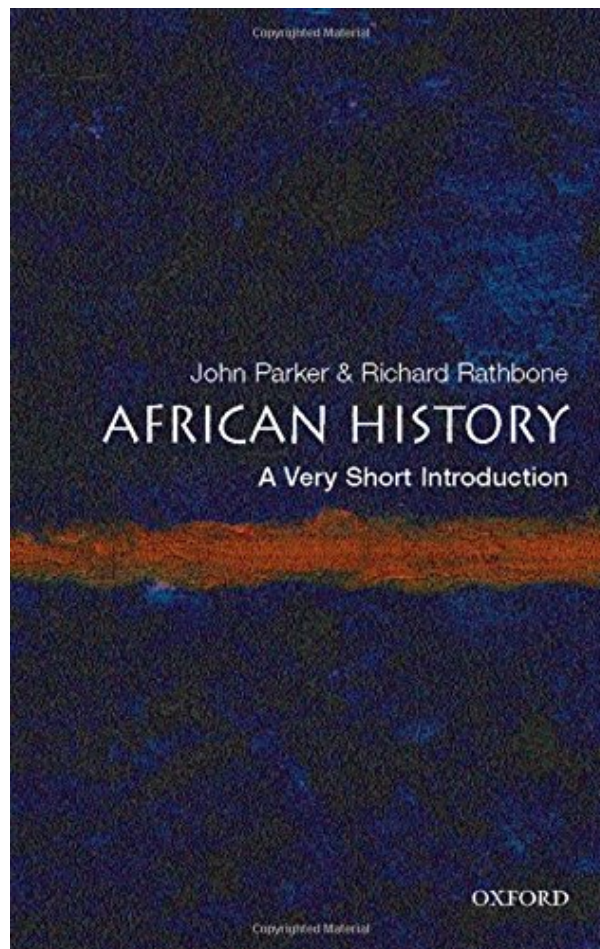
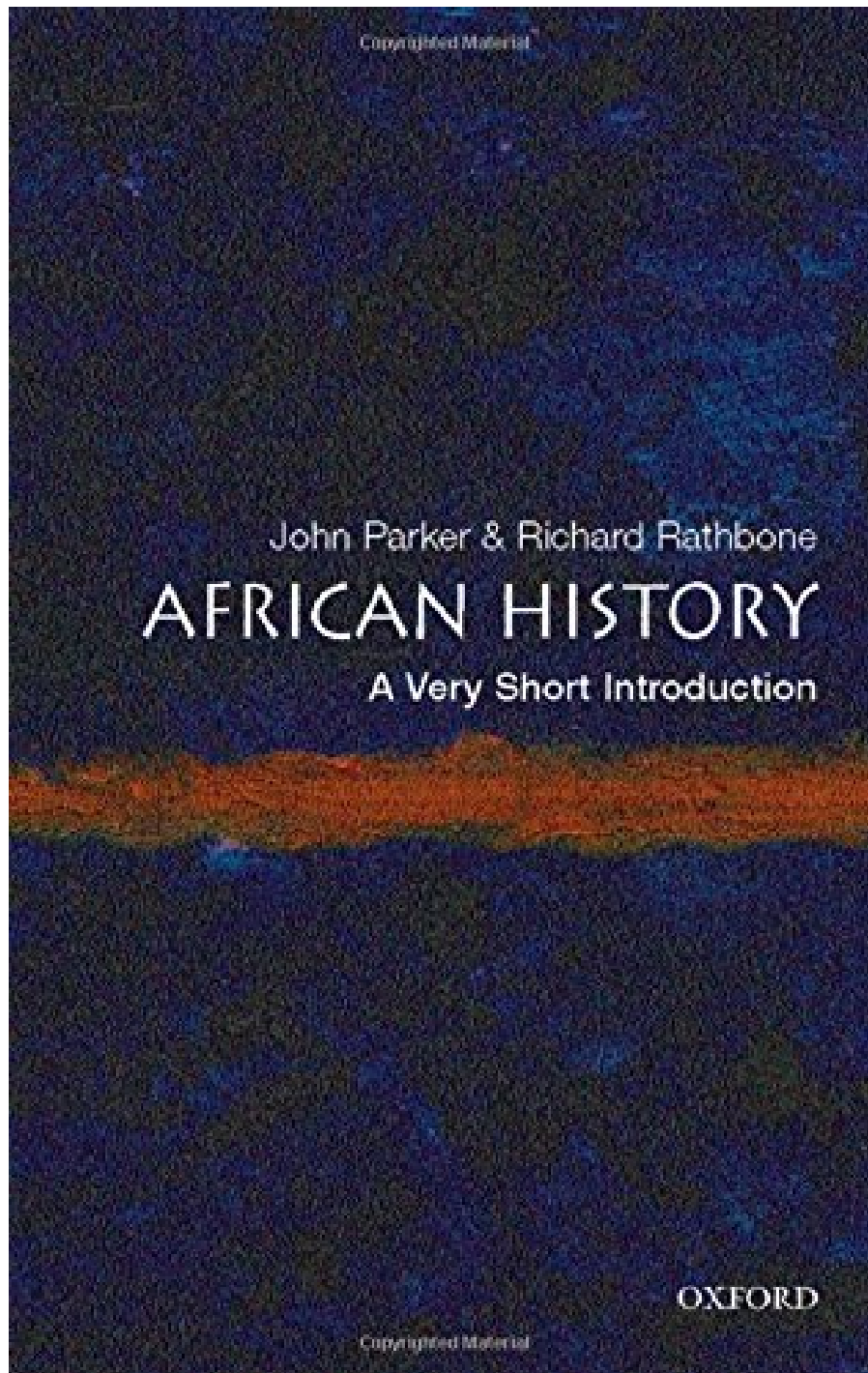


