled

Word Wise: Enabled

Lending: Not Enabled

Screen Reader: Supported

Enhanced Typesetting: Enabled

Best Sellers Rank: #256,810 Paid in Kindle Store (See Top 100 Paid in Kindle Store) #12

in Kindle Store > Kindle eBooks > Nonfiction > Travel > Africa > Morocco #40 in Books > Travel > Africa > Morocco #274 in Books > Travel > Africa > General

Customer Reviews

Loved the colorful storytelling

Harris was a Times correspondent from the 1900s Morocco who witnessed the tumultuous transition from quasi-independent sultanate to French occupation. Yet he was also much more - an insider with access to the court and the sultan, someone who could move with relative freedom across the

country occupied by a rapacious government, semi-independent Berber tribes, prosperous Jews who were mostly left to their devices milking hapless Arabs through any imaginable sort of trade, assorted bandits and Italian, Spanish and German spies. Morocco was a strategic pawn in the maneuvering between European powers; Harris documents with tragic precision how Europeans manipulated the hapless well-meaning but weak sultan Mulai Abdul Aziz with gimmicks, tricks and toys. The country was held together by force represented by sultan's army and sultan himself - capricious, unfair, childlike, brutal, controlled by a scheming vizier yet, in a weird way, innocent. Everyone was out to deceive him and suck him dry, so sultan used Harris as (perhaps his only trustworthy) adviser for politics, etiquette, European gadgetry and fun. Harris, after all, was a pukka sahib in the best possible sense of that designation, with an unflappable confidence and courage of the English gentleman (they don't make 'em anymore). There are priceless descriptions of the country and its people. Audiences with the sultan, sumptuous meals, court intrigues. Harris has much affection for the country even as he documents the cruelty, avarice, brutality, naivete, sufferings - but also generosity and expansiveness of its people. Then, as today, walking the corridors of the casbah meant every man for himself. In Harris' view, the French brought sorely needed stability to the country, together with the security and prosperity to the middle classes of Morocco. One can see the legacy of the French today in the roads, the language and bureaucracy. The book is often light-hearted and funny. It's also sad even a bit incredulous when describing the sufferings of the people at the hands of the powerful. Above all, it provides a priceless glimpse in a world that was. If you are contemplating a visit - read this book.

Walter Harris, London Times correspondent and 30 year inhabitant of Tangier, delivers the definitive account of pre-protectorate Morocco and the Moroccan Royal Courts. This eyewitness account of an ancient culture coming to grips with an overwhelming Western influence is both absorbing and hilarious to the point of disbelief. Harris' tales of Berber rebels and a matter-of-fact Sultanry, in addition to his coverage of the inevitable process of European colonialization, captures the loss of innocence which befell a still vital land. A must read for anyone interested in North African history.

Walter Harris may have been one of the most self-important men of his period, at least among the expatriate community in Morocco during his era. Even so, his record in this book is mostly accurate and always entertaining and informative. I might disagree a little with some of his insights, but his perspective is one worth studying and considering, as it was common in his era. If you have an interest in this era of Moroccan history, buy this book.

My favorite book on Moroccan history. Harris has access to exclusive parts of Moroccan society at a pivotal time in Moroccan history (leading up to the French occupation). He writes as a sensitive traveler, but one with an insider's point-of-view. His writing style makes historical figures human; comic and tragic. His book is both funny and informative. Highly recommended.

This book is fascinating. As someone of Moroccan heritage, I admired this book. There are however certain passages in the book that may be questionables but overall I highly recommend it.

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