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INTRODUCTION BY JOHN PARKER,  
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## **Review**

A very well informed and sharply stated historiography... should be in every historiography student's kitbag. A tour de force... it made me think a great deal. Terence Ranger, *The Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies* You will finish this book better informed, with a better understanding of Africa and a clearer idea of the questions. Robert Giddings, *Tribune* This small book is a smart and stimulating essay exploring issues of history, sources and methods, Africa in the world, colonialism and postcolonialism, and the past in the present as a means of introducing students and others to academic thinking about African history. Tom Spear, *Journal of African History*

## **About the Author**

John Parker teaches African history at the School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London. He specializes in the history of Ghana and is the author of *Making the Town: Ga State and Society in Early Colonial Accra* and (with Jean Allman) *Tongnaab: The History of a West African God*. He is currently researching a book on the history of death and burial in Ghana.

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This Very Short Introduction looks at Africa's past and reflects on the changing ways it has been imagined and represented, both in Africa and beyond. The author illustrates important aspects of Africa's history with a range of fascinating historical examples, drawn from over 5 millennia across this vast continent. The multitude of topics that the reader will learn about in this succinct work include the unity and diversity of African cultures, slavery, religion, colonial conquest, the diaspora, and the importance of history in understanding contemporary Africa. The book examines questions such as: Who invented the idea of "Africa"? How is African history pieced together, given such a lack of documentary evidence? How did Africa interact with the world 1,000 years ago?

Africa has been known as 'the cradle of mankind', and its recoverable history stretches back to the Pharaohs. But the idea of studying African history is itself new, and the authors show why it is still contested and controversial. This VSI, the first concise work of its kind, will prove essential reading for anyone interested in the African continent and the diversity of human history.

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- 144 pages

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A very well informed and sharply stated historiography... should be in every historiography student's kitbag. A tour de force... it made me think a great deal. Terence Ranger, *The Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies* You will finish this book better informed, with a better understanding of Africa and a clearer idea of the questions. Robert Giddings, *Tribune* This small book is a smart and stimulating essay exploring issues of history, sources and methods, Africa in the world, colonialism and postcolonialism, and the past in the present as a means of introducing students and others to academic thinking about African history. Tom Spear, *Journal of African History*

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in Colonial Ghana and Nkrumah and the Chiefs.

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39 of 40 people found the following review helpful.

Necessary background to understanding Africa

By Eric Balkan

Like many of the OUP "Very Short Introduction" series, you can't really tell what the book is about from the title. This is not a survey of African history, but rather a survey of how historians, political leaders and others have interpreted African history. E.g., colonialists created an African history -- or pretended there wasn't one -- that would best serve the cause of colonialism. That is, if Africa is seen as a land of primitive, savage tribes, the colonial powers could defend their actions as just spreading civilization. Conversely, post-colonialists have often created a nationalistic view of African countries that did not exist prior to the European powers marking arbitrary lines on their maps.

The authors take pains to note that any statement about Africa as a whole is likely an over-generalization. The history of the Congo area, for instance, is considerably different from that of South Africa. Yet, as diverse as the regions are, the authors assert that the concept of "Africa" shouldn't be abandoned.

The whole subject of African history is a difficult one for historians, or anyone, because of the lack of sources. What we know of African cities like Timbuktu is essentially what travelers wrote about them. Often, the African climate has worked to eradicate the records of what might have been there prior to 19th century European colonization. Even oral history is suspect, as oral histories are subject to change over time. This makes it difficult for those attempting to decolonize Africa to actually figure out what a particular African region was like prior to colonization. For once colonization began, the nature of the region might have changed drastically. For instance, the 1996 Rwanda genocide of the Hutu against the Tutsi is not, as depicted in Western media, a struggle between two tribes. The difference between the Hutu and the Tutsi -- genetically the same -- entirely stems from how these people were treated by German and Belgian colonialists, creating an artificial division between them that continued and worsened even after the Europeans were long gone. (It occurs to me as I write this, that this is somewhat similar to the aftermath of Ottoman colonization of Southern Slavs.)

But while African history can't escape concentrating on the effects of colonialism, the authors cover other areas, e.g., the participation of African states in the slave trade -- possibly as many slaves went East as went across the Atlantic, and many slaves were transferred internally only. African history can't be discussed without discussing the slave trade, but the authors warn that there was a lot going on at the time not related to the slave trade, so it's a mistake to think of Africa as a continent of victims.

History has always been more about interpretation than facts, and that's particularly true in the case of Africa.

If you plan on reading any African history, or just want to understand the background of current African political issues, this book will provide needed perspective.

15 of 15 people found the following review helpful.

African Studies Snob Meets Her Match

By TheReviewer

Appearance: True to its name, this is a small pocket sized book from Oxford with a good and sturdy thick cover.

Content: If you want a standard, linear progression of the African continent, you must walk away. This book is an small academic companion to african historical studies. Not intending to ACTUALLY speak on African history, the authors rather discuss the many problems, theories and experiences of scholars studying African history. It is an AMAZING read and it lifted the proverbial veil from my eyes. I have since gone on to deepen my knowledge of the academic study of history and its many quandries. A good read for any budding academic, geek, African Studies minor, major, student or interested persons.

Categories: African Studies, History.

I fully recommend this.

13 of 13 people found the following review helpful.

Far more than a "short introduction"

By spinoza

This book is very, very good, a must read for anyone interested in Africa and African studies. The commenter who notes that this is not a superficial recounting of African chronological history is correct, but this is a good thing. In fact, the authors make the important point that such a superficial recounting of naive historical narrative is a total distortion of African history in all its magnitude and complexity. We're talking about entire continent here, with literally 1000s of ethnic groups and an almost equal number of languages. The complexity of African history is magnified by the fact that much of it has been told--and hence distorted--by outsiders, outsiders who share little understanding and empathy of the complex richness of African history. Hence the authors weave a fascinating narrative of both history and historiography in this volume, and they do this by demonstrating that African history requires such a self-reflective historiographical approach because of its unique nature. The book is well-written and for anyone interested in African history compelling reading; I read it in one long sitting. Highly recommended.

